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Learner Journeys Research – Education Maintenance Allowance

March 2010

Of interest to staff and stakeholders with an
interest in Learner Support

Further information

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LSC Learner Journeys Research – Education Maintenance Allowance

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March 2010



Produced by BMG Research

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Investors in People Standard - Certificate No. WMQC 0614

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

This survey was commissioned to determine the impact of the financial assistance available to learners on participation and achievement. It's main aim was to understand how well the funding provided by the LSC is helping learners with regard to the four stages of their learning, including finding out about the course and making the decision to take-up a course; actually taking up a course and staying on it to the end; completion of a course and achieving qualifications; and moving on to further learning.

Overall, 3,807 interviews (out of a total of 10,688 across all Learner Support schemes) were conducted amongst learners receiving *Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)*.

1.2 Engagement

Just 8% of learners who had heard about the funding before deciding to do their original course may not have done the course if the funding had not been available. However, nearly two-thirds of all learners were concerned about having enough money whilst on the course. There were also significant levels of concern about other costs, including affording course materials and transport.

Most learners (94%) found it easy to find out about EMA.

Half the learners received general advice or guidance about financial support for learning. Clearly there is scope for wider access to advisory services.

1.3 Retention and persistence in learning

The retention rate (estimated by the survey) for learners supported by EMA is 86%. This is similar to the national average for all FE learners (87% in 2006/07).

More than two-thirds of those who have completed or are still on the course (71%) feel that they could not have finished their course or would have struggled financially without the funding. Thus, we can conclude that EMA has a positive impact on retention.

The main reason for early leaving is a change in personal circumstances. However, financial issues are a significant factor and nearly a third (31%) of early leavers report that financial issues influenced their decision to leave their course.

However, amongst those who left the course before completion, transport is the most frequent cause of financial problems whilst in learning. Around a third cite general living costs and a similar proportion cite the cost of course materials and books.

1.4 Achievement

The success rate (estimated by the survey) for learners supported by EMA is 81%.

Nearly all those completing their original course (95%) achieved a qualification. A large majority agrees that EMA funding helped them to achieve a qualification.

The proportion of learners with an NVQ equivalent qualification increased following their EMA funded course.

1.5 Learning progression

More than half the learners who are no longer on their original course have progressed into, or have registered for, further learning. Of these, most (87%) have progressed to a higher level.

Of those who failed to complete their original learning and have not progressed, 82% said they would have considered more learning if more financial support had been available.

Three-fifths of those who are either still on or have completed their further learning have received some financial assistance. Thus, two-fifths have continued learning without financial support.

Financial support received for further learning is most likely to have been other grants for learners including student loans and bursaries.

The majority of learners who achieved a qualification from their further learning and received funding for this learning, report that the financial support helped them to achieve more qualifications.

More than two-fifths of those achieving a qualification from their further learning achieved a Level 3 qualification for the first time; and around one in ten gained an NVQ equivalent qualification where before they had none.

1.6 Employment progression

The great majority (85%) of learners believe that the funding they received helped them progress in their work/career. Of these, nearly half (37% of all learners) feel it helped a great deal.

Nearly all the learners were in full-time learning (mainly at school) prior to taking up the funded course. Consequently, following the learning there have been increases in both the proportion of learners now in employment and the proportion not in work, whether actively seeking work or inactive. Much new employment (72%) is part-time.

1.7 Personal and social benefits

The perceived benefits of undertaking learning supported by EMA are wide-ranging and encompass a number of personal and social gains.

1.8 Conclusions

Strengths

- Knowledge of EMA is clearly widespread amongst its target group. Only 3% of recipients had any difficulty in finding out about this form of funding.
- Early leaving for financial reasons is estimated to apply to only 4% of all EMA recipients. Thus, EMA funding means that few people who receive it are obliged to leave a course of learning because of lack of money.

- Achievement of EMA-supported learners is significant. 95% of those who completed their courses achieved a qualification. Most of these qualifications were at levels which increase the probability of employment and learning progression. 85% were at level 2 or above and 57% were at level 3 or above.
- Learning progression following EMA-funded learning is significant. 25% have taken up further learning and 31% have registered for further learning.
- This further learning has already delivered further qualifications for 77% of learners who undertook it.
- For learners in employment both before and after EMA-supported learning, significant increases in income have been experienced.
- Those who are now employed report a range of career benefits including greater responsibility, better pay and movement into a permanent position.

Issues to consider in the further development of EMA

- There is little evidence that EMA exerts strong leverage on supported learners' decisions to enter and remain on the course for which they are funded. 84% say they would definitely (57%) or probably (27%) have undertaken the course even if EMA had not been available. Only 8% say they would definitely or probably not have done it. Although 60% of supported learners said they would have struggled financially during the course if EMA had not been available, only 11% said that EMA funding was essential to their completing and 29% said that the funding made no difference to their staying on and completing the course. However, although EMA has a limited impact on learning take-up, it is to a great extent in line with LSC policy that the availability of EMA should not influence learning choice.
- Post-EMA outcomes probably reflect prevailing economic circumstances rather than anything concerned with EMA itself. However, these outcomes are not particularly positive. 37% of supported learners have continued in education. 38% are in work, but 72% of these are in part-time jobs and only 63% are in jobs (full- or part-time) which they regard as permanent. 25% are neither in education nor employment, including 16% who are unemployed and seeking work and 9% who are not working and not seeking work. These findings suggest that many young people need assistance towards the end of their courses to help them find positive directions when those courses end.

2 Background

2.1 Background

In February 2008, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned BMG Research to undertake a survey to determine the impact of the financial support schemes available to learners.

The main aim of the research is to understand how well the funding provided by the LSC is helping learners on their courses, with the focus on four key stages of learning comprising:

- Finding out about a course, including making the decision to take-up a course;
- Actually taking up a course and staying on it to the end;
- Completion of a course and achieving qualifications;
- Moving onto further learning; and the impact of funded learning on career and personal development.

More particularly, learners were asked a range of key questions relevant to each of the four key stages of learning and beyond:

- **Engagement/Participation:** Is the funding helping to raise interest in taking up learning? Is it encouraging people to take-up learning, who might not have been able to if the funding was not there to help them?
- **Retention:** Does the funding help learners to stay on a course until the end? Does it help prevent learners from dropping out, such as learners who might have had to stop learning to earn money if the funding was not there to support them?
- **Achievement:** Does the funding help learners complete their course and achieve a qualification, or achieve a higher qualification than they might have if the funding wasn't there?
- **Progression:** Does the funding encourage learners to think about future courses, or has it encouraged them to try for a promotion, or take on more responsibility at work, or take-up other learning for personal development/interest?

The survey methodology, which involved a complex sample structure based on funding scheme and year of funding, was tailor-made to serve the aims of the survey and provide an appropriate level of detail with regard to the findings. As a result of the specific approach undertaken, findings from the survey cannot be compared with any other research or evaluation undertaken in the past.

2.2 Methodology

10,688 interviews were conducted with learners in several of the LSC's financial support schemes (including Education Maintenance Allowance, Adult Learning Grant, and others) over three academic years

A stratified random sample was drawn by funding scheme, the year in which funding was received, and the gender and age of learners. Where the sample was relatively

small by year of funding, contacts were maximised. Where sufficient sample was provided to achieve minimum targets, quotas were set.

Within the overall total, 3,807 interviews were conducted amongst *Education Maintenance Allowance* recipients. [Education Maintenance Allowance supports young people in full-time learning or following a valid Entry to Employment/ Programme-led Apprenticeship of at least 12 guided learning hours per week by providing weekly payments based on the learner's total household income). More information about EMA can be obtained via the following weblink: <http://ema.lsc.gov.uk/>. Interviews were undertaken by telephone with recipients living across England.

The sample data for EMA learners was weighted to reflect LSC counts of all EMA recipients for each of the three academic years 2005/06 to 2007/08. This ensures that sample estimates are representative of the views of learners from all these years.

The following table shows the number of contacts and number of interviews achieved by year of funding:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Number of contacts	68,079	135,350	119,345
Achieved interviews (unweighted)	884	909	2,014
% of interviews (unweighted)	23	24	53
Achieved interviews (weighted)	1,090	1,358	1,359
% of interviews (weighted)	29	36	36

Note on figures: All percentages charted throughout this report are using data to one decimal place. However, data is presented as whole integers. Thus, rounding numbers which are added to or subtracted from each other may result in slight discrepancies. For example: 70% plus 27% equals 97% but the numbers used are actually, 69.8% (which rounds up to 70%) and 26.6% (which rounds up to 27%), which, when added together equal 96.4% (which rounds down to 96%). Furthermore, where there are two percentages presented side by side which look like they should be identical but the 'bars' are slightly different lengths the actual percentages differ by tenths of a percent. For example: 4% could be within the range 3.5% to 4.4%.

2.3 Sample profile

All interviewees were aged between 16 and 19. The majority (76%) were aged 16. The profile by gender is slightly in favour of females (52% are female, 48% are male).

The sample includes more than half who received funding in the year 2007/08 (53%). The remainder are quite evenly split between 2006/07 (24%) and 2005/06 (23%).

22% of EMA respondents represented an ethnic minority group. This compares with 23% across all funding schemes and 14% of 16-19 year olds across England.

Just 4% of respondents have a long standing illness, disability or infirmity. This compares with 10% across all funding schemes.

Most respondents (96%) are single. A further 3% are married or living with a partner and fewer than 1% are separated, divorced or widowed.

Just 2% are parents or carers of children.

3 Engagement

Key findings

For a group of mostly quite young learners in receipt of EMA – three-quarters are aged 16 – the reasons for learning are mostly straightforward. They want to get qualifications, either as an end in themselves or as a step towards higher qualifications. Many also recognise the significance of learning to future employment and career prospects but, at this stage, this is less often the main reason for learning.

Most learners who are supported by EMA had financial concerns before starting their learning. These included general concerns about money, and more specific ones about transport and course materials, books or equipment.

