SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Evaluation of the Scottish
University for Industry

Enterprise and Lifelong Learning

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research

EVALUATION OF THE SCOTTISH UNIVERSITY FOR INDUSTRY

SQW Ltd
with FMR Research Ltd

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   The Scottish University for Industry (SUfI) – branded as learndirect scotland - was launched in October 2000 as part of the drive to help Scotland rise to the new global economic challenges. In November 2005, SQW was commissioned by the Scottish Executive (SE) to conduct an evaluation of SUfI, with the overall aim of assessing the impact of SUfI in order to inform the future allocation of resources by the SE.

2.   The policy context for the study was the Lifelong Learning Strategy, launched in 2003 with the aim of fostering a culture of lifelong learning in Scotland to:

- benefit Scotland economically
- ensure individuals develop personally
- bring collective benefits to society as a whole.

3.   Key factors underpinning this policy thrust are Scotland's relatively low levels of economic growth and productivity, and a decline in the size of the working population.

4.   Thus, there is an underlying belief that greater participation and achievement in learning can be a key factor in stimulating economic growth and competitiveness, enhancing individuals' capabilities and generating a more inclusive society.

SUFI

5.   In order to contribute to the achievement of the goal of a 'learning, earning nation', the main objectives of SUfI are to:

- stimulate the demand for learning
- provide information and advice
- improve access
- develop infrastructure and capacity.

6.   To support these aspirations, SUfI has established a sophisticated, technology-enabled, national infrastructure including:

- a network of 500 quality-assured, client-focused learning centres
- a national database of over 80,000 quality-assured learning opportunities
- national information and advice helplines
- a team of field-based support staff who assist learning centres and small businesses to engage more effectively and efficiently.

METHODOLOGY

7.   The methodology which was adopted comprised:

- a desk-based review of data and background information
- consultations with SUfI personnel

- a telephone survey of 300 individuals who had contacted learndirect scotland, whose services are delivered by SUfI
- a telephone survey of 200 SMEs who had contacted learndirect scotland for business
- a focus group with SMEs/employers
- telephone interviews with 30 branded learning centre (BLC) managers
- two focus groups with BLC managers
- consultations with 6 external stakeholder organisations.

8. In addition, it was felt that the value of the findings of this survey would be enhanced by making comparisons, where appropriate, with the findings of the Learner Tracking Study (LTS), which was commissioned by SUfI and introduced in 2002.

VIEWS OF INDIVIDUAL CALLERS

9. Callers to the learndirect scotland helpline have different motivations for making contact. Some may already have made a decision to start learning, while others may be seeking general advice and guidance.

10. 'Wanting to learn a new skill' was the most commonly cited reason for seeking advice from learndirect scotland: just under two thirds of all respondents (including 63 per cent of employed people and 76 per cent of unemployed people) reported that this was one of the reasons for their call. A further 18 per cent wanted to improve an existing skill. This is broadly in line with findings from the Learner Tracking Study over a three year period.

11. These findings provide further support for the notion that employment or work-related reasons lie behind the majority of decisions of adults to engage in learning activity.

12. Approximately 47 per cent of respondents indicated that they had already decided what they wanted to learn, but wanted information on availability.

13. The fact that the majority (85 per cent) of those who had completed courses after calling learndirect scotland were already well qualified prior to undertaking their courses appears to bear out the received wisdom that 'learning begets learning'.

14. In this take-up of learning the overwhelming significance of IT-related courses was apparent, and was interpreted as reflecting a perceived need on the part of many callers to develop skills which enhance individuals' employability.

15. Of the 300 survey respondents, 115 (38 per cent) had not done any learning since leaving school. Given the proportion that may be termed traditional 'non-learners', it is interesting, and encouraging, to note that 27 per cent of the total sample had completed a course since contacting the helpline and a further 18 per cent were undertaking a course at the time of interview.

16. Evidence of this capacity to engage or re-engage people in learning is also seen in the significant proportion of those who had completed a course of learning after

contacting learndirect scotland and who could be described as 'new learners': almost one quarter of this group had not done any learning since leaving school.

17.   Furthermore, almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the total number of people who had completed or were undertaking a course at the time of interview were 'quite unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to have done so if they had not received information and/or advice from learndirect scotland.

18.   Of the 200 people who were referred to a branded learning centre as a result of their call to the learndirect scotland helpline, 121 (61 per cent) had not subsequently embarked upon learning, with the vast majority (116) having done nothing at all. Moreover, a very high proportion of 'non-engagers' either had no formal qualifications at all or were only qualified to Standard Grade level.

19.   There was evidence that some of the traditional barriers to learning are still in existence. Childcare, for example, continues to be a problem for some would-be learners. Inconvenient timing or location of learning opportunities remain issues for others.

20.   The findings indicate not only that substantial numbers of the samples of callers have gone on to acquire new skills, improve existing skills or attain a qualification, but, crucially, an overwhelming majority of these attribute their achievement directly to the role of learndirect scotland.

21.   A total of 48 out of 123 employed respondents reported that they now feel more confident in their job. Over half of these (25) said that this was directly attributable to their contact with learndirect scotland.

22.   A third of the entire survey sample (101 respondents) reported that they now feel 'more confident generally', and 50 per cent of these attributed the increase in confidence directly to their engagement with learndirect scotland.

23.   Some support was also evident for the notion that interest or participation in learning can contribute to greater job satisfaction, while 38 per cent of the overall sample reported that they now had a better appreciation of the value of learning and 61 per cent of those attributed this directly to the outcome of their call to learndirect scotland.

24.   A very high proportion of respondents (84 per cent) rated the helpline service as good or very good. These high satisfaction ratings point to learndirect scotland being highly efficient in the way in which it operates, and, in particular, in the way in which its staff interact with callers. These findings are consistent with those of the LTS.

VIEWS OF SMES

25.   The 2005 study suggested that there were very low levels of awareness of learndirect scotland for business among SMEs.

26.   The Training Partner service continues to deliver high satisfaction levels and is regarded as being extremely valuable by the majority of respondents.

27.   When asked about their motivation for calling learndirect scotland for business, the most frequently cited reasons were 'to request further information' (mentioned by 52 per cent of respondents) and 'to enquire about a general field of learning' (mentioned by half the respondents).

28.   The findings indicate that there is a considerable requirement of need for the input of Training Partners in working alongside employers to identify needs and discuss appropriate means of addressing them. Of the total of 44 respondents who had received a visit from a Training Partner since calling learndirect scotland for business, 37 went on to report that the TP service had had a positive impact upon their business.

29.   Overall, the results of the SQW survey point to there being a more than satisfactory level of post-contact activity emanating from employers calling learndirect scotland for business.

30.   Half of the SMEs reported that employees within their organisation had undertaken training in the period since they first called the training advice line.

31.   The fact that a high proportion of SME employees had gained new skills was also apparent. Moreover, a quarter of the whole sample asserted that, following the contact made with learndirect scotland for business, they or their employees felt more confident generally and happier at work.

32.   There was also a contention on the part of a fifth of the sample that, as a result, they had developed higher expectations or aspirations in life.

33.   Overall, 66 per cent of SME respondents said that the service provided by learndirect scotland for business either met, or exceeded, their expectations.

BRANDED LEARNING CENTRES (BLCS)

34.   There are various types of centre, and they can be characterised in terms of their sector and their level of engagement with SUfI. These factors may increasingly come to determine the level of resource made available to them.

35.   Learning Centre Development Officers (LCDOs) are held in extremely high regard by BLC staff, although some problems have been identified in the northern region, where it is perceived that the LCDO has been too stretched (in geographical terms) to provide the level of service which centres have come to expect.

36.   There is a cautious willingness amongst BLCs to improve and/or increase the provision of learner statistics, if it would help SUfI to monitor impact. This would be subject to a clear rationale and clear instructions from SUfI.

37.   Networking opportunities are very highly valued, particularly amongst rural BLCs, although more notice of events would be appreciated (perhaps in the form of an annual calendar of events).

VALUE FOR MONEY

38.   The discussion of value for money assesses the costs and benefits of SUfI's activities, while recognising the difficulties which this entails, such as the problem of according attribution for a shift in behaviour to a single source, the time periods which are often required before tangible benefits (e.g. qualification attainment) accrue, and the issue of measuring attitudinal shifts.

39.   Central to this assessment is distinguishing between the total number undertaking learning and the number that would not have done so without the intervention of SUfI. We have used the results of the surveys of individuals and SMEs and applied these to overall population contacting learndirect scotland.

40.   Although the overall sample sizes are robust (300 individuals and 200 business interviews), we have used smaller sub-samples in order to calculate additionality. Consequently we would stress that the following results, based on extrapolation from the survey, should be treated with caution and regarded as indicative only.   The numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100.

41.   The survey of callers to the main learndirect scotland line found that 24% of those that went on to undertake learning would not have done so without the support. This provides an estimate of 6,800 new learners, with a quarter from excluded area postcodes and 23% having done no new learning since school.

42.   The results suggest that around 3,100 learners who were not in work, moved into employment. This is a relatively large proportion and highlights the powerful effect that new skills can have on finding work for all groups, including unemployed, retired and those out of work through illness or incapacity. Of these it is estimated that 400 would not have enrolled in learning without contacting learndirect scotland.

43.   As far as SMEs are concerned, there is substantial evidence from the survey of additional training activity resulting from contact with learndirect scotland for business. The analysis of business benefits relates to the total number of 5,257 SMEs that SUfI has engaged with in 2005-06.

44.   It is estimated that this activity has resulted in between 4,500 and 5,000[1] employees undertaking learning or training that would not otherwise have done so. Based on evidence from a number of training impact studies, it is estimated that this activity would lead to increased wage payments of around £3.4m and new value added for businesses of just less than £7m.

45.   This figure is only intended as a guide to the potential value of the support. For a number of reasons, this will underestimate the overall effects. It excludes benefits generated through individual callers that could accrue to employers, the duration of these effects, and the wider contribution that the service makes to moving people into work.

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[1] This range is derived from two complementary strands of research: the lower figure is extrapolated from SQW's survey of SMEs, the higher from learndirect Scotland data.

46.   Finally, the surveys demonstrate many other benefits which relate to quality of life both in work and for leisure. For example, increased self-confidence and self-esteem were prominent in the findings, as were shifts in attitudes towards learning. The difficulties of deriving a meaningful measure of the scale of this benefit are explored, but the fact that there was survey evidence to support claims of benefit should not be discounted.

47.   Overall, set against these impacts, the £8.5m core funding allocated to SUfI represents good value for money, when viewed in the context of the contribution of the service to the longer-term economic and social goals of Scotland.

48.   The prime objective of SUfI is to generate greater attachment to, and participation in, learning, particularly among adults who have exhibited a reluctance to do so in the past. This is coupled with the aim of enhancing Scotland's productivity and economic competitiveness through increasing the engagement of employers, especially SMEs in training activity. This study points to considerable success having been achieved in these aims.

CONCLUSIONS

49.   Consultations with stakeholders revealed a high regard for SUfI, which is unanimously described as 'dynamic', 'energetic', 'highly responsive', 'innovative in its thinking', 'very approachable and accessible', 'completely open and honest', 'enterprising', 'not entrenched in bureaucracy'. Moreover, SUfI is seen to be characterised by a can-do culture which permeates all its dealings. Its willingness to engage and to listen are universally acknowledged.

50.   A real strength of SUfI is the regular and widespread generation of data relating to its operations, impact and receptiveness of individuals and SMEs. It will be important for SUfI to ensure that the volume and variety of data it generates is coordinated and analysed in a meaningful way, rather than being held in stand-alone form in different parts of the organisation.

51.   The findings point to the awareness-raising activities of SUfI being successful in generating calls to the helpline not only in terms of numbers, but in generating responses from 'hard to reach' groups.

52.   The importance of work-relatedness, both in the motivation to contact learndirect scotland and in the follow-up learning activity is confirmed by the findings. Although this is not surprising, it does emphasise the potential for SUfI to make a significant impact on the development of a more skilled Scottish workforce, and thereby on the nation's economic competitiveness.

53.   Although a relatively high proportion of those who contacted learndirect scotland and subsequently completed a course of learning were 'new learners', over two thirds of those who were referred to a branded learning centre had still, at the time of interview, not embarked on further learning.

54.   A major hurdle for SUfI in engaging more SMEs and promoting higher levels of workforce development activity is the longstanding resistance to exhortations to invest in training on the part of the majority of SMEs.

55.   The role of the Training Partners is likely to be crucial to the success of learndirect scotland for business. This may present a dilemma for SUfI, for the degree of individual and expert support which the Training Partners are able to provide is time-consuming and, in relative terms, expensive.

56.   The ultimate test of SUfI's impact will be whether over time there are perceptible shifts in adults' attachment to, and participation in, learning. While SUfI is only one of a number of agencies working towards this long-term goal, and therefore could claim only partial credit for any sustained increase which may occur, the evidence from the study supports the argument that it is making a positive contribution to the achievement of this goal.

57.   It was apparent from the study that there are areas of SUfI's operations which require ongoing monitoring and review, notably the marketing of the services to both individuals and businesses, the relationships with branded learning centres, and ensuring that sustained support is available following initial enquiries from individuals, especially if they are from 'new learner' target groups.

58.   A substantial number of the components and aspects of the delivery of SUfI's services emerged as being significant strengths. Notable among these are:

  • the penetration of the marketing to individuals, including those from 'hard to reach' groups

  • the attraction of those seeking to learn for work-related reasons, which have beneficial effects for the individual, the employer and the wider economy

  • the high proportion of survey respondents who had undertaken further learning since contacting learndirect scotland

  • the ability to attract 'new learners'

  • the fact that an overwhelming majority of those who have acquired skills or qualifications attribute this success directly to the influence of SUfI

  • the extremely high levels of satisfaction recorded for individuals' experience of the service

  • the Training Partner service, which is highly regarded by, and highly influential among, SMEs

  • the high levels of satisfaction expressed by employers.

59.   Thus, the overriding conclusion to be drawn from the study is that the amount of funding allocated to SUfI can claim to represent good value for money, when viewed

CHAPTER ONE   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Scottish University for Industry (SUfI) – branded as learndirect scotland - launched its activities in October 2000, as part of the drive to help Scotland rise to new global economic challenges. Its objective is to make a key contribution to the development of a more competitive economy and inclusive society. Within this aim, SUfI is perceived to occupy a key role in delivering the Scottish Executive's goal of creating a 'learning, earning nation'.

1.2   In November 2005, SQW Ltd (SQW) was commissioned by the Scottish Executive (SE) to conduct an evaluation of SUfI. The overall aim of the assignment was to assess the impact of SUfI in order to inform the future allocation of resources by the Scottish Executive. The assignment was required to provide:

        • analysis of value for money, costs and benefits (quantitative impact)
        • analysis of the wider, experiential impact of SUfI (qualitative impact).

1.3   The research brief specified that the evaluation should go beyond straight value-for-money analysis, and assess the impact of SUfI's services on learners and its key stakeholders in a more quantitative and experiential way.

BACKGROUND TO SUFI

1.4   SUfI was originally set up as two private companies, with the holding company limited by guarantee of directors appointed by Scottish Ministers. However, from 1 April 2005, SUfI has been operating as an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body with private limited company status. This means that there is no commercial imperative to generate profits.

1.5   Before presenting evidence which is intended to shed light on the performance and impact of SUfI, it is important to understand the context within which SUfI operates and the broader objectives that underpin its activities.

Lifelong Learning Strategy

1.6   The policy framework which is of most relevance to SUfI is the Lifelong Learning Strategy (Scottish Executive, 2003). The strategy's overarching aim is to foster a culture of lifelong learning in Scotland. The three main pillars to the strategy propose that lifelong learning will:

        • benefit Scotland economically
        • ensure individuals develop personally
        • bring collective benefits to society as a whole.

1.7   Thus it is grounded on the belief that greater participation and achievement in learning can be a key factor in stimulating economic growth and competitiveness, enhancing individuals' capabilities and generating a more inclusive society.

1.8   To achieve these aims, the strategy argues that the following must happen:

- more people must be dissuaded from believing that learning is 'not for them', by discovering that it is
- change must occur in key aspects of both the supply of, and demand for, learning
- the strategy must complement and influence the work being advocated and undertaken within other key policy documents and strategies.

1.9   Against this background the strategy outlines a vision for Lifelong Learning in Scotland, which is 'the best possible match between the learning opportunities open to people and the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours which will strengthen Scotland's economy and society'. To realise this vision, the strategy focuses on five key goals, beneath which sit a range of specific actions:

- Goal 1 - a Scotland where people have the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills they need to participate in economic social and civic life
- Goal 2 - a Scotland where people demand and providers deliver a high quality learning experience
- Goal 3 - a Scotland where people's knowledge and skills are recognised, used and developed to best effect in their workplace
- Goal 4 - a Scotland where people are given the information, guidance and support they need to make effective learning decisions and transitions
- Goal 5 - a Scotland where people have the chance to learn, irrespective of their background or current personal circumstances.

How does SUfI contribute to the strategy?

1.10   In order to contribute to the achievement of the goal of a 'learning, earning nation', the main objectives of SUfI are to:

- stimulate the demand for learning
- provide information and advice
- improve access
- develop infrastructure and capacity.

1.11   Within these main objectives are the underlying goals of enhancing the skills and employability of individuals, and enhancing the skills and competitiveness of SMEs.

1.12   To support these aspirations SUfI has established a sophisticated, technology-enabled, national infrastructure with the following features:

- a network of 500 quality-assured, client-focused learning centres
- a national database of over 80,000 quality-assured learning opportunities
- national information and advice helplines
- a team of field-based support staff who assist learning centres and small businesses to engage more effectively and efficiently with their clients.

1.13   The key elements of SUfI's provision are described in more detail below.

Network of Branded Learning Centres

1.14   learndirect scotland oversees a network of 500 learning centres which 'offer high quality services in a welcoming and supportive learning environment where learners can make guided choices about what, how and when they learn'. learndirect scotland does not own or manage any of these centres, but enters into agreements with learning providers to offer high quality in a learner-centred environment.

1.15   The first step in joining the network of branded learning centres is for the centre to agree to deliver the learndirect scotland Pledge to Learners (see www.lds4partners.com). At the heart of the pledge is the belief that people should be able to access learning throughout their lives. Branded centres undertake to:

- *'offer the time, place, pace and style of learning that most closely meets your needs*
- *give clear information that helps you make the best personal choices about learning programmes and maintain control of your learning*
- *provide learning materials that are relevant to your own personal and work interests and actively involve you in practical examples, exercises and experience*
- *enable you to monitor your progress and record your achievements as you go, not just at the end of a complete programme*
- *provide you with access to the specialist support you need when you need it*
- *work with you to develop the skills that help you to learn and stay learning*
- *give you the chance to relate your learning to your own longer term ambitions*
- *help you to feel part of a wider learning community and put you in touch with other people studying the same things.*
- *link your learning to key areas of your life such as work, family, citizenship and your own personal development*
- *encourage you to value learning and see it add value to your life.'*

National Learning Opportunities Database (NLOD)

1.16   The opportunities database offers individuals and companies a single comprehensive national database of learning opportunities and a central source of information for potential learners. In 2004-05 approximately one million searches were undertaken.

1.17   Training and learning providers can promote their learning opportunities to individuals and companies via this database, subject to quality assurance. Registered providers receive software - the Provider Opportunity Management Tool (PROMT) that enables them to manage their own learning information. They are also allocated a named learning information specialist and receive activity reports. PROMT is intended to allow providers to: add, edit or remove courses in line with changing course content, new start dates or fees; react quickly if courses become fully booked or are no longer running; maintain the accuracy of information; perform bulk updates to quickly change information in multiple courses.

National Helplines

1.18   SUfI runs the national free helpline for individuals and the national training advice line for SMEs, offering advice and information on more than 100,000 learning opportunities held on the national learning opportunities database. Information is also available on: the network of learndirect scotland branded learning centres; the learndirect scotland portfolio of on-line sectoral content, which is free to branded learning centres, learning technology; and business support capacity, via the Training Partner team.

Developing Content

1.19   SUfI is not a learning provider or reseller, but a broker. However learndirect scotland works with a range of partners and developers to produce accessible, engaging and relevant online learning content in areas where gaps have been identified and where there is no clear, commercial market opportunity. This includes brokering and acting as repository for other originators' free content.

1.20   The purpose of commissioning new learning content for the repository is to:

- address market failures
- develop capacity in learning centres
- engage disadvantaged learners in life skills
- stimulate the competency of the learning market
- provide courseware free to the Learning Centre network.

1.21   SUfI's content commissioning model focuses on ensuring that future content meets the requirements of the learning centre network and learners. It also involves learning centre staff and learners in testing new content. This is designed to ensure that learners are comfortable with the style, format and level of new online materials and that they are easily accessible to as many learners as possible.

Skillnet and Learning Bytes

1.22   Skillnet is SUfI's learning management system. Its most high profile element is 'Learning Bytes'. These are short courses which are intended to offer individuals the opportunity to experience a taste of the subject, before deciding whether to embark on a more in-depth and accredited course within the subject area.

1.23   The 300 taster courses in the learndirect scotland online 'Learning Bytes' catalogue are available at no cost to the network of branded learning centres. They include courses in business and management and information technology, including basic PC, Windows, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, Project, office integration, e-mail, internet and web courses.

1.24   It is also worth noting that the Training Partners can make these courses available to SMEs in order to provide an opportunity for them to evaluate e-learning in the workplace, before referring the SME to an appropriate learning centre where they can explore other e-learning opportunities.

1.25   The Learning Bytes catalogue also includes complete or abridged commissioned courses, which were previously promoted as the Sectorsolutions range. These include skills-based taster-courses plus others which support qualifications (for example in construction, hospitality, call handling, and engineering), as well as general interest courses with no assessments in subjects such as Gaelic and health and safety.

1.26   Learners accessing e-learning through branded learning centres can self-register and launch courses within minutes. Reports tracking all learning are accessed by learning centre staff and certificates can be issued by the system for centres to give to their learners.

1.27   Work is in progress to cluster blended learning opportunities together as a package in the catalogue, offering a combination of e-learning and face-to-face learning through the learning centres.

Joint Campaigns

1.28   SUfI works with partners and has often led joint campaigns to develop marketing campaigns targeting individuals and businesses. These range from high profile campaigns such as ILA Scotland, where SUfI is involved as one of the Scottish Executive's delivery partners, and The Big Plus, where SUfI works under the direction of Communities Scotland, to smaller-scale activities targeting, for example, voluntary sector organisations working with disadvantaged groups, or business sectors such as the hospitality industry.

1.29   This range of activities has been established within a relatively short time to enable SUfI to become a highly regarded organisation within the learning community in Scotland, as will be asserted later in the report.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

1.30   The next chapter of the report describes the methodology adopted to conduct the study. Chapter 3 considers the policy and economic context and summarises the views of some of SUfI's external stakeholders. This is followed by chapters concentrating on the findings generated by the study: Chapter 4 focuses on the survey of individual learners, Chapter 5 on learndirect scotland for business, and Chapter 6 on branded learning centres. Chapter 7 provides an assessment of the value for money which SUfI represents, while Chapter 8 considers key performance indicators and progress made towards targets. The concluding chapter draws together the main points emanating from the study.

1.31   Please note that SUfI is the name of the organisation and it provides services to the public by means of brands – learndirect scotland and learndirect scotland for business. At times in this report reference is made to SUfI or to the brands – the choice is dictated by the way in which different people (individuals or businesses or other bodies) relate to the organisation that is SUfI.

CHAPTER TWO   METHODOLOGY

2.1   The methodology used to conduct the study comprised a number of complementary elements, described below.

DESK BASED REVIEW OF DATA AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.2   A review of background documentation and existing literature was undertaken, with a focus on research relating to demand and supply in learning, SME engagement with learning, and previous and similar evaluations in Scotland and the UK. In addition, financial information was obtained from SUfI in order to conduct a degree of cost-benefit analysis.

INITIAL CONSULTATIONS WITH KEY SUFI PERSONNEL

2.3   Following an Inception Meeting at which the scoping, parameters and objectives of the study were agreed and a range of key stakeholders identified, scoping interviews were carried out with a sample of senior SUfI staff. These interviews were semi-structured. They were designed to tease out some of the wider issues surrounding the perceived role and impact of SUfI and, crucially, to gain a fuller understanding of how the organisation works towards its objectives.

2.4   Members of the following teams were interviewed:

- **Learning Team**: responsible for enhancing learner support services, commissioning materials and developing a national network of learner-focused learndirect scotland learning centres

- **Learning Technologies team**: responsible for the development and maintenance of the national learning opportunities database, as well as implementation of all IT systems, including the online learning environment Skillnet

- **Marketing and Business Development Team**: responsible for driving the demand for learning and attracting individuals and businesses into learning through a variety of marketing and PR techniques.

TELEPHONE SURVEY OF INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS (300)

2.5   A telephone survey was undertaken of 300 individuals who had contacted the learndirect scotland helpline. These comprised 100 respondents who were characterised as 'known completers', because they had embarked on and completed a course of learning after contacting learndirect scotland, and 200 respondents who had contacted learndirect scotland and subsequently been referred to a local learning centre.

2.6   It will be clear from these criteria that the survey does not constitute a representative sample of all callers to the service, as it is targeted at those callers for whom further activities had either been recommended or undertaken. A key consideration in deciding on this focus was that the service is regularly surveyed by the Learner

Tracking Study (LTS) conducted by Progressive Partnership. While covering much of the same ground as the LTS, SQW's survey placed greater emphasis on the benefits derived by callers, their perceptions of the impact of their contact with the service, and the influence of that contact on future involvement in, and disposition towards, learning.

2.7   Further details of the SQW survey, and the comparisons made with the findings of the Learner Tracking Studies, are reported in Chapter 4.

TELEPHONE SURVEY OF SMES/EMPLOYERS (200)

2.8   Putting together a pool of potential respondents for the survey was not quite as straightforward as had been anticipated. Not only is the number of callers to the learndirect scotland for business national advice line significantly smaller than the number of individual callers, but it was also important to ensure that our own survey did not conflict with SUfI's ongoing Tracker Study – the latest wave of which was to take place at the same time.

2.9   In order to avoid including in the sample any respondents who had been interviewed for the Tracker Study, it was decided that the SQW sample would include only SMEs who had called the learndirect scotland for business helpline between October 2004 and October 2005.

2.10   At the same time, it was considered important that there was comparability between the studies, and therefore the telephone questionnaire contained some of the same questions used in the biannual Tracker Study of SMEs. (A copy of the questionnaire can be found at Annex A).

2.11   Both telephone surveys were conducted by FMR Research.

FOCUS GROUP WITH SMES/EMPLOYERS

2.12   With the assistance of key SUfI personnel, a focus group with SMEs took place in Glasgow in March 2006. Turnout was disappointingly small: several of those who had indicated that they would be present did not attend. It had been expected that difficulties might arise in attracting representatives of SMEs, given their workloads. Accordingly, a breakfast meeting was considered to be the most appropriate means of obtaining a reasonable attendance. Nonetheless, only three people from SMEs attended.

2.13   The aim of the focus group was to explore in detail some of the benefits to SMEs of engagement with learning.

RESEARCH INTO BRANDED LEARNING CENTRES

2.14   This element of the study comprised telephone interviews with 30 Branded Learning Centres (BLCs) managers and two focus groups with BLC managers.

2.15   Given that an online survey of learning centres had been conducted for SUfI by Progressive Partnership only a matter of weeks prior to the present study, it was

decided to conduct a series of in-depth telephone interviews with BLC managers in order to gain a more detailed understanding of some of the issues affecting BLCs.

2.16 The sample of 30 managers was structured to take account of variability in terms of geography, sector and local circumstances. The managers were drawn from the following types of centre: four corporate, four college-based, three higher education, four local authorities, three library-based, four NHS, two private, one trade union, and five voluntary sector learning centres. Fourteen were based in Social Inclusion Partnership areas. There was a good distribution of rural and urban centres. Most had been branded learning centres for many years and several had been through the re-branding process.

2.17 With the assistance of SUfI personnel, two focus groups with learning centre managers were set up. The purpose of these was threefold:

- to test the findings from existing research
- to gain insight into other issues affecting BLCs (such as any differences between rural and urban centres)
- to guide the design of an aide memoire for subsequent telephone interviews.

2.18 The first focus group, held in Perth, was attended by five learning centre managers from rural locations, comprising: three voluntary sector, one private sector, and one college-based centre. A second group, comprising seven BLC managers from the central belt of Scotland was held in Glasgow, with the following representation: three private sector providers, one voluntary sector, two college-based centres, and one local authority.

