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Leading learning and skills

# Evaluation of the Adult Learner Account Trials: Year 1 Quantitative Report

Claire Johnson with Thomas Usher  
and Jim Hillage

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Of interest to everyone involved in improving  
learning opportunities and skills in England.

Presented by:

INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT STUDIES

Mantell Building

University of Sussex Campus

Brighton BN1 9RF

UK

Tel: + 44 (0) 1273 686751

Fax: + 44 (0) 1273 690430

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# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

The government White Paper *'Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances'* set out the trial of a new type of learner account from Autumn 2007. The Adult Learner Account (ALA) trials were launched in August 2007 in two Learning and Skills Council (LSC) regions: the South East and the East Midlands, targeting adult full Level 3 learners only<sup>1</sup>. The aims of ALAs are as follows:

- to offer a wider choice of providers offering full Level 3 learning, leading to an increased number of individuals being qualified to Level 3
- to support learners in making the right learning choices by better access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) on learning, work and careers
- to raise awareness of the support, costs and contribution that the state, employers and individuals are making through transparent financial statements.

Individuals who register to have an ALA are meant to receive:

- access to high quality independent IAG on career choices, Level 3 courses and providers
- receipt of an information pack setting out provider contact details and information on learning options
- a wider range of providers to choose from than they would have had otherwise
- regular statements showing details of their provider, course, total cost of tuition, contributions from the state and individuals/ employers (if relevant), learner

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<sup>1</sup> Full Level 3 courses include courses such as NVQ Level 3, BTEC National Diploma, 2 or more A-levels, advanced vocational awards, or Access to Higher Education.

support provided, and sources of further information on learning and support for learning.

- personalised support and IAG, during and on completion of the course, to help learners achieve their qualification aims and progress into work or further learning if they so wish.

## The evaluation

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in partnership with Ipsos MORI have been commissioned to undertake the evaluation of the ALA trials. The evaluation will run between 2007 and 2009, and includes two main strands: a process evaluation strand exploring the design, management and delivery of the ALA trials from the perspective of national, regional and local stakeholders; and a quantitative evaluation strand comprising a longitudinal survey of ALA learners and a comparison sample of full Level 3 learners outside the trial areas, alongside analysis of Management Information (MI).

This report contains findings from Year 1 of the learner survey, and MI analysis of the Learner Account Management System (LAMS) which contains information on learners who have been registered for an ALA. The learner survey was undertaken by telephone and comprised of 886 interviews with ALA learners and 448 interviews with a comparison sample of full Level 3 learners.

## Key findings

- Not all ALA learners know they have one. Three-quarters knew that they were registered for an ALA (73 per cent), with a further 13 per cent who could recall receiving information about it.
- Reflecting this, half of learners said they felt well-informed about the ALA (51 per cent) but around half did not (47 per cent).
- Half the ALA learners did not know what the benefits of having an ALA were (51 per cent), although this decreased the more well-informed learners were about it.
- The most common way for learners to have first heard about the ALA was via their learning or training provider (42 per cent) followed by information in the post or a leaflet through the door (20 per cent). Learning providers were also the most common source of information about ALAs, generally.
- Just five per cent of ALA learners could recall using the ALA helpline. The volume of calls to the helpline had been lower than expected during the main pre-enrolment window (summer 2007).
- Three-quarters of ALA learners had received an information pack (76 per cent) and two-thirds of these found this useful (67 per cent).