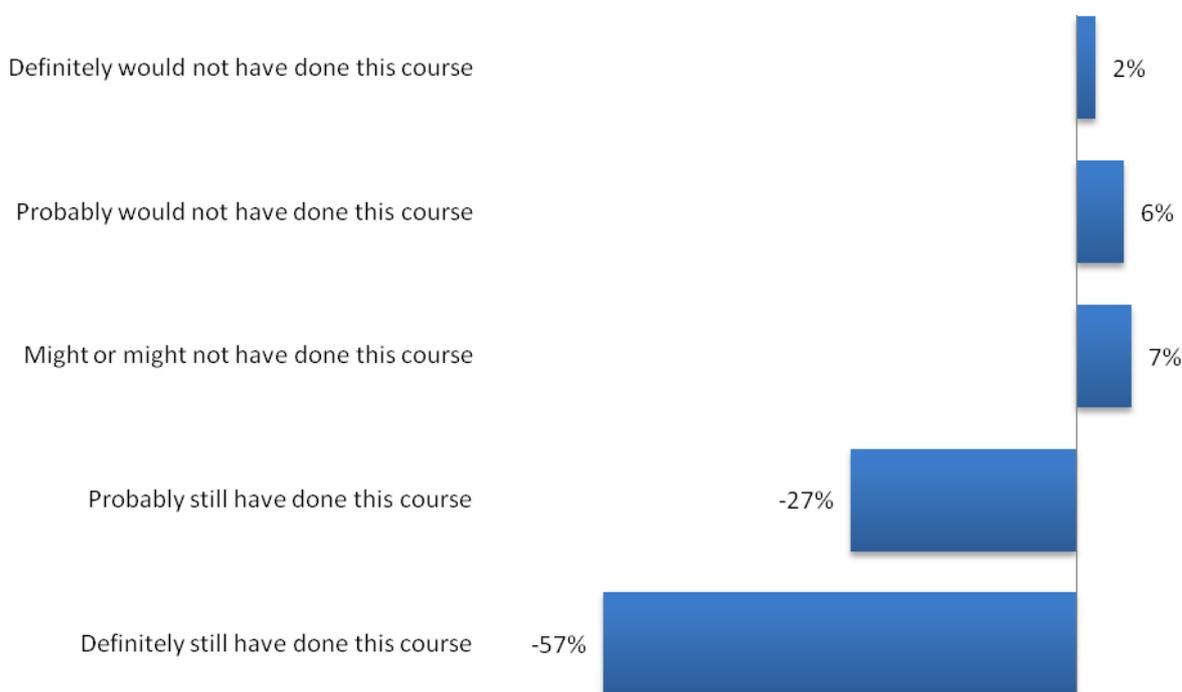
Eight out of ten learners were aware of EMA before they started their course but only half said they had received more general information, advice and guidance on the range of funding available. Where such information, advice and guidance had been received, it was rated as useful or very useful in nearly all cases.

However, EMA appears to have limited leverage on supported learners' decisions to undertake the supported learning. Over a quarter (27%) say that they would probably have entered the supported learning without EMA and over half (57%) say they would definitely have done so.

3.1 Impact of funding on course take-up

80% of EMA-supported learners had heard of EMA before they started on the course for which they could receive EMA funding. Of these, 84% say they would definitely (57%) or probably (27%) have undertaken the course even if funding had not been available. Only 8% say they would definitely or probably not have done it:

Figure 1: Impact of funding on course take-up (where heard about funding before deciding on course) Base = 3,096

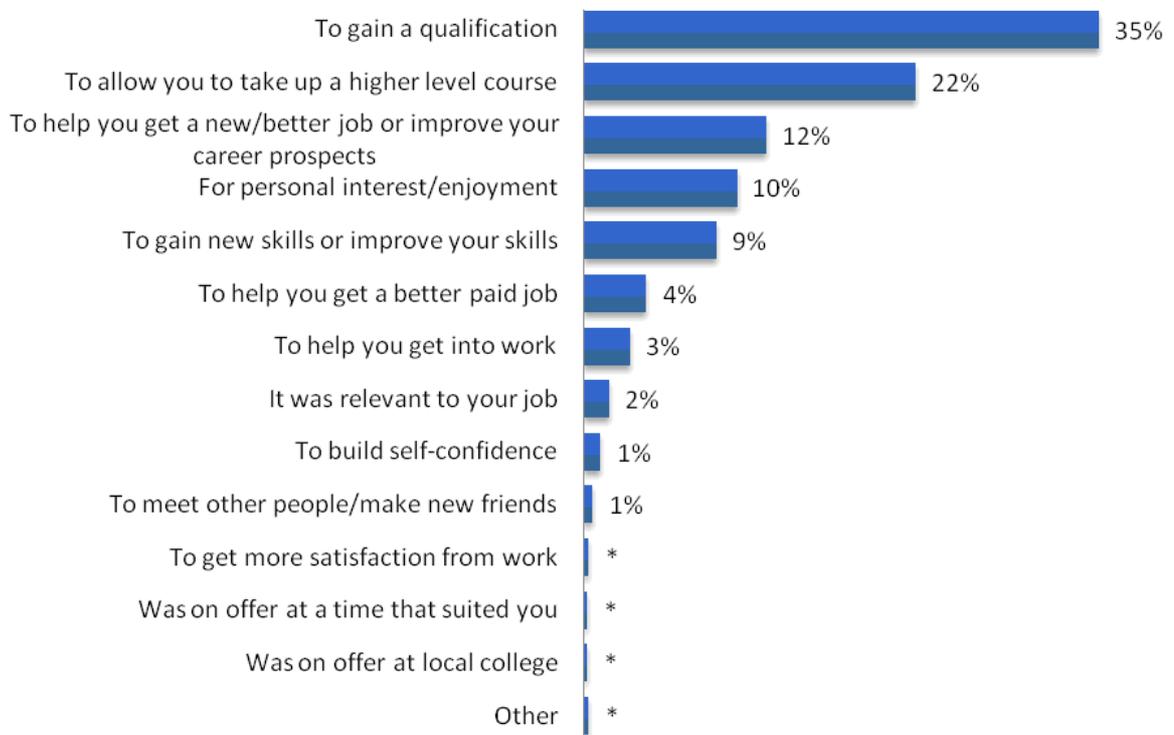


Younger learners who were aged between 16 and 18 and not in education or training prior to taking up the course (those classified as ‘NEET’) are more likely to feel that they *definitely or probably would not* have done the course without the funding being available (13%, compared with 8% of the total sample).

3.2 Reasons for taking up the course

Few learners give just one reason for taking up a course. When prompted with a list of possible reasons, the one most frequently selected is that of ‘to gain a qualification’ (96% of all learners). Only slightly fewer cite ‘to gain new skills or improve your skills’ (94%), ‘to help you get a new/better job or improve your career prospects’ (89%) and/or ‘to allow you to take-up a higher level course’ (89%). When respondents were asked to identify just one *main* reason, then ‘to gain a qualification’ was the reason most frequently given, followed by ‘to allow you to take-up a higher level course’. As would be expected amongst a young group of learners, the focus of motivation to learn is on qualifications and learning progression rather than directly on employment outcomes:

Figure 2: Main reason for course take-up, prompted (all respondents) Base = 3,807 *denotes less than 0.5%

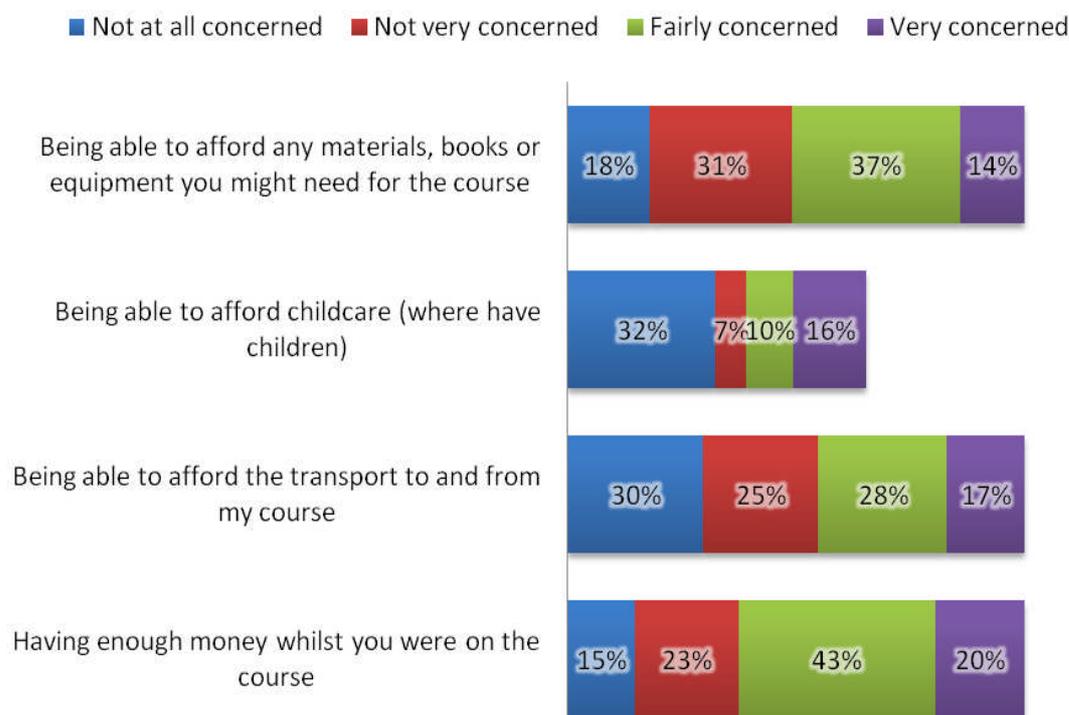


Wanting to get a new or better job or to improve career prospects is a more significant reason for those with prior work experience (16%). Those without qualifications prior to the original course are particularly likely to cite gaining a qualification as the main reason for taking it up (52%).

3.3 Financial concerns before starting the course

Learners were asked whether or not they had financial concerns before starting the course. Overall, nearly two-thirds had one or more concerns. The most frequent concern was simply the general one which EMA is designed to alleviate – that of having enough money whilst studying. However, there are also significant levels of concern about transport costs and course materials. For the very small minority (2%) who have children, there are additional concerns about childcare costs:

Figure 3: Extent to which respondents were concerned about financial issues before starting the course (all respondents) Base = 3,807 Base (where have children) = 81 % that respond 'don't know' not presented



3.4 Information on funding

Most learners (80%) found out about EMA before starting the course.