2.19 A key aim of these focus groups was to add depth to the online survey of BLCs commissioned recently by SUfI.

CONSULTATIONS WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

2.20 In order to gain wider perspective on where SUfI sits within the 'landscape' of lifelong learning in Scotland, interviews were conducted with a number of external stakeholders at national level:

- Scottish Further Education Unit
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- SSAScot
- Scottish Libraries Information Council
- Association of Scottish Colleges
- Learning Link Scotland.

2.21 In these consultations we sought to gain a general impression of: areas of alignment between the goals of SUfI and other organisations; perceptions of whether SUfI is succeeding in its desire to 'de-clutter' the landscape; and stakeholders' general perspectives about the organisation.

2.22 Clearly, the views of such a small group of consultees cannot be regarded as representative of the entire learning infrastructure in Scotland. Nevertheless, they add

a useful dimension to the wider policy and environmental context. We report on this element of our research in Chapter Three.

SUMMARY

2.23   While acknowledging the limitations of some aspects of the data-gathering process, notably the survey of individuals and the attendance at the SME focus group, the methodology adopted nonetheless generated a rich set of data which is described and analysed later in the report.

CHAPTER THREE   POLICY, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

3.1   In this Chapter we provide, first, a desk based review of policy and economic factors that bear direct relevance to SUfI. This is followed by a summary of our consultations with some of the external stakeholder organisations which help to form the wider environmental context.

REVIEW OF POLICY AND ECONOMIC TRENDS

3.2   As Chapter One indicated, the policy framework which is of most relevance for SUfI is the Lifelong Learning Strategy. 'Life through Learning: *Learning Through Life*' recognises that this policy direction is part of a broader UK-wide drive to enhance participation in learning, as a component in supporting productivity, enabling growth and tackling social exclusion.

3.3   The key elements of the socio-economic context within which this policy is set are Scotland's 'relatively low economic growth and low productivity compared to some other advanced countries'; and 'a reduction in the working population' (Scottish Executive, 2003, p 13). A related issue is that there will also be an increase in the proportion of older people in the workforce. Given these demographic trends, in order to attain higher levels of productivity and economic competitiveness there is a clear case for prioritising the enhancement of the skills base of the labour force. At the same time the dangers of marginalisation, especially among some of the more remote rural areas of the country, need to be considered.

3.4   Another factor which supports this argument is that, compared to Europe and the rest of the UK, Scotland has a higher than average proportion of adults lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills, estimated at 23 per cent of adults, according to the Labour Force Survey.

Labour market trends

3.5   It is now widely acknowledged that profound occupational changes have been taking place and will continue to occur in coming years. Job growth over the last two decades has been strongest in managerial, professional and technical occupations, which require increasingly higher levels of skills and qualifications. These groupings are also expected to continue to grow in numbers in coming years as the economy restructures towards knowledge-based activities, along with personal service occupations. While this latter occupational group is not particularly highly skilled, the overall trend is one of a continuing increase in the skill and qualification levels demanded of the workforce. Thus, there is perceived to be an economic imperative to enhance the skills and qualifications of the whole population in order to satisfy the needs of the labour market and hence the nation's economic competitiveness.

3.6   In comparative terms, employment projections indicate that Scotland will experience a slower rate of increase in employment, as well as a higher level of unemployment, than is the case for the UK as a whole. Indeed, Working Futures 2004-2014 National

Report (SSDA, 2006) suggests that there will be a slight fall in the number of employed residents between 2004 and 2014, with the reductions being concentrated in male employment. In contrast, workplace employment is projected to increase by a total of 50,000 over the period, although, at a rate of 0.2 per cent per annum, this still represents a much lower rate than for the UK as a whole - which again points up the urgency of the drive to enhance skill levels in Scotland and the importance of the role which SUfI can potentially play.

Participation in learning

3.7   Recent data on qualification attainment in Scotland indicates that considerable progress is being made in terms of adults' participation in learning. For example, 'Lifelong Learning Statistics 2005' (Scottish Executive, 2005), notes that 'the proportion of working age adults who have qualifications below SCQF level 5 decreased from 28 per cent in 1992 to 19 per cent in 2004' (p 7). This led to the conclusion that 'we have shown that the proportion of the Scottish population without any qualifications or with only low level qualifications has dropped significantly over the last ten years, and that trend is expected to continue over the next five years' (p 26).

3.8   Moreover, it was asserted that 'Scotland has a higher proportion of the working age population qualified at S/NVQ 3 and 4 than the rest of the UK – although slightly lower at degree level'. These statistics are supported by others in the same document which suggests that Scotland is performing at least at the average UK level in terms of the proportion of people receiving workplace training, and that 'the majority (74.4 per cent) of the Scottish working age population has been involved in some type of learning in the last year' (p 132).

3.9   Unfortunately, such an optimistic picture is not replicated in the findings of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) 2005 Survey on Adult Participation in Learning (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2005), which, admittedly on the basis of a relatively small sample in Scotland, notes that '*In 2005, participation rates across the four nations of the UK varied slightly, although only the English and Scottish rates show any statistically significant differences to each other. England and Wales report the highest proportion of current/recent learners (42 per cent), while just over a third of adults living in Scotland (36 per cent) and Northern Ireland (37 per cent) also report participation in learning. The differences are more striking among current learners where Scotland (14 per cent) lags behind both England and Wales (22 per cent)*'.

3.10   Evidence of a stubborn 'learning divide' emerges in Scottish data from the 2002 adult learners' survey carried out by NIACE. The Scottish figures (Slowey, 2004) suggest that the older, less qualified and more disadvantaged people are, the less likely they are to be interested in pursuing learning. The overall 58 per cent of those unlikely to undertake any learning, for example, becomes 80 per cent in the case of those who had not taken part in any 'recent learning' (within the previous three years). However, these results should be treated with caution given the small sample.

3.11   Recent experience of learning can also be significant. A study conducted in the 1990s confirmed the findings of earlier studies that 'the greatest likelihood of learning in the

future is recent experience of learning. Recent job-related learning quadruples the likelihood of future learning while other recent learning increases the likelihood by almost as much' (Maguire, Hasluck and Green, 1996). Thus, levels of take-up of current provision may be a key indicator of future participation in learning.

3.12   In terms of motivations to learn, the literature suggests that while individuals can have a variety of reasons for participating in learning - with a broad distinction often being made between job-related or career development reasons, and non-work-related reasons such as personal development - work-related reasons lie behind most decisions to participate in training, if not in learning activities more generally. While concurring with this general thesis, St Clair (2006) makes the interesting point that 'learners may not distinguish between interest and instrumental reasons for participating in education'.

3.13   The following factors have been identified by McGivney (2004) as being highly significant when considering initiatives designed to encourage those without recent experience of engaging in learning activities to express an interest in participating:

- people who do not have clearly defined learning/training needs are unlikely to approach any advice service. Learning needs are often not defined as such, as many people understand 'learning' as involving formal and assessed courses on specifically defined subject areas. However, many may require help in specific areas of their working lives - to solve a problem, to improve their working situation, to improve their performance. These will not necessarily be articulated as learning requirements and it takes skill to tease out what people's learning needs are and translate them into responsive action

- paper-based information and publicity is not effective with adult groups who traditionally do not engage in education and training. Face-to-face approaches are *by far* the most effective means of making people aware of learning and other initiatives

- such approaches are best made by known and trusted individuals or people with similar characteristics and backgrounds to the targeted groups. Learning intermediaries or brokers - people who act as influencers, catalysts or change agents - are hugely important in encouraging others to engage in learning. These can be friends, workmates, union representatives, local opinion leaders, other adult learners or trusted professionals

- groups are far easier to contact and engage in any educational initiative than are individuals. Many people do not want to act differently from others in their circle. There is safety in numbers and it is much easier to embark on something new and potentially intimidating with other people, especially if it departs from family, social or workplace norms

- there is an over-reliance on short-term and small-scale pilot or special measures to engage under-represented groups. Expectations of short-term projects are often too high and do not take account of the time it can take to achieve significant individual or cultural change. Small-scale and isolated

measures may be successful in drawing *some* individuals into learning but they are unlikely to create an *overall* learning culture

- people are not attracted back into learning by approaches that highlight deficiencies (e.g. inadequate basic skills) or which threaten to replicate compulsory education and formal assessment systems (qualifications). They are far more likely to be attracted to learning activities they perceive to be relevant and connected to their everyday lives and which promise to lead to tangible rewards (e.g. increased occupational status, higher remuneration)

- adults' decisions to act on information on learning possibilities are not always immediate but this does not mean that the information has not been useful and absorbed. Depending on their (very varied) circumstances and needs, individuals may not take action until they are ready to do so or until the right moment arrives.

Barriers to participation

3.14 In terms of barriers to learning, most studies confirm the validity of McGivney's (1993) broad categories of reasons for non-participation. These are: lack of information; situational barriers (time and cost); institutional barriers (the unresponsive system); and dispositional barriers, which encompasses 'attitudes, perceptions and expectations, and are closely related to cultural influences'. For example, Hillage and Aston (2001), suggest that 'the barriers cited by non-learners usually fall into three distinct clusters: attitudinal barriers, including confidence and motivation; physical and material barriers, such as finance and time; and structural barriers around the way education and training is provided'.

3.15 A number of studies have identified lack of awareness of the availability of opportunities as a major obstacle to enhanced take-up of learning activities, and the importance of information and guidance in stimulating participation in education and training has long been widely recognised. 'The Learning Imperative' (NIACE, 1993) asserted that adults, as learners, 'are often unclear about their learning needs and the relationship of certain courses to their vocational or other goals. Guidance and assessment are thus extremely important for adult learners, who might also require help in finding and enrolling on relevant provision. Without such support, adult choices of education and training programmes can be inappropriate, resulting in withdrawal from study, which demoralises the individual learner and wastes teaching resources'.

3.16 The 2002 NIACE survey conducted in Scotland also found that when asked about access and barrier to learning, over a third of respondents felt that there was not enough advice about the different sorts of learning that people could do. Women appeared to have found more difficulties in finding help or advice about learning than men; in terms of age, it was the youngest age group (17-24) which were more likely to say that there was not enough help or advice about learning.

3.17 This clearly points to the potential usefulness of SUfI's role in encouraging participation in learning, through generating awareness among large swathes of the adult population who traditionally have shown little inclination to engage in learning.

3.18   This section has provided a broad overview of the socio-economic context within which SUfI operates, highlighting those aspects to which it seeks to contribute, notably in encouraging and facilitating greater participation in learning, in order to support economic growth and development. In order to gain a wider perspective on where SUfI sits within the 'landscape' of guidance and learning in Scotland, the next section summarises the perspectives of some of SUfI's external stakeholders.

CONSULTATIONS WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS

3.19   Brief interviews were conducted with a number of key stakeholders at national level: the Scottish Further Education Unit; Highlands & Islands Enterprise; SSAScot; Scottish Libraries Information Council; the Association of Scottish Colleges; and Learning Link Scotland.

3.20   In these consultations we sought to: identify areas of alignment between the goals of SUfI and other organisations; explore perceptions of whether SUfI is succeeding in its desire to 'de-clutter' the landscape; discuss the perceived impact which SUfI is having and how it could best measure that impact; and to explore stakeholders' general perspectives about SUfI as an organisation.

3.21   Most consultees felt that their own organisational strategies aligned well with that of SUfI and that it had succeeded in filling a gap in Scotland's learning infrastructure. There was a clear desire on the part of the voluntary sector to engage even more closely with SUfI at a strategic level in order to engage the 'hardest to reach' groups of potential learners. Likewise, the library sector appeared keen to develop existing synergies with SUfI in terms of learner progression: libraries are used by many potential learners, who can be converted into actual and continuing learners thanks to the facilities and materials provided. In terms of SME users, the relationship between SUfI and the sector skills councils is developing, aided by an ESF-funded collaborative project with SSAScot.

3.22   Consultees from the further education sector, however, were more cautious about the extent of strategic alignment with SUfI. Our evaluation research suggests that the further education sector has more concerns about this than other sectors. Consultations highlighted that the college sector would welcome a general 'refreshment' of its relationship with SUfI, to secure clarification of respective roles and ensure that strategic goals continue to be well aligned. Stakeholder consultees at national level also echoed the view of some college-based learning centres that the profile of the learndirect scotland brand within the FE sector has waned. Regardless of this, however, consultees stressed that the positive aspects of SUfI outweighed any of their concerns.

3.23   Stakeholder consultees were aware of the need to establish the most effective ways in which SUfI can measure the impact which it is having. Most concurred that this is a difficult issue: although existing mechanisms for tracking learndirect scotland website 'hits' and footfall at learning centres were considered to provide a useful starting point, these were regarded as insufficient on their own to provide insightful impact analysis. Few ideas were forthcoming, other than for SUfI to continue their longitudinal tracking studies.

3.24   One consultee suggested that there might be a role for SUfI to play in coordinating the collation of data from various other sources (such as destination statistics from the FE sector, Careers Scotland, etc). Whether it would be desirable or practical for SUfI to take on such a role would be open to debate.

3.25   Our consultations confirmed our wider impression from the evaluation that SUfI has a slightly different role to play in the Highlands and Islands. SUfI has a Scotland-wide remit and there are learndirect scotland branded learning centres across the whole of the Highlands and Islands region. However, the way in which SUfI organises its activity in the Highlands and Islands differs from the way it delivers across the rest of Scotland. For example, the Training Partner service is not delivered in the Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) region: instead, business advisers from the HIE Network provide the single entry point for this kind of service, with access to all learndirect scotland for business materials. Likewise, the HIE Network has established its own learning portal – www.learning-works.co.uk – which operates in partnership with SUfI to offer the region's own version of the national Learning Opportunities Database.

3.26   Consultation with HIE confirms that the region is keen to maintain its own identity in respect of the coordination of guidance and learning information. The HIE Network works in close partnership with SUfI to avoid duplication of provision, and the relationship between HIE and SUfI is solid and constructive. However, our consultations suggest that the learndirect scotland brand has a slightly lower profile in this part of the country than in the rest of Scotland.

3.27   Although no major concerns were expressed about the existing remit of SUfI in relation to other organisations, all stakeholders are keen to ensure that respective roles and remits remain complementary rather than creating duplication of activity. The fact that SUfI is such a responsive organisation – that is, responsive to changes in policy and responsive to requests from the Executive to take on additional responsibilities (such as delivery of ILAs) - leads some organisations to sense a risk of overlap in activity.

3.28   Finally, the evaluation research explored stakeholders' general perspectives on SUfI as an organisation.

3.29   Shortly after SUfI's establishment under its original business model, an initial evaluation was commissioned to assess how it was regarded by other agencies making up the national learning infrastructure. Given that SUfI's remit at that time was more commercial in its orientation, the feedback from other agencies was characterised by a large degree of suspicion and mistrust.

3.30   The contrast between that initial evaluation and the present study could not be more striking. SUfI has now had time to become embedded in the landscape and its revised business model means that it is no longer regarded as a threat. Consultations with stakeholders to date have revealed an extremely high regard for the organisation. When asked to describe their views of SUfI, consultees unanimously described it as "dynamic", "energetic", "highly responsive", "innovative in its thinking", "very approachable and accessible", "completely open and honest", "enterprising", "not

entrenched in bureaucracy". SUfI is seen to be characterised by a can-do culture which permeates all its dealings. Its willingness to engage and to listen are universally acknowledged and praised.

3.31   It is concluded that these views in themselves indicate a strong vindication of the decision to make significant changes to SUfI's business model. learndirect scotland is no longer regarded with suspicion and mistrust. On the contrary, stakeholder organisations consider that SUfI plays an important role in Scotland's guidance and learning infrastructure.

CHAPTER FOUR   SURVEY OF INDIVIDUAL LEARNERS

INTRODUCTION

4.1   As indicated in Chapter Two, in order to elicit data on the perspectives and experiences of users of the learndirect scotland service, a survey of individuals who had called the helpline was undertaken. The analysis in this chapter refers to the role of learndirect scotland as the brand which customers recognise rather than SUfI.

4.2   It was agreed that telephone interviews would be conducted with two groups of individuals:

   a)   'known completers': people known to have completed a course of learning after contacting learndirect scotland (identified through previous learner tracking studies and flagged accordingly on the learndirect scotland database) (100 interviews)

   b)   'referrals to branded learning centres': people referred to a local learning centre as a result of their call to the learndirect scotland helpline (200 interviews).

4.3   In addition, it was felt that the value of the findings of this survey could be enhanced by making comparisons, where appropriate, with the findings of the Learner Tracking Study (LTS), which was introduced in 2002. This survey was commissioned by SUfI in order to gauge the impact the organisation is having. The approach adopted by the LTS is to conduct interviews with a random selection of callers three months after their contact with learndirect scotland, in order to allow sufficient time for them to have acted upon the advice received whilst ensuring that the memory of the service they had received is still fresh.

4.4   Clearly, the LTS provides a comprehensive appraisal of callers to the service. It also has the advantage, through follow-up of individuals, to elicit longitudinal data on the subsequent impact on, or behaviour of, respondents. In contrast, the SQW survey was conducted using single point interviews.

4.5   Another characteristic of the SQW sample, in relation to overall usage of SUfI, is that it was restricted to those who accessed learndirect scotland through the contact centre. This precluded the inclusion of those individuals who had sought out services through other means, such as the Give it a Go! Campaign and the work of the Social Inclusion team.

4.6   The intention of the SQW survey was not to replicate the approach of the LTS. Rather, it was to use that work as point of comparison, where similarity in the topics being addressed allowed. Effectively, this was seen as a means of providing greater weight to findings where messages appeared to be confirmed.   Alternatively, disparities between the findings of the respective survey would require explanation or hypothesis. Accordingly, the design of the questionnaire for the survey was informed by the question set used for the LTS, while retaining a primary focus on the objectives of this study. A copy of SQW's questionnaire is presented at Annex A.

4.7   The telephone questionnaire for the two cohorts used many of the same questions as those in the LTS. It was important, for example, to ensure that the way in which respondents' most recent involvement in learning was recorded could be compared

directly with the LTS survey. Overall, however, it should be stressed that results from the SQW survey and those from the LTS cannot be compared 'like for like': as will be discussed later, the characteristics of the samples differed considerably.

4.8   This Chapter is based primarily on results from the SQW survey but makes reference to the LTS wherever there is potential for additional insight to be gained. Thus, throughout the section, the LTS data is referred to where it can provide a more comprehensive perspective on the topic being addressed.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

4.9   The first point to be made about the comparisons of the data from the two distinct surveys the (LTS and the SQW survey) is that the profiles of respondents exhibit significant differences. Moreover, the LTS is based on a random sample, whilst the SQW survey was targeted at two particular cohorts. Nevertheless, given that the LTS provides an overview of overall caller characteristics (including socio-economic grouping and ethnic minority status) which were not covered in the SQW survey, the joint presentation of results highlights some interesting points.

4.10   The striking, and potentially significant, difference in the characteristics of the two sets of respondents is shown in Figure 4.1, which provides a breakdown of the profiles of the two sets of respondents by age. Here it is clear that the sample of respondents for the latest LTS was considerably younger than that for the SQW survey. As will be explained later, this has implications for any comparisons which are made.

Figure 4.1: Profile of respondents by age
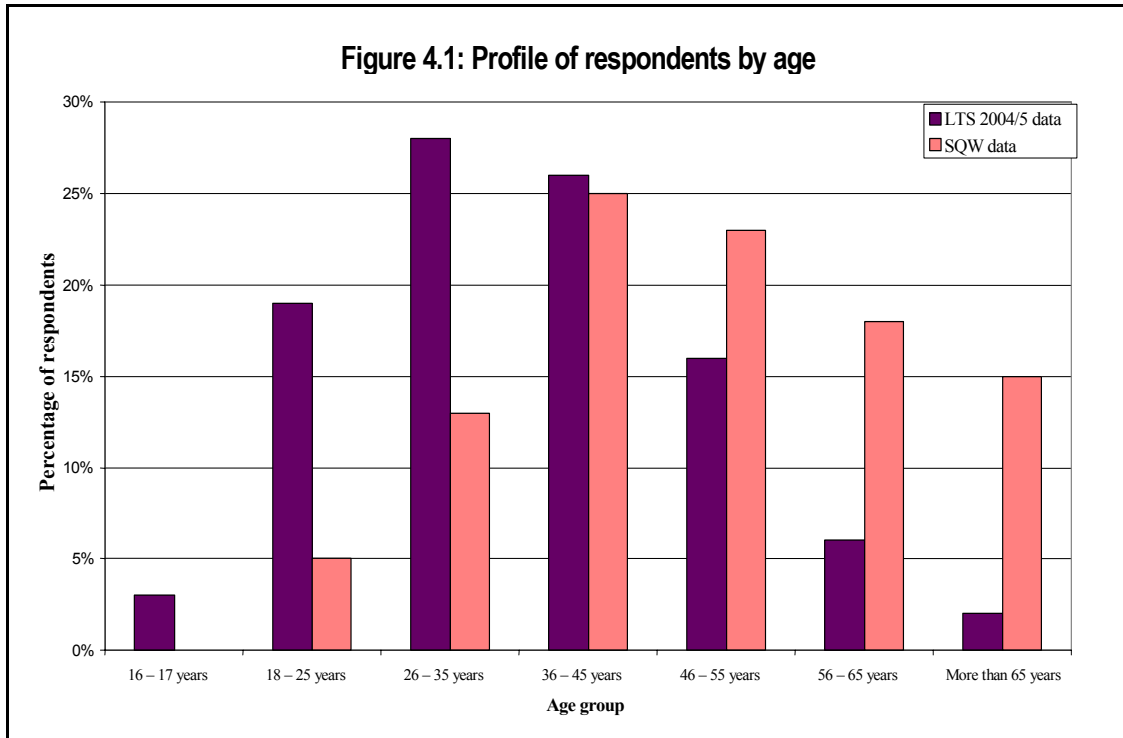
4.11   It was also noted in the Learner Tracking Study that when the profile of callers to learndirect scotland is compared to the Scottish population as a whole, there is a weighting towards younger age groups, females and those within the C1 and C2 socio-economic groups. Approximately one in ten callers to learndirect scotland is classified as a woman returner (i.e. a woman who is unemployed or a housewife who

intended to return to work at some point in the future). Two thirds of the sample for the SQW survey were female - this was only a marginally higher proportion than in the 2004/5 LTS, possibly because this is not a group targeted through marketing.

4.12   In terms of geography, the profile of callers who responded to the LTS over the last three years has been broadly in line with the Scottish population as a whole. However, the proportion of callers from the Glasgow and Lanarkshire areas has become higher than average: the proportion of callers from Glasgow has increased from 16 per cent in 2001/02 to 21 per cent in 2003/04, remaining at this level in 2004/05.

4.13   The proportion of callers from socially excluded areas (49 per cent in the most recent learner tracking study) is consistent with the general population as a whole. In the SQW survey of 300 callers, which was heavily weighted towards those who were known to have completed some learning after calling learndirect scotland (and were termed 'completers'), the proportion of callers from SEAs was lower than this, at 35 per cent.

4.14   In the most recent Learner Tracking Study, just over half of the respondents were in employment (51 per cent). Most studies concur that adults enquiring about, or engaging in, learning are motivated to do so primarily for work-related reasons (see Maguire et al, LSDA, 2006): with this in mind, it might have been expected that this figure would be higher. However, 25 per cent of callers from the most recent study were unemployed when they contacted learndirect scotland, compared to the population average of four per cent. This serves to substantiate that gaining access to, or progressing within, employment remains the most compelling factor in motivating adults to embark on learning activity. Of those responding to the SQW survey of 300 callers, 44 per cent were in employment and 18 per cent were registered unemployed. While these proportions are lower than those found in the LTS, they still confirm the importance of work-relatedness for the decision to call the learndirect scotland helpline. It should also be recognised that the disparity between the respective proportions may be attributable to the fact that 56 per cent of the SQW sample were over the age of 45, and therefore - certainly in the older age bands - would be less likely to be considering learning for work-related reasons and more likely to be doing so for reasons of personal development.

Prompt for calling learndirect scotland

4.15   Interviewees were asked whether they could recall what prompted them to contact learndirect scotland. The responses (Table 4.1) point to a high degree of penetration of learndirect scotland advertising campaigns among those who contacted the organisation.

Table 4.1: What prompted you to contact learndirect scotland?

Employment status

	Self employed	Employed	Unemployed	Retired	Health problem/disability	Housewife	Other	In education (16+) or not seeking work	Total
I saw an advert and decided to call them	5	78	32	30	6	15	10	0	176 (59%)
Other	2	16	12	11	2	1	7	1	52 (17%)
It was something I decided to do	2	8	3	7	1	1	0	1	23 (8%)
Can't remember	1	8	2	6	0	1	2	1	21 (7%)
Friend or relative suggested it	1	6	3	4	0	4	1	1	20 (7%)
Careers adviser suggested it	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	6 (2%)
My boss suggested it	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (0%)
One of my colleagues suggested it	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (0%)
TOTAL	12	120	54	59	9	22	20	4	300

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

4.16 The majority (59 per cent) said that they saw a learndirect scotland advert and decided to make a call. A substantial proportion of respondents identified an 'Other' reason as their prompt, but when their detailed responses are analysed this reveals that learndirect scotland promotional activity (radio adverts, leaflets, other promotional activity, roadshows, etc) accounted for a large proportion of these. When 'Other' responses are incorporated into the overall response, learndirect scotland's own promotional activity accounts for almost two thirds of 'prompts' for people to call the helpline.

4.17 This indication of the significant influence which learndirect scotland advertising has had on call-prompting contrasts with the feedback which was received from learning centre managers. Learning Centre staff considered that the majority of people who call in to the centres are unaware of the learndirect scotland television adverts and have not previously heard of learndirect scotland: they are said to have approached the centre in passing, or as a result of word of mouth, but not as a result of a television advert.

4.18 Two possible explanations can be offered for this apparent contradiction. Firstly it should be remembered that the SQW sample of respondents was interviewed after their contact with learndirect scotland, and therefore, when asked to recall where they had learned about learndirect scotland, may have inadvertently referred to the advertising. Alternatively, and more plausibly, when asked by Learning Centre staff about the specific trigger which prompted them to make contact, they may mention that they were 'passing by', but not necessarily go on to state that they had already known about it from an advertising campaign. Furthermore, it seems somewhat counter-intuitive that people would call in to a centre, while passing, without having some prior knowledge of what that centre provided.

Motivation to call learndirect scotland

4.19   Callers to the learndirect scotland helpline have different motivations for making contact. Some may already have made a decision to start learning, while others may be seeking general advice and guidance. The SQW survey of callers attempted to examine what people are looking for when they call the helpline.

4.20   Table 4.2, below, summarises callers' motivations for calling the learndirect scotland helpline. (Multiple responses mean that the total number of responses is more than the 300, which was the size of the sample.) The table gives the numbers responding to each category of motivation.

Table 4.2:   What was your motivation for calling learndirect scotland?

	Employed	Self employed	Unemployed	In education /not seeking work	Retired	Health problem/ disability	Housewife	Other	Total
TOTAL RESPONDENTS IN THIS CATEGORY	**120**	**12**	**54**	**4**	**59**	**9**	**22**	**20**	**300**
Wanted to learn a new skill	75	8	41	2	39	6	17	8	**196**
Looking to improve career prospects/gain a promotion	45	1	12	0	0	2	5	2	**67**
Looking to change the type of work I do	34	4	6	1	3	1	4	6	**59**
Wanted to improve an existing skill	25	0	7	1	13	1	2	4	**53**
Interested in learning connected to a hobby or interest	14	2	3	1	22	3	1	0	**46**
To help me get a job (unemployed at time)	1	0	31	0	1	0	2	2	**37**
Wanted to boost confidence/broaden experience	5	1	11	0	9	3	5	1	**35**
Looking to change my job/employer	19	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	**24**
Wanted to return to education	11	1	5	0	2	1	1	2	**23**
To help me get a job (returning to work after career break)	1	0	2	0	0	0	7	0	**10**
A change in personal circumstances	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	2	**10**
Had been made redundant	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	**6**
To help my children with their school work	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	**5**
Can't remember/unsure	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	**3**
TOTAL	236	19	124	5	94	17	48	31	574

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

4.21   It can be seen that 'wanting to learn a new skill' was the most commonly cited reason for seeking advice from learndirect scotland: just under two thirds of all respondents (including 63 per cent of employed people and 76 per cent of unemployed people) reported that this was one of the reasons for their call. A further 18 per cent wanted to improve an existing skill. This is broadly in line with findings from the Learner Tracking Study over a three year period.