- ALA and other Level 3 learners had similar motivations for learning, although ALA learners were more likely to want to be motivated by moving on in education (30 per cent compared with 24 per cent). This reflects the relatively high proportion of ALA learners doing Access to Higher Education (HE) courses, which had been targeted by some providers for registering Accounts.
- Almost all learners had received pre-entry information, advice or guidance and there was no difference between ALA learners (97 per cent) and other Level 3 learners (96 per cent).
- ALA learners were more likely than other Level 3 learners to say that having a choice about which course they did (71 per cent versus 63 per cent) and which learning provider they used (80 per cent versus 76 per cent) was very important. However they were no more or less likely to report having a great deal or fair amount of choice (71 per cent versus 74 per cent said they had a choice about their course; and 58 per cent versus 62 per cent said they had a choice about their provider).
- Learners expressed very high satisfaction with their learning experience (comparable with the National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007, at 90 per cent<sup>1</sup>) but there was no difference between ALA (88 per cent) and other Level 3 learners (86 per cent).
- Retention rates were comparable between ALA and other Level 3 learners in the survey (seven per cent compared with nine per cent). This will be investigated further during Year 2 of the evaluation, using analysis of the ILR.
- ALA learners were more likely to have paid something towards the cost of their course than other Level 3 learners (48 per cent compared with 37 per cent). This remained the case when controlling for age group differences in the sample. The difference is partly related to the course profile of ALA learners compared with other Level 3 learners (ALA learners were more likely to be doing Access to HE and other types of course which learners contribute towards). They were also more likely to feel well-informed about the full cost of their course and how this had been paid for (73 per cent compared with 64 per cent).
- Almost half the ALA learners could recall receiving a statement (45 per cent), and those who had received one found it easy to understand (92 per cent).
- Four learners in five (84 per cent) said they were likely to undertake further learning within the next three years, so access to progression IAG on future learning opportunities is critical. Although ALA learners were no more likely to have received progression IAG than others, amongst those that had, they were

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is for Level 3 learners only; it should be noted that it includes learners aged 16 to 18 and is based on all Level 3 learners not just full Level 3 ones.

more likely to have received it from a specialist adviser at their learning provider (34 per cent, compared with 23 per cent of other Level 3 learners).

### Information gap about having an ALA

The sample was a census of records from the LAMS database, as at end of February 2008. In theory, therefore, all the learners in the sample are registered for an Account. However, in the survey:

- 73 per cent reported they were registered for an ALA
- 13 per cent said they were not registered/ did not know, but had heard or seen information about ALAs
- 14 per cent said they were not registered/ did not know, and could not recall hearing/seeing any information about it.

### Providers are the key source of information about ALAs

Those who said they were registered on an Account or who had received information about it were asked how they **first** became aware of the ALA. Around two ALA learners in five heard about it directly from their learning or training provider (42 per cent). One in five (20 per cent) received information about it in the post or a leaflet through the door (we know from the process evaluation that some providers wrote to learners telling them about the Account).

The majority of learners (67 per cent) reported they subsequently got information about the ALA from their learning or training provider. The information that learning and training providers gave to learners was based on LSC provided material. One learner in ten (nine per cent) got information on ALAs via learndirect or nextstep. Among those who had received information about the ALA, learners who had dealt with the helpline, a learndirect/ nextstep adviser, or the LSC directly were much more likely to say they felt *very* well-informed, compared with those who received information from their provider. In particular, the 'net' rating for feeling well-informed about the ALA was twice as high among those who got information from a specialist IAG adviser at learndirect or nextstep (+51) than among those who got it from their learning or training provider (+25).

### Use of the ALA helpline was very limited, but those who used it were satisfied

Just five per cent of learners said they got information about the ALAs via the ALA telephone helpline. However, among those who called the helpline, almost all were satisfied with the helpfulness of the Adviser they spoke to and with the usefulness of the information they received.

## Three-quarters of registered learners recalled receiving an ALA information pack: most who did found it useful

Among those who said they were registered for an ALA or who had heard about it, three-quarters (76 per cent) said they had received an information pack. Of these, 67 per cent found the pack useful, but 18 per cent did not. We know from the process evaluation that the pack contained some 'upfront' information such as course and provider details, which may have been redundant for some ALA learners who were registered for an Account after they had already enrolled on a course.

## Learners need more information about ALAs and most do not understand the benefits of having one

Just half of the learners felt very or fairly well-informed about ALAs (51 per cent); half did not feel well-informed (47 per cent). This is reflected in responses to the perceived benefits of having an ALA:

- 51 per cent did not know what the benefits were
- 12 per cent said there were no benefits
- 18 per cent thought the benefits were extra funding to pay for learning (which is not correct) – this was mentioned by 25 per cent of those who said they felt well-informed about ALAs.

Learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were less likely to say they did not know what the benefits of it were (38 per cent compared with 65 per cent of those who did not feel well-informed). Although cited by small numbers, they were also more likely to identify the planned benefits of having an Account, such as more regular access to IAG, better information on the cost/value of the course, more control over their choice of learning, and increased commitment to completing the course.

## ALA learners were more likely to regard choice of course and provider as 'very important'

ALA learners were more likely than other Level 3 learners to consider having a choice about course and learning provider was 'very important' (71 per cent and 53 per cent, respectively). However they were no more or less likely to consider that they had a great deal or a fair amount of choice (71 per cent versus 74 per cent said they had a choice about their course; and 58 per cent versus 62 per cent said they had a choice about their provider).

## Learning providers were the main source of pre-course information, advice or guidance on learning or work

Almost all learners had accessed some form of pre-course IAG even if it was just from informal sources such as friends and family. Around three learners in five received



(self-defined) IAG from their learning or training provider before they started the course: there was no significant difference between ALA (62 per cent) and other Level 3 (59 per cent) learners.

Nine learners in ten were satisfied with the pre-course IAG they received and again there was no significant difference between ALA and other Level 3 learners (87 per cent and 90 per cent, respectively).

### **Nine learners in ten were satisfied with their learning experience**

Almost nine learners in ten (87 per cent each) agreed that the course was meeting their needs and that support was available to help them carry out their course. Reflecting this, overall satisfaction with their learning experience was very high at 88 per cent of ALA learners and 87 per cent of other Level 3 learners. This is similar to satisfaction levels reported in the National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007<sup>1</sup> (90 per cent<sup>2</sup>).

### **ALA learners more likely to have paid towards the cost of their course and to feel well-informed about it**

Almost half (48 per cent) of ALA learners had made a financial contribution to the cost of their course fees, compared with around one-third of other Level 3 learners (37 per cent). This is related in part to the course profile of ALA learners compared with other Level 3 learners (ALA learners were more likely to be doing Access to HE and other types of course which learners contribute towards).

Three-quarters (73 per cent) of ALA learners felt well-informed about the full cost of their course, significantly higher than other Level 3 learners (64 per cent). Those that had received a financial statement were more likely to say they felt well-informed (84 per cent, compared with 63 per cent of those who had not): this was the case even among those learners who had not paid anything towards the course costs. This is important given that better information about the monetary value of the course is key to one of the theories underpinning the Adult Learner Account, that learners who know more about the full cost of their course and how it has been paid for may be more likely to feel committed to completing it, potentially resulting in improved completion rates.

### **Almost half of ALA learners said they had received a financial statement**

Almost half the ALA learners said they had received a financial statement showing them the full cost of the course and how it was paid for (45 per cent) but slightly more

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<sup>1</sup> Ipsos MORI (2008); National Learner Satisfaction Survey 2007, Learning and Skills Council, Coventry

<sup>2</sup> This figure is for Level 3 learners only; it should be noted that it includes learners aged 16 to 18 and is based on all Level 3 learners not just full Level 3 ones.

(52 per cent) said they had not. Given that the survey fieldwork took place during the summer term of 2008, and most of the learners enrolled on their course between September and December 2007, this figure appears lower than we may have expected. It does not appear to be associated with limited awareness of being registered for an ALA as there is no significant difference according to whether learners recognised they had an ALA or felt well-informed about it.

### **Progression is important and over half had received IAG on future learning or work opportunities since they started their course**

Four-fifths said they were very or fairly likely to undertake further learning in the next three years (84 per cent of ALA learners and 82 per cent of other Level 3 learners). Around three learners in five had received IAG on future learning or work opportunities since the start of their course (58 per cent of ALA learners and 63 per cent of other Level 3 learners; this increased to 62 per cent and 70 per cent respectively, among completers). Most learners received progression-related IAG from their teacher/tutor but around one-third had received it from a specialist adviser at their learning provider, and this was more common among ALA learners.

### **Conclusions from Year 1**

ALA trials are testing a set of hypotheses about the benefits of having an Adult Learner Account. These objectives mean that, in comparison to other Level 3 learners, we might expect ALA learners to be:

- more likely to have independent, pre-learning IAG
- more likely to have a choice of provision
- more likely to know about the full cost of their course and how this has been paid
- more likely to be offered progression IAG.