The proportion is significantly higher amongst learners who had qualifications at NVQ equivalence level 2 or above prior to the course for which they received funding (82%, compared with 76% of the lesser qualified). It is also significantly higher amongst 16 year olds (83%, compared with 71% of older learners).

One in five learners (19%) found out about the funding after deciding to do the course.

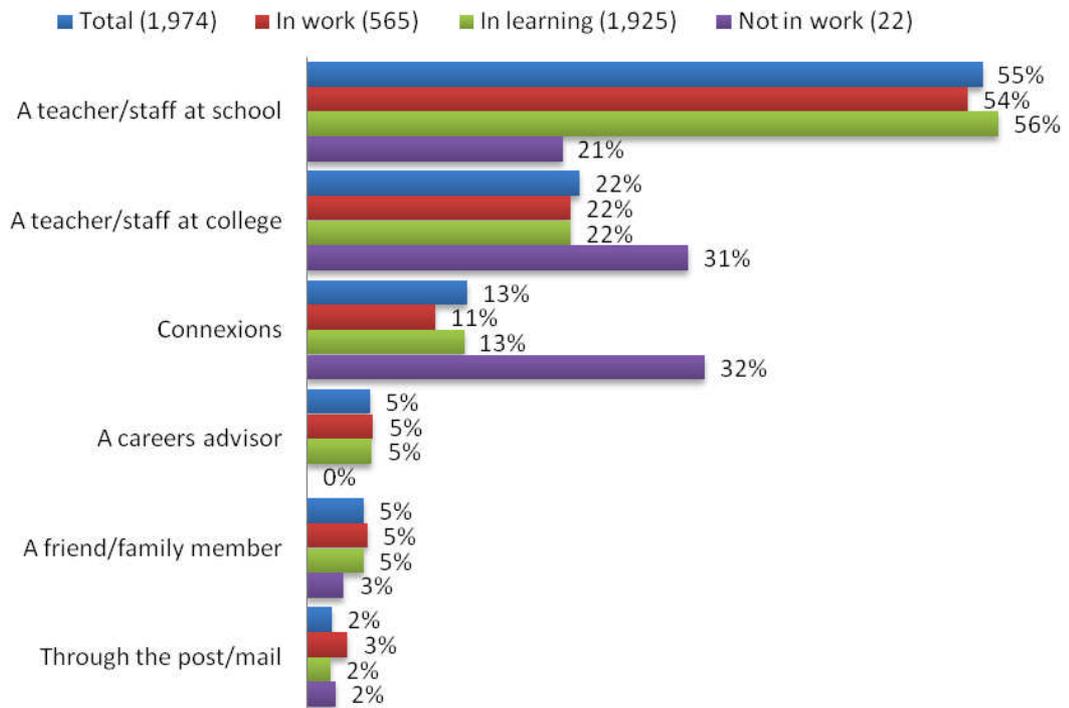
The majority of learners (94%) found it easy to find out about the funding. Only very small proportions found it fairly (2%) or very difficult (1%). (3% replied that they found it neither easy nor difficult and 1% could not give an answer.)

3.5 Information, advice or guidance on funding

Half of learners (51%) reported receiving information, advice or guidance (IAG) about the different types of funding available.

The most frequently reported source of IAG was a teacher or other member of staff at school (55%). This proportion is lower amongst 18 year olds (27%) who are more likely to cite their source as a teacher or member of staff at college (41%). These older learners being twice as likely as younger ones to cite Connexions as a source:

Figure 4: Most frequently cited sources of information, advice or guidance, by prior status (those receiving IAG)
 Figures in parentheses are sample bases



The information, advice and guidance received is highly rated, with 97% finding it useful (including 54% rating it as very useful).

4 Retention and Persistence in Learning

Key findings

EMA is estimated to generate a retention rate of 86% for its supported learners. (The retention rate is the proportion of learners who complete their studies whether they are awarded the qualification or not.) The national retention rate for all students in Further Education was stable at 87%, in both 2005/06 and 2006/07 (Book of FE Facts, dcsf, 2008).

Where early leaving occurs, financial issues are a significant factor in fewer than a third of cases. Most early leavers left because of changes in circumstances or because they had lost interest in their course. Correspondingly, when early leavers were asked what would have helped them to complete their course, only around a third said that more financial support might have had this effect.

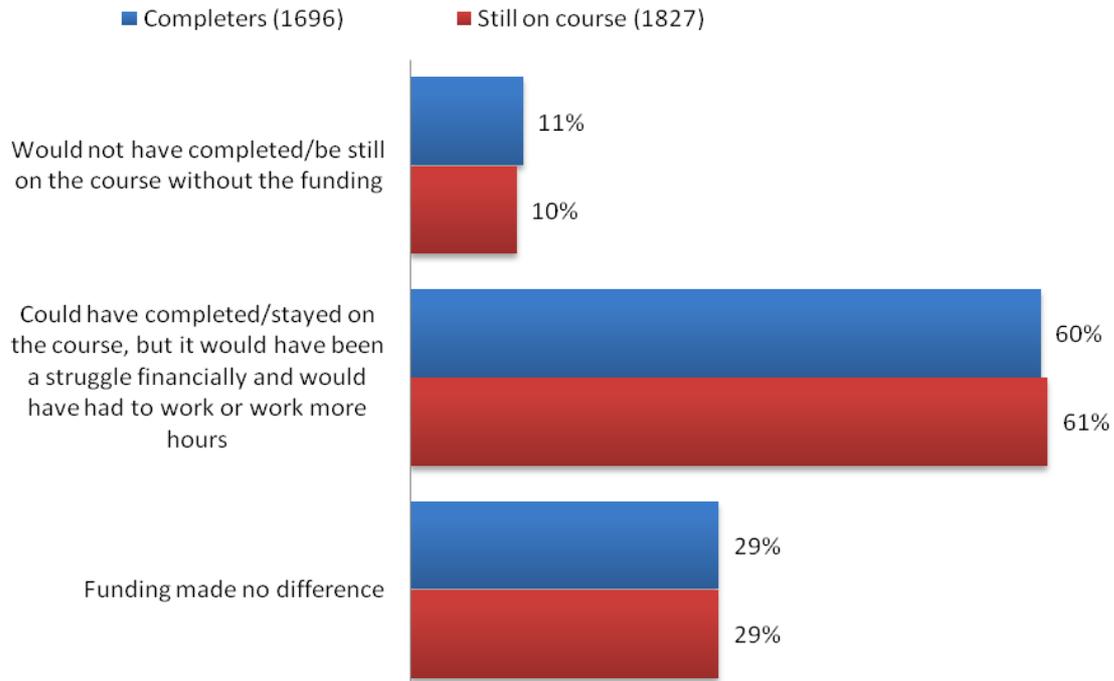
For learners who complete their studies, EMA is not a critical factor in most completions. Only 11% said they would definitely not have completed without it. However, 6 out of 10 said they would have struggled financially without it. For the remainder (29%), EMA made no difference to their completing or otherwise.

Overall, therefore, it appears that EMA has a persuasive or encouraging power in respect of staying on and completing courses of learning. It ensures that completion rates for financially disadvantaged learners remain the same as those for all learners. It ensures that most early leaving is not for financial reasons and it assists those who would otherwise struggle financially during their studies.

4.1 Value of funding to completing/staying on the course

Only 1 in 9 learners who were funded by EMA and who completed their course (11%) said that the funding was essential and that they would not have completed the course without it. A much larger proportion (60%) said, however, that they would have struggled without it. Fewer than a third (29%) said that the funding had made no difference to their staying on and completing the course:

Figure 5: Statements that best describes learners' feelings about the funding received (where completed or still on the course) Bases in parentheses



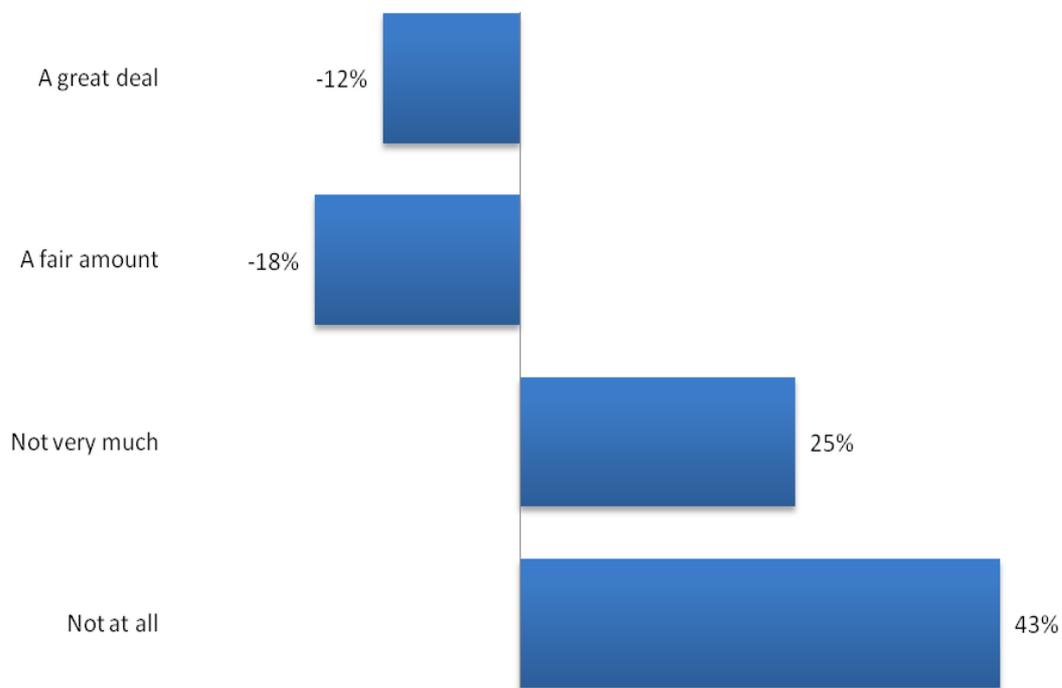
4.2 Completion and early leaving

The majority of those who are no longer on the course for which they received funding completed the course (86%). The remainder (14%) left their course early.