4.22   The second most commonly cited response was 'looking to improve career prospects/gain a promotion'. The question was phrased in such a way that it was applicable both to employed and unemployed people. Overall, 22 per cent of respondents in the survey (67 out of 300) cited this as at least part of their motivation for calling. In the most recent Learner Tracking Study, the figure was much higher at 49 per cent. This difference can be attributed to the younger age profile of the LTS respondents.

4.23   These findings provide further support for the notion that employment or work-related reasons lie behind the majority of decisions of adults to engage in learning activity.

4.24   The longer-term Learner Tracking Study revealed some variances in findings across the demographic profile of its sample. Male respondents (18 per cent) and those within the DE socio-economic grouping (25 per cent) were the most likely to be motivated to call learndirect scotland to undertake learning that would help them to get a job. As expected, women returners (41 per cent) were also more likely to cite this as their motivation to call learndirect scotland compared to other women (8 per cent). Over-46 year olds (23 per cent) were more likely than other age groups to be motivated by the desire to improve an existing skill and by undertaking learning related to a personal interest (37 per cent). Females were more likely than males to be motivated by broadening experience or confidence-boosting (15 per cent and 9 per cent respectively). Older respondents were less likely than those within the younger age groups to be motivated to learn in order to change their job (38 per cent of over 45 year olds, compared to 53 per cent of those aged 45 years and younger).

4.25   Respondents in the SQW survey were asked to indicate what kind of advice or help they were looking for when they called the helpline. The results are shown in Table 4.3.

4.26   Approximately 47 per cent of respondents indicated that they had already decided what they wanted to learn but wanted information on availability. This figure is lower than the findings from the Learner Tracking Study, which reported that in 2005 the figure was around 67 per cent. Again, this is explicable by referring to the differences in the age profiles of the respective samples. It seems likely that LTS respondents, with a lower age profile, would be contacting learndirect scotland for information about specific, often work-related courses, while the SQW sample contained a much higher proportion of older respondents whose motivation was more likely to be for reasons of personal interest.

4.27   Around 34 per cent of respondents reported that they knew roughly what they wanted to do, but needed more help in choosing the right course. Again this finding differs from the LTS, where the figure was much lower at 19 per cent.

Table 4.3: Type of information/help sought by callers

	Known completers	Referrals to learning centre	Total
Total in cohort:	**100**	**200**	**300**
Knew what I wanted to learn - wanted information on availability	51	89	140
Knew roughly what I wanted to learn but needed help choosing what was right for me	31	71	102
Wanted to learn something new, but wasn't sure what or where to start	7	39	46
Information on funding/grants available	25	15	40
Other	10	6	16
Wanted careers advice	2	8	10
Information about qualifications	3	5	8
Can't remember/unsure	4	2	6
Information to help with childcare	1	1	2
TOTAL	134	236	370

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

Multiple responses were allowed, so the total number of responses is higher than the number of respondents (300)

Outcome of contact with learndirect scotland

4.28   In examining the outcome of calls to the learndirect scotland helpline, the data are derived from the cohort of 200 respondents whose call to learndirect scotland resulted in their referral to a branded learning centre. (The first cohort of 100 respondents are known to have completed a course.)

4.29   Respondents from the second cohort were asked to confirm the subsequent outcome of their contact. The responses revealed that 17 per cent had subsequently completed a course, 22 per cent were currently undertaking a course, one per cent had applied for a course but not yet started, 3 per cent had investigated options but not yet applied for a course, and 58 per cent had done nothing.

4.30   This can be contrasted with the findings from the Learner Tracking Study, which was conducted with a much larger and random sample. In total, 35 per cent of all LTS respondents had undertaken learning since calling: 29 per cent were currently undertaking a course and a further 6 per cent had completed a course. In addition, 14 per cent reported that they had applied for a course which had not yet started. The proportion of callers undertaking learning in 2004/05 was consistent with those measured in the previous three waves of the tracking study. However, in the SQW study a much higher proportion of respondents had subsequently completed a course. This could be expected: it is attributed to being a function of the criteria for inclusion in the sample, which, for one of the cohorts, was to have completed further learning.

4.31   In the most recent Learner Tracking Study, 29 per cent of respondents reported that they had done nothing since calling learndirect scotland in terms of progressing towards learning. In the SQW survey the figure is exactly twice as high, at 58 per cent. The LTS respondents in this group were asked the reasons why they had not yet engaged in learning. The most frequently cited responses were because they had not

found anything to suit their needs (20 per cent), they had not got round to undertaking learning but still intended to (19 per cent), and a lack of time (11 per cent).

4.32 Thus the evidence from the LTS points to high levels of commitment to, or interest in, undertaking further study, even by those who had not embarked on any learning at the time of interview. The notably higher proportions of the SQW sample that had, at the time of interview, not started a learning activity may again be attributable to the age distribution of the sample: for many of this older group, the urgency of gaining a skill or qualification in order to gain employment or career progression may not be as great.

4.33 Across the total LTS sample for the year, almost 35 per cent of respondents reported that they were currently learning or had completed a course since calling learndirect scotland. This finding is exactly consistent with the proportion of learners converted from callers measured in 2003/04, and very marginally less than in previous years.

Attribution

4.34 Survey responses clearly point to learndirect scotland having a significant impact on the subsequent participation of callers in learning. Of the 78 people from the cohort of 200 who had completed or started a course, almost two thirds reported that this was 'wholly' as a result of information or advice provided by learndirect scotland, suggesting that it is adding considerable value to the existing information, advice and guidance landscape. A further 12 per cent said that the outcome was 'partly' as a result of the assistance. By contrast, less than one quarter said that their embarking upon a course of learning had 'nothing to do with' the information or advice received.

Location

4.35 In terms of the place where subsequent learning took place it is interesting to note where the second cohort of interviewees - who had all been referred specifically to a learndirect scotland branded learning centre after their initial call to the helpline - the majority of those who subsequently became 'completers' or 'current learners' chose to do their learning (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

4.36 Although this shows a wide range of facilities. It is important to point out that many learning centres are located in colleges and learners may not distinguish between a college and a college-based learning centre. It would require more analysis to understand whether this is indeed the case or whether learners are choosing more generally to use facilities other than those they are referred to.

Figure 4.2: Location of Learning for Known Completers

Other 9%
Library 10%
University 7%
Local school 5%
At home/distance learning/Open University 10%
Learning centre 6%
Community centre 3%
Workplace 1%
Local college 49%

Figure 4.3: Location of Learning for Completers/learners after referral to BLC

Other 11%
Library 9%
Local school 4%
At home/distance learning/Open University 4%
Learning centre 13%
Community centre 8%
Workplace 1%
Local college 50%

Characteristics of 'Completers'

4.37   When the two cohorts of the survey are combined, the number of people who have completed a course of learning after contacting learndirect scotland is 134. Their characteristics have been analysed to determine what they have in common, and what – if anything – makes them more likely to follow through their initial enquiry.

4.38   Of the 134 completers, 46 per cent were employed or self-employed at the time of their initial enquiry to the learndirect scotland helpline. A smaller proportion, 31 per cent, were of working age but not in employment. The remainder were retired and not looking for work.

4.39   The gender distribution of completers replicated that of the overall sample: two thirds female and one third male.

4.40   A quarter of completers were from postcode areas defined as 'excluded', with the remainder being from non-disadvantaged areas. Completers were somewhat under-represented compared to the overall survey size: 35 per cent of the total sample size were from 'excluded' areas. This may point to the difficulties experienced by those who are seeking to re-engage with learning, but have little or no recent experience of the process.

4.41   This argument is further supported by the finding that, in comparison to the overall sample, 'completers' tended to have already attained substantial academic or vocational qualifications (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4:   Prior educational attainment of completers

Educational attainment before call to learndirect scotland	No.	%
Some O grades/Standard Grades/GCSEs	24	18%
Some Highers/A Levels	15	11%
Degree	22	16%
A vocational qualification	39	29%
Masters degree/PhD	3	2%
No formal qualifications	20	15%
Other	11	8%
TOTAL	**134**	**100%**

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

4.42   Thus, the fact that the majority of completers were already well qualified prior to undertaking their learndirect scotland-referred learning appears to bear out the received wisdom that 'learning begets learning'.

4.43   Table 4.5 lists the learners' choice of subject areas, by 'completers' and current learners. It should be noted that multiple response was possible and that several completers had undertaken more than one course of study.

Table 4.5:   Choice of subject by completers and current learners

Subject	Known completers	Current learners	Total
IT/computing/web design	32	46	78
European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)	15	15	30
Other	10	3	13
Languages	8	3	11
Humanities/Arts/Education	8	0	8
Beauty Therapy/Personal Services	6	0	6
Counselling	4	1	5
Childcare	4	1	5
Administration	2	2	4
Social work	2	2	4
Hobby (wine tasting, soft furnishing, etc)	4	0	4
Mathematics/Science	3	0	3

Subject	Known completers	Current learners	Total
Accounting/book keeping	1	1	2
Photography	2	0	2
Business management/Management	2	0	2
First Aid/Food Hygiene/Health & Safety	1	1	2
Forklift driver	2	0	2
Horticulture	1	1	2
Care (incl. nutrition, dental)	1	1	2
Communication	1	1	2
Hospitality	1	0	1
Basic literacy/numeracy	1	0	1
Tiling	0	1	1
Travel	0	1	1
TOTAL	111	80	191

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

4.44   The overwhelming significance of IT-related courses is quite striking and may again be linked to the perceived need on the part of many callers to develop skills which enhance individuals' employability. Alternatively, it may also reflect the propensity for people to engage in this type of learning for personal or social reasons. Indeed, St Clair (2006) refers specifically to this type of learning as an example of the difficulties of distinguishing between personal interest and instrumental reasons for participating in learning, and posits that 'Computer classes … may be taken for curiosity but may also enhance the individual's employability' (p 2).

4.45   One of the most encouraging findings of the survey was that a significant proportion of completers can be described as 'new learners': almost one quarter had not done any learning since leaving school. As indicated in Chapter 2, great importance is attached to the drive to increase levels of engagement in learning among adults who have previously exhibited little inclination to do so.

4.46   Another encouraging finding was that almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the total number of people who had completed or were undertaking a course at the time of interview were 'quite unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to have done so if they had not received information and/or advice from learndirect scotland. This offers supporting evidence to the contention that the service is making a significant contribution to levels of adult participation in learning.

Characteristics of 'Non-Engagers'

4.47   At the same time, it is useful to consider the characteristics of people who have called the helpline but have not followed up on the information or advice they received.

4.48   Of the 200 people who were referred to a branded learning centre as a result of their call, 121 (61 per cent) had not subsequently embarked upon learning, with the vast majority (116) having done nothing at all. Of course this does not suggest that they never will return to learning. For many, the appropriate course may not have become available or the convenient time may not have arrived. As Chapter 3 suggested, issues of availability of provision at the right time, place and cost, can impose constraints on individuals' attempts to engage with learning.

4.49   Indeed, the proportion of respondents in this cohort from socially excluded areas (41 per cent) is only slightly higher than that for the overall survey sample. (Of the total 300 survey respondents, 35 per cent are from excluded areas). This points to there being a variety of reasons for not engaging with learning by the time of the interview.

4.50   Of the 121 'non-engagers', 23 per cent were registered unemployed; 17 per cent were of working age but not in employment; 44 per cent were employed or self-employed; and 17 per cent were retired. This, in itself, is indicative of the constraints faced by those in employment in finding the time to undertake - and, crucially, complete - a particular course. Moreover, it should not be interpreted as representing a lack of interest or motivation, on the part of those respondents who were employed or self-employed, in embarking on the learning about which they made enquiries. It is highly likely that many would undertake their chosen course, when it was available and convenient as far as their own commitments were concerned.

4.51   More worryingly, however, a very high proportion of 'non-engagers' either had no formal qualifications at all or were only qualified to Standard Grade level (Table 4.6): 52 per cent of this group were poorly qualified, compared to 33 per cent of 'completers'. This suggests that the correlation between prior learning and the impetus to complete further learning continues to be significant.

Table 4.6: Educational attainment of 'non-engagers' at point of calling learndirect scotland helpline

Educational attainment prior to call to learndirect scotland helpline	No.	%
No formal qualifications	42	35%
Some O grades/Standard Grades/GCSEs	20	17%
Some Highers/A Levels	15	12%
Degree	12	10%
A vocational qualification	17	14%
Masters degree/PhD	1	1%
Other	14	12%
TOTAL	121	100%

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

4.52   This proposition is further supported by the findings that over half (51 per cent) of the non-engagers had not done any learning since leaving school; a further 31 per cent had not undertaken any learning in the previous three years; and only 6 per cent of the non-engagers had undertaken some form of learning within the last year.

Reasons for 'Doing Nothing'

4.53   Clearly, a significant proportion of callers to the helpline had not, at the time of interview, proceeded any further with learning activity. They were invited to indicate why this was the case. Responses to this question elicited a variety of reasons (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Reasons why non-engagers have done nothing since their call to learndirect scotland

Reason for non-engagement	No.	%
Haven't got round to it but still intend to	25	21%
Other	13	11%
Too expensive	11	9%
Won't have time in the foreseeable future	10	8%
Unsuitable timing and/or location of learning	10	8%
Family commitments	8	7%
Changed my mind	7	6%
Not found anything to suit my needs (not defined)	7	6%
Found (or changed) job so no longer necessary	7	6%
Poor/insufficient info/help from learndirect scotland	7	6%
Childcare problems	4	3%
Haven't found anything of interest	4	3%
Health problems	3	2%
Can't meet my requirement for distance learning	3	2%
Change in personal circumstances	2	2%
Don't have the confidence to get back into learning	0	0%
TOTAL	121	100%

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

4.54   In some cases people have good reasons for not following up on the advice that they were given: for example, those whose health problems or family commitments have taken precedence. There is evidence, however, that some of the traditional barriers to learning are still in existence. Childcare, for example, continues to be a problem for some would-be learners. Inconvenient timing or location of learning opportunities remain key issues for others.

4.55   Although no respondent directly identified 'lack of confidence to get back into learning' as a barrier, it was clear through additional questioning that this factor was apparent, albeit expressed in other ways. Several respondents made statements such as: 'I'm probably a bit old for that kind of thing now', 'I'm not in a good frame of mind at the moment', 'it's not really worth it', which could be taken as indirect expressions of lack of confidence. This has important implications for SUfI's operations, as it indicates that the availability of additional support and encouragement for those adults who have lack the confidence to re-engage - often after being 'disengaged' for many years - may reap rewards in terms of the re-engagement of traditional non-learners.

4.56   The potential for rewards accruing from providing such additional support is given added weight by the finding that 21 per cent of the 'non-engagers' stated that they intended to embark upon learning in the future. This is further cause for being encouraged by the findings of the study.

4.57   Six per cent of those who had not engaged with learning following their call to learndirect scotland identified poor or insufficient information from and/or 'lack of helpfulness' on the organisation's part, as the reason for their not having undertaken any learning. These respondents were in a minority, but the numbers correlate with findings from elsewhere in the survey about the service provided. Although perceptions of the service are largely positive, it is worth identifying areas where improvements could be made.

Success in attracting new and return learners

4.58   It is one of SUfI's key aims to attract interest from people who might not previously have felt that learning is for them. To assess the impact which learndirect scotland is having, it is important to identify the proportion of callers who are new learners or returners to learning.

4.59   New learners are defined as people who have started learning since calling the helpline but who had not previously undertaken learning since leaving school. Returners to learning are defined as people who have started learning since their contact, but who had not previously undertaken learning for at least three years.

4.60   The Learner Tracking Study investigates this on a quarterly basis. Table 4.8 summarises the profile of all respondents in terms of their prior engagement in learning (whether or not they have subsequently engaged in learning).

Table 4.8:   Success in attracting new and return learners

Percentages

	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Most recent participation in learning	**Total**	**Total**	**Total**	**Total**
Currently undertaking learning	19	25	21	22
In last year	25	29	25	24
1 – 3 years ago	17	16	20	21
More than 3 years ago	31	20	25	24
Not since school	8	10	9	10
BASE	1532	1065	1027	1022

Source: Progressive Partnership 2005

Scottish population figures for 'Last Time Took Part in Formal Learning Activity' are not available.

4.61   These figures indicate slight increases over four years in the proportions of callers who were currently undertaking learning, or whose most recent participation in learning had been between one and three years previously, as well as those who had not done any learning since their schooldays. Reductions occurred among those who had done so in the previous twelve months, and, in particular, those whose most recent participation had been more than three years previously. However, the fluctuations between years, and the fact that the degree of change tends to be relatively small, make it difficult to attach great significance to these results.

4.62   The 2004-05 Learner Tracking Study found that, across the total sample of 1,022 callers, 4.6 per cent were classified as 'new learners'(Table 4.9). Of the total LTS sample, 2.4 per cent of callers were new learners from socially excluded areas and one per cent were new learners employed by SME organisations.

Table 4.9: Proportion of new learners calling learndirect scotland helpline (Learner Tracking Study)

Percentages

Proportion of new learners	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
From Social Exclusion Areas	0.9	3.2	3.2	2.4
Employed by SME	0.6	1.1	0.7	1.0
TOTAL	2.0	6.0	5.1	4.6

Source: Progressive Partnership 2005

4.63   Perhaps the most striking feature of this table is the notable increase which occurred after the 2001/02 survey. This may indicate the initial success which learndirect scotland had in tapping into a latent demand among both individuals and SMEs.

4.64   The 2004/05 study also found that 10.4 per cent of the sample of callers to learndirect scotland were 'returners' to learning, who had not undertaken learning in the previous three years. The proportion of respondents who were 'returners' from Social Exclusion Areas was 4.2 per cent, whilst 2.5 per cent of the total sample were return learners employed by SME organisations. This indicated, therefore, that there had been a slight decline in the proportion of return learners from Social Exclusion Areas in 2004/05, whilst the proportion employed by SME companies had remained consistent.

4.65   The SQW survey attempted to investigate this in a similar way. The results of imposing a correlation between prior learning status and subsequent action are provided in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10:   Action undertaken since calling the learndirect scotland helpline

Most recent participation in learning	Nothing	Have investigated options but not yet applied for a course	Have applied for a course but not yet started	Currently undertaking a course	Have completed a course	Total
I was studying/learning at the time I phoned learndirect scotland	3	1	0	4	12	20 (7%)
Within the previous year	7	0	0	3	25	35 (12%)
1 - 3 years before	11	0	0	4	21	36 (12%)
More than 3 years before	36	1	0	12	45	94 (31%)
I hadn't done any learning since leaving school	59	3	1	21	31	115 (38%)
TOTAL	116	5	1	44	134	300 (100%)

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

4.66   Of the 300 survey respondents, 115 (38 per cent) had not done any learning since leaving school. Moreover, 27 per cent of these had completed a course since contacting learndirect scotland and a further 18 per cent were undertaking a course at the time of interview. This points to learndirect scotland having made some contribution to the engagement of 'new learners', although, as has been alluded to earlier, attributing causality to a single source is fraught with danger.

IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS

4.67   Clearly, the single most important aspect of learndirect scotland's work in terms of its effectiveness is the extent to which it impacts on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals, in relation to their participation in learning. This can apply to those

seeking entry or re-entry to the labour market, as well as to those in employment who are seeking to enhance their skills and career progression.

Entry into Employment

4.68   Of the overall survey sample, 109 respondents were not in work (but of working age) at the time they contacted learndirect scotland. These comprised: registered unemployed (54), housewives (22), people with health problem/disability (9), those in education/training but aged over sixteen (3), those not seeking work (1) and 'other' (20).

4.69   A total of 22 respondents reported that they were not previously working, but had subsequently found a job. The figure was twice as high amongst those who had completed a course (12 per cent) as amongst those who had not completed a course (6 per cent). This is an important finding, as it provides substantial evidence to highlight the benefits to be derived from participation in learning – in this case, obtaining a job.

4.70   Of the 22, 9 agreed that their new employed status was directly attributable to their dealings with learndirect scotland. Of these 9, one third had not undertaken any learning since leaving school, and one further respondent had not undertaken any learning in the previous three years. Although the sample is relatively small it does indicate a positive role played by learndirect scotland.

4.71   In summary, 9 out of 109 of all those who were unemployed when they called learndirect scotland had not only found employment, but had done so directly because of learndirect scotland. Of the 9 who attributed their employed status to this call, 7 (78 per cent) had completed a course. There were more females than males in this cohort, but the figures are broadly in line with the wider survey sample.

4.72   These job-finders were more likely to come from non-excluded areas. Only 5 of the 22 were from postcode areas identified as excluded. This exemplifies the difficulties of addressing what are often multiple barriers to employment faced by those living in deprived areas.

4.73   Of the 132 callers who were employed at the time of contacting learndirect, 20 said that, since contacting learndirect scotland, they had found a better job than the one they were in previously. Of these job-improvers, 8 (40 per cent) said that this was directly as a result of their dealings with learndirect scotland. Although the absolute numbers here are small and statistical significance is arguable, this is nonetheless a positive finding.

Benefits to Learners

4.74   A total of 14 respondents reported that they had received a pay rise since they contacted the helpline, although only two people felt that this was attributable to learndirect scotland. Also, the time lag between contacting learndirect scotland and being interviewed may, in some cases, be sufficiently long to expect a pay rise to have been awarded irrespective of any intervention.

4.75   As another indication of the benefits to be derived from participation in learning, the survey sought to quantify the extent of skills and qualifications being gained by individuals as a result of learndirect scotland support. Table 4.11 summarises the responses in terms of some of these 'hard' benefits:

Table 4.11:   Tangible ('hard') benefits accruing from learndirect scotland intervention

Benefits gained	Total citing benefit	Benefit attributable to learndirect scotland
I have gained a new skill	145	110
I have improved my existing skills	102	69
I now have a qualification that I didn't have before	65	64

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

Base: 300

4.76   These findings are extremely positive, as they indicate not only that substantial numbers of the sample of callers have gone on to acquire new skills, improve existing skills or attain a qualification, but, crucially, overwhelming majorities of those in each of these categories attribute their achievement directly to contacting learndirect scotland.

4.77   More than three quarters of those who had gained a new skill (110 out of 145) said that this was directly attributable to learndirect scotland. Nearly 68 per cent of those who had improved their existing skills (69 out of 102) also reported this. Overwhelmingly, those who had gained a qualification since contacting learndirect scotland attributed this directly to learndirect scotland.

Intangible Benefits

4.78   It is important to remember that 'hard' benefits do not provide the full story about engagement in learning. For many individuals, less tangible benefits are equally important. Table 4.12 summarises some of the 'soft' benefits which individuals have experienced since first contacting learndirect scotland. It should be emphasised, however, that these 'soft' measures are extremely difficult to quantify, largely due to their being essentially subjective assessments. Therefore, the percentages should be regarded as offering indications of the weighting of benefits, rather than hard and fast measures.

Table 4.12:   Intangible ('soft') benefits accruing from learndirect scotland intervention

Benefits gained	Total citing benefit	Total citing benefit attributable to learndirect scotland
I feel more confident in my job	48	25
I feel more confident generally	101	50
I feel happier at work	53	28
I feel happier generally	104	50
I have a better appreciation of the value of learning	114	69
I now have higher expectations or aspirations	79	45

in life		
I have taken up a new interest	38	26

Confidence Gains

4.79   A total of 48 out of 123 employed respondents reported that they now feel more confident in their job. Over half of these (25) said that this was directly attributable to their contact with learndirect scotland. That is, 20 per cent of all employed respondents stated that they had gained confidence at work as a direct result of contacting learndirect scotland. Notwithstanding the reservations about the robustness of some of these measures of 'soft' outcomes, perceived increases of this size are by no means negligible.

4.80   One third of the entire survey sample (101 respondents) reported that they now feel 'more confident generally', and 50 per cent of these attributed the increase in confidence directly to learndirect scotland. That is to say, 17 per cent of all respondents report increased confidence as a result of their contact. It is interesting, and encouraging, to note that there was a slight over-representation of individuals from disadvantaged areas in the numbers claiming to have experienced enhanced confidence.

Well-being/contentment

4.81   Some support was also evident for the notion that interest or participation in learning can contribute to greater job satisfaction. Thus, a total of 53 employed respondents claimed that they felt 'happier at work' than they did before their contact with learndirect scotland, and more than half of these (28) attributed the support through the helpline.

4.82   The potential for these enhanced feelings of well-being to affect non-work related aspects of people's lives was suggested by the finding that just under 17 per cent of all survey respondents claimed to feel generally happier and attributed this directly to learndirect scotland.

Change in Attitudes

4.83   Given the acknowledged ambition of learndirect scotland to facilitate attitudinal change towards participation in learning, the fact that 38 per cent of the overall sample reported that they now had a better appreciation of the value of learning, and that 61 per cent of those attributed this directly to the outcome of their contact with learndirect scotland, suggests that learndirect scotland is having a significant positive impact on the callers it attracts.

4.84   A total of 79 respondents said that they now had higher expectations or aspirations in life, and 60 per cent of these attributed the changed outlook directly to learndirect scotland. That is, 15 per cent of all those who make use of the helpline gain a more positive outlook which is directly attributable to learndirect scotland. In this group, however, people from disadvantaged postcode areas are notably under-represented. This may reflect a realistic appraisal of their situation. Thus, although this group may have become more self-confident overall, this does not necessarily mean that it will have any great impact on their job or career prospects in the foreseeable future.

4.85   It is useful to compare these attitudinal findings with the Advertising and Attitudinal Tracking Study (AATS) which is commissioned on an ongoing basis by SUfI. The March 2005 phase of the AATS indicated that overall attitudes towards learning across the Scottish population have not shifted to any great degree. As with previous phases of the research, there was found to be a strong correlation between attitudes towards learning and socio-economic groups: the higher the social group, the more positive the attitude to learning.

4.86   Although the responses indicated that a high proportion of people have positive attitudes towards the practical benefits of learning (Table 4.13), the March 2005 phase of the AATS saw a decline in the perceived relationship between learning and career options. For example, there was a reduction in the proportion of respondents who agreed with the statement that 'learning can lead to a greater choice in the types of job you can do'.

Table 4.13:   Attitudes to learning by socio-economic group

	Percentage of respondents agreeing with statement				
Attitudes to learning	**Total**	**AB**	**C1**	**C2**	**DE**
Learning can lead to a greater choice in the types of job you can do	80	86	84	82	72
Learning is an important part of helping people get back to work	82	90	88	83	75
Learning leads to better pay/promotion/job	82	88	87	83	76
Learning helps you get a job	77	84	82	79	70
Learning is an investment in a better future for myself/my family	62	66	73	61	57
BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS	1050	104	244	229	462

Source: Progressive Partnership 2005

4.87   The AATS also looks at some of the other personal benefits of learning. Whilst agreement with the more personal benefits of learning remained at a high level in March 2005, Table 4.14 shows that the lower socio-economic groups were less inclined to agree than those in the higher classifications. In particular, DEs were less likely to agree that 'learning can be fun' (67 per cent) or that 'learning new skills is valuable whether or not there is a qualification to show for it' (77 per cent). Respondents in the DE group were also least likely to express a desire to expand their horizons (47 per cent). This may point to an acceptance of their situation which was unlikely to undergo significant change.

Table 4.14:   Personal benefits of learning by socio-economic group

Perceived benefits of learning	Percentage of respondents agreeing with statement				
	Total	**AB**	**C1**	**C2**	**DE**
Learning is something people do throughout their lives	89	97	95	89	85
Learning new skills is valuable whether or not there is a qualification to show for it	83	93	89	85	77
Learning can be fun	76	91	84	77	67
I want to expand my horizons more	53	60	60	53	47
More knowledge would make me more confident	51	50	56	45	50
Base: all respondents	**1050**	**104**	**244**	**229**	**462**

Source: Progressive Partnership 2005

4.88   One fifth of respondents in the AATS reported that they did not have the confidence to learn, with a significantly higher proportion from DE socio-economic groups (29 per cent compared with 13 per cent from other groups) and from social exclusion areas (24 per cent compared with 18 per cent from other areas). C2s and DEs were most likely to feel that learning was not for them (34 per cent and 28 per cent respectively), compared with higher social groupings. A preference for spending their free time doing things other than learning peaked among the C2 group (63 per cent). These findings exemplify one of the great challenges to SUfI: eliciting interest in, and commitment to, learning on the part of lower socio-economic groups.