The main reasons for leaving the course before completion concern changes of circumstance and the fact that the course did not hold the learner's interest sufficiently.

Fewer than one in twenty early leavers (4%) *spontaneously* stated that they could not afford to continue the course or that financial issues prevented them from continuing. However, when prompted, around a third of early leavers (31%) reported that money issues influenced their decision to a significant extent:

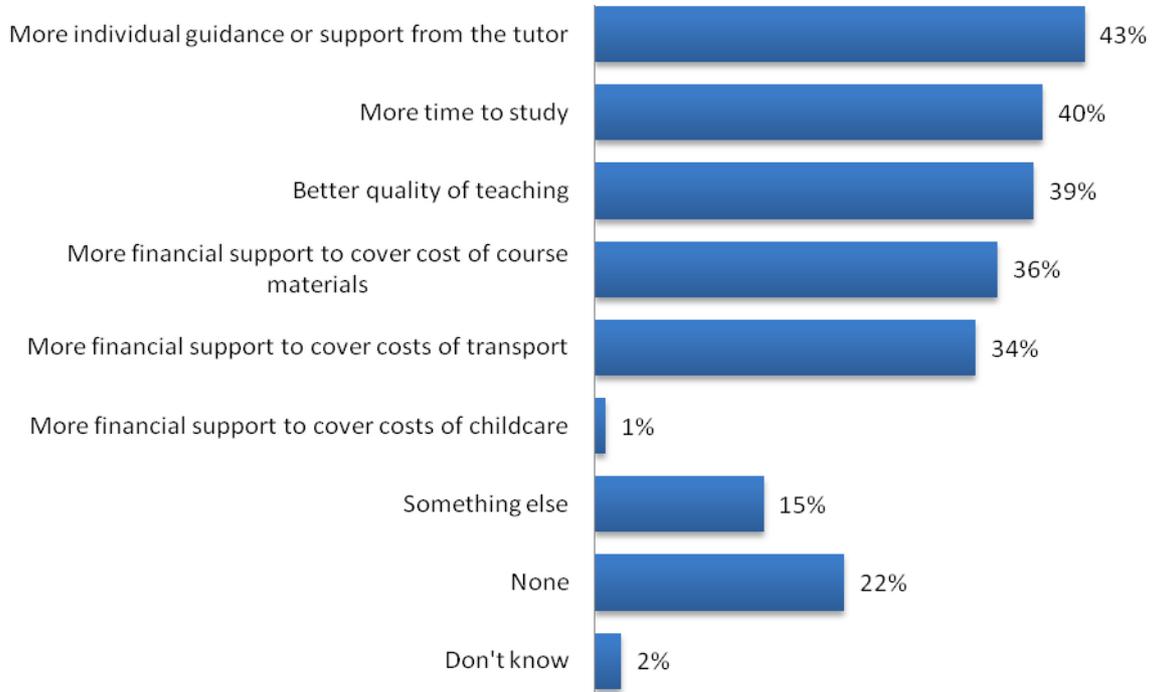
Figure 6: Extent to which money issues influenced their decision to leave the course (where did not complete the course) Base = 284



Transport costs are most likely to be reported as the cause of financial difficulties (73% of those citing financial concerns). More than a third (37%) reported concerns about general living costs, with fewer reporting concerns about course materials and books (31%).

When asked what might have helped them to complete their course, 'more individual guidance or support from the tutor' was the most frequently selected option (by 43% of early leavers), particularly by those without qualifications prior to the learning (53%). The next most frequently selected option was that of 'more time to study' (40% of early leavers). Around a third cited each of 'more financial support for course materials' (36%) and/or 'transport' (34%):

Figure 7: Ways that learners may have been helped to complete their course, prompted, multiple response (where did not complete the course) Base = 284



4.3 On-going or further financial assistance

Only one in twenty learners who are still on or who have completed the course (5%) have received financial assistance other than that from EMA.

This is equally likely to meet the costs of course materials (39% of those getting further financial assistance) and/or transport costs (38%).

5 Achievement

Key findings

The great majority, 95%, of those who completed their EMA-supported course achieved one or more qualifications. Of all those who started a course (including early leavers), 82% achieved one or more qualifications.

Nearly 6 out of 10 (57%) of those who achieved qualifications, achieved at Level 3 or above.

Nearly 9 out of 10 learners who achieved a qualification feel that EMA contributed substantially to that outcome.

5.1 Achievement of qualifications

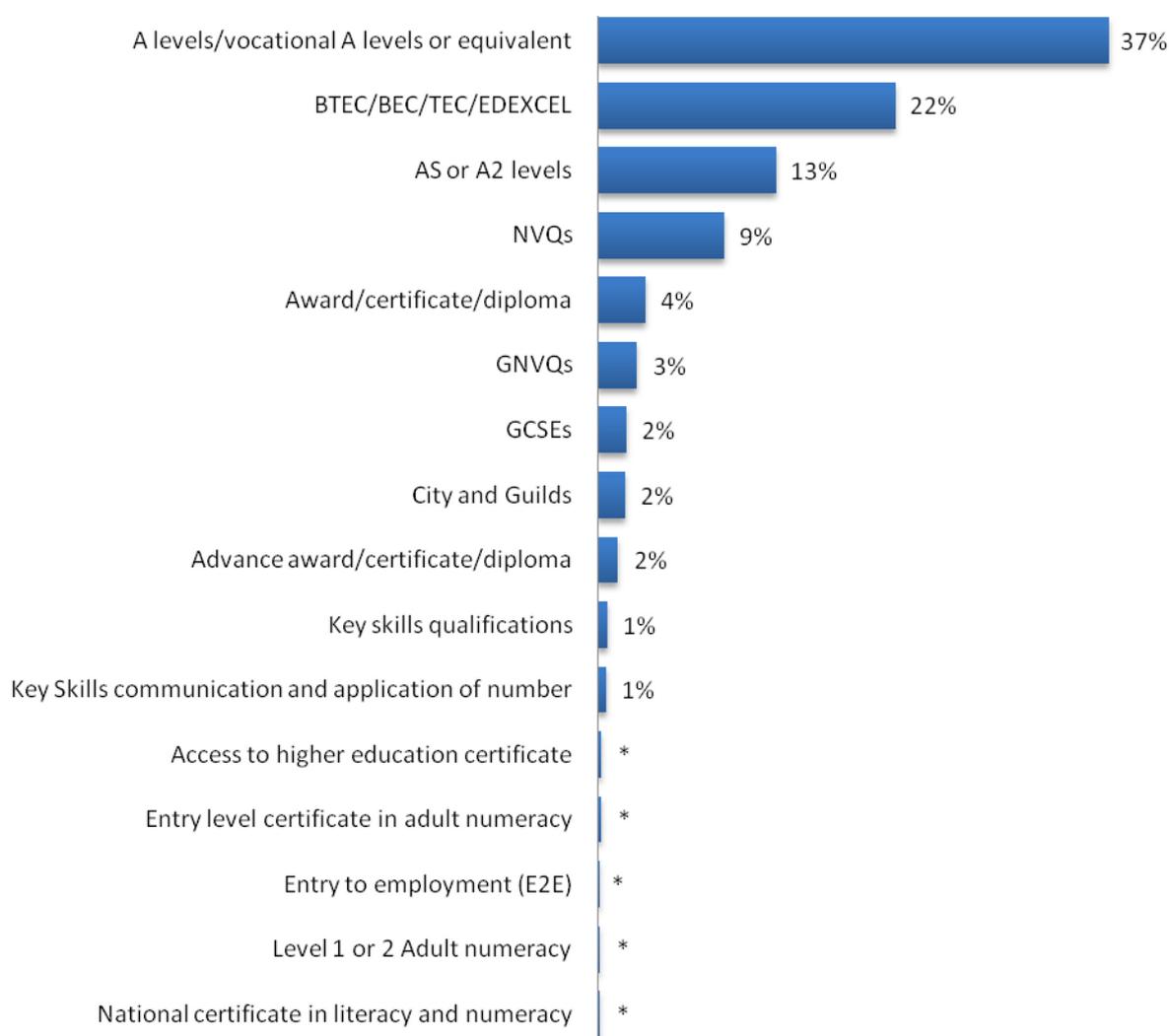
More than 9 in 10 (95%) of learners who completed their course were able to achieve a qualification. (Of those achieving a qualification: 11% achieved at Level 1, 28% at Level 2, 56% at Level 3, and 1% at Level 4. A further 4% received a qualification without an NVQ equivalence, that is, below Level 1.) The proportion of completers achieving a qualification is fairly constant over time (90% in 2007/08 and 96% in 2006/07 and 2005/06).

Learners are very positive about the contribution that the funding made to their achievement of these qualifications. Although the majority do not feel the funding was essential to enabling them to undertake the learning, 37% feel the funding helped 'a great deal' and a further 50% consider that it helped 'a fair amount'.

The proportion who feel that the funding helped a great deal/a fair amount is high even amongst those who would definitely still have done the course without the funding (84%) or for whom (in their view) the funding made no difference to the likelihood of completion (68%).

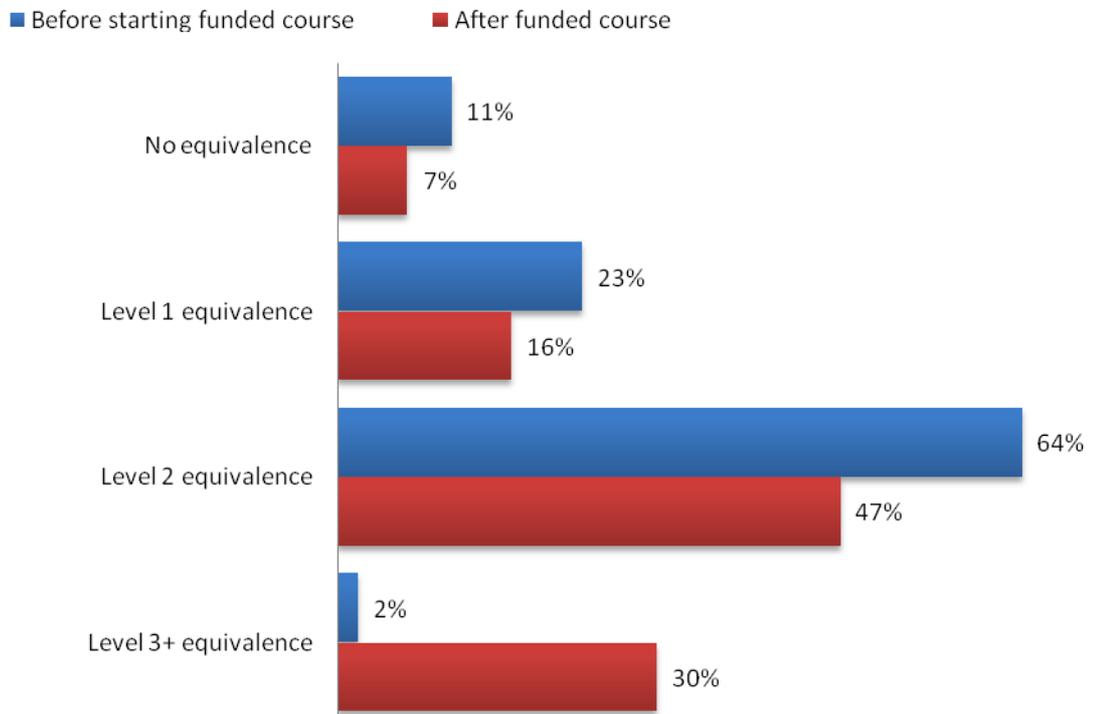
The qualifications which were achieved are set out in more detail in the following figure:

Figure 8: Qualifications achieved from the funded course (where achieved any qualifications) Base = 1,598
 *denotes less than 0.5%



A comparison of the NVQ equivalence of learners' qualifications before and after the course for which they received EMA funding (based on all respondents) shows a significant increase in qualification levels. The proportion without a qualification with any NVQ equivalence fell from 11% to 7%. The increase in the proportion with Level 3+ qualification (from 2% to 30%) is particularly significant:

Figure 9: NVQ equivalence before and after the course for which received funding (all respondents) Base: 3,807



6 Learning Progression

Key findings

There is clear evidence that participation in EMA-supported learning promotes significant further learning beyond the original course:

25% have taken up further learning.

77% of those who have completed this further learning got a qualification.

A further 31% have registered for further learning.

Of those not registered for a further course, 46% say that they definitely intend to progress on to a further course.

In total, two-thirds (66%) of ex-EMA learners report that they have learned or are now learning further, that they are registered to learn, or that they intend to register to learn.

87% of people who have taken up or registered for further learning have learned, are learning, or will learn towards a *higher qualification* than that at which their EMA-supported course was targeted.

There is clear evidence, too, that financial support is important to this progression. Of those who have undertaken further learning, 60% have received financial support, with a second round of EMA funding being the key support for around 4 in 10 of these. A large majority (81%) of these people report that funding was important to this further participation.

Where EMA-supported learners who left early have not gone into further learning, lack of access to support funding appears to have been a significant constraining factor.

Generally, therefore, statistics on learning progression are clearly supportive of EMA funding. The learning which it originally supported has led or will lead to a very substantial level of participation in further learning (mostly at a higher level). And, again, financial support to learning, including renewed access to EMA, is shown to be important to this further participation.

6.1 Learning progression

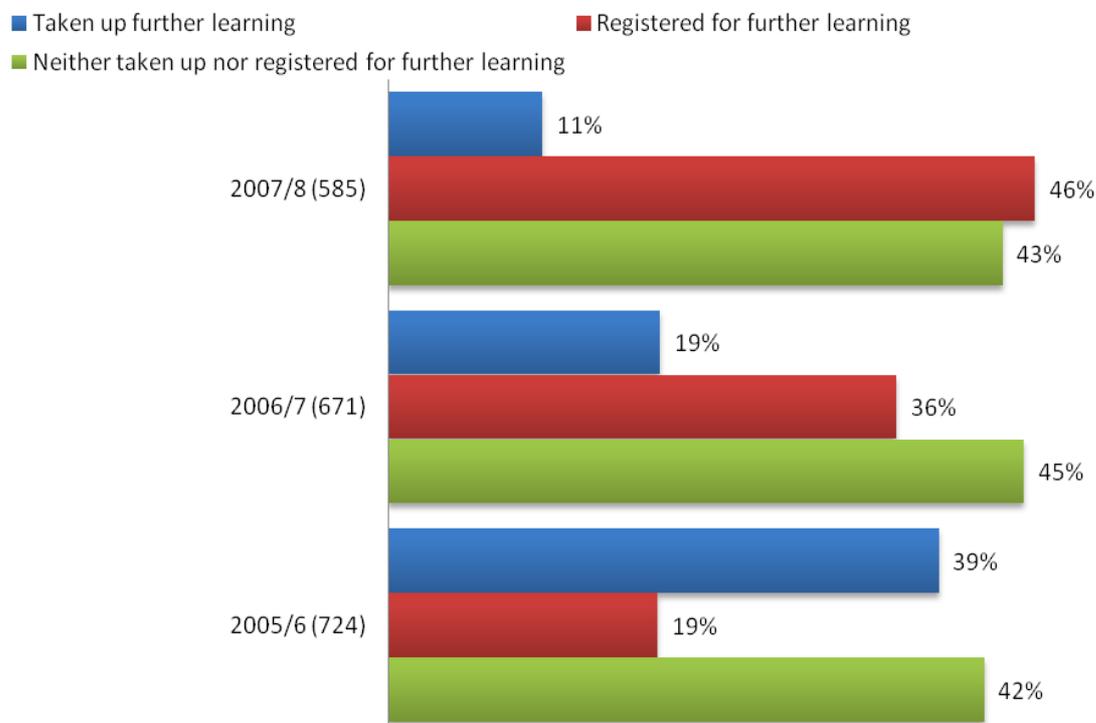
25% of those no longer on the original course for which they received EMA funding report that they have taken up other learning since leaving that course. Those who completed their original course are significantly more likely than early leavers to have gone on to further learning (26%, compared with 21%).

A *further* 31% of learners no longer on their original course have registered for further learning but not yet begun it. The proportion is twice as high amongst those who completed their original course than amongst those who left early (34%, compared with 15%).

Thus, more than half the learners no longer on the original course (56%) have taken up or registered for further learning.

The propensity to have taken up or registered for further learning increases over time. This is shown in the chart below, which shows progression by year of funding:

Figure 10: Take-up of further learning by year of funding (where no longer on the original course) Figures in parentheses are sample bases

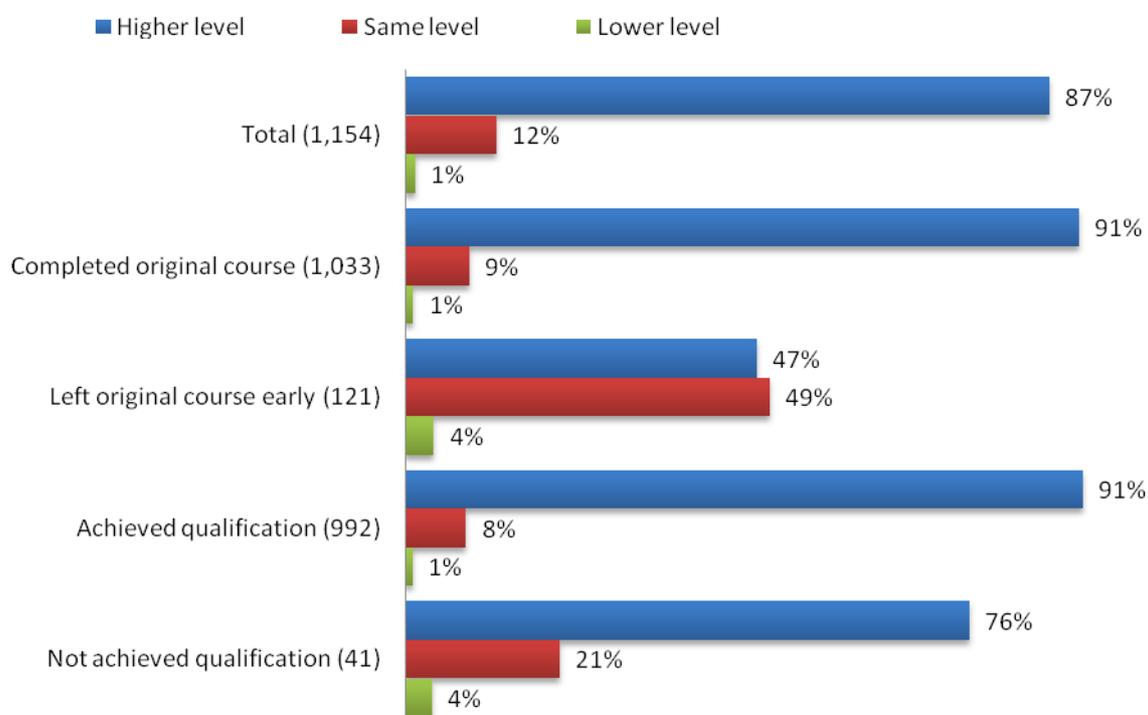


6.2 Level of further learning

The great majority (87%) of the 56% of learners who have taken up or registered for further learning, undertake learning at a higher level than their EMA-supported course. The proportion is significantly higher amongst those who completed their original course than amongst those who left their course early (91%, compared with 47%).

Generally, those learners who left the original course early or who failed to achieve a qualification from their original course are less likely to have progressed to higher-level learning, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 11: Level of further learning (where taken up/registered for further learning) Figures in parentheses are sample bases



6.3 Funding of further learning

Three-fifths (60%) of those who have taken up further learning have received further financial assistance. This is most likely to have involved other grants for learners, including student loans/bursaries, although nearly 4 in 10 of these who have received further assistance have received a further EMA award:

Table 1: Schemes from which learners have received funding for further learning (where received further financial assistance) Base = 265 *Base = 453 (where taken up further learning and still on it/completed it)

Received funding for further learning*	60%
Did not receive funding for further learning*	40%
Other grants for learners including student loans/bursaries	55%
Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)	38%
Discretionary funds – for transport, books and learning materials	6%
Residential Support Scheme	2%
Don't know	9%

Just one in twenty learners (5%) who have received funding for further learning has also received other financial assistance that is in addition to that from one of the schemes in the previous table.