Caller satisfaction with learndirect scotland

4.89   It is axiomatic that repeat usage of learndirect scotland, or word of mouth recommendations about the benefits to be derived from the service, will depend to a large extent on callers' perceptions of the helpfulness, friendliness and efficiency of the service they received. Accordingly, the 300 respondents were asked how they would rate the overall service they received from learndirect scotland.

Figure 4.4: Caller satisfaction with learndirect scotland
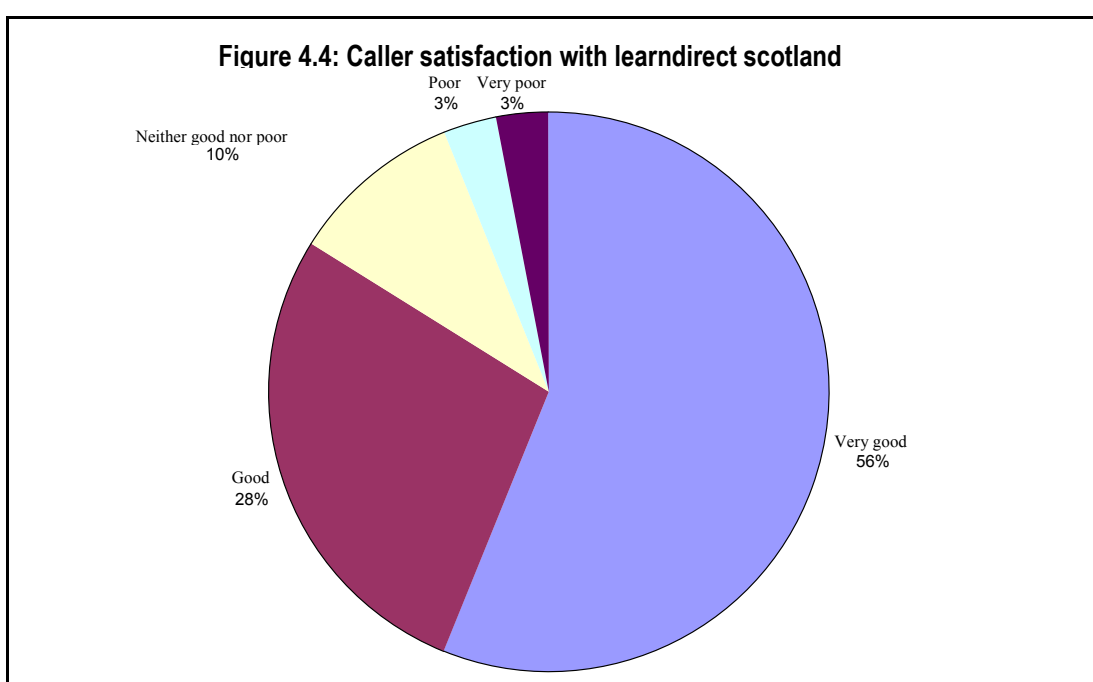
4.90   As Figure 4.4 indicates, a very high proportion of respondents (84 per cent) rated the helpline service as good or very good. These high satisfaction ratings point to learndirect scotland being highly efficient in the way in which it operates, and, in particular, in the way in which its staff interact with callers. These findings are consistent with those of the LTS.

4.91   The Learner Tracking Study looks at caller satisfaction ratings in much more detail. In the 2005 study the majority of respondents considered that learndirect scotland had either met or exceeded their expectations (73 per cent). Of the remainder, 14 per cent claimed not to have had any expectations, leaving 12 per cent who thought that learndirect scotland was worse than expected.

4.92   When asked how satisfied they were with the way in which learndirect scotland had handled their call, 91 per cent of the most recent LTS sample provided a positive rating of 'excellent' (31 per cent), 'very good' (43 per cent) or 'good' (17 per cent). Although the overall level of satisfaction in 2004/05 was consistent with that recorded in 2003/04, the proportion stating that they considered the call handling to be 'excellent' increased from 24 per cent to 31 per cent.

4.93   Similarly, when asked to rate the overall learndirect scotland service, the majority (86 per cent) of LTS respondents in the most recent study reported being satisfied, with 28 per cent describing it as 'excellent', 38 per cent considering it to be 'very good' and 20 per cent saying that the service was 'good'. The overall level of satisfaction with learndirect scotland has not varied significantly over the three phases of research, although again there has been an increase in the proportion describing it as 'excellent' since 2003/04 (from 19 per cent to 28 per cent).

4.94   It can be deduced from these findings from the two different surveys that learndirect scotland invariably provides its callers with an efficient service.

CHAPTER FIVE   LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND FOR BUSINESS

INTRODUCTION

5.1   learndirect scotland for business was launched in Summer 2002 from within the existing budget, with a remit to encourage and support SMEs to undertake training for staff. Whilst the brand operates under the umbrella of learndirect scotland, it is seen as an important addendum, focusing some resources on business. Information and advice is provided initially via the National Business Training Advice Line (NBTAL). Businesses can then request a visit from a Training Partner to conduct a bespoke training needs assessment. A report is provided with recommendations regarding the best training solutions for the company. The Training Partner acts objectively in identifying the best solution for a business, and will not necessarily recommend the services of a Branded Learning Centre.

5.2   It was apparent from the stakeholder consultations that other SME-focused activities were also being taken forward. These include increasing engagement with Sector Skills Councils, in order to: a) ensure alignment of provider databases, and b) guide SUfI in its increasingly sector-driven approach to business assistance.

5.3   This review of learndirect scotland for business is derived from three sources. First, a review was undertaken of previous research and surveys which had been conducted on learndirect scotland for business. This was then used to inform a telephone survey (undertaken by FMR Research) of 200 SMEs which had had some contact with learndirect scotland for business. Following the survey, a sample of SMEs were invited to a focus group meeting held over breakfast in Glasgow.

5.4   The data from employers cannot be portrayed as being representative of employers generally, given that some contact was a pre-requisite for inclusion in the survey. Importantly, however, it provides indicative findings which enable a number of issues to be identified and explored.

REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

5.5   As part of SUfI's recognition of the fact that research is required to understand the impact of employers' contact with learndirect scotland for business and satisfaction with the service, surveys have been conducted with employers bi-annually since March 2003. The most recent wave of research (at the time of this evaluation) was undertaken in October 2005.

5.6   The following section highlights some of the key findings flowing from this research.

Awareness levels of learndirect scotland for business

5.7   A tracking study was initiated by SUfI in March 2002 to monitor levels of awareness of the learndirect scotland for business brand among employers and their recall of the campaign. For the purposes of this report, the findings of the March 2005 survey were the most recently available.

5.8   The 2005 study suggested that there were very low levels of awareness of learndirect scotland for business among enterprises, the . Indeed, when compared to the findings from previous years, the study indicated a continuing decline in knowledge about the

brand, which was down to 15 per cent - although awareness was higher within the tourism sector, at 23 per cent, where specific marketing efforts had been undertaken. This is a somewhat curious finding, given that the expectation would normally be of a gradual increase in awareness over time.

5.9   We note that more recent research, in 2006, however, indicates a higher levels of awareness following work by SUfI.

5.10   The main conclusions from the 2005 study were that:

- there was evidence of a healthy interest in training amongst SMEs, with around half of the sample believing that training was increasing in importance
- increasing numbers of employers were using external training organisations, alongside informal training methods
- there appeared to be great potential for the provision of relevant training advice/resource
- little concern was expressed about sourcing courses: only 9 per cent considered this difficult
- in contrast, issues were raised about identifying funding and sourcing types of training to suit individual business needs. This would appear to offer opportunities in terms of what the Training Partners can offer
- learndirect scotland for business has very low spontaneous brand awareness among SMEs
- in particular, recall of mailings was very low amongst an audience known to have been mailed. This may call into question the effectiveness of mass market mailings: it should be noted that SUfI has acted on these findings by introducing more sectorally relevant campaigns, based on a segmentation model - a perceived success has been achieved in the Tourism sector
- in the tourism sector, whose employers had been specifically targeted, awareness and understanding was higher, thereby lending support for the idea of a sector targeting approach
- few respondents appeared to understand the role of learndirect scotland for business or how it could be of help to their business.

5.11   As indicated earlier, the findings from the survey can be viewed as disappointing, certainly in relation to awareness. However, in response SUfI has instigated a comprehensive review of its approach to marketing to SMEs and the 2006 results demonstrate improvements.

learndirect scotland for business: Service Evaluation Results

5.12   In contrast to the relatively downbeat findings about awareness of learndirect scotland for business, other external research (Progressive Partnership, December 2005) highlighted the impressive levels of service being provided to callers. This was notably well-received at two levels, database/information provision and Training Partner involvement.

5.13   The quality of the service which is provided for employers is fundamental to the successful development of the learndirect scotland for business offering and provides a sound foundation on which the policy of awareness-raising can be based.

5.14   The findings of the learndirect scotland for business service evaluation are extremely pertinent given the diversity of the SME market and the variability of employers' requirements for training. The evaluation found that the highest satisfaction levels were achieved when both database and Training Partner services were performing well. It could be deduced from this that effective provision of both aspects are needed to meet the needs of the market. Latest data point to the database service being well-regarded by employers, with the proviso that it could benefit from continued updating to ensure that the information is accurate and covers as many industry-specific courses as possible. One area where monitoring is required is in the follow-up: it is considered to be important that callers receive all the information they have been promised.

5.15   The Training Partner service continues to deliver high satisfaction levels and is regarded as being extremely valuable by the majority of respondents. It would be easy to suggest that this should be rolled out more widely, in order to address the needs of greater numbers of employers. However, a note of caution needs to be introduced: should a roll-out be attempted, it will be important that the current levels of individual service/attention are maintained. At the same time, in terms of communication there is an identified need to ensure that greater clarity and reassurance over the specifics of what learndirect scotland for business offers is provided. The consultations suggest that this is in hand already. Therefore, the main challenge will be to maintain and improve service levels in the face of the increasing expectations of SMEs which are driven by new communications (see Progressive Partnership, 2005).

Training Partner service: internal review conducted by SUfI

5.16   Another source of evidence about the operations of learndirect scotland is the internal reviews of its Training Partner service which have been conducted by SUfI. The main findings of the study which reported in August 2005, in terms of its Training Partner (TP) achievements between May 2002 and March 2005 were as follows:

- 2,562 'new' SMEs were visited by a Training Partner
- 1,983 'new' SMEs adopted a planned approach to learning as a result of TP intervention (77 per cent of SMEs who engaged with TP)
- A further 1788 'new' SMEs received non 'face to face' advice from a Training Partner
- 980 SMEs engaged in our 'online for success' e-learning project
- 90 per cent of surveyed SME learners who engaged in e-learning stated that this learning would improve their work performance
- 1,523 SMEs received at least one follow up Training Partner visit
- 1,132 engagements with partner organisations were undertaken
- Training Partners assisted in the delivery of over 150 Business Learning Accounts
- 87 per cent of SMEs rated the service to be valuable or very valuable.

5.17   SUfI's internal review refers to the independent research conducted by Progressive Partnership, which concluded 'The experience of those who have used the Training Partner service appears to be universally positive. They see clear value in the work completed by the Training Partners, driven to a large degree by the bespoke and tailored approach taken.' This clearly identifies the Training Partner service as a key component of learndirect scotland for business' offering, which was confirmed by the other data-gathering strands of the study.

5.18   The internal review (SUfI, 2005) concluded that:

- each Training Partner spent almost 50 per cent of their time undertaking research and performing administrative tasks. With additional central support, the geographic Training Partners can increase client engagement activity by 33 per cent

- with the introduction of enhanced materials and review cycles, the Training Partner will now be better equipped to monitor client progress and measure learning outcomes, linking this directly to improved business performance

- it could be argued that we are limited only by the finite resource available to us and that we could scale up our activity (and the resultant impact in terms of economic growth) by introducing further Training Partners

- the research projects conducted by Progressive for learndirect scotland for business have resulted in the emergence of a number of consistent themes. One of these is the importance and value placed on the Training Partner service amongst those who have experienced it, and the positive attitudes to the concept amongst those who were unaware of the existence of this service

- there is a clear need for a service such as that provided by Training Partners, highlighted in the mostly ad-hoc approach taken by many SMEs towards identification of training needs, and fulfilment of these. In addition, the lack of a specific training manager in many of the smaller companies means that any form of support in this area is welcome

- the one major factor holding back the development of the Training Partner service is lack of awareness, not just of this service specifically, but of learndirect scotland for business in general. This is in part due to resource limits preventing widespread promotion of the Training Partner service, but is also partly due to the fact that much of the awareness about learndirect scotland for business that does exist is being driven by the core learndirect scotland brand, which can cause confusion.'

5.19   The Training Partner service is clearly successful, effective and well-regarded by those using the service. The potential for doing even more, through the expansion and further roll-out of the service, was recognised in SUfI's internal report. At the same time, however, the resource-intensity of the service was acknowledged as a constraint on its immediate extension. Recommendations were made for reducing the research and administrative responsibilities of the Training Partners, in order that they could increase their employer contact time, and thus their effectiveness. This has now been implemented.

5.20   A fundamental issue which was identified in the report was the lack of awareness of the Training Partner service among employers, and particularly SMEs. In seeking to rectify this, however, care needs to be taken to avoid creating a demand which may be well in excess of the capacity of the current cadres of Training Partners to satisfy. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, increasing the capacity of the Training Partner service is not necessarily straightforward.

TELEPHONE SURVEY OF 200 SMES

5.21   In order to learn more about the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of employers in relation to learndirect scotland for business, a survey of 200 SMEs was conducted (by FMR Research) as part of the SQW study.

Profile of SME respondents

5.22   Respondents were asked to indicate how many people were employed by their company. As Figure 5.1 shows, a significant proportion (28 per cent) of the 200 SMEs in the survey were micro-companies employing fewer than 5 people, and over half of the companies who took part in the survey employed fewer than 10 staff. This is in line with the twice-yearly studies carried out since 2002, which consistently report that the size of companies calling the national advice line is skewed towards the lower end of the scale.

Figure 5.1: Survey Response by Company Size
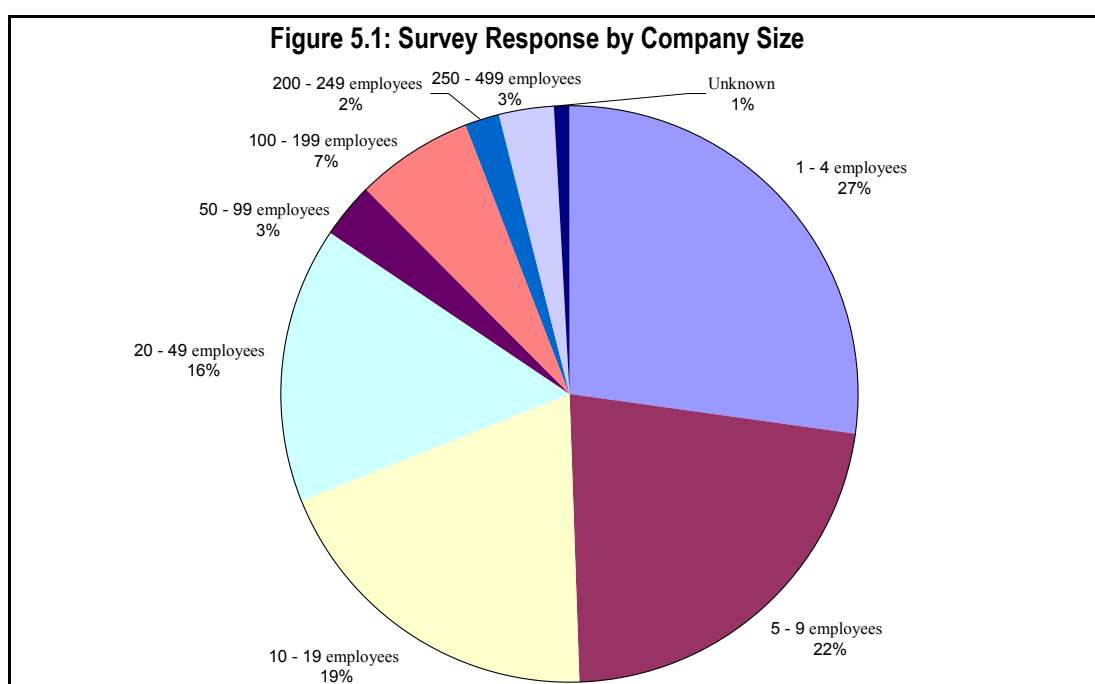
Source: SQW/FMR 2006

5.23   In terms of the distribution of the sample by industrial sector (Figure 5.2), Health and Social Work and Other Community, Social and Personal Service Activities were significantly over-represented in the sample. Indeed, the prevalence of service industries is striking, especially given the acknowledged skills and training needs of firms in manufacturing. This certainly suggests that a concentrated effort is required to increase the penetration of learndirect scotland for business among firms in those sectors where current representation is low.

Figure 5.2   Survey response by Standard Industrial Classification
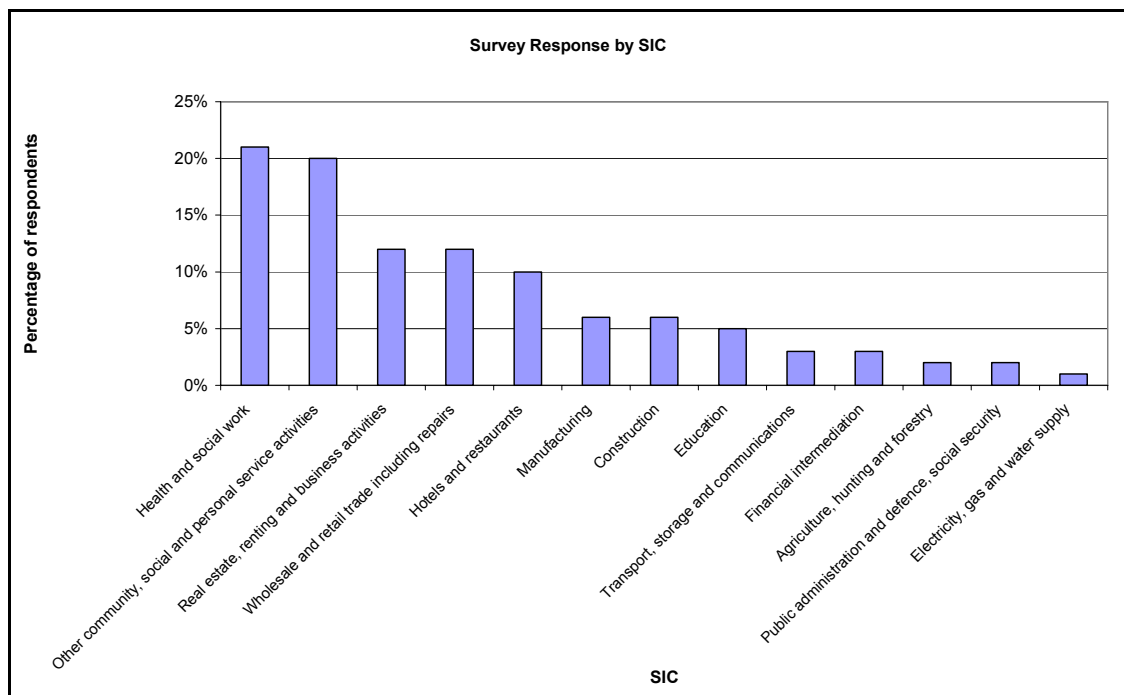
5.24   The respondents to the survey were invariably senior managers or owners of the companies concerned.

Motivation for calling learndirect scotland for business

5.25   When asked about their motivation for calling learndirect scotland for business, the most frequently cited reasons were 'to request further information' (mentioned by 52 per cent of respondents) and 'to enquire about a general field of learning' (mentioned by half the respondents). It should be noted that respondents were allowed to give more than one response. Thirty five per cent had a specific course for which they required further information. Almost a fifth were seeking information or advice on funding options, and18 per cent were enquiring generally about the training options which may be appropriate for their organisation.

5.26   These findings are interesting, because they indicate that there is a considerable degree of need for the input of Training Partners in working alongside employers to identify needs and discuss appropriate means of addressing them.

5.27   Certainly, this type of input may be greater than that which is anticipated by the majority of callers to the service. As Table 5.1 highlights, the majority of callers initially envisaged a relatively low key input from the service, involving the provision of information on courses and funding rather than provision of support.

Table 5.1:   Perceptions of learndirect scotland for business role prior to contacting helpline

When you first phoned them, what did you think were the main roles of learndirect scotland for business?	
To provide information on general courses	131
To provide information on specific courses for my industry	72
To provide support in identifying training needs in organisations	58
To provide information on funding for training	45
Unsure	43
To provide support in implementing training plan in organisations	38
To provide information on e-learning	20
Other	5
To provide training	4
To help small businesses	3

Base: 200 (multiple response allowed)
Source: SQW/FMR 2006

Outcome of call to learndirect scotland for business

5.28   In terms of the impact of the contact which was instigated with learndirect scotland for business, the survey findings reveal a substantial amount of activity having taken place in the wake of the contacts. Sixty per cent of respondents stated that they had received written information in the post following their call to the business helpline. The second most frequently mentioned response was that of having received a visit from a Training Partner, which was the case over a fifth (22 per cent) of the sample. Given that it could be expected that many of the queries and contacts could be satisfied without recourse to a visit from a Training Partner, this represents a considerable degree of in-depth input from the service. It may also point to a very large potential demand for this type of service, with the opportunity to generate significant longer-term impact on employers' attitudes to training and staff development.

5.29   Fifteen per cent of the sample claimed that as well as being visited by a Training Partner they had received a report from them. At the time of the interview, a much smaller proportion (7.5 per cent of the sample) had acted upon the advice received from the Training Partner.

5.30   Thirty respondents (15 per cent of the sample) stated that nothing had happened since their contact with learndirect scotland for business. While this is a significant minority, it is likely that a substantial proportion of these respondents had gained what they required from the service without need for further input – for example, through being referred to appropriate training providers at the time of the initial call. It is also the case that the interview may have taken place relatively soon after their contact with learndirect scotland for business, and therefore there may not have been time for agreed actions to have been instigated.

5.31   Overall, it can be concluded that the results of the survey point to there being a more than satisfactory level of post-contact activity emanating from employers calling learndirect scotland for business.

Training Partner Service

5.32   Of the total of 44 respondents who had received a visit from a Training Partner since calling learndirect scotland for business, 37 went on to report that the TP service had had a positive impact upon their business. This is an impressive figure, and again suggests that, where awareness can be generated, there is enormous potential for Training Partners to influence employers' attitudes to, and subsequent participation in, training.

5.33   Furthermore, it became apparent from other responses to the survey that many of those who initially reported 'no impact' had in fact benefited in various ways from the TP service, e.g:

- 'Has motivated staff'
- 'Helped to show me how to find staff.'

5.34   Also, as stated earlier, an absence of activity does not necessarily reflect a lack of intention or motivation to instigate some activity in the future:

- 'Didn't follow it up with further courses - not through fault of learndirect scotland for business'
- 'Didn't go ahead with it, staff were going through in house training'
- 'Have not yet acted on advice, also looked at other options.'

5.35   Table 5.2 presents the responses to a specific question about the impact of the Training Partner service. While it may appear that relatively modest proportions of the sample were able to report identifiable impact emanating from their contact with a Training Partner, it should be emphasised that as far as many of the types of change are concerned - such as attitudinal shifts, enhanced morale, and productivity gains - these are often gradual changes which can only be positively identified after a lengthy period has elapsed. Indeed, it is significant that the most frequently mentioned impact, that of an improvement in the skill levels of employees, is perhaps one of the most readily measurable changes which can be expected to emerge as a direct and immediate result of training activity.

Table 5.2:   Impact of Training Partner Service

Perceived impact of Training Partner service	Proportion of sample	
	No.	%
Staff skills have improved	27	14
We now provide a better service to customers	17	9
Other	15	8
We now have a more positive attitude towards learning and training	14	7
We have improved our organisational structure	12	6
Staff morale has improved	11	6
Our productivity levels have improved	11	6
It's too early to say	5	3
None of the above statements is true	28	14

Base: 200

Multiple responses allowed
Source: SQW/FMR 2006

5.36   Among the comments from respondents who expanded upon their answer were:

- 'Gave us information on what we need for the future'
- 'Helped to show me how to find staff'
- 'Lady who came out was excellent. I can now use computer to benefit business'
- 'Made it easier to get into and to add further skills to staff'
- 'Range of courses very good and have taken up some'
- 'Some staff were able to get funding through ILAs'
- 'Staff did not take up opportunities'.

Training undertaken since calling learndirect scotland for business

5.37   A total of 99 SMEs reported that employees within their organisation had undertaken training in the period since they first called the training advice line. Of these, 41 said that this was 'wholly' as a result of information or advice provided by learndirect scotland for business, and a further 22 said that it was 'partly' as a result of this.

5.38   To gain an impression of additionality, these respondents were asked whether this training would have happened anyway, even if they had not called the national advice line. Of these 99 respondents, 69 per cent said that the training was 'very likely' or 'likely' to have happened anyway, and 9 per cent were unsure. Absolute additionality, therefore, is limited to around 21 per cent.

5.39   However, several respondents expanded upon their answer by pointing out that it would have taken them longer to find the information that they needed, or that it would have been more expensive. The fact that some of the training activity would have taken place at some time, even without the involvement of learndirect scotland for business, should not be interpreted as an indication that it is not in these circumstances performing a useful service. By speeding up the process or making it more cost-effective to employers, learndirect scotland for business is essentially contributing to greater productivity, profitability and efficiency among employers. This in itself is a justifiable aim of SUfI, which is thereby providing value for money. It can be concluded, therefore, that additionality at a more general level may be considerably higher than 21 per cent.

BENEFITS ARISING FROM CONTACT WITH LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND FOR BUSINESS

5.40   SME respondents were invited to identify what benefits, if any, had arisen for them or their employees as a result of learndirect scotland for business intervention. A range of tangible and less tangible benefits were discussed.

5.41   Table 5.3, below, represents an attempt to quantify some the tangible benefits accruing to SME employees as a result of learndirect scotland for business. Respondents were able to select more than one answer.

Table 5.3: **Which of the following benefits has your firm seen since calling learndirect scotland for business, and to what extent can they be attributed to the intervention? (Tangible or 'hard' benefits)**

Benefits mentioned	Total no. of respondents citing benefit	Total instances of benefit attributable to learndirect scotland for business	% of total benefit attributable to learndirect scotland for business	% of total sample with benefit attributable to learndirect scotland for business
I/my employees have had a pay rise	19	1	5	0
I/my employees have received a financial bonus at work	7	2	29	1
I/my employees have been promoted	16	3	19	2
I/my employees have gained a new skill	75	51	68	26
I/my employees have improved existing skills	65	51	78	26
I/my employees now have a qualification not held before	28	20	71	10
I/my employees have started a course	34	17	50	9

Base: 200

Source: SQW/FMR 2006

5.42   As can be clearly seen, the financial benefits accruing to individual SME employees as a direct result of learndirect scotland for business are limited. Of the 19 respondents who reported that they or their employees had received a pay rise, only one felt that this could be attributed in any way to learndirect scotland for business. Furthermore, the number reporting receipt of a financial bonus is too small to be statistically significant.

5.43   By contrast, tangible benefits in the form of the acquisition of skills and qualifications can be much more clearly seen. Of the 65 SMEs who reported increases in existing skills, more than three quarters (78 per cent) said that this was directly attributable to learndirect scotland for business. That is, 26 per cent of the entire survey sample reported not only that existing skills had improved, but that this was directly attributable to the support.

5.44   The fact that a high proportion of SME employees had gained new skills was also apparent. Taken together, these findings lend weight to the argument that once SMEs become aware of learndirect scotland for business, substantial and measurable benefits can accrue, with a significant impact being made on workforce skills.

5.45   As discussed earlier in relation to the responses and experiences of individuals who called, difficulties arise when attempting to quantify less tangible or 'softer' benefits, largely because of the subjective nature of the assessments made. Table 5.4, below, summarises some of the 'softer' benefits arising. Again, respondents were able to select more than one answer.