Where further financial assistance (from any source) has been received, it is most likely to help with buying course materials (66%) and/or to pay for transport (30%).

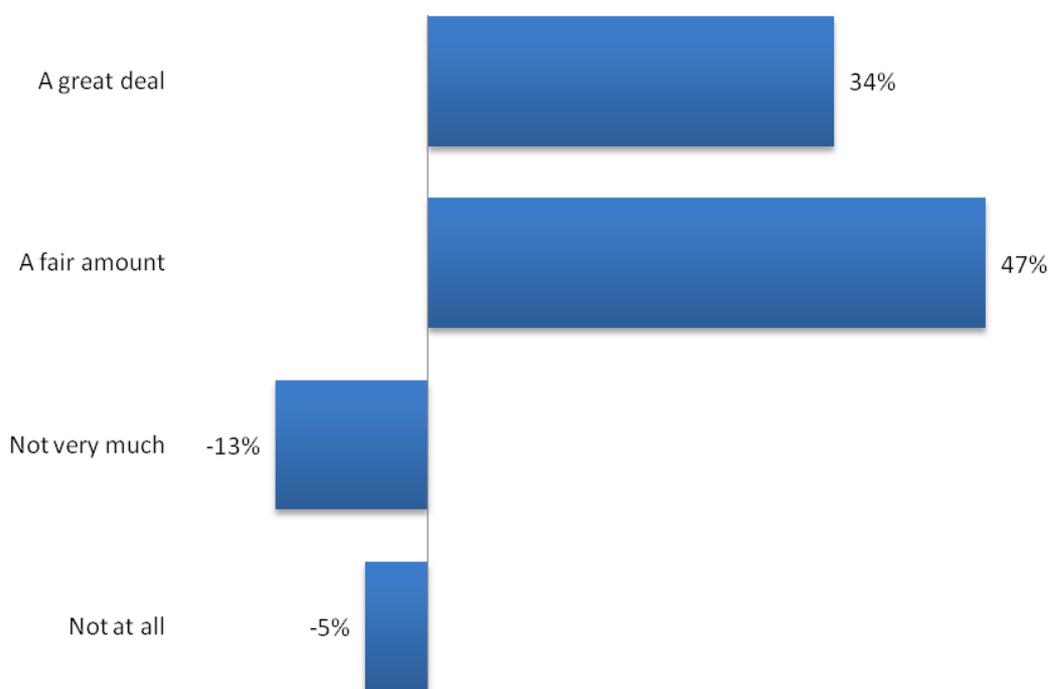
Just one in seven learners (15%) who have *completed* a further course of learning and received funding to support that further study feel they could not have completed the course without that funding. However, the majority (57%) feel they would have struggled financially without it.

A higher proportion of learners who are *still on the further course* and receive funding (39%) feel they would not still be on the course without it. Most of the remainder feel they would still be on the course without the funding but would struggle financially (49%).

6.4 Impact of EMA on learning progression

EMA has a strong influence on progression into further learning. Most learners (81%) feel that the funding has helped them move on to further learning. This includes 34% who feel the funding helped them a great deal:

Figure 12: Extent to which funding has helped learners to move on to further learning (all respondents) Base = 3,807



Of those not yet registered for a future new course, 46% definitely intend to go on to a further course.

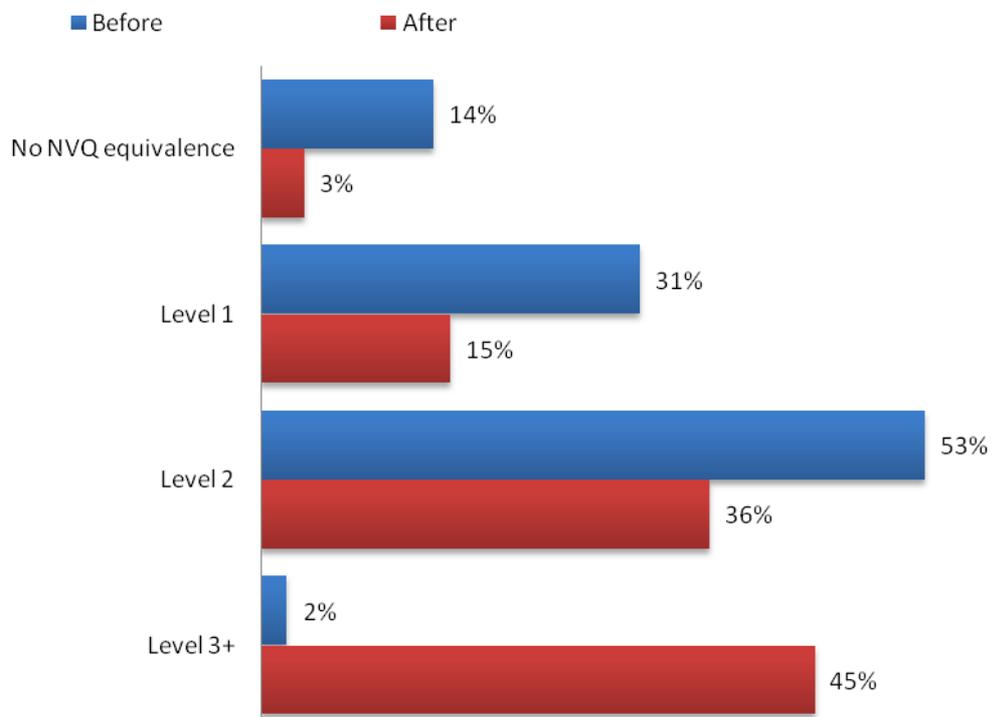
6.5 Achievement from further learning

Nearly all learners (97%) *still in* further learning report that they are aiming to achieve qualifications from this further learning.

The majority of learners (77%) who have *completed* a further course have achieved a qualification from it.

As a result of qualifications achieved from their further course, the proportion of these learners (that is, those who have gone on to further learning and achieved a qualification from it) who are now without an NVQ equivalent qualification has fallen (from 14% to 3%) and nearly half are now qualified at level 3 or above:

Figure 13: NVQ equivalence before and after further learning (where achieved a qualification on further course)
Base = 126



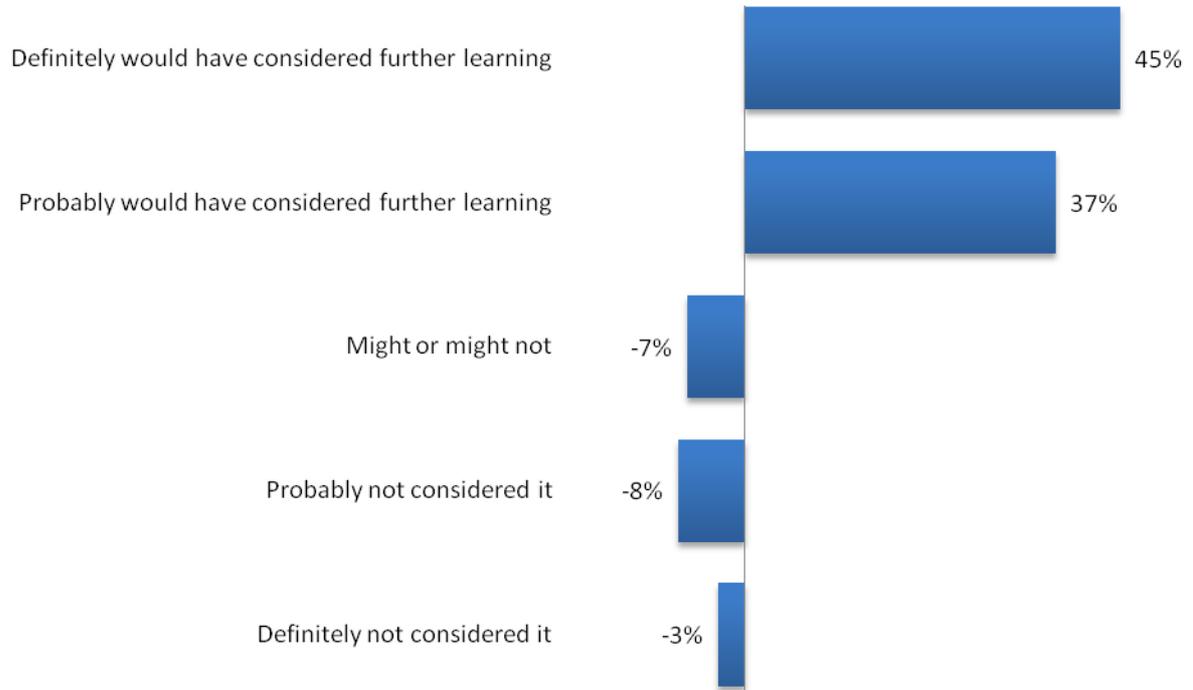
The majority of learners (81%) who achieved a qualification from their further learning and received funding whilst on the course believed that the funding helped them to gain the qualification.

6.6 Take-up of further learning by early leavers

The majority (82%) of those who dropped out early from their original course because of financial issues and who have not taken up or registered for another course, said that they would probably or definitely have considered doing more learning had more financial support been available. This suggests that lack of financial support (or knowledge of its being available) has had a significant negative impact on the extent to

which these learners were able to progress into further learning. Please note that these findings should be treated with caution as they are based on a small base of 49 learners.

Figure 14: Impact of further financial support on take-up of further learning (where left original course early for financial reasons and have not taken up further learning) Base = 49 Caution: small sample base



7 Employment Progression

Key findings

Subjectively, EMA-supported learners are positive that EMA has helped their careers. 85% feel that the learning supported by EMA has or will help them to progress.

Objectively, there is some evidence to support this perspective. Nearly four in ten recipients of EMA (38%) are now in work and a further 37% are in further learning. However, against these 'positive destinations', 16% of recipients are now unemployed and seeking work and a further 8% are not working and not seeking work. These latter figures suggest that more support was needed towards the end of EMA-supported learning to assist those recipients to move into work or further learning. Further, around seven out of ten of those in work are in part-time rather than full-time jobs and only two-thirds of those in work regard their jobs as permanent. It is clearly difficult in present conditions for young people to find full-time, permanent positions and it may be some time before the full employment benefits of EMA support become evident.