Table 5.4: **Benefits derived since calling learndirect scotland for business and attribution**

Benefits mentioned	Total no. citing benefit	Total instances of benefit attributable to learndirect scotland for business	% of total sample with benefit attributable to learndirect scotland for business
I/my employees feel more confident at work	61	31	16
I/my employees feel more confident generally	50	21	11
I/my employees feel happier at work	50	24	12
I/my employees feel happier generally	15	5	3
I/my employees have a better appreciation of the value of learning	56	32	16
I/my employees now have higher expectations or aspirations in life	40	18	9
I/my employees have taken up a new interest	8	2	1

Base: 200 (multiple response allowed)
Source: SQW/FMR 2006

5.46 Notwithstanding the aforementioned issues relating to measuring 'soft' benefits, these responses provide powerful evidence of the positive impact of learndirect scotland for business. A quarter of the whole sample asserted that, following the contact made, they or their employees felt more confident generally, and happier at work.

5.47 There was also a contention on the part of one fifth of the sample that as a result of the intervention they had developed higher expectations or aspirations in life. One of the critical limitations of surveys or evaluations which seek to identify the impact of measures whose objectives are to effect longer-term attitudinal and cultural change is the timescale over which such processes of change need to be tracked. That such change can be identified in the relatively short period since the intervention occurred suggests that, over time, learndirect scotland for business has immense potential to inculcate a greater attachment to learning and training in companies in Scotland.

5.48 At the same time, the results offer exciting evidence of the possibility of measuring such change over shorter periods than had appeared likely. This presents a great opportunity for initiating studies of the impact on individual companies. The product of such research could be compelling case studies, which can be used to persuade sceptical employers of the benefits, both 'hard' and 'soft', of investing in the training and development of their employees.

Satisfaction with learndirect scotland for business service

5.49 As well as seeking indications of the impact of employers' contact with learndirect scotland for business, the survey attempted to gain an impression of SMEs' satisfaction with the general level of service provided. Figure 5.3 illustrates the distribution of the responses.

Figure 5.3: To what extent did the service you received from learndirect scotland for business meet your expectations?

Unsure 4

Did not have any expectations
12%

Met my expectations
43%

Fell short of my expectations
20%

Exceeded my expectations
21%
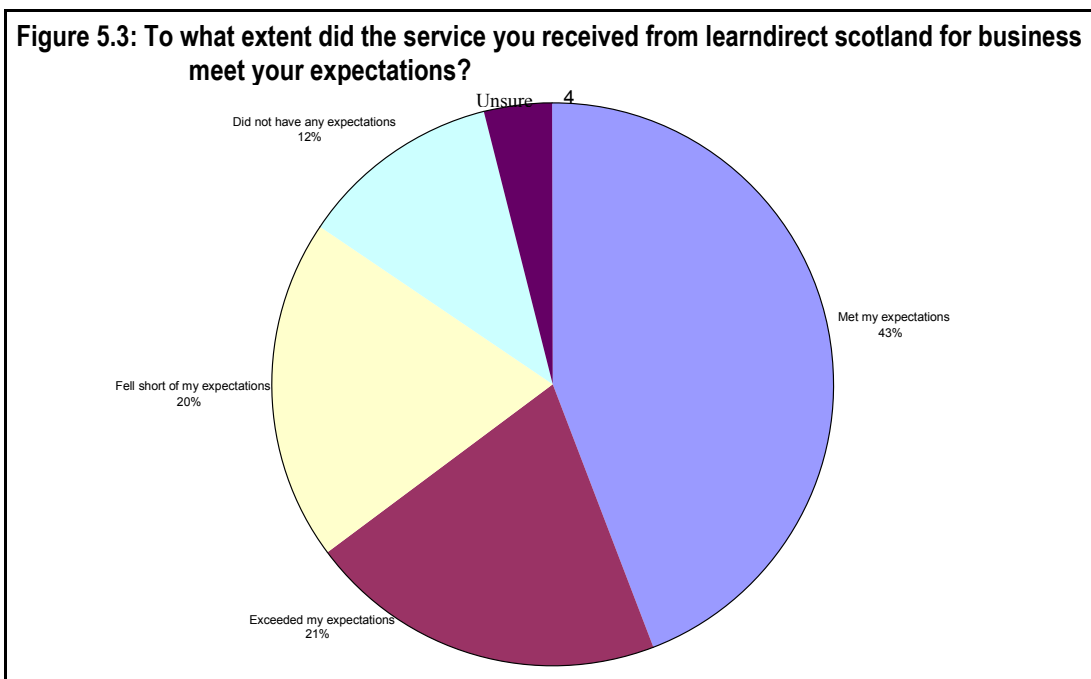
Source: SQW/FMR 2006
Base: 200

5.50   Overall, 64 per cent of respondents said that the service provided by learndirect scotland for business either met or exceeded their expectations. This is lower than the findings from the wider evaluation carried out by Progressive Partnership, 2005, which reported to SUfI in December. The elapsed time between the service provision and the survey may have some bearing on this, as the perceptions of SMEs who phoned the helpline very recently may vary from those who called over a year ago. Nonetheless, this still represents a high degree of satisfaction with the service.

5.51   In line with the wider evaluation, perceptions of the quality of learndirect scotland for business service were more favourable amongst those who had received the Training Partner service: 16 out of 44 of those who received a visit from a Training Partner said that the service exceeded their expectations. Amongst those who had gone a stage further – acting on the advice given by the Training Partner – 40 per cent reported that the service had exceeded their expectations.

5.52   In commenting on the benefits deriving from their contact with learndirect scotland for business, those aspects which were prominent were:

- the facilitation role - '*Facilitation is an important element - we would have got there without learndirect scotland for business, but it would have taken us a lot longer.*'

- the efficiency of the service provided - '*Got a speedy response from learndirect scotland for business, top notch service!*'

- the support provided - '*If [learndirect scotland for business] hadn't been there, there would be no motivation*'

- the helpfulness of the staff - *'learndirect scotland for business were delightful to work with. Some staff have gone on to do further advantageous things. learndirect scotland for business very supportive. Most changes are due to courses & help from learndirect scotland for business.'*

- the information provided - *'Information from learndirect scotland for business courses 100 per cent responsible [for benefits gained].'*

5.53   It is apparent from the comments that once employers can be persuaded to make the initial contact, the responsiveness of the staff - in particular, the input from the Training Partners - makes a highly favourable impression. This is a real strength, which can form the basis of a concerted effort to attract more SMEs to engage with the service.

SME FOCUS GROUP

5.54   Although the small number of SME representatives who attended the breakfast focus group did not encompass the range of sectors which might have been hoped for, they were able to offer different perspectives and provided some very useful insight into SMEs' engagement with learndirect scotland for business.

5.55   The key findings emanating from the focus group are described below.

Awareness of learndirect scotland for business services

5.56   General awareness of the service was high, as might be expected from SMEs that had already engaged with learndirect scotland for business, but how it could specifically help SMEs was less clear. The question arose: how can business benefits be demonstrated to enhance the message delivered, highlighting that training is an investment not a cost? It was also highlighted that it is hard to keep track of the range of services and initiatives on offer ('quite confusing'). Television and press advertisements maintain strong general awareness.

Service visibility

5.57   Once engaged with learndirect scotland for business, the potential benefits of its offering were readily apparent. However, initially it was difficult to identify what the benefits might be, thus highlighting a barrier to engagement with the service. There was acknowledgement of the difficulty of selling lots of different messages at the same time and it was felt that perhaps the message is skewed towards SMEs which are in the business planning phase.

Service experience

5.58   In some cases learndirect scotland for business was used as a referral point to seek general information on the different initiatives, whilst others had a specific interest or question in mind. Contact with learndirect scotland for business was viewed as a long-term relationship. External training was considered more credible than internal courses, highlighting to employees that they are valued within the organisation.

Individual Learning Accounts Scotland

5.59   ILAs are not targeted at business employees, but at individuals, although they could be used by low-paid employees acting on their own cognisance. Awareness of ILAs is high, but some barriers in take-up were cited. It was suggested that individuals tend not to make use of ILAs as they have to spend time registering and completing all the paperwork: a suggestion was made that perhaps this could be done collectively, in businesses, through Training Partners, but this would be contrary to the ILA Scotland scheme rules. It was also suggested that people might think there is a catch in applying for an ILA. It was perceived to be about changing the mentality, so that training is regarded as an investment and not as a cost. The point was made that training is particularly important for those who have been out of education for a long time, as it gently helps them to get back into learning.

5.60   The following suggestions for service improvements were made:

- Training Partners could be allocated responsibility for specific Sector Skills Councils
- there is a need for more financial assistance for SMEs, and Training Partners could have a role to play in lobbying the case for SMEs
- there is a real need to target those individuals within SMEs who lack numeracy and literacy skills - perhaps by linking with guidance and support mechanisms. Under current arrangements, this would be a role for SUfI in partnership with Communities Scotland.
- a clear demand for networking opportunities and maybe a forum to exchange ideas would also help to spread the word about learndirect scotland for business
- it was considered vital that Training Partners take the initiative by visiting SMEs to stay in touch, rather than SMEs instigating the contact, in order to sustain an effective long-term relationship. This would require more staff resource.

5.61   The feedback from such a small focus group cannot be regarded as representative of all SMEs. Nevertheless, some of the group's suggestions are in line with the way in which SUfI is moving (such as interaction between Training Partners and the Sector Skills Councils), and can be taken as validation of SUfI's approach.

CHAPTER SIX   BRANDED LEARNING CENTRES

INTRODUCTION

6.1   This Chapter focuses on the study's exploration of branded learning centres (BLCs). After a description of their aims and operations, earlier research on the centres is discussed. This is followed by a presentation and analysis of the findings from the current study, derived from the focus groups and telephone interviews conducted with the managers of the BLCs. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings and discussion of their implications.

6.2   In direct support of the Scottish Executive's Lifelong Learning Strategy, the mission of SUfI is to help individuals and small businesses across Scotland to realise their potential through learning, at a time, place, pace and style that suits their needs. Its network of 500 quality-assured learning centres is a key part of the national infrastructure set up to deliver these aspirations.

6.3   It is important to bear in mind that SUfI *does not own or manage any learning centres*, but enters into agreements with learning providers to offer high quality provision in a learner-centred environment. Learning centres across all sectors (further and higher education, voluntary and private sector providers, local authorities and others) apply to SUfI to become a 'branded' centre. learndirect scotland's learning centre approval panel meets monthly to consider applications based on the documentation submitted and a visit report.

6.4   Only learning providers that deliver the Pledge To Learners to the necessary quality standards can become members of the network (see www.learndirect scotland4partners.com). In delivering the Pledge to Learners learning centres undertake to:

- *'Offer the time, place, pace and style of learning that most closely meets your needs*
- *Give clear information that helps you make the best personal choices about learning programmes and maintain control of your learning*
- *Provide learning materials that are relevant to your own personal and work interests and actively involve you in practical examples, exercises and experience*
- *Enable you to monitor your progress and record your achievements as you go, not just at the end of a complete programme*
- *Provide you with access to the specialist support you need, when you need it*
- *Work with you to develop the skills that help you to learn and stay learning*
- *Give you the chance to relate your learning to your own longer term ambitions*
- *Help you feel part of a wider learning community and put you in touch with other people studying the same things*
- *Link your learning to key areas of your life such as work, family, citizenship and your own personal development*
- *Encourage you to value learning and see it add value to your life.'*

6.5   Branded learning centres (BLCs) are encouraged to register their learning provision on the national learning opportunities database (NLOD) as do other providers. The NLOD offers learners a single comprehensive national database of learning opportunities – currently encompassing details of over 80,000 learning opportunities throughout Scotland (www.learndirect scotland4partners.com). The data held on the NLOD is at the core of the information and advice given to callers to the learndirect scotland and learndirect scotland for business helplines, and is not limited to data from Branded Learning Centres. It can also be accessed via the course search on the learndirect scotland websites.

6.6   Once branded, learning centres receive access to enabling software - the Provider Opportunity Management Tool (PROMT) - that enables them to manage their own learning information. PROMT allows providers to: add, edit or remove courses in line with changing course content, new start dates or fees; react quickly if courses become fully booked or are no longer running; maintain the accuracy of information; and perform bulk updates to quickly change information in multiple courses. SUfI provides training in the use of PROMT.

6.7   Branded Learning Centres are also provided with access to Skillnet, learndirect scotland's learning management platform. Skillnet improves local access to learning and can be a major benefit for the centres: it is an additional option available to them that does not come at the cost of anything else. SUfI intends to review and replace the base software of the application in 2007.

6.8   Using the Skillnet platform, learning centres are able to offer Learning Bytes. Skillnet not only allows learners to access learning on-line in the learndirect scotland branded learning centre network, it enables individuals to undertake a broad range of learning opportunities on-line from their homes or workplaces.

6.9   Skillnet's 'launch and track' characteristics mean that learners have to register only once with the system, after which all their achievements are logged as they work their way through a learning programme. This enables individuals to see the progress they are making, and acts as encouragement for them to keep going. The system can generate certificates on completion of learning programmes.

REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

6.10   Given the existence of other recent research which has been undertaken on branded learning centres, it is relevant to place the findings of the focus groups conducted with branded learning centre managers in the context of the findings of that earlier research.

Survey of Branded Learning Centres

6.11   In 2005 SUfI commissioned research into its (then) 483 branded learning centres (Progressive Partnership, 2005). The objectives of the study were to:

- provide more detailed profiling of the learndirect scotland BLC database which could be used for segmentation and future targeting of products and communications

- determine awareness of the services provided by SUfI through learndirect scotland, and the value of these services to BLCs
- assess the potential for new learning content topics, and how these should be delivered
- evaluate usage and perceived value of the Skillnet system
- explore interest in potential new products and services that could be delivered by SUfI
- explore any additional ways in which SUfI could support the BLC network.

6.12 The research took the form of focus groups with BLC managers to identify key issues, followed by an online survey of all BLCs to explore those issues in more depth. A self-completion questionnaire was sent by email to all 483 BLCs. Respondents had the option of online, fax-back or postal return.

6.13 In total, 185 completed questionnaires were returned. However, some respondents were answering on behalf of more than one centre (38, or 21 per cent of the sample) and these responses were duplicated according to how many BLCs they represented. The final sample size was, therefore, 237, making an overall response rate of 49 per cent. This is be considered to be a very good response for a business survey of this kind.

6.14 Given the robustness of the findings from this study, it is appropriate to provide a summary of them.

Profile of BLCs

6.15 Figure 6.1, below, summarises the findings from research into BLCs (Progressive Partnership, 2005). It shows how the (then) 483 BLCs were distributed across the various sectors (in green) and compares this with the survey response rate from each sector (in violet):

Figure 6.1:   Survey response rate compared to overall representation
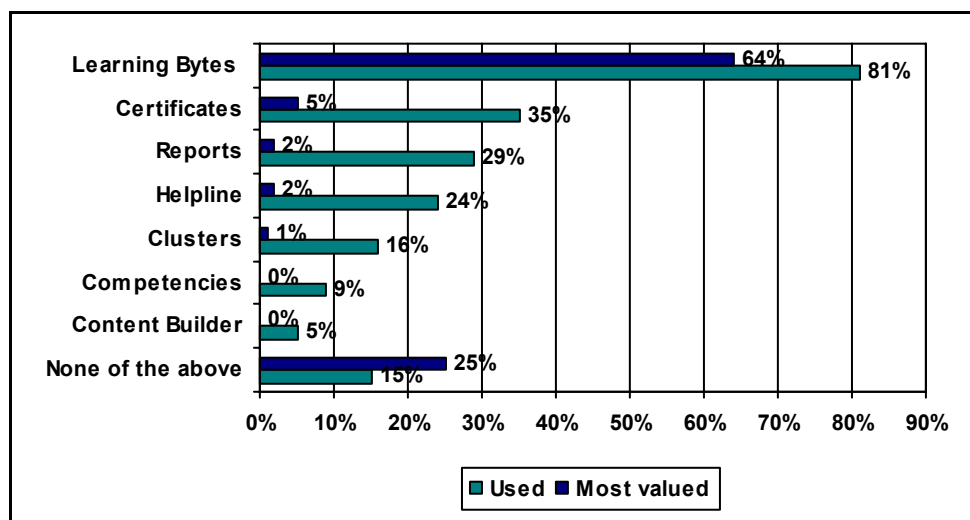
Source: Progressive Partnership, 2005

6.16   As the figure indicates, the sample had higher than average representation from centres which were community based (26 per cent response rate, compared to 19 per cent of all BLCs in this sector), corporate (6 per cent compared to 1 per cent), libraries (17 per cent compared to 14 per cent), and NHS (8 per cent compared to 6 per cent).

6.17   On the other hand, there was a lower than average representation from centres based in further education (14 per cent compared to 26 per cent), private independent (12 per cent compared to 18 per cent) and higher education (0 per cent compared to 3 per cent).

6.18   The disproportionately high response rate from community based centres, and disproportionately low return from college-based centres, are both worthy of note and helped to guide the subsequent SQW research with BLCs. Thus, the telephone survey sample was chosen to ensure representation from college-based centres, in proportion to their representation among learning centres.

6.19   The research undertaken by Progressive found that key groups targeted by BLCs were aligned with SUfI's key targets for deprived areas/lower socio-economic groups, as follows:

- community BLCs were the most likely to identify unemployed people (75 per cent) and those living in deprived areas (43 per cent) as their key targets;
- BLCs based in libraries were also particularly likely to target people living in deprived areas (65 per cent), as well as their local communities (73 per cent);
- private sector BLCs tended to target SMEs (71 per cent) and people on workforce development programmes (54 per cent);
- as might be expected, BLCs in educational facilities were the most likely to target students (45 per cent), but a high proportion also targeted areas of high deprivation (52 per cent).

6.20   Table 6.1 summarises the value placed by BLCs on the various SUfI services. This reveals the high value placed on funding for physical infrastructure and for development projects, and the slightly lower, but still considerable value attached to a wide range of other services.

6.21   Interestingly, a further breakdown of the responses shows that different sectors value the various learndirect scotland services to varying degrees. Thus:

- community-based centres most value: funding for development and infrastructure; Learning Bytes; LCDOs
- libraries most value: LCDOs; marketing materials; funding for development and infrastructure; accredited for ILAS
- private sector centres most value: funding for development and infrastructure; NLOD
- education-based centres most value: funding for development and infrastructure; accredited for ILAS, NLOD

Table 6.1:   Perceived value of services provided by SUfI

Percentages

Aspects of service valued	Very valuable	Quite valuable	Not very valuable	Not at all valuable	Base
Funding for physical infrastructure	80	17	3	1	**181**
Funding for development projects	78	19	3	1	**190**
Advice and support via network of LCDOs	65	30	5	0	**226**
To be accredited for using ILAS	61	30	8	2	**190**
Provision of free e-learning content	53	39	7	0	**211**
Opportunity to place your courses on NLOD	58	29	11	2	**180**
PROMT training	57	27	16	0	**123**
To gain access to/get referrals of potential learners	54	35	9	2	**183**
Training for learning centre staff	49	41	10	0	**201**
Provision of marketing materials, signage and leaflets	42	45	10	2	**231**
Networking events	36	55	9	0	**204**
Clusters of blended learning	38	49	13	1	**135**
eLearning Workshops	34	52	13	1	**153**
Promotional events	31	56	11	2	**185**

Source: Progressive Partnership, 2005

6.22   The survey also found that larger BLCs tended to place slightly more value on Learning Bytes, NLOD and PROMT training than smaller centres. This may merely reflect the fact that larger centres have greater capacity to offer and support a wider range of activities.

Skillnet

6.23   The online survey of BLCs also sought to identify the value placed upon the range of Skillnet functions (Figure 6.2) and the extent to which each function was being used.

Figure 6.2:   Skillnet functions used and most valued

Source: Progressive Partnership, 2005

56
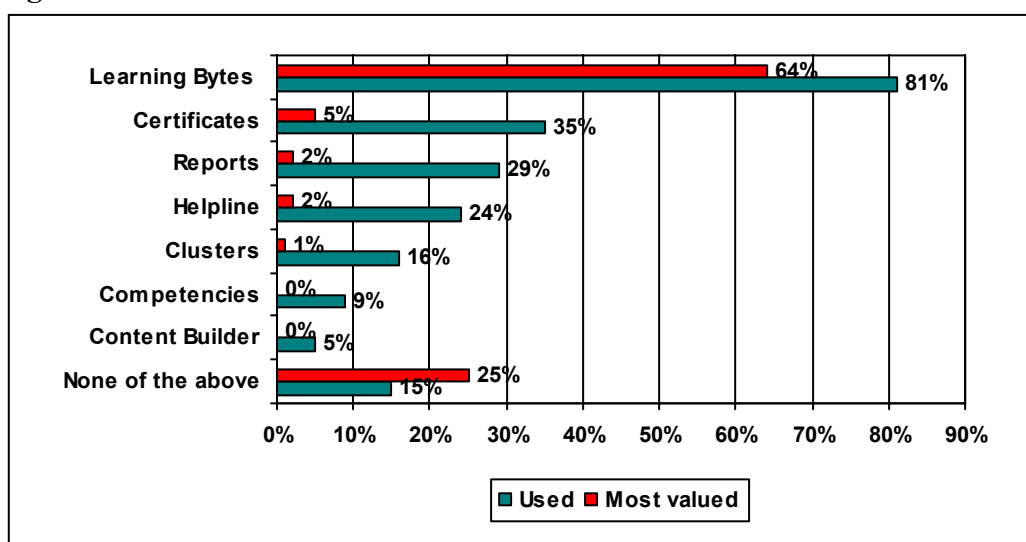
6.24 The results indicated that BLCs do not use the full range of Skillnet facilities. In particular, private sector and education based LCs were more likely to use a range of functions, whilst community based and libraries LCs were more likely to restrict their use to the Learning Bytes function. On the basis of the data from the qualitative element of the study (focus groups with BLC managers), the researchers felt that there may be difficulties with understanding the functionality of the current version of Skillnet. Moreover, their overall conclusion was that these issues may be placing limitations on the perceived value of the service.

6.25 Table 6.2 presents the responses to a question about what BLC managers considered to be potential new functions that would improve Skillnet. Respondents were able to mention more than one function.

Table 6.2:   Potential new functions that would improve Skillnet

Functions of Skillnet	Percentage of respondents mentioning function
Ability to work offline then submit activity/test results online	55
Easier navigation	52
Ability to add own LC messages to welcome page	46
Ability to add own LC logo	43
Online discussion	24
Integral screen text reader	21
No changes – current system is satisfactory	17
Other	11

Base: 227
Source: Progressive Partnership, 2005

Conclusions

6.26 The conclusions of Progressive's online survey of BLCs which are of most relevance for this study are that:

- the diversity of the BLC network is confirmed: different types of LC have different audiences and needs, and sector seems to be the primary differentiator. However, centres' key target groups are aligned with SUfI's own key target audiences

- the majority of BLCs are aware of, and value, the services provided by SUfI, although segmentation and tailoring of future initiatives would help to ensure that perceptions of value are improved

- services which may be being underused are: eLearning workshops; clusters of blending learning; and PROMT training. It is also apparent that BLCs are not using the full range of functions of Skillnet.

6.27 Pertinently, however, interest is evident in many of the proposals for new learning content and initiatives, particularly: staff training opportunities; softer skills learning

content; funding and funding information; support for key target groups; and IT/on-line support.

6.28   The findings from this research were used to inform the topics and questions for the focus groups and interviews with BLC managers which were conducted as part of the SQW study.

'Mystery shopping' survey

6.29   Another relevant source of data was the research programme using mystery shopping visits to assess the standards of service provided by delivery partners, which was commissioned by SUfI (ORC International, 2005). Mystery shopping visits to 50 centres across the country were undertaken in November 2005.

6.30   The general requirements of the research were to:

- identify and report on service levels and quality of service
- identify and report on areas of strength and excellence
- identify and report on areas of poor service and suggest possible improvements.

6.31   Table 6.3 gives an indication of the researchers' perceptions of the staff who handled their enquiry.

Table 6.3:   How did the staff member handle your enquiry?

Perceptions of staff response	Percentage positive
They were polite and friendly	100
They conversed freely and easily with me	100
They treated me with respect at all times	100
They were quick and efficient	100
They tried to be as helpful as possible	100
They treated me as a valued customer	98
They knew where to look for the information I needed	98
They appeared knowledgeable and able to answer my query	95
They appeared to understand my needs	93
They gave information without prompting	91
They appeared rude and disinterested	0
They used jargon or language that I did not understand	0

Sample base: 43
Source: ORC International, 2005

6.32   The findings of this study provide overwhelming support for the contention that the efficiency, helpfulness and knowledge of the BLC staff is a great strength.

6.33	Other findings from the mystery shopping exercise are summarised below, under the headings of: premises; 'traffic' within the centre; level of privacy; staff knowledge; and overall impressions. A summary of the recommendations in each of these areas is also provided. In assessing these findings, it should be emphasised that SUfI does not own or manage the centres, and that it is for centres themselves to implement changes.

The premises

6.34	In three quarters of BLCs, both learndirect scotland plaques and leaflets or posters were identified. Most delivery partners provided physical environments of a sufficiently high standard to encourage clients to enter and make their enquiry. All mystery shoppers found the premises to be clean and centres were invariably described as being tidy and comfortable.

6.35	A recommendation emanating from the study was that Learning Centres should be encouraged to increase the volume of learndirect scotland literature on display, as this may persuade clients to take leaflets away to share with others, and will improve branding knowledge. In addition, regular facilities audits will encourage delivery partners to display a full range of information.

Traffic within the centre

6.36	Most shoppers found centres to be quiet and only a single shopper found the noise level within the centre too high. Two shoppers found it difficult to know where to queue and one shopper was kept waiting for ten minutes and received no apology from a member of staff for their wait.

6.37	This suggests that some improvements may be made within sites where shoppers had to ask where to make their enquiry or wait. Also, it should be stressed to staff that, whilst they cannot control the length of time a client has to wait, it is important that the wait is acknowledged.

Privacy

6.38	Whilst the numbers are low, it is worth noting that three mystery shoppers said their conversations could be overheard, and that during one visit the mystery shopper was able to see personal materials relating to another client.

6.39	Although it may be impossible to avoid a situation where a conversation can be overheard, during such instances staff members may wish to employ other techniques, such as lowering their voice, to ensure that maximum privacy is gained. Staff should be reminded of the importance of keeping personal information in a secure location.

The enquiry

6.40	The study found that most members of staff asked additional questions of the enquirer and were usually able to deal with the enquiry by themselves. In some cases, advice was sought from a colleague.

Overall impressions

6.41   Overall, staff were found to provide a warm greeting to members of the public, and the standards of service were regarded as high.

6.42   As recommended in the previous exercise in 2004, the researchers felt that the results of the mystery shopping should be disseminated to all involved. It was felt that this would help staff embrace the mystery shopping process, as they would see that it could be used to highlight areas of excellence, as well as areas where additional instruction may be required.

SQW FOCUS GROUPS WITH BLC MANAGERS

6.43   As trailed in Chapter 2, two focus groups of BLC managers were convened. The key messages from the focus group held with five learning centre managers from 'rural' learning centres were as follows:

- learndirect scotland networking events are very highly valued: several learning centre managers have found them 'inspirational' and a very important opportunity to share ideas and learn from good practice

- notwithstanding the above, it was felt strongly that SUfI should provide more notice of forthcoming events, possibly through producing an annual diary of events

- 'word of mouth' is a particularly important means of attracting learners in small rural communities. If one learner has a positive experience they will encourage relatives and friends to visit the centre, whereas if they are not impressed with the centre, they have the power to alienate an entire rural community

- concerns were expressed that the national database does not allow referrals to smaller, rural centres – 'mystery shopping' by learning centre manager confirms that callers to the helpline are not always being well signposted

- Learning Bytes are highly valued for their content, particularly in the case of disadvantaged groups – but the current version of Skillnet throws up various ICT related problems and the system is not regarded as being particularly user-friendly

- Learning Centre Development Officers provide valuable support, but those who have to cover a large, geographically dispersed area, such as the Highlands, are unable to devote sufficient time to centres which require assistance

- SUfI is a very 'human' organisation: staff are very approachable, and BLC managers feel comfortable in contacting the LCDOs' line manager if their LCDO is unavailable. The flat structure of the organisation is noted and appreciated by centres

- some centre managers would like contact with learndirect scotland for business, but contend that they have continually been 'put off' when they have tried to pursue this. Some also claimed that they had been unable to ascertain who their learndirect scotland for business contact is. This confusion stems

from the independence of the Training Partner team, meaning that Training Partners, in all geographic areas, are not allocated to the network of centres.