However, where employment has been achieved it has brought significant increases in income and three-quarters of those in work report one or more specific benefits including greater responsibility, increased pay, or movement into a permanent position.

7.1 Extent to which funded learning helped career progression

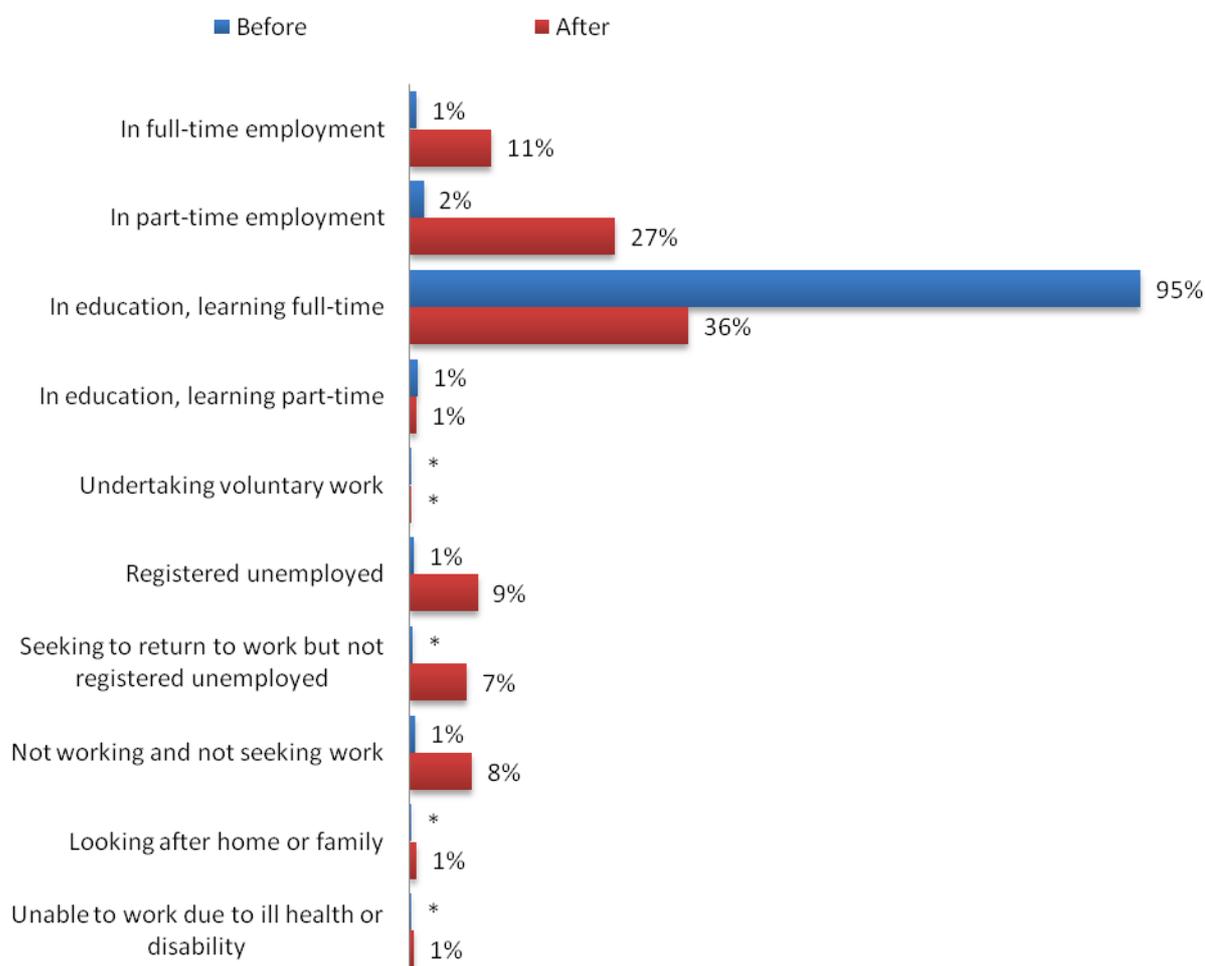
Learners who completed a funded course are very positive about the contribution that the funding has made to progress in their career. Overall, 85% of these learners feel it has helped them at least 'a fair amount', including 37% who feel it has helped 'a great deal'.

The proportion who feel that the funding has helped 'a great deal' to progress their career, either now or in the longer term, is higher amongst those who received funding in 2005/6 (41%), reflecting the fact that career progress is likely to become more evident over time.

7.2 Employment status: before and after the original course

The following figure compares the working status of learners before and after the original course for which they received funding:

Figure 15: Employment status: before and after the funded course (all respondents) Base = 3,807 *denotes less than 0.5%



The ‘employment status’ profiles of learners before and after EMA-funded learning are very different. Before the learning, most recipients were young people studying in school or college. Afterwards, they went in several directions:

- Nearly four in ten (38%) are in work (with 72% of these being in part-time work);
- 37% have continued in education;
- 25% are not working including 9% who are registered as unemployed, 7% who are seeking work but not registered as unemployed and 9% who are ‘inactive’;
- 1% are unable to work due to ill health or disability.

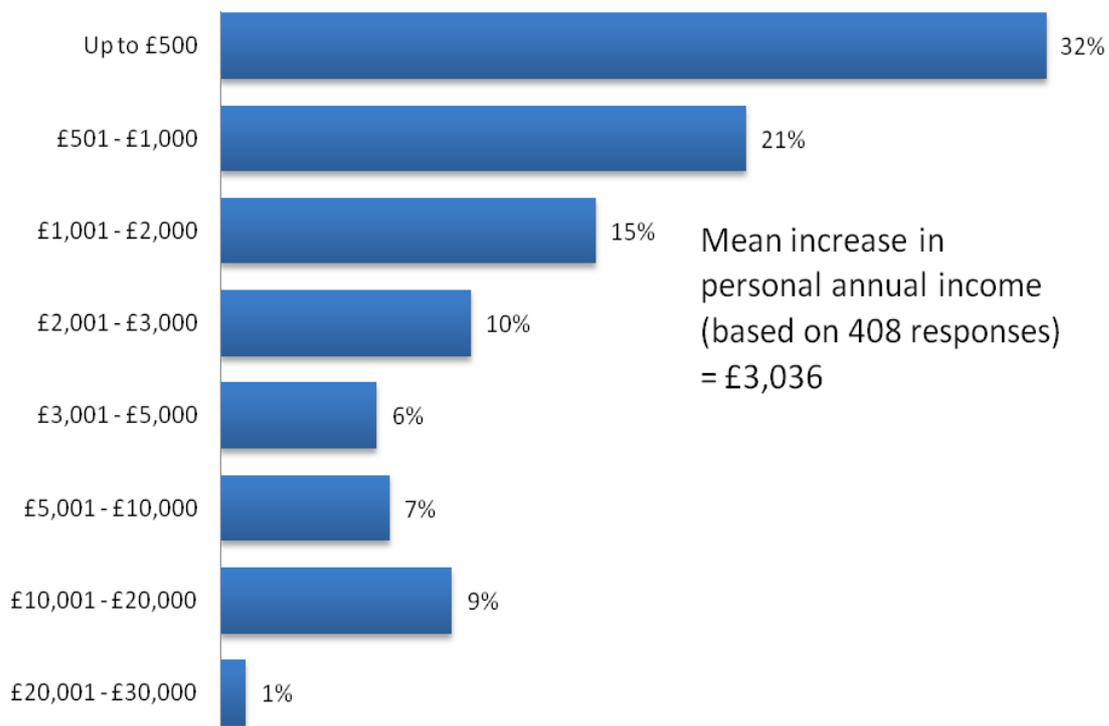
Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those in full- or part-time employment after their course are in a permanent job. This compares with just over half before the learning (55%) and represents a significant increase.

7.3 Financial benefits

More than two-fifths of learners (41%) report that their annual personal income has increased since they started their original course.

More than four-fifths of learners (83%) who were in employment both before and after the supported learning and who report an increase in their personal income were able and willing to provide an estimate of the size of the increase. The average (mean) increase in income amongst those in employment both pre- and post- learning is around £3,000 per annum.

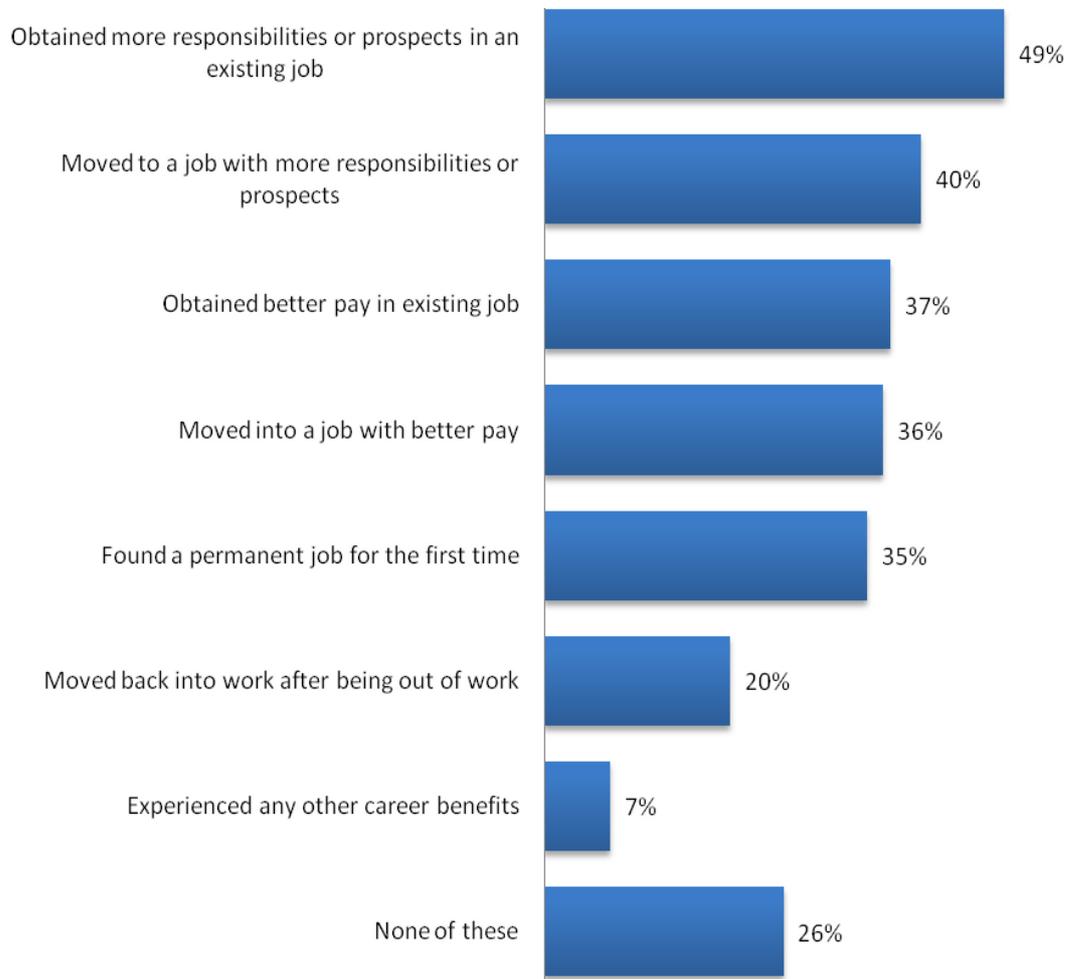
Figure 16: Approximate increase in annual personal income (where in work before and after learning, report that their annual personal income has increased and provided a response) Base = 408