- dissatisfaction was expressed about the way in which the Sustainable Development Fund has been administered, with some managers claiming that their centres had received verbal approval of their application, but had still not been given formal approval. This was creating a feeling of uncertainty, particularly in cases where the renewal of staff contracts was dependent on that funding. In keeping with policy guidelines, SUfI would only ever award grants by letter, so there appears to be an issue with communication.

6.44 The key messages from the 'urban' group of seven learning centre representatives were as follows:

- learndirect scotland for business is again regarded as 'cagey', because of expressed difficulties in contacting anyone from the business side of learndirect scotland

- LCDOs are very highly respected and provide a huge amount of support

- there are considerable technological barriers inherent in the NLOD and Skillnet, which creates difficulties for users. Some centres are reluctant to use Skillnet in companies because it 'crashes too often'

- many centres keep fairly detailed learner data which could potentially be provided to SUfI for further analysis

- Individual Learning Accounts have helped centres to increase learner numbers

- there are perceptions of big variances in SUfI between areas of excellence (e.g. learndirect scotland officers and the content of the Learning Bytes) and perceived poorer aspects (e.g. learndirect scotland for business and the technical problems associated with Learning Bytes).

SQW TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH 30 BLC MANAGERS

6.45 Key findings from the interviews are summarised below. Where direct comments are quoted, they are referenced by sector.

Benefits of having branded learndirect scotland status

6.46 BLC managers were asked why they originally sought status as a branded learndirect scotland learning centre. Their responses can be broadly categorised under the following headings:

- those who sought it primarily because of the funding opportunity it represented (4 out of 30 respondents)

- those who sought it primarily because of the marketing opportunity it represented (4 respondents)

- those who wanted access to new and/or online learning (3 respondents)

- those who saw branded status as an additional quality kite mark or 'stamp of approval' (8 respondents)

- those in small or rural centres who sought additional support from being part of a network (2 respondents)

- those who regarded it as evidence of their organisational commitment to learning (3 respondents)

- unsure (5 respondents)

- other (3 respondents).

6.47 Thus, the credibility and 'stamp of approval' inherent in branded status was the key motivating factor in more than a quarter of cases – the most frequently cited reason for seeking branded learndirect scotland centre status.

6.48 Interviewees were then asked to summarise the actual benefits to them of having become a branded learning centre. Responses showed that the actual benefits accruing from branded status were greater than those anticipated at the time of applying. For example, the four BLCs who cited access to funding as the primary reason for seeking learndirect scotland status reported that the actual benefits proved to be more wide-ranging:

- for one local authority BLC, the cash funding originally sought never actually came to fruition: instead, the actual benefits to the centre came in the form of 'the training provided to administrative staff and the ability to promote e-learning qualifications'

- for one NHS centre, although cash funding for new equipment has been a great bonus, the other most important benefit has been the network of support which became available: 'the network of other BLCs, events/conferences, and opportunities to exchange ideas and share good practice, etc'.

6.49 Another NHS centre described the benefits of having branded status as follows:

'It gives us support from a national organisation with a good reputation. There's good publicity and promotional stuff. The materials that learndirect scotland provides - promotional literature, guidance, etc - are well thought out. [Being a learndirect scotland centre] keeps us in touch with news and developments in the world of learning and training. It gives us access to new ideas and innovations – it always keeps us thinking.'

6.50 The survey did not highlight any correlation between type (sector) of learning centre and benefits gained. Across the entire sample, various key benefits of branded status can be identified. Chief amongst these were:

- networking opportunities
- funding (for new equipment, etc)
- credibility and recognition
- access to a wider client group
- publicity and marketing

- as a quality criterion to help seek ILA accreditation.

6.51   The survey sought to establish whether the attainment of branded status had enabled BLCs to increase the volume of learners using the centre. Of the 30 respondents, 19 (63 per cent) confirmed that branded status had indeed led to an increase in footfall. Many of these ascribed this increase to the advertising and marketing support engendered by being part of the network.

Skillnet

6.52   Although Skillnet is available to all centres, our survey sought to establish the extent to which BLCs are making use of it.

6.53   Clearly our small sample of 30 BLCs does not constitute a statistically robust survey. Nevertheless, problems with the accessibility and user-friendliness of Skillnet are a recurring theme, and our interviews have served to underline the findings from previous research commissioned by SUfI (Progressive Partnership, 2005) as well as confirming some of the points highlighted in our own focus groups. The use and value of Skillnet are not reaching full potential.

6.54   However, it is worth highlighting instances where Skillnet has been used successfully. One particularly positive response came from an NHS-based learning centre which reported that:

'it opens up opportunities for staff who don't like a classroom environment, or who can't access a learning centre. It's already proved very important in developing lifelong learning for staff, and there's been particularly good take-up amongst domestic support staff. We have a good example of a hospital porter who gained some IT skills and enjoyed it so much that he has now been seconded to help deliver training in the hospital – and this is a direct result of learndirect scotland.'

6.55   Another trade union BLC reported that:

'[through Skillnet we] can reach union members right across Scotland - they don't have to be based locally, they can log in remotely and learn wherever they live. Also word of mouth is important – if one person enjoys learning, their family members often sign up too.'

Provision of monthly statistics

6.56   Learning centres are not formally obliged to provide SUfI with statistics about their learners, but our interviews confirmed that the majority do report the total number of users on a monthly basis to their LCDO. (This enables SUfI to extrapolate the total number of people using BLCs each year).

6.57   However, many learning centres appear uncertain about exactly what information is required of them and how it should be reported. Some were unsure whether they were reporting the total number of visits, or the number of unique new learners each month. SUfI has not created a standard proforma which would ensure that BLCs all report on the same thing.

6.58   Encouragingly, more than 50 per cent of interviewees (16 out of 30) indicated that they would be willing to provide more detailed monthly statistics if asked to do so, in order to help SUfI monitor its impact more effectively. Many of them already collate information for their own purposes, and this could conceivably be shared with SUfI if required. A further 10 interviewees (one third of respondents) indicated a cautious willingness to provide additional information, and only 4 were categorically unwilling to do so.

Potential impact of losing learndirect scotland branded status

6.59   Interviewees were asked to say what impact their centre would experience if, for any reason, learndirect scotland branded status were withdrawn:

- 4 respondents said that loss of learndirect scotland branded status would mean they would not be accredited to offer Individual Learning Accounts, and that this would reduce the number of learners enrolling with them: there is a clear perception of a correlation between having learndirect scotland status and having ILA accreditation

- 4 felt that the main negative impact would be loss of access to learndirect scotland funding

- 8 felt that the loss of learndirect scotland status would equate to a loss of credibility, and would therefore have a negative impact upon them

- 2 indicated that much of the benefit of having learndirect scotland status lay in being part of a network, and that loss of this status would leave them more isolated

- 4 felt that loss of learndirect scotland status would have little or no impact upon them

- the remainder offered other reasons:

  ➢ *'It would narrow the opportunities for development' [voluntary sector]*
  ➢ *'No access to learning bytes and other resources. Lost support from learndirect scotland, e.g. conference opportunities' [local authority]*
  ➢ *'Would be more difficult to do things. 25 per cent less business perhaps' [higher education]*
  ➢ *'Even less support for centre from management level of NHS' [NHS]*
  ➢ *'Would have a major negative impact – it signals to staff a standard and confidence in offering' [local authority]*
  ➢ *'Wouldn't like to lose learndirect scotland status; being in touch with learndirect scotland keeps you up to date with new thinking and ideas' [NHS]*

CONCLUSIONS

6.60   Learning centres vary greatly in size, ownership, management arrangements and service delivery. Despite this diversity many learning centres now share a common bond of learndirect scotland branded centre membership.

6.61   SUfI is already conscious that the network cannot be regarded or treated as homogenous, and plans are under way to develop strategies in order that the organisation can work effectively within a complex landscape. Given that SUfI's resources are finite, it may have to prioritise which, and how many, centres it works with.

6.62   SUfI has already attempted to categorise its learning centres according to their level of commitment and engagement with SUfI. This work is ongoing and is at a preliminary stage at the time of writing. Evidence collected by SUfI to date suggests that there are three 'levels' of centres within the network, in terms of their level of engagement. These are defined below. (It should be stressed that the categories do not refer to the quality of provision offered by each one. All centres have met the learndirect scotland 'pledge', have been quality assured, and have access to the same support.)

- Category 1 centre: 'communicates effectively with Learning Centre Development Officer (LCDO), keeps BLC details up to date, is on the NLOD and updates course info, always provides statistics to LCDO, attends events, has used Learning Bytes to campaign level, has taken up some development support through LCDO, Staff Development, Skillnet support etc' (this category classified by SUfI as comprising around 27 per cent of all learning centres)

- Category 2 centre: 'LCDO has usually to take the lead with communications and updating BLC details, provision is not always on NLOD (although it should be noted that for some small community based centres and or specialist centres this would be inappropriate), irregular stats provision, some but irregular attendance at events, low level of Learning Bytes usage, has taken up some development support through LCDO' (around 46 per cent of all centres)

- Category 3 centre: 'LCDO always has to lead on communications and updating BLC details, not on NLOD, no voluntary stats provision, low attendance at events, little or no Learning Bytes usage, little development support yet taken up' (around 27 per cent).

6.63   According to SUfI's own estimates, therefore, over one quarter of all branded learning centres might be described as 'fully engaged' and almost half are at least partially engaged.

6.64   SUfI has been giving thought to how best the network of BLCs should be consolidated and developed, and this work is ongoing. It seems reasonable to suggest that any future resources be targeted on those centres which are most committed to SUfI and its aims and objectives.

CHAPTER SEVEN   VALUE FOR MONEY

7.1   A key consideration when evaluating a public sector intervention is the extent to which it has delivered value for money.

7.2   Value for money (VfM) is the term used to assess whether or not an organisation has obtained the maximum benefit from the services it provides, within the resources available to it. It not only assesses the cost of service provision, but also takes into account the mix of quality, resource use, fitness for purpose, timeliness and convenience to judge whether or not, when taken together, good value has been achieved.

DETERMINING VALUE FOR MONEY

7.3   In the absence of a study with a sufficient longitudinal element to measure change over time (e.g. in a firm's productivity or an individual's wage rates), the snapshot data from the SQW survey and the other sources presented in this report can be used to indicate the likely value of SUfI's input.

7.4   In devising our approach, we have built on authoritative literature sources which provide insights into how the value for money of SUfI's activities might be assessed. These are discussed below. Data from the present study will then be considered.

Valuing benefits to individuals

7.5   As far as individuals are concerned, the returns to some form of learning or training are often related to increases in wages, with the scale of the returns being greater the higher the qualification obtained.

7.6   For example, based on an analysis of UK Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, Dickerson (2006) asserts that 'on average, returns to low level qualifications are negligible or zero. At all other levels, the returns are quite substantial - approximately 12-15% for both level 2 and level 3, and rising to more than 20% for level 4 and level 5. Interestingly, Dickerson also highlights the difference in the type of return between academic and vocational qualifications, with the former being much greater than the latter at all levels apart from level 5.

7.7   Research by Blundell (1996 &1999) found that individuals undertaking employer-provided or vocational training boosted the real wage of men by, on average, some 3.6% (for on-the-job training) and 6.6% (for off-the-job training). For women the effects of training in the current job were 4.8% (on-the-job training) and 9.6% (off-the-job training). Training in previous jobs also had a positive effect on wages. These estimates refer to training which did not lead to a qualification. Higher vocational qualifications boosted male wages by about 8% on average, and female wages by about 10%.

7.8   Arulampalam et al. (1997) looked at the effects of both training and educational courses on wage growth, for males only, over the period 1981 to 1991. The results indicated that receipt of training increased wages by about 11% over the period 1981 to 1991 (comparing those who experienced at least one training episode to those

receiving none). The size of the effect falls after the first five years of completing the training event by 0.44% per month.

7.9   Greenhaugh (2002), summarising the literature, concludes that the estimates using British data indicate wage gains after training for workers of all ages in the range of 3% to 10%, while for younger workers the gains are estimated from 11% to 21%.

7.10   Although this study does not allow any direct measurement of the impact of the additional learning attributed to the intervention, it is possible provide indicative values by using these studies as a guide to the scale of effect that might be expected.

Employers

7.11   In terms of employers' investment in training, the most commonly applied measure of the impact of this investment is on the productivity of the enterprise. Keep and Mayhew (2002) state that 'the overall conclusion from the majority of studies is that there is a positive relationship between increased levels of skill and productivity, but little agreement about the magnitude of the effect'. Nonetheless, this enables a positive value to be placed on the participation of employers in training, as a result of contact with SUfI.

7.12   Attempts have also been made to establish a relationship between investment in training and company profitability, although here the evidence is more equivocal (Keep and Mayhew, p3).

7.13   Other factors which may be taken into account include 'hard' measures such as: plant down-time; rates of absenteeism; and labour turnover, as well as 'softer' measures, such as levels of customer satisfaction; and employee motivation and commitment (Keep and Mayhew, pp 14-15).

7.14   While there appears to be general acceptance of a positive relationship between enhancing the skills of the workforce and productivity, this is often tempered by an acknowledgement that this impact usually requires other aspects of people management to be effective.

7.15   One of the most influential studies, and of more utility for the present study, is that of Dearden, Reed and Van Reenen (2000). On the basis of their analysis of Labour Force Survey data which focused on the effect of training on value added per head in the UK, these authors conclude that 'an increase of five percentage points in the proportion of employees trained is associated with a 4 percent increase in productivity' (p 53). In a further paper in 2005, the same authors report the impact of training on productivity was calculated to be twice the effect on wages.

SCOPE OF BENEFITS

7.16   The purpose behind the allocation of public funding to SUfI is to engage two key target groups in learning: (1) individuals who are least likely to be interested in learning and (2) SMEs. Drawing on the data derived from the study, the anticipated benefits accruing to both individuals and employers who have initiated contact with SUfI can be assessed in the light of the costs involved.

7.17   In order to approach an assessment of value for money, the benefits arising from SUfI are summarised below before considering these in relation to the total costs incurred. In Table 7.1 the key quantifiable outputs and outcomes, as indicated by SQW's survey results, are summarised. In order to assess value overall relative to costs, the net additional benefits determined from the survey samples are extrapolated to the appropriate populations

7.18   The value of benefits to individuals from enhanced wages and benefits to employers from enhanced productivity are assessed below, as advised by the literature review. However, given the objectives of SUfI, it is also appropriate when assessing value to take into account two other quantifiable measures: individuals engaging with learning and individuals gaining employment.

7.19   It is also appropriate to ensure that "softer" benefits are not missed out of the value for money assessment, even though quantification is not always possible. Therefore, these are also summarised in what follows.

QUANTIFYING THE BENEFITS

7.20   Producing quantifiable measures of the outcomes of engagement with SUfI through learndirect scotland or learndirect scotland for business, on the part of either individuals or companies, and certainly in the short term, is extremely difficult.

7.21   The two main reasons for this are: the fact that, in the case of both individuals and companies, the desired changes in attitude and behaviour are often protracted processes, which require longitudinal research or long-term monitoring to identify; and the complexities involved in attributing impact to specific interventions, when a myriad of influences could be brought to bear.

7.22   However, findings from both the surveys and the different waves of the LTS are indicative of the benefits which have accrued. These are used together with the evidence from literature on the wage returns accruing to training and a series of assumptions to produce, what is best described as a set of indicative estimates of the additional impact of SUfI's activities. Providing some broad estimates is necessary in order to draw any conclusion on value for money.

7.23   Although learndirect scotland received just over 135,000 enquiries in 2005/06, the survey was based on telephone calls rather than all sources (which also includes web, e-mail and fax enquiries). It is unclear what the differences would be, but in developing the indicative estimates, we have extrapolated solely on the basis of telephone calls. This means that the results will underestimate the impacts as they will not include those influenced to undertake learning through web-based (or other) forms of contact. This assumption is particularly important for the business service where the number of calls is a much smaller proportion of enquiries.

7.24   The forecast for 2005-06 was for calls to represent 60% of all individual enquiries. With a projected total of 135,429 enquiries, this would mean 81,257 telephone enquiries. For learndirect scotland for business, the total of 19,428 enquiries, the forecast was for calls to represent 18% of enquiries. Applying this to the projected

total of 19,428 enquiries gives 3,497 calls. However, from the KPI data we also know that learndirect scotland's activities engaged 5,257 SMEs in learning in 2005-06. This is a better estimate of the base number of SMEs.

7.25   The following table uses these figures along with the survey data to produce estimates of the number of people engaged in learning and the difference that intervention has made.

Table 7.1:   Summary of key benefit estimates

BENEFIT	SURVEY FINDING	SCALE AT LEVEL OF POPULATION	COMMENT
Employees			
Number of individual enquiries	From LDS statistics	Projected 135,429 enquiries	Includes all forms of enquiry, telephone, web, email, fax and other sources
Number of participating in learning and attributed to LDS	LTS estimates: 29% currently studying 6% completed SQW survey found 24% would not have enrolled without LDS	6,826 additional learners attributed to LDS	Based on 81,257 telephone callers There is no assumption about the conversion rates of web enquiries to engagement in learning
Learners from excluded areas	SQW survey 25% of completers from excluded postcode areas	1,707 learners from excluded postcode areas	Assumes that those currently studying have similar profile to those that have completed
New learners	SQW survey 23% of completers are "new learners" "new" learners are those that have not engaged in learning since school	1,569 "new" learners	Assumes that those currently studying have similar profile to those that have completed
Employment	From SQW survey 11% of those completing courses go from "not in work" into work	3,128 learners into work	Assume that current learners complete courses (e.g. 28,440)
Additional number moving into employment	From SQW survey 14% would not have enrolled in course without LDS	438 additional people into work	
Employers			
Total number of enquiries to LDS for Business	LDS data (KPI measure)	Projected 19,428 enquiries	Survey reflects telephone calls only although most enquiries are web based.
Number of SME's engaged	LDS data (KPI measure)	5,257	SME's engaged
Total number engaged in learning since contact	From SQW survey 75% of SMEs working with TPs had undertaken training	3,942	Sub analysis of SME's with TP visits
Additional number learning	From SQW survey 21% would not have undertaken training without LDS intervention	946	Sub analysis of SME's with TP visits
Number of individuals in engaged in learning	SME survey	5,108	Average of 5.4 employees per SME among those reporting additional learning

Source: SQW (LDS = learndirect scotland)

Benefits to individuals

7.26   The following is a summary of benefits to individuals:

- the relatively high proportion of individual enquiries from localities of social deprivation (49 per cent in the LTS survey), pointing to success, on the part of learndirect scotland, in achieving penetration among one of the key target groups, that is the 'hard to reach'. Ultimately, however, it may represent the most powerful indication that SUfI is making inroads into a key area – the achievement of a significant cultural shift in the mindsets of traditional 'non-learners' may not be readily apparent for some years, but these early indications are distinctly promising

- around a quarter of those who subsequently completed courses could be classified as 'new learners', in that they had previously undertaken no formal learning since leaving compulsory education

- the work-relatedness of the motivation for contacting learndirect scotland on the part of the majority of callers (Paras 4.17-4.22) suggests that immediate benefits will be derived, either in finding a job or enhancing career prospects

- from the LTS findings, 35 per cent of all respondents had undertaken learning since contacting learndirect scotland, representing a substantial rate of 'success'

- as well as attracting significant numbers of 'new' learners who subsequently attain a qualification, a quarter of those who were in the process of learning expressed an interest in undertaking further study in the future (4.44). This provides evidence of SUfI's legacy, through its contribution to effecting cultural shifts in attachment to learning

- the less tangible aspects of the beneficial impact of contacting learndirect scotland, and subsequently engaging in learning activity, such as increased self-confidence and self-esteem, were also prominent in the findings, with over a third of the SQW survey respondents citing 'feeling more confident' or 'feeling happier'

- also, importantly, shifts in attitudes towards learning were apparent, with 38 per cent of the respondents claiming to have developed a better appreciation of the value of learning as a result of their experience with learndirect scotland. The difficulties of deriving a meaningful measure of the amount of this benefit have already been explored, but the fact that there was survey evidence to support these claims should not be discounted

- there are other aspects of the effects of increased training activity which are more difficult to quantify. These include levels of job satisfaction, attachment to the organisation on the part of employees, and heightened aspirations and expectations (mentioned by a fifth of respondents to the SQW survey).

7.27   Aside from a concentration on 'hard to reach' groups, the survey findings suggest that those who were who were unemployed and seeking work benefited considerably from their contact with learndirect scotland. This is highlighted by the finding that 22 of the 109 respondents in the SQW sample who had not been employed had since found employment.

7.28   The surveys found that 11% of the sample of those that had completed courses had moved from not being employed into employment. For the population of those that have completed courses (4,875), this would represent 536 individual learners. If all those that are currently studying, completed courses, this would generate a further 2,592 moving into employment. Added together this gives a total of 3,128. Analysis of this sub group indicates that while learndirect scotland was instrumental in helping them find the specific course, many may have enrolled for some form of learning anyway. Among the 22 in the sample, three (14%) were unlikely to have enrolled in a course without learndirect scotland. This indicates that of the population of callers, we estimate that there were 438 additional people moving into work as a result of contact with learndirect scotland.

7.29   Because these figures are in some cases based on relatively small sub-samples, they should be treated with caution and regarded as indicative rather than as formal estimates.

7.30   It is not possible to determine whether these represent additional jobs within the economy. This would depend on whether their new employment was at the expense of other prospective employees. However, it does represent a contribution to increasing the size and level of skills of the workforce and provides evidence that the support has brought new people into the labour market.

7.31   These benefits generally contribute to raising skills within the workforce and increasing the prospects of those not in work. The extent to which SUfI is responsible for these is reflected in Table 7.2 which shows the gross and net figures, using the survey evidence to estimate whether clients would have enrolled for some form of learning anyway.

Table 7.2:   Gross to net benefits

Measure	Gross value	Additionality	Net	Table notes
From LDS individual callers				
Total number of enquiries	135,429	100%	135,429	Total from SUfI data
Number of telephone enquiries (basis for survey)	81,257	100%	81,257	Extrapolated from LDS contact data
Number of learners (completed or in learning)	28,440	24%	6,826	Number of learners derived from LTS (35%of sample went on to participate in learning) Additionality based on SQW survey which estimates 24% of learners would not have engaged in learning without availability of LDS
Number of "new" learners	6,541	24%	1,569	SQW survey shows that 23% of completers are "new learners" Additionality based on SQW survey which estimates 24% of learners would not have engaged in learning without availability of LDS
Number of learners from socially excluded postcodes	7,110	24%	1,706	SQW survey 25% of completers from excluded postcode areas Additionality based on SQW survey which estimates 24% of learners would not have engaged in learning without availability of LDS
Number of learners moving into work	3,128	14%	440	From SQW survey 11% of those completing courses go from "not in work" into work Among these, cases additionality was slightly lower, 14% would not have undertaken learning without LDS
From LDS for Business				
Total number of enquiries	19,428	100%	19,428	From SUfI data
Number of SMEs engaged	5,257	100%	5,257	From SUfI data
Number of SMEs undertaking learning	3,942	21%	828	From SQW survey 75% of SMEs engaged in learning. 21% would not have done so without LDS
Number of individuals in engaged in learning	21,286	21%	4,470	Average of 5.4 employees engaged per SME from SQW survey data

Source:SQW
Table notes:

Valuing the impacts to individuals

7.32   The earlier analysis of the literature suggested, broadly, that a period of training is associated with wage returns of between a 3% and 10%. The amounts vary significantly depending on the nature and duration of the training and the circumstances of the employee. To provide an indicative estimate of the effects of the

additional training generated by contact with learndirect scotland for business, we have assumed a wage premium of 5%[1].

7.33   Using the estimate of 4,470 new learners generated through the Training Partners and calls to learndirect scotland for business, and assuming that those training earn an average of £15,100[2], a 5% increase in wages would represent an increase of £755 each. This would represent a collective increase in wages of £3.4m.

Benefits to SMEs/employers

7.34   As far as SMEs are concerned, although there is clearly more to be done in creating awareness of learndirect scotland for business, the success, particularly of the TP service, is undeniable. The fact that 77 per cent of SMEs which had engaged with the Training Partner service subsequently claimed to have adopted a planned approach to learning points to significant benefits being derived, on the basis of Dearden et al's (2000) assertions about the impact on productivity.

7.35   There is also evidence from the SQW survey of firms of additional training activity emanating from the input of learndirect scotland for business. While it is possible, notionally, to quantify the benefits accruing to SMEs, in the form of reduced labour turnover, reduction of skills shortages, a more skilled and flexible workforce, productivity gains and company growth and competitiveness, this would require in-depth studies of individual organisations, from which proxies could be derived. Consideration should be given to undertaking such studies in the future, if the full costs and benefits of the impact of SUfI, and therefore the value for money which it represents are to be gauged.

7.36   Nonetheless, the finding that 99 of the 200 SMEs included in the sample had instigated some form of training since calling learndirect scotland for business suggests that considerable immediate benefits have been derived, even allowing for the contention that in only 21 of these cases was the training directly attributable to the learndirect scotland for business intervention.

7.37   Using the projected estimate of 5,257 businesses engaged, the earlier analysis suggested that there were around 4,470 additional employee learners and that this would result in wage increases of around £3.4m.

7.38   The paper, by Dearden[3] et al, building on the findings reported in 2000, makes two key observations. Firstly it demonstrates that raising the proportion of workers trained in an industry by one percentage point (say from the average of 10% to 11%) is associated with an increase in value added per worker of about 0.6%. Secondly, it finds that the impact of training on wages is only half as large as the impact of training on productivity. Logically, rational employers would only pay wage

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[1] The use of 5% is a conservative estimate, based on the range of findings discussed in sections 7.5 – 7.10, specifically the summary in Greenhaugh (2002) which suggests range of 3% to 10%.
[2] The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2005 indicates that average annual pay in Scotland excluding occupational categories for senior managers and professionals is £15,100.
[3] CEP Discussion Paper No 674, February 2005, The Impact of Training on Productivity and Wages: Evidence from British Panel Data, Lorraine Dearden, Howard Reed and John Van Reenen

increases up to the value of any productivity benefits. Using wages as a proxy for the increase in value added, therefore does not take into account the likelihood that employers also benefit from training, through increased productivity (from which a proportion is paid to the employee).

7.39   The estimate of £3.4m represents thin additional wages would therefore represent the *minimum* additional value added generated. The evidence above suggests that the benefits to employers, through productivity improvements could be double this[4]. On the assumptions discussed, this would lead to an estimate of around £6.8m of additional GVA for businesses.

7.40   These estimates are based on one year. In practice the new skills will generate benefits over a longer period of time, although subject to some depreciation. A further factor is that these estimates do not allow for the costs of training, either the direct costs or the foregone output during the period of training.

7.41   While the results relate only to learndirect scotland for business service, many of the individual callers to the main service will also undertake training which will improve productivity. We know from the survey that 22% cited "looking to improve career prospects/gain a promotion" as a motivation for their engagement. Among callers, this represents 1,501 additional learners. If this learning was sufficiently work-related it would add considerably to the economic benefits.

7.42   Finally, we stress again that these extrapolations should be treated as indicative of the scale of benefit rather than formal estimates.

COSTS

7.43   In assessing value for money, it is relevant to compare the benefits that accrue with the costs of the intervention(s) responsible. Although a detailed breakdown of costs for the operation of all aspects of SUfI are available, in the context of assessing value for money it is appropriate to consider the overall costs against benefits.

7.44   In total, the funding bid, set out in the 2005/06 operating plan was for £8.5m. In addition a further £133,000 was invested in a number of other projects. The figures exclude separate funding related to ILA Scotland (£4.0m), which operates separately from learndirect scotland activities.

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[4] Based on research finding (para 7.38) that the impact of training on wages is only half as large as the impact of training on productivity (value added per employee)

Table 7.3:   Costs (Operating Plan 2005/06)

Costs (as estimated in operating plan 2005/06)	£000's
Income	212
Staff costs	3,095
Corporate services	979
Contact centre activities	917
Learning technologies	1,214
Marketing	1,550
Capital expenditure	217
Learning services	740
Other	133
TOTAL	**8,633**

7.45   The total funding allocated to marketing in 2005-06 was just under £1.6m. Of this, approximately 45 per cent (£711k) was allocated to consumer marketing (i.e. targeted at individual learners). This produced a total of 135,000 contacts in the year, which equates to a cost of £5.27 for attracting each call.

7.46   Moreover, approximately two thirds of the sample had contacted learndirect scotland as a direct result of the advertising. This would indicate that the £711k investment had generated a response from at least 50,000 individuals.

7.47   In terms of the contact centres, the total funding allocated to their activities in 2005-06 was £917,000. Of this, approximately 93.5% (£857k) can be attributed to the cost of handling calls from individuals[5]. Taking the figure of 135,000 contacts, the average cost of handling each one is around £6.35. When marketing and contact centre costs are combined, the cost of each contact is £11.62.

7.48   SUfI's recently formed Inclusion Team has a remit to promote learning in local communities and amongst key disadvantaged groups. The team's budget of £163k in the current year is limited. SUfI aims to avoid incurring direct costs, by tapping into existing mainstream mechanisms and activities delivered by other agencies.

7.49   The Inclusion Team has attempted to measure the cost of reaching individuals. They have calculated, for example, that an average event costs about £3,000 to deliver and attracts around 100 people, representing a cost of £30 to reach one person. For larger events, where costs are higher, the cost per individual can go up to £75. The wider benefit, however, is brand building for learndirect scotland. Again, the difficulties of measuring the benefits derived from this activity are considerable. Not only would it be unreasonable to expect that some direct causality for subsequent participation in learning could be attributed directly to attendance at such events, but the wider impact on societal attitudes to learning would be practically impossible to gauge. This model is scheduled for appraisal in 2007.

7.50   It is axiomatic that the cost of engaging with the most disadvantaged individuals, who have not undertaken any learning since leaving school and do not feel that learning is relevant to them, will be high. If this is the case, then this overall level of response is

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[5] Information provided by SUfI's director of finance, March 2006

made even more impressive when, as evidenced by the findings of the LTS (para 4.11), almost half of those contacting learndirect scotland were from socially excluded areas.

The cost of engagement with SMEs

7.51   Of the total marketing budget of £1.6m, approximately 27 per cent (£433k) is allocated to business marketing (i.e. targeted at SMEs). In 2005-06, it was projected that there would be 19,000 calls to the learndirect scotland for business helpline. Thus, the cost of attracting each SME call roughly equates to £23. Certainly, when we consider that each SME that subsequently engaged in training led to an average of 5.4 people going into learning, this is very effective.

7.52   Around 6.5 per cent of the total contact centre costs (£60k) is attributable to learndirect scotland for business. Given the projected number of 19,000 contacts, the average cost of handling each one would therefore, be around £3.10.

7.53   When marketing and contact centre costs are combined, the notional average cost of each SME call to the helpline is around £26. When considered in the context of traditional antipathy among SMEs to engage in training, and to respond to external initiatives, this represents a relatively small investment, especially as it could be expected that, having contacted the service, those SMEs were sufficiently motivated to follow up their interest and to make future investments into workforce training and development.

7.54   The cost of the TP service is £768k[6]. The number of 'new' SMEs visited over a three-year period is 2,562; therefore the average number of 'new' SMEs visited per annum is 854. This puts the cost of visiting each 'new' SME at approximately £899.

7.55   Some indication of the cost of taking this activity a step further can also be calculated. The number of 'new' SMEs which adopted a planned approach to learning as a result of TP intervention, over a three year period, is 1,983 – roughly equivalent to 661 per annum. Using the same crude method of calculation, the cost of each 'new' SME adopting a planned approach to learning is approximately £1,162. However, this represents planning that will impact on a number of employees in each business

CONCLUSIONS

7.56   Clearly, not all the benefits can be quantified, although they should be taken into account in assessing value for money. For purposes of ready comparison, it is appropriate to compare the total public sector investment of £8.5m with the quantifiable element of net additional economic impact and to argue that, as it discounts the "softer" benefits for practical reasons, it offers a conservative view.

7.57   The results that have been calculated should be considered both indicative and partial, but in our opinion provide a basis for asserting that the contribution of SUfI intervention offers good value for money. Extrapolating from the survey results to

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[6] Information for 2005-06, provided by SUfI's director of finance, March 2006

produce indicative values we conclude that the overall public investment of £8.5m has generated the following:

- around 6,800 additional learners
- directly moved around 400 people into work
- engagement of approximately 4,500 additional SME employees in learning
- an increase in GVA in Scottish businesses of at least £7m[7].

7.58   There are a number of factors that make us believe that the actual impact on GVA is potentially greater than this:

- it excludes the value of bringing new people into the workforce (400)
- there are estimated to be a further 1,500 additional learners that contacted the main learndirect scotland service motivated by career prospects. Their higher output is likely to contribute to business value added, but is not included
- the estimates represent the impact for one year. The impact of the training will lead to continuing productivity benefits over a longer period of time (although depreciating)
- there is evidence from the surveys of significant contributions to individuals' quality of life and future engagement in learning.

7.59   For these reasons the actual contribution of SUfI is likely to be considerably higher than the £7m calculated above. This is in addition to the quality of life benefits reported.

INTERPRETING THE FINDINGS

7.60   Notwithstanding the estimates of value offered above, it is important to note that in the case of SUfI, the issue of assessing value for money is far from straightforward, for a number of reasons. SUfI is not a provider of learning: it is a broker of learning. As such, it provides one component of the process by which individuals, or companies, embark on learning activity. The weight of the SUfI intervention in leading up to the decision to participate, in comparison to the contributions of other components, such as family and peer pressures, workplace encouragement or requirement, or advice and guidance from other sources, will vary considerably between individuals and organisations.

7.61   Second, much of the work of SUfI, whether targeted at individuals or companies, is essentially attempting to inculcate attitudinal or cultural change. Deep-seated changes of this nature may not appear until several years after the programme, and in this time other factors may have played a role achieving impact (Wainwright 2002; Maguire and Killeen 2003). Thus, the time period over which outcome measures are applied is extremely important, as it could be argued that longer-term outcomes, for the individual, the organisation, and society as a whole, are likely to reflect more truly the

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[7] Rounded from £6.8m

benefits of SUfI's provision. In measuring the long-term impact of an initiative or programme, it can, again, be difficult to establish causality.

7.62 It should be emphasised that SUfI is driven as much by aspirations as by concrete objectives: it aspires to engage those people who are the most 'hard to reach', as they have exhibited no inclination to participate in learning, or even to consider that learning was for them.

7.63 Rather than looking at a value for money metric, it is more realistic to regard SUfI as part of the education, training and guidance infrastructure in Scotland, whose worth lies in its ability to challenge and influence the status quo and provide an essential link between various key agencies, allowing other initiatives to be more effective than they otherwise would be. Adding in these dimensions of SUFI's strategic added value makes the process of quantifying the organisations value for money even more complex.

OVERALL VALUE FOR MONEY

7.64 The total allocation of funding to SUfI in 2005-06 was £8.5 million, excluding VAT, as core budget.

7.65 Our analysis of the business related benefits of SUfI activity demonstrates a reasonably strong return on investment for the Scottish economy. Of the elements of the service that can be valued, we estimate a contribution to business GVA of at least £7m. When we also consider that this only represents part of the service, the total return, including contributions to employability and quality of life, is further strengthened.

7.66 Overall, therefore, the funding allocated to SUfI represents good value for money when viewed in the context of the potential contribution of the service to the longer-term economic and social goals of Scotland.

CHAPTER EIGHT   KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS TARGETS

INTRODUCTION

8.1   The previous chapter provided indications of the costs and benefits, and an assessment of the value for money provided by SUfI. Clearly, any consideration of SUfI's key performance indicators (KPIs) needs to be couched in the context of those costs and benefits, and the underlying objectives which they reflect.

8.2   In doing so it should be emphasised that, at the time of the study, new KPIs were being developed with the intention of their being closely aligned to the SUfI corporate plan.

8.3   SUfI's overarching goals are set out in the form of six key objectives:

- stimulate the demand for learning
- enhance the skill and employability of individuals
- enhance the skills and competitiveness of SMEs
- provide information and advice
- improve access
- develop infrastructure and capacity.

8.4   In turn, progress towards achievement of these objectives is measured by means of KPIs, which, for 2005-06 comprised:

- to generate a set amount of individual enquiries from SUfI's target group through local and national marketing campaigns and partnership activity
- to generate a set amount of SME enquiries through local and national marketing campaigns and partnership activity
- to get a set rating for quality and effectiveness of the National Learning Opportunities Database (NLOD)
- to get a set rating for customer satisfaction of the information and advice given
- to engage a set number of learners into learning through the network of quality assured learndirect scotland branded learning centres
- to engage a set number of SMEs into learning
- to partake in a set number of innovative joint/pilot initiatives to overcome barriers to learning.

8.5   The inter-relation between Objectives and KPIs is shown in Table 8.1 below.

Table 8.1: Relationship between Objectives and KPIs

KPI	Enhance the skills and employability of individuals	Enhance the skills and competitiveness of SMEs	Stimulate the demand for learning	Provide Information &Advice	Improve Access	Develop Infrastructure & Capacity	Output Metric
1	✓		✓	✓	✓		Generate individual enquiries from SUfI's target group through local and national marketing campaigns and partnership activity
2		✓	✓	✓	✓		Generate SME enquiries through local and national marketing campaigns and partnership activity
3	✓	✓		✓	✓		Quality and effectiveness of the national Learning Opportunities Database (NLOD)
4	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Information and advice customer satisfaction rating
5	✓				✓	✓	Learners engaged in learning through the network of quality assured learndirect scotland branded learning centres
6		✓			✓	✓	SMEs engaged in learning
7	✓	✓			✓	✓	Innovative joint pilots/initiatives to overcome barriers to learning

Source: SUfI 2006

8.6   The extent to which each of the 2005-06 KPIs has been met, which was derived from material provided by SUfI, is set out in Table 8.2 below. For the purposes of discussion, the targets for 2004-05 are also shown, although the striking disparities between some of the two sets of figures require explanation. For example, while the target for individual enquiries stood at 300,000 in 2004-05, this was reduced drastically to 120,000 for 2005-06. This was because the 2004-05 figure was based on website hits, whereas the 2005-06 figure was based on unique enquiries. Clearly, this revised way of accounting for enquiries is preferable, as, under the previous method, an attempt at assessing the numbers of individuals who had been persuaded or encouraged to contact the service could be skewed by individuals generating multiple hits on the website.

8.7   A reduction in numbers also occurred in the target of SME enquiries to be generated, although the magnitude of the decrease was by no means as great (from 14,000 to 11,650). While this may have been a reflection of lower than anticipated responses from SMEs, the actual figures, at 19,428, point to further revisions being required for this KPI.

8.8 In contrast, the numbers of learners engaged through the branded learning centres had risen substantially, from 90,000 to 480,000. The targets for 2005-06 were formed on the basis of results from surveys, rather than from those of a sample audit, as had been the case previously. Thus, it would appear from the projected actual figures that those which were set for 2005-06 were far more realistic, and represented an accurate appraisal of the current situation and what might be considered to be challenging, but attainable levels of performance.

Table 8.2: Progress towards 2005-06 targets

KPI	Output metric	Target 2005-06	Projected actual	Target 2004-05, for comparison
1	Generate individual enquiries from SUfI's target group through local and national marketing campaigns and partnership activity	120,000	135,429	*300,000*
2	Generate SME enquiries through local and national marketing campaigns and partnership activity	11,650	19,428	*14,000*
3	Quality and effectiveness of the NLOD	80%	85%	*95%*
4	Information and advice customer satisfaction rating	83%	89%	*85%*
5	Learners engaged in learning through the network of branded learning centres (total individuals and SMEs)	480,000	568,637	*90,000*
6	SMEs engaged in learning	3,700	5,257	*n/a*
7	Innovative joint pilots/initiatives to overcome barriers to learning	30	35	*20*

Source: SUfI 2006

APPROPRIATENESS OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

8.9 The following discussion assesses the appropriateness of different KPIs, and some issues related to their measurement. It should also be recognised that the Chairman's personal enthusiasm for reaching beyond the KPIs is well known within SUfI as the 'so what?' question. That is to say, numbers in themselves do not necessarily tell the full story.

Number of enquiries to the national helpline

8.10 In order to assess the extent to which it is raising awareness of, and demand for, learning SUfI currently measures the total number of calls to the learndirect scotland and learndirect scotland for business helplines. This, in itself, is useful, as it tracks the 'volume of traffic' to the helpline.

8.11 However, in both cases, these KPIs ,as they stand, are not sufficient to gauge the impact of SUfI. First, as far as the number of enquiries from individuals is concerned, more precise target-setting is required. For example, while achieving a set target of enquiries from members of key target groups, such as those with no or only low levels of qualifications, or those with little or no previous experience of engagement in learning, it is vital to identify the proportions who go on to undertake some form of

learning as a result of their contact with learndirect scotland. While it is certainly a laudable goal to incite members of these groups to make initial contact with learndirect scotland, it is also important to assess the value which ensues from participation in learning, the acquisition of skills which enhance employability, and subsequent job entry. As stated earlier, there are, potentially, clear economic benefits accruing to: the individual, in terms of greater income; employers, through the reduction of skill shortages and enhanced productivity; and to society more generally, through a reduction of welfare dependency.

8.12   At the same time, as indicated in the previous Chapter, the magnitude of economic benefits derived is greater among those attaining higher level qualifications. Therefore, as well as retaining the focus on the key target 'hard to reach' groups, it is important to measure the impact at these higher levels, through providing targets for those already well-qualified. While the ability to attract 'new learners' and those from specific target groups should be built into the KPIs, it should be recognised that the greater, and often more immediate 'pay off' from the more highly qualified, represents considerable value for money.

8.13   Two key points need to be made when discussing a KPI which is based on identifying the number of enquiries from target groups, as a means of assessing the impact of marketing and awareness-raising activity. First, there is a need to provide targets for different categories of potential learners, based on characteristics such as socio-economic background, levels of qualification attainment, recent experience of learning etc. Second, it is not sufficient merely to know whether numbers of individuals from certain groups have made contact with learndirect scotland (although that does give an indication of the success of the marketing function). Rather, emphasis should be placed on the proportions who subsequently engage in learning activity, as that is when the economic benefits become apparent.

8.14   Similarly, with SMEs, identifying callers from industrial sectors which are generally less well represented in training activity, and those which have previously undertaken little workforce development may help to gauge progress against newly-specified KPIs. Importantly, however, as identified in the literature which points to significant productivity gains ensuing from investing in the training of the workforce, the value for money attached to employers' engagement in training activity is considerable. It is the measurement of the take-up and subsequent belief in training by employers which should be a focus for KPIs. As indicated in paragraph 5.15, the internal reviews of the Training Partners service which are conducted by SUfI provide robust evidence of the impact of the service.

Quality and effectiveness of the NLOD

8.15   Given that the currency and reliability of the NLOD depends upon individual providers updating their own course information, the database will never achieve 100 per cent accuracy. Providers are under no formal obligation to update their information. Nevertheless, the fact that the NLOD is such an important aspect of SUfI's remit means that it is important to maintain some form of indicator.

8.16   As with other aspects of the KPIs, the target for 2005-06 was considerably lower than had been the case in the previous year, reflecting the findings of the surveys, and

therefore being aligned more accurately to the realities of available provision. In the current year, SUfI exceeded its KPI target for quality and effectiveness. However, it will be important to consider on an ongoing basis how best to maximise the accuracy of the NLOD.

Information and advice customer satisfaction rating

8.17   Again, although the 2005-06 target for customer satisfaction was exceeded, it was lower than the previous year's. Nonetheless, the findings of the SQW survey suggest that levels of satisfaction among individuals continue to be extremely high. This does not reduce the need to monitor these levels on an ongoing basis, and to include this issue in the KPIs.

8.18   Minor quibbles from the surveys concern callers not always receiving the follow-up information which helpline advisers are promising them by post, and a minority of respondents who rated the service as 'very poor'. Where such views are aired, further investigation may be required to gain a better understanding of any shortcomings in the service offered, and to develop appropriate responses.

Learners engaged in learning through the network of branded learning centres

8.19   The measurement of learners using branded learning centres is a major challenge for SUfI. Measurement relies entirely upon staff in branded learning centres providing monthly statistics to their Learning Centre Development Officer. Given that SUfI does not own the centres, and that centres are under no legal obligation to provide this data, it is possible that some centres will not provide the information required. The number of actual learners using learning centres (figures from those learning centres which do provide information), is extrapolated by SUfI in order to reach a total figure for all learning centres.

8.20   Again, further investigation may be required in order to better understand not only the levels and type of subsequent take-up of learning opportunities, but also the processes involved and any potential barriers to take-up.

8.21   Interviews undertaken with managers of branded learning centres revealed a cautious willingness on their part to provide additional learner data, if it would help SUfI to monitor its impact. Therefore, the possibility of obtaining further useful data from learning centres could be explored.

Innovative joint projects

8.22   SUfI has increasingly been involved in projects to stimulate demand amongst its key target groups. The 'Give It A Go' events in local communities have been a good example of this. Another example is SUfI's involvement in an ESF-funded project delivered by SSAScot which seeks to promote the benefits of learning to SMEs.

8.23   The number of such projects in itself does not, however, reflect what SUfI is trying to achieve. Therefore the KPIs should be related to the objectives of the initiatives. For example, the two initiatives mentioned above are geared to generating participation by individuals and SMEs respectively. The concern raised earlier about the high

proportions of 'non-engagers' with few or no qualifications suggests that an initiative which attempted to address this issue could be valuable in retaining and facilitating the engagement in learning of some of these 'non-traditional' learners. If such an initiative were to be introduced, it could contribute to the achievement of this KPI.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

8.24 At the outset, it should be recognised that SUfI is still a relatively youthful organisation, which is seeking to make inroads into areas which are vital to Scotland's future prosperity, economic growth and social cohesion. If it is accepted that the targets for 2005-06 are realistic, then the fact that SUfI has not only succeeded in reaching all of its targets, but has exceeded them – in many cases by a wide margin – is extremely positive.

8.25 Certainly, given the size of Scotland's population, and of its business base, the target numbers of calls to be received, from both individuals (120,000) and SMEs (11,650), would seem, at first glance, to be ambitious. Therefore, the finding that the projected numbers show that both have been exceeded by some distance, is impressive.

8.26 However, this is overshadowed by the scale of the target (480,000), and projected numbers of learners (568,637) engaged through BLCs. This, in itself, suggests that progress is being made in effecting significant shifts in attitudes towards learning. While SUfI can only claim partial (and extremely difficult to quantify) responsibility for initiating this level of take-up, it is nevertheless important to place SUFI's work within this overall context. Moreover, the establishment of new KPIs should be an opportunity to set realistic and appropriate targets for the various aspects of SUfI's activities, whose progress will therefore be able to be monitored year on year.

8.27 As well as measuring the operational aspects, such as the number of callers, subsequent take-up of courses or, in the case of SMEs, investment in training, it will be important to be cognisant of the wider trends pertaining to learning activity. An essential part of SUfI's remit is to contribute to greater participation in learning among 'hard to reach' groups. Evidence of progress will be derived from national studies which chart trends in overall participation, and identify differential rates of participation between age groups, socio-economic groups etc.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

8.28 As the organisation matures, it is likely that there will be a need to develop further the nature of the KPIs, ensuring a balance of those indicators defined on input/activity and output metrics with ones defined in terms of outcomes.

8.29 It will be important to recognise explicitly within an evolved monitoring and evaluation framework that similar desirable outcomes, either for individuals or for businesses, may come about through different access routes and activities. Such a framework may prove helpful in determining allocative efficiencies, offering further help in deciding how best to apportion and prioritise resources to achieve the desired outcome-based KPIs.

CHAPTER NINE   CONCLUSIONS

9.1   Shortly after SUfI's establishment under its original business model, an initial evaluation was commissioned to assess how it was regarded by other agencies making up the national learning infrastructure. Given that SUfI's remit at that time was more commercial in its orientation, the feedback from other agencies was characterised by a large degree of suspicion and mistrust.

9.2   The contrast between that initial evaluation and the present study could not be more striking. SUfI has now had time to become embedded in the landscape, and its revised business model means that it is no longer regarded as a threat. Consultations with stakeholders have revealed an extremely high regard for the organisation. When asked to describe their views of SUfI, consultees described it as 'dynamic', 'energetic', 'highly responsive', 'innovative in its thinking', 'very approachable and accessible', 'completely open and honest', 'enterprising', 'not entrenched in bureaucracy'. SUfI is seen to be characterised by a can-do culture which permeates all its dealings. Its willingness to engage and to listen are universally acknowledged.

9.3   In addition, it should be recognised that a real strength of SUfI is the regular and widespread generation of data relating to its operations and its impact and receptiveness, on the part of individuals and SMEs. The Learner Tracking Study (LTS) and the Advertising and Attitudinal Tracking Study (AATS) are prime examples of this. This study has attempted to draw together some of that existing data and to complement it with additional primary research targeted at individuals, SMEs and branded learning centres.

9.4   The overall aim of the study was to assess the impact of SUfI and the extent to which it was achieving its aims and representing value for money. The data derived has enabled conclusions to be reached in respect of three key aspects of SUfI's 'landscape':

- individuals making contact with learndirect scotland
- SMEs having involvement with learndirect scotland for business
- the value for money provided by SUfI

9.5   In terms of calculating value for money, although the sample sizes are robust (300 individuals and 200 business interviews), we have used smaller sub- samples in order To calculate additionality. Consequently we would stress that the results based   on extrapolation to the survey, should be treated with caution and regarded as   indicative only.

9.6   Indeed, while it is acknowledged that there were some limitations of some aspects of the data-gathering process, notably the survey of individuals and the attendance at the SME focus group, the methodology adopted nonetheless generated a rich set of data, the main findings of which are set out below.

IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION IN LEARNING

9.7   This study's findings point to the awareness-raising activities of SUfI being successful in generating calls to the helpline not only in terms of numbers, but also in generating responses from 'hard to reach' groups. Given that the greatest difficulties, in any sustained effort to appraise people of a 'new' offering is to create initial awareness of the brand, then the findings suggest that this breakthrough has been made, and that it is now important to build on and exploit those foundations. It is also important to recognise that the proportions of those contacting learndirect scotland who are from socially excluded areas approximates the proportions in the population as a whole. This is indicative of the success of SUfI in targeting 'hard to reach' groups, for it could have been expected that they would be under-represented in the samples, as they are in learning activity generally (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2005).

9.8   The importance of work-relatedness, both in the motivation to contact learndirect scotland and in the follow-up learning activity is confirmed by the findings. Although this is not surprising, it does emphasise the potential for SUfI to make a significant impact on the development of a more skilled Scottish workforce, and, thereby, on the nation's economic competitiveness. It may also provide pointers to future awareness-raising campaigns, in suggesting that this is a focus which will attract interest from larger numbers of both those in employment, who are seeking to advance their careers, and those who are attempting to gain entry to the labour market

9.9   The relatively high proportion (24 per cent) of those who contacted learndirect scotland and subsequently completed a course of learning who were 'new learners' again suggested that SUfI is going some way to achieving its aim of engaging individuals from 'hard to reach' groups.

9.10   However, this positive finding is offset by the fact that over two thirds of those who were referred to a branded learning centre had still, at the time of interview, not embarked on further learning. The reasons for this were not readily apparent from the survey, and it may be appropriate to undertake follow-up work to determine whether this was something to do with the inappropriateness of the referral, the inability of the BLC to accommodate the respondent's preferred option, or address their needs, a lack of commitment on the part of the respondent, or other reasons. While there will almost certainly be a variety of reasons for this non-participation, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the factors which are inhibiting the desired follow-up, so that, wherever possible, remedial action can be taken.

9.11   Even among those in the survey sample (who are, after all, the 'converted', in that they have called the helpline), there were indications that some of the traditional constraints on participation, such as childcare responsibilities, and the timing and location of courses, persist in preventing, or at least delaying, their access to learning. Again, a deeper understanding of the processes at work may be gleaned through further research, which could identify any issues of specific relevance to SUfI, and would inform the planning of service delivery, and, in all probability, highlight the need for more effective collaborative working between SUfI and other organisations and bodies involved in stimulating adult participation in learning and addressing the needs of adult learners.

9.12   Although two thirds of those who subsequently completed a course of learning asserted that they would have undertaken this course even without the intervention of learndirect scotland, this points up the facilitator role of SUfI, which may be beneficial in speeding up the process. It also illustrates, once again, the complexities of attempting to quantify the impact of SUfI, especially when its input is secondary to others, but nonetheless important.

9.13   Surveys of adult learners invariably conclude that the majority of those attracted to participate in learning are those who have already performed well in the education and training system and have been successful in attaining qualifications (Maguire et al, 2006). This was confirmed in this study. However, this should not be viewed negatively, despite the avowed intention of SUfI to attract people from 'hard to reach' groups. SUfI should be seeking to encourage and facilitate adult participation in learning across the board. Indeed, the study's assessment of value for money pointed out the increasing magnitude of the economic benefits, for both the individuals and their employers, associated with the participation in learning of those who were already well-qualified.

9.14   The propensity for significant numbers of callers to learndirect scotland to improve their skills and/or obtain qualifications, and to attribute this directly to learndirect scotland was matched by assertions from many respondents that similar improvements had occurred in their levels of confidence and job satisfaction. In order to go beyond these findings and produce more robust evidence to support the conviction that SUfI offers services which tend to have profound positive effects on the majority of those who call the helpline, more in-depth and longitudinal research is required. At present, however, the regular production of data from surveys of callers, which builds up over time and enables trend data to emerge, should be sufficiently persuasive to provide strong support for the efficacy of those offerings.

9.15   The ultimate test of SUfI's impact will be whether, over time, there are perceptible shifts in adults' attachment to, and participation in learning. While SUfI is only one of a number of agencies working towards this long-term goal, and therefore could claim only partial credit for any sustained increase which may occur, the evidence from the study supports the argument that it is making a positive contribution to the achievement of this goal.

IMPACT ON SMES' INVOLVEMENT IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

9.16   A major hurdle for SUfI in encouraging more SMEs to take advantage of its services and engage in higher levels of workforce development activity is the longstanding resistance to exhortations to invest in training, on the part of the majority of SMEs. Not surprisingly, therefore, the study pointed to levels of awareness of learndirect scotland for business among businesses being low.

9.17   Despite this, those companies which have engaged with learndirect scotland for business have been impressed by the service offered, and in particular that provided by the Training Partner service. 87 per cent of SMEs considered the service to be valuable or very valuable, while 77 per cent had adopted a planned approach to training as a result of their contact with the Training Partners. The enthusiasm for this service exhibited by respondents to the survey suggests that case study material and

examples of good practice derived from companies' experiences may form the basis of persuasive and compelling arguments which, if 'packaged' appropriately, could be highly influential in persuading larger numbers of SMEs to contact SUfI and make enquiries about its services.

9.18   In doing so, however, the messages being purveyed and the channels through which they are disseminated must be characterised by clarity of explanation and concise delivery.

9.19   The role of the Training Partners is likely to be crucial to the success of the learndirect scotland for business initiative. This may present a dilemma for SUfI, for the degree of individual and expert support which the Training Partners are able to provide is time-consuming and, in relative terms, expensive. Should an increase occur in SME contact with SUfI, then the demands on the time of the Training Partners may be difficult to satisfy without considerable expansion of the service.

9.20   On the one hand, there would be the danger of stimulating a demand which could not be satisfied, with the added risk of alienating some SMEs to such an extent that their interest in workforce development would effectively be put on the back burner. On the other hand, attempting to satisfy the demand could be fraught with problems of recruiting sufficiently qualified staff and maintaining economic stability - the current practices of the Training Partners, and especially the amount of time devoted to supporting individual firms, warrants close scrutiny to ensure that the service is operating within specified cost boundaries.

9.21   This cautionary tone is not intended to detract from what is clearly a well-regarded service which can claim to be highly effective, given the large majority of those who had taken advantage of the service and cited that it had had a positive impact on their business.

9.22   The survey findings which affirm the impact on subsequent investment in training, employee skill acquisition, and on workplace attitudes and aspirations provide a strong case for further expansion of the service.

VALUE FOR MONEY

9.23   The discussion of value for money attempted to assess the costs and benefits of SUfI's activities, while recognising the difficulties which this entails, such as the problem of according attribution for a shift in behaviour to a single source, the time periods which are often required before tangible benefits (e.g. qualification attainment) accrue, and issue of measuring attitudinal shifts.