7.1 Career progression

The majority of learners (74%) who are now in work following completion of a funded course feel their career benefited in at least one way. These benefits are summarised in the figure below:

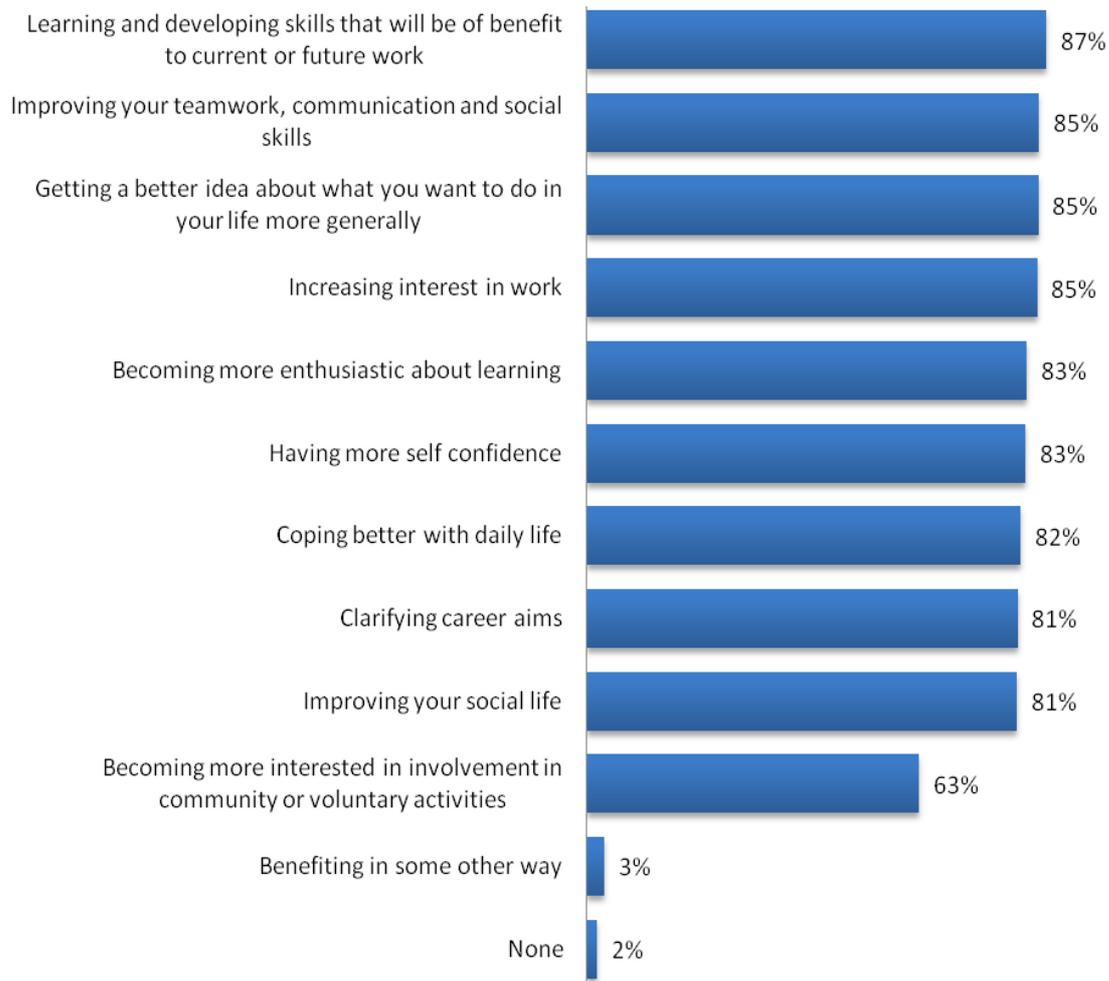
Figure 17: Career benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (where completed any funded course and in work) Base = 783



8 Personal and Social Benefits

The majority of learners selected every item in a list of possible benefits which resulted from undertaking the course for which they received funding. This shows that benefits of learning are wide-ranging and widely perceived; only 2% of learners could identify none of these benefits:

Figure 18: Benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (all respondents) Base = 3,807



Learners who failed to complete their original course or who did not achieve a qualification from it are both a little less likely to report some of these benefits. However, overall, there is very little difference between non-completers and completers and between those who achieved a qualification and those who did not in terms of the propensity to report at least one of the specified benefits.

Whatever impacts EMA has on achievement of qualifications and on employment progression, it is quite clear that EMA participation significantly improved learners' skills, morale and sense of direction, which may have a positive impact upon their future employment prospects.

9 Overview

Key indicators based on EMA survey responses are:

Engagement	
Definitely/probably would not have done course without EMA	8%
Concerned about having enough money whilst on the course	63%
Easy to access information on EMA	94%
Received IAG on funding available	51%
Where received, IAG was helpful	97%
Retention	
Proportion who completed (Benchmark for all in FE in England = 87%)	86%
Funding important or essential to completion	71%
Achievement	
Funding important or very important to achievement of a qualification	87%
Proportion of starters who achieved a qualification	81%
Progression	
Proportion who had undertaken further learning or have registered to do so	56%
Proportion of those who have undertaken further learning who have received financial assistance to support that learning	60%
Proportion of those in employment following EMA funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)	38% (+35% points)
Proportion of those in learning following EMA funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)	37% (-59% points)
Proportion of those unemployed or inactive following EMA funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)	25% (+24% points)
Proportion reporting a positive personal or social ('soft') benefit from EMA funded learning	98%

Using these indicators suggests some strengths and limitations of EMA funding and of the learning participation it supports:

Strengths

- Knowledge of EMA is clearly widespread amongst its target group. Only 3% of recipients had any difficulty in finding out about this form of funding.
- Early leaving for financial reasons is estimated to apply to only 4% of all EMA recipients. Thus, EMA funding means that few people who receive it are obliged to leave a course of learning because of lack of money.
- Achievement of EMA-supported learners is significant. 95% of those who completed their courses achieved a qualification. Most of these qualifications were at levels which increase the probability of employment and learning progression. 85% were at level 2 or above and 57% were at level 3 or above.
- Learning progression following EMA-funded learning is significant. 25% have taken up further learning and 31% have registered for further learning.
- This further learning has already delivered further qualifications for 77% of learners who undertook it.
- For learners in employment both before and after EMA-supported learning, significant increases in income have been experienced.
- And these people, those who are now employed, report a range of career benefits including greater responsibility, better pay and movement into a permanent position.

Issues to consider in the further development of EMA

- Evidence that EMA exerts strong leverage on supported learners' decisions to enter and remain on the course for which they are funded is not wholly convincing. 84% say they would definitely (57%) or probably (27%) have undertaken the course even if EMA had not been available. Only 8% say they would definitely or probably not have done it. Although 60% of supported learners said they would have struggled financially during the course if EMA had not been available, only 11% said that EMA funding was essential to their completing and 29% said that the funding made no difference to their staying on and completing the course.
- Post-EMA outcomes probably reflect prevailing economic circumstances rather than anything concerned with EMA itself. However, these outcomes are not particularly positive. 37% of supported learners have continued in education. 38% are in work, but 72% of these are in part-time jobs and only 63% are in jobs (full- or part-time) which they regard as permanent. 25% are neither in education nor employment, including 16% who are unemployed and seeking work and 9% who are not working and not seeking work. These findings suggest that many young people need assistance towards the end of their courses to help them find positive directions when those courses end.

10 Appendix

10.1 Sample error

As with all quantitative research, the sample size is subject to a level of statistical reliability at various levels.

To give an indication, a finding of 50% on a base size of 3,807 interviews has a confidence interval of +/-1.6% at the 95% level. That is to say that if the survey returns a finding of 50% for a particular question there is a 95% probability that the “true” figure (amongst all those learners in the population, not just those interviewed) will lie within +/-1.6% (i.e. between 48.4% and 51.6%) of that finding.

When looking at sub-groups within a sample this confidence interval increases. So for example, when looking at a sub group like those that registered for a course in 2005/06 (with a base size of 884 interviews in this study) statistical confidence is reduced further still (to around +/-3.3% in this case).

To give an indication of the effect of sample size on statistical reliability:

- A sample size of 100 would have a confidence interval of +/-9.8%
- A sample size of 500 would have a confidence interval of +/-4.4%
- A sample size of 1,000 would have a confidence interval of +/-3.1%

Note that where a small population (relative to sample size) is sampled, as in the case of the present study (where around a quarter of all eligible learners were interviewed) statistical reliability is increased. Given this, and the relatively limited availability of sample, a larger sample size for the population surveyed for this project would be impractical and unnecessary but should be considered if the scope of the survey were to be increased.

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© LSC March 2010
Published by the Learning and Skills Council

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This publication is available in electronic form on the Learning and Skills Council website: www.lsc.gov.uk

Publication reference: LSC-P-NAT-100557