9.24   Specifically, a substantial number of the components and aspects of the delivery of SUfI's services emerged as being significant strengths. Notable among these were:

  • the penetration of the marketing to individuals, including those from 'hard to reach' groups

  • the attraction of those seeking to learn for work-related reasons, which have beneficial effects for the individual, the employer and the wider economy

- the high proportions of survey respondents who had undertaken further learning since contacting learndirect scotland

- the ability to attract 'new learners'

- the fact that an overwhelming majority of those who have acquired skills or qualifications attribute this success directly to the influence of learndirect scotland

- the extremely high levels of satisfaction recorded for individuals' experience of the service

- the Training Partners service, which is highly regarded by, and highly influential among, employers, and especially SMEs

- the high levels of satisfaction expressed by employers.

9.25   The analysis of value for money uses the survey results and the projected levels of SUfI activity in 2005-06 to produce estimates of the additional number of individual and SME learners.

9.26   The survey of callers to the main learndirect scotland line found that around 24% of those that went on to undertake learning would not have done so without the support. This provides an estimate of 6,826 new learners, with a quarter from excluded area postcodes and 23% having done no new learning since school.

9.27   The analysis estimates that around 3,128 learners who were not in work moved into employment. This is a relatively large proportion and highlights the powerful effect that new skills can have on finding work for all groups, including unemployed, retired and those out of work through illness or incapacity. Of these we estimate that 438 would not have enrolled in learning without learndirect scotland.

9.28   As far as SMEs are concerned, there is substantial evidence from the survey, of additional training activity emanating from the input of learndirect scotland for business.

9.29   The analysis of the business benefits relates to the total number of 5,257 SMEs that SUfI has engaged with in 2005-06. We estimate that this activity has resulted in 5,108 employees undertaking learning or training that would not otherwise have done so. Based on evidence from a number of training impact studies, we estimate that this activity could lead to increased wage payments of around £4.8m and new value added for businesses of just less than £10m.

9.30   This figure is only intended as a guide to the potential value of the support. For a number of reasons, we think this could underestimate the overall effects, as it excludes benefits generated through individual callers that could accrue to employers, the duration of these effects, and the wider contribution that the service makes to moving people into work.

9.31   Finally, the surveys demonstrate many other benefits that cannot readily be quantified which relate to quality of life both in work and for leisure. For example, increased self-confidence and self-esteem were prominent in the findings, as were shifts in attitudes towards learning. The difficulties of deriving a meaningful measure of the amount of this benefit have already been explored, but the fact that there was survey evidence to support these claims should not be discounted.

9.32   Overall, set against these impacts, the £8.5m funding allocated to SUfI can claim to represent good value for money, when viewed in the context of the contribution of the service to the longer-term economic and social goals of Scotland.

9.33   The prime objective of SUfI is to generate greater attachment to, and participation in, learning, particularly among adults who have exhibited a reluctance to do so in the past. This is coupled with the aim of enhancing Scotland's productivity and economic competitiveness through increasing the engagement of employers, especially SMEs in training activity. This study points to considerable success having been achieved in these aims.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AATS	Advertising and Attitudinal Tracking Study
BLC	Branded Learning Centres
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
LCDO	Learning Centre Development Officer
LTS	Learner Tracking Study
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NLOD	National Learning Opportunities Database
NDPB	Non-departmental Public Body
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
S/NVQ	Scottish/National Vocational Qualification
SUfI	Scottish University for Industry
TP	Training Partner

ANNEX A: QUESTIONNAIRES

LIST A: PEOPLE WHO HAVE CALLED LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND AND SUBSEQUENTLY COMPLETED A COURSE OF LEARNING

Introduction *: Good morning/afternoon I am....................... from FMR, an independent research company. We're doing some work on behalf of the Scottish Executive.*
a) If reception : May I speak to _____(named person on database). If unavailable arrange call back date and time. If available see b)
b) If named person on database : Good morning/afternoon I am....................... from FMR, an independent research company. We are carrying out a survey on behalf of the Scottish Executive about your experiences of contacting learndirect scotland. It will only take about 10 minutes - would you be willing to answer a few questions?:

If person answers yes but is unavailable arrange call back date and time.

Q1

Can you remember what prompted you to contact learndirect scotland?
ONE CODE ONLY

SPONT (but prompt if necessary: was it their own decision, or did someone suggest it?)

	CODE
I saw an advert and decided to call them	1
Friend or relative suggested it	2
Careers adviser suggested it	3
One of my colleagues suggested it	4
My boss suggested it	5
It was just something I decided to do	6
Other (please specify)	7
_____	
Can't remember	8

Q2

What was your working status when you called learndirect scotland?

ONE CODE ONLY

	CODE
Self employed	1
Employed	2
Registered unemployed more than 6 months	3
Registered unemployed less than 6 months	4
In education (aged over16 years)	5
In education (aged under 16 years)	6
Not seeking work	7
Retired	8
Health problem/disability	9
Housewife	10
Other (please specify)	11
_____	

Q3

What is your current working status?

ONE CODE ONLY

	CODE
Self employed	1
Employed	2
Registered unemployed >6 months	3*
Registered unemployed < 6 months	4*
In education (aged >16 years)	5
In education (aged < 16 years)	6
Not seeking work	7
Retired	8
Health problem/disability	9
Housewife	10*
Other (please specify)	11

Only ask Q4 if coded 1 or 2 at Q2

Q4

How many employees does your company/the company you work for have?

	CODE
Less than 250	1
More than 250	2
Unsure	3

Q5

At the time when you phoned learndirect scotland, how recently had you participated in learning (such as taking a course)?

	CODE
I was studying/learning at the time I phoned learndirect	1
In the last year	2
1 – 3 years ago	3
More than 3 years ago	4
I hadn't done any learning since leaving school	5

Q6

At the time when you phoned learndirect scotland, what qualifications did you have?

	CODE
Some O Grades/Standard Grades	1
Some Highers	2
A degree	3
A vocational qualification*	4
Other (please specify)	5

*State name and level of vocational qualification

Q7

Thinking back to when you decided to call learndirect scotland, can you tell me which of the following best describes what motivated you to call?

READ OUT (TICK START & ROTATE)
CAN BE MULTI-CODED

Any other reason?

	CODE
To help me get a job (unemployed at the time)	1
To help me get a job (returning to work after a break to look after children)	2
Looking to change my job/employer	3
Looking to change the type of work I do	4
Looking to improve career prospects/gain a promotion	5
Wanted to learn a new skill	6
Wanted to improve an existing skill	7
Wanted to boost confidence/broaden experience	8
Interested in learning connected to a hobby or interest	9
Other (please specify)	10
_____ Can't remember/unsure	11

Q8

Which of the following types of information or advice were you looking for when you called learndirect scotland?

READ OUT LIST (TICK START & ROTATE)

Probe – Were you looking for any other types of information?
WRITE IN UNDER OTHER

	CODE
Knew what I wanted to learn – wanted information on availability	1
Knew roughly what I wanted to learn but needed help choosing what was right for me.	2
Wanted careers advice	3
Information about qualifications	4
Information on help with childcare	5
Information on funding/grants available	6
Wanted to learn something new, but wasn't sure what or where to start	7
Can't remember/unsure	8
Other (specify)	9

Q9

Before you contacted learndirect scotland, had you ever been in touch with any of the following organisations?

READ OUT ONE BY ONE
MULTI-CODE

	CODE
Local college	1
Local careers office	2
Local enterprise company	3
Local learning centre	4
Local training provider	5

Q13

Since calling learndirect scotland, we understand that you have undertaken a course [*read out name of course from info sheet*] Confirm that course is same as information held by interviewer, and code.

	CODE
IT/computing/web design	1
European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)	2
Languages	3
Counselling	4
Beauty Therapy	5
Mathematics	6
Accounting/book keeping	7
Business management/management	8
Social work	9
Child care	10
Engineering	11
Nursing	12
Photography	13
Administration	14
Other	15

Q11

Can you tell me, did you do/are you doing this course as a result of information or advice provided by learndirect scotland ?

	CODE
Yes, wholly	1
Yes, partly	2
No	3

Q12

Did you do/are you doing this course at one of learndirect scotland's local learning centres ?

	CODE
Yes 1	1
No 2	2

1 Please state which one
2 Please state where you did it

Q16

Since starting/completing your course, do any of the following statements apply to you?
Read out one by one
MULTI-CODE

	CODE
I wasn't working before, but now I have a job	1
I have had a pay rise	2
I have found a better job than the one I was in before	3
I have been promoted	4
I have received a (financial) bonus at work	5
I feel more confident in my job	6
I feel more confident generally	7
I have gained a new skill	8
I have improved my existing skills	9
I feel happier at work	10
I feel happier in my life generally	11
I have a better appreciation of the value of learning	12
I now have higher expectations or aspirations in life	13
I now have a qualification that I didn't have before*	14

* State which qualification:

Q17

For each of those statements you identified above, can you say on a scale of 1 to 5 whether this is because of the course you did after calling learndirect?

Remind them which statements they identified at Q above, and ask for rating, where: 1 = **nothing to do with learndirect and my course** 2 = *(between 1 and 3)* 3 = **partly because of learndirect and my course** 4 = *(between 3 and 5)* 5 = **directly because of learndirect and my course**	CODE	1	2	3	4	5
I wasn't working before, but now I have a job	1					
I have had a pay rise	2					
I have found a better job than the one I was in before	3					
I have been promoted	4					
I have received a (financial) bonus at work	5					
I feel more confident in my job	6					
I feel more confident generally	7					
I have gained a new skill	8					
I have improved my existing skills	9					
I feel happier at work	10					
I feel happier in my life generally	11					
I have a better appreciation of the value of learning	12					
I now have higher expectations or aspirations in life	13					

I now have a qualification that I didn't have before	14	
None of the above statements is true	15	

Q18 Supplementary open question:
Please expand on what you have said above, describing how much learndirect scotland (and your course) has been responsible for these changes

Q19

Since you contacted learndirect scotland, have you been in touch with any of the following organisations?

READ OUT ONE BY ONE.
MULTI-CODE

	CODE
Local college	1
Other local training provider	2
Local careers office	3
Local enterprise company	4
Local learning centre	5

Q14

If you hadn't called the learndirect scotland helpline, do you think you would have enrolled on a course anyway?

PROMPT

	CODE
Very likely to have enrolled on a course without learndirect help	1
Quite likely to have enrolled on a course without learndirect help	2
Quite unlikely	3
Very unlikely	4
Not sure	5
Expand if appropriate:	

Supplementary open question: why do you say this?

Q20

Finally, how would you rate the overall service you have received from learndirect scotland?

READ OUT

	CODE	ROUTE
Excellent	1	
Very good	2	
Good	3	
Neither good nor bad	4	
Poor*	5	
Very poor*	6	
Dreadful*	7	
Unsure	8	

*Why do you say that the service was poor?

Thank, classify and close

LIST B: PEOPLE WHO HAVE CALLED LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND AND BEEN REFERRED TO BRANDED LEARNING CENTRES

Introduction : *Good morning/afternoon I am........................ from FMR, an independent research company. We're doing some work on behalf of the Scottish Executive.*
a) If reception : May I speak to _____(named person on database). If unavailable arrange call back date and time. If available see b)
b) If named person on database : Good morning/afternoon I am........................ from FMR, an independent research company. We are carrying out a survey on behalf of the Scottish Executive about your experiences of contacting learndirect scotland. It will only take about 10 minutes - would you be willing to answer a few questions?

If person answers yes but is unavailable arrange call back date and time.

Q1

Can you remember what prompted you to contact learndirect scotland?
ONE CODE ONLY

SPONT (but prompt if necessary: was it their own decision, or did someone suggest it?)

	CODE
I saw an advert and decided to call them	1
Friend or relative suggested it	2
Careers adviser suggested it	3
One of my colleagues suggested it	4
My boss suggested it	5
It was just something I decided to do	6
Other (please specify)	7
_____	
Can't remember	8

Q2

Can you tell me, what was your working status when you called learndirect scotland?

ONE CODE ONLY

	CODE
Self employed	1
Employed	2
Registered unemployed >6 months	3
Registered unemployed < 6 months	4
In education (aged >16 years)	5
In education (aged < 16 years)	6
Not seeking work	7
Retired	8
Health problem/disability	9
Housewife	10
Other (please specify)	11
_____	

Q3

And can I ask, what is your current working status?

ONE CODE ONLY

	CODE
Self employed	1
Employed	2
Registered unemployed more than 6 months	3*
Registered unemployed less than 6 months	4*
In education (aged over 16 years)	5
In education (aged under 16 years)	6
Not seeking work	7
Retired	8
Health problem/disability	9
Housewife	10*
Other (please specify)	11
_____	

Only ask Q4 if coded 1 or 2 at Q2

Q4

How many employees does your company have?
[this means the entire company, not just the particular branch in which they work]

	CODE
Less than 250	1
More than 250	2
Unsure	3

Q5

At the time when you phoned learndirect scotland, how recently had you done any studying or participated in any kind of learning?

	CODE
I was studying/learning at the time I phoned learndirect	1
In the last year	2
1 – 3 years ago	3
More than 3 years ago	4
I hadn't done any learning since leaving school	5

Q6

At the time when you phoned learndirect scotland, what qualifications did you have?

	CODE
Some O Grades/Standard Grades	1
Some Highers	2
A degree	3
A vocational qualification*	4
Other (please specify)	5

Q6a *State name and level of vocational qualification

Q7

Thinking back to the time when you decided to call learndirect scotland, can you tell me which of the following best describes what motivated you to call?

READ OUT (TICK START & ROTATE)
CAN BE MULTI-CODED

Any other reason?

	CODE
To help me get a job (unemployed at the time)	1
To help me get a job (returning to work after a break to look after children)	2
Looking to change my job/employer	3
Looking to change the type of work I do	4
Looking to improve career prospects/gain a promotion	5
Wanted to learn a new skill	6
Wanted to improve an existing skill	7
Wanted to boost confidence/broaden experience	8
Interested in learning connected to a hobby or interest	9
Other (please specify)	10
_____ Can't remember/unsure	11

Q8

Which of the following types of information or advice were you looking for when you called learndirect scotland?

READ OUT LIST (TICK START & ROTATE)

Probe – Were you looking for any other types of information?
WRITE IN UNDER OTHER

	CODE
Knew what I wanted to learn – wanted information on availability	1
Knew roughly what I wanted to learn but needed help choosing what was right for me.	2
Wanted careers advice	3
Information about qualifications	4
Information on help with childcare	5
Information on funding/grants available	6
Wanted to learn something new, but wasn't sure what or where to start	7
Can't remember/unsure	8
Other (specify)	9

Q9

<u>Before</u> you contacted learndirect scotland, had you ever been in touch with any of the following organisations?

READ OUT ONE BY ONE
MULTI-CODE

	CODE
Local college	1
Local careers office	2
Local enterprise company	3
Local learning centre	4
Local training provider	5

Q10

Since calling learndirect scotland, what action have you taken towards undertaking learning?
SPONT

	CODE	ROUTE
Nothing	1	Go to 15
Have investigated options but not yet applied for a course	2	Go to 15
Have applied for a course but not yet started	3	Go to 11
Currently undertaking a course	4	Go to 11
Have completed a course	5	Go to 11
Expand on answer if appropriate:		

Q11

Can you tell me, did you do/are you doing this course as a result of information or advice provided by learndirect scotland ?

	CODE
Yes, wholly	1
Yes, partly	2
No	3

Q12

Are you doing this course at one of learndirect scotland's own learning centres ?

	CODE
Yes [1]	1
No [2]	2

[1] **Please state which one**
[2] **Please state where you are studying**

Q13

What subject area are you currently studying/or have you just completed? **DO NOT PROMPT**

	CODE
IT/computing/web design	1
European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)	2
Languages	3
Counselling	4
Beauty Therapy	5
Mathematics	6
Accounting/book keeping	7
Business management/management	8
Social work	9
Child care	10
Engineering	11
Nursing	12

	CODE
Photography	13
Administration	14
Other	15

Q14

If you hadn't called the learndirect scotland helpline, do you think you would have enrolled on a course anyway?

PROMPT

	CODE
Very likely to have enrolled on a course without learndirect help	1
Quite likely to have enrolled on a course without learndirect help	2
Quite unlikely	3
Very unlikely	4
Not sure	5

Supplementary open question: why do you say this?

Only ask Q15 if answer to Q10 was negative

Q15

Why have you not yet applied for a course or other learning opportunity?

SPONT

	CODE
Not found anything to suit my needs	1
Haven't got round to it but still intend to	2
Changed my mind	3
I won't have the time in the foreseeable future to go on a course	4
It's too expensive	5
Don't have the confidence to get back into learning	6
Other (please specify)	7

Q16

Since calling the learndirect helpline, can you say if any of the following statements apply to you?

Read out one by one
MULTI-CODE

	CODE
I wasn't working before, but now I have a job	1
I have had a pay rise	2
I have found a better job than the one I was in before	3
I have been promoted	4
I have received a (financial) bonus at work	5
I feel more confident in my job	6
I feel more confident generally	7

I have gained a new skill	8
I have improved my existing skills	9
I feel happier at work	10
I feel happier in my life generally	11
I have a better appreciation of the value of learning	12
I now have higher expectations or aspirations in life	13
I now have a qualification that I didn't have before*	14*
None of the above statements is true	15

Q16a * State which qualification:

Q17

For each of those statements you identified above, can you say on a scale of 1 to 5 whether this is thanks to learndirect scotland?

Remind them which statements they identified at Q above, and ask for rating, where: 1 = nothing to do with learndirect 2 = (between 1 and 3) 3 = partly because of learndirect 4 = (between 3 and 5) 5 = directly because of learndirect	CODE	1	2	3	4	5
I wasn't working before, but now I have a job	1					
I have had a pay rise	2					
I have found a better job than the one I was in before	3					
I have been promoted	4					
I have received a (financial) bonus at work	5					
I feel more confident in my job	6					
I feel more confident generally	7					
I have gained a new skill	8					
I have improved my existing skills	9					
I feel happier at work	10					
I feel happier in my life generally	11					
I have a better appreciation of the value of learning	12					
I now have higher expectations or aspirations in life	13					
I now have a qualification that I didn't have before	14					

Q18 Supplementary open question:
Please expand on what you have said above, describing how much learndirect scotland (and/or your course) has been responsible for these changes

Q19

Since contacting learndirect scotland, have you been in touch with any of the following organisations?

READ OUT ONE BY ONE.
MULTI-CODE

	CODE
Local college	1
Local careers office	2
Local enterprise company	3
Local learning centre	4
Local training provider	5

Q20

Finally, how would you rate the overall service you have received from learndirect scotland?

READ OUT

	CODE
Excellent	1
Very good	2
Good	3
Neither good nor bad	4
Poor*	5
Very poor*	6
Dreadful*	7
Unsure	8

*Why do you say that the service was poor?

Thank, classify and close

FOR GENERAL CALLERS

Introduction : Good morning/afternoon I am....................... from FMR, an independent research company. We're doing some work on behalf of the Scottish Executive.
a) If reception : May I speak to _____(named person on database). If unavailable arrange call back date and time. If available see b)
b) If named person on database : Good morning/afternoon I am....................... from FMR, an independent research company. We are carrying out a survey on behalf of the Scottish Executive about your experiences of contacting learndirect scotland. It will only take about 10 minutes. Can I first check:

Intro		**CODE**	**ROUTE**
Do you recall telephoning learndirect scotland for business in [month]?	Yes	1	Continue
	No	2	Close

If person answers yes but is unavailable arrange call back date and time.
If person answers no, try to prompt their memory before giving up.

Q1		**CODE**
Can you describe your position in the company?		
	Owner manager	1
ONE CODE ONLY	Director	2
	Manager	3
	Supervisor	4
	Secretary/administrator	5
	Other employee	6
	Other (please specify)	7
Please specify exact job title:		

FIRST, A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PERIOD BEFORE YOUR FIRST CONTACT WITH LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND FOR BUSINESS:

Q2		**CODE**
Can you remember how you first became aware of learndirect scotland for business?	Received information through the post	1
	From the web site	2
SPONT	**From a Local Enterprise Company**	3
	Saw an advert in the press	4
	At an event/conference	5
	Word of mouth recommendation	6
	Through contact with learndirect scotland	7
	Networking event	8
	Other (please specify)*	9
	Can't remember/unsure	10

*

Q3

Before you contacted learndirect scotland, had you ever been in touch with any of the following organisations?

READ OUT ONE BY ONE
MULTI-CODE

	CODE
Local college	1
Local learning centre	2
Other local training provider	3
Local careers office	4
Local enterprise company	5

Q4

Thinking back to when you decided to call learndirect scotland for business, can you tell me which of the following best describes what motivated you to call?

READ OUT (TICK START & ROTATE)

CAN BE MULTI-CODED

Probe - Any other reason?

	CODE
To request further information	1
To enquire about a specific course	2
To enquire about a general field of learning	3
To request a visit from a Training Partner	4
To seek advice generally about training suitable for my organisation	5
To enquire about funding options	6
To request help in setting up training	7
To request information on qualifications	8
To request free e-learning courses	9
Other (please specify)*	10
Can't remember/unsure	11

*

Q5

When you first phoned them, what did you think were the main roles of learndirect scotland for business?

READ OUT – MULTI-CODE

	CODE
To provide information on specific courses for my industry	1
To provide information on general courses (e.g. computing, admin)	**2**
To provide support in identifying training needs in organisations	3
To provide support in implementing training plan in organisations	4

To provide information on funding for training	5	
To provide information on e-learning	6	
Other (write in)	7	
Unsure	8	

Q6

Did you contact learndirect scotland4b primarily for your own benefit, or on behalf of your employees/an employee?

	CODE
For myself	1
On behalf of an employee	2
For a group of employees	3
For the entire workforce	4
Other*	5
Not sure/can't remember	6

*

AND NOW SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE YOU CALLED THE HELPLINE

Q7

When you first called the learndirect scotland for business Helpline, which of the following happened?

READ OUT

Probe: anything else?

	CODE
I gave my company contact details so I could receive information in the post	1
I discussed my company's options with an advisor	2
I arranged to have a visit from a Training Partner (training adviser)	3
Other (please specify)*	4
Can't remember/unsure	5

*

Q8

Since calling learndirect scotland for business, have any of the following things happened?

READ OUT

	CODE	ROUTE
I have received written information in the post	1	9
I have received a visit from a Training Partner (training advisor)	2	8a
I have received a visit from a Training Partner (training advisor) and received a report from him/her	3	8a
Have acted upon the advice of the training advisor	4	8a
Nothing	5	9

Q8a

What did the Training Partner (training adviser) service involve?

READ OUT
CAN BE MULTI CODED

	CODE
Training Needs Assessment	1
Developing a Training Plan	2
Consulting with staff	3
Providing information about courses	4
Providing information about funding	5
Providing access to online learning	6
Helping us take a more structured approach to training	7
Other (describe)*	8

*

Q8b

Would you say that the Training Partner (training adviser) service has had an impact on your business?

	CODE
Yes, positive impact	1
No impact	2
Unsure	3

Q8c

Can you say if any of the following statements are true, regarding the impact which the Training Partner (training adviser) service might have had on your business?

READ OUT

CAN BE MULTI CODED

	CODE
Staff morale has improved	1
We have improved our organisational structure	2
Our productivity levels have improved	3
We now provide a better service to customers	4
Staff skills have improved	5
We now have a more positive attitude towards learning and training	6
Other (describe below)*	7
It's too early to say	8
None of the above statements is true	9

*

Q9

Have any employees within your organisation undertaken learning in the period since you first

	CODE	ROUTE
Yes	1	9a
No	2	10

called the Helpline in [month]? (Please include all employees who have undertaken learning, whether as a direct result of advice provided by learndirect scotland or not. Please include all types of training, both in-house and any training courses undertaken away from the workplace.)

Unsure	3	10

Q9a

Can you tell me, is this learning a result of information or advice provided by learndirect scotland for business?

	CODE
Yes, wholly	1
Yes, partly	2
No	3

Q9b

If you hadn't called the learndirect scotland for business helpline, do you think you or your employees would have done some learning/training anyway?

PROMPT

	CODE
Very likely to have done learning/training without learndirect help	1
Quite likely to have done learning/training without learndirect help	2
Quite unlikely	3
Very unlikely	4
Not sure	5

Supplementary open question: why do you say this?

Q9c

Approximately how many staff have undertaken learning since [month]?

	CODE
If number known, write below:	1
_____	
Unsure	2

Q9d

What subject area/s did this staff training involve?

DO NOT READ OUT

CAN BE MULTI CODED

	CODE
ECDL	1
Computing/IT	2
Customer service	3
Technical subjects	4
Engineering	5
Finance	6
Accounting	7
First Aid	8
Manual/Trades related	9
Health and safety	10
Administration	11
Business	12

Management	13	
Marketing	14	
Sales	15	
Subjects specific to my industry	16	
Other (specify)*	17	
Unsure	18	

*

Q10

I am going to read out a list of reasons why your organisation may not have undertaken learning since [month]. Can you tell me, do any of these apply to your organisation?

READ OUT LIST

PROBE – ANY OTHER REASON?

CAN MULTI-CODE

	CODE
We haven't got round to organising it but still intend to	1
We haven't had time to organise it and won't have any time for the foreseeable future	2
We haven't received the report from our Training Partner yet	3
We've not found anything to suit our needs	4
It's too expensive	5
We can't spare any staff to do training	6
There's no need for training at present in the organisation	7
We do intend to undertake training and training courses are organised	8
Other (please specify)*	9

*

Q11

Do you expect that your organisation will undertake any staff training in the next 6 months?

	CODE	ROUTE
Yes, definitely	1	11a
Yes, possibly	2	11a
No	3	12
Unsure	4	12

Q11a

What subject area/s will this staff training involve?

DO NOT READ OUT

	CODE
ECDL	1
Computing/IT	2
Customer service	3
Technical subjects	4

Engineering	5
Finance	6
Accounting	7
First Aid	8
Manual/Trades related	9
Health and safety	10
Administration	11
Business	12
Management	13
Marketing	14
Sales	15
Subjects specific to my industry	16
Other (specify)*	17

*

Q12

<u>Since</u> you contacted learndirect scotland for business, have you been in touch with any of the following organisations?

READ OUT ONE BY ONE.
CAN MULTI-CODE

	CODE
Local college	1
Local learning centre	2
Other local training provider	3
Local careers office	4
Local enterprise company	5

Q13

Since calling the learndirect scotland for business helpline, can you say if any of the following statements apply to you or your employees?

Read out one by one
MULTI-CODE
Note: when reading out responses, be aware of their earlier response to Q

	CODE
	1
I/my employees have had a pay rise	2
I/my employees have been promoted	3
I/my employees have received a (financial) bonus at work	4
I/my employees feel more confident in my job	5
I/my employees feel more confident generally	6
I/my employees have gained a new skill	7
I/my employees have improved my existing skills	8
I/my employees feel happier at work	9
I feel happier in my life generally	10
I/my employees have a better appreciation of the value of learning	11

	CODE	
I/my employees now have higher expectations or aspirations in life	12	
I/my employees now have a qualification that I didn't have before*	13	
I/my employees have started a course	14	
I/my employees have taken up a new interest	15	
None of the above statements is true	16	

* State which qualification:

(Interviewer can merge Q13 and Q14)

Q14

For each of those statements you identified above, can you say on a scale of 1 to 5 whether this is thanks to learndirect scotland?

Remind them which statements they identified at Q above, and ask for rating, where: **1 = nothing to do with learndirect** **5 = directly because of learndirect**	CODE	1	2	3	4	5
I/my employees have had a pay rise	1					
I/my employees have been promoted	2					
I/my employees have received a (financial) bonus at work	3					
I/my employees feel more confident in my job	4					
I/my employees feel more confident generally	5					
I/my employees have gained a new skill	6					
I/my employees have improved my existing skills	7					
I/my employees feel happier at work	8					
I feel happier in my life generally	9					
I/my employees have a better appreciation of the value of learning	10					
I/my employees now have higher expectations or aspirations in life	11					
I/my employees now have a qualification that I didn't have before*	12					
I/my employees have started a course	13					
I/my employees have taken up a new interest	14					
None of the above statements is true	15					
I/my employees have had a pay rise	16					

Q Supplementary open question:
Please expand on what you have said above, describing how much learndirect scotland (and/or your course) has been responsible for these changes

Q15

To what extent did the service you received from learndirect scotland for business meet your expectations?

READ OUT

	CODE	ROUTE
Exceeded my expectations	1	End
Met my expectations	2	End
Fell short of my expectations	3	Q15a
Did not have any expectations	4	End
Unsure	5	End

Q15a

Why do you say that? How could the service be improved?

Thank, classify and close