As a result, the hypothesis is that ALA learners will have a better learning experience (ie be more satisfied), have higher attainment / retention levels, and be more likely to progress to further learning.

Regarding the hypotheses listed above, findings from the Year 1 learner survey indicate that:

- ALA learners were no more likely to have had pre-entry IAG or to feel that they had a choice about which course they did or which learning provider they used. There was a degree of mis-match between the ALA learner journey as originally conceived and what happened in practice for those learners starting their courses in September 2007. This meant that access to upfront independent IAG before enrolment, *through* an ALA, was limited, as most learners identified a course, and enrolled on it, before they were identified or registered as having an Account.

- ALA learners were more likely to feel well-informed about the full cost of their course and how this had been paid for, and this was more likely among those who reported they had received a statement (even so, a majority of other Level 3 learners also felt well-informed about the cost of their course, as did a majority of ALA learners who reported they had not received a statement). The financial statement showing the full value of the course and how it has been paid for is key to one of the main ideas behind the policy – that learners who appreciate the full value of their course will feel more committed and be more likely to complete it. It is therefore important to ensure that all ALA learners get a regular statement. The time lag in sending out statements (which was caused by the time taken for providers to register learners on the LAMS system) may mean that the impact of getting a statement has been reduced because drop-out is more likely during the initial stages of a course and learners did not start getting statements until November onwards.
- There were no differences between ALA learners and other Level 3 learners on satisfaction with the learning experience overall, or the range of support learners had been given by their provider. (Satisfaction was high among both groups).
- It is too early to tell whether there are any differences in learner retention or attainment.
- There is no difference as yet on use of progression IAG, although the nature of progression IAG provision does appear to be different for ALA learners, who are more likely to have received this from a specialist adviser at their learning provider.

There were some early issues with the implementation of the ALA trials which meant that the main window for providers to market ALAs alongside their August-September enrolment window was missed. Among some providers (mainly colleges, which have the bulk of their enrolments in September) this resulted in a retrospective ‘catch-up’ in which learners were enrolled on Accounts after they had already started their course.

The survey has found that among around one-quarter of ALA learners (27 per cent), there is an ‘information gap’ in terms of whether they realised they were registered on an ALA or not, ie although the MI indicated they were registered, they were not themselves aware of this. Evidence from the process evaluation suggests that this may be because some learners were enrolled on the ALA retrospectively without being fully aware of it.

Just over half the ALA learners felt well-informed about the ALA. However, around half did not feel well-informed. Evidence shows that learners who received upfront information via a specialist adviser or the ALA helpline felt the most well-informed about the ALA: these are learners who most closely followed the design of the learner journey, as it was originally conceived.

Providers were both the most common way that learners first heard about ALAs and the most common source of information about them. Not all learners will have the need or inclination to visit an IAG specialist at their learning provider and therefore it is likely that individual course tutors need to be better informed about the ALA in order to make learners more aware of them and any additional IAG or other support that may be on offer.

More fundamentally, and as many of the providers raised in the process evaluation, ALAs are a 'virtual' service being trialled, about which few learners could articulate the benefits. In some ways this could be anticipated given that the process evaluation found that all of the learner-facing stakeholders (providers, ALA helpline, nextstep) identified difficulties in 'selling' the benefits of having an Account. Better understanding among learners will be achieved through better information – but also, having something tangible associated with the Account, as concrete evidence to learners of what the benefits are. Currently, the only tangible thing associated with the Account as such is the financial statement and only half of ALA learners reported having received one of those, at the time of the survey. It may help learners to understand the benefits of having an ALA if some way of associating opportunities for progression IAG and additional support (such as information on financial support for learning, like the ALG) can be more explicitly linked to having an Account.

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# 1 Introduction

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This report presents the findings from Year 1 of the evaluation of the Adult Learner Account (ALA) trials. The evaluation is being carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) (in partnership with Ipsos MORI) on behalf of the national Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The report draws on qualitative research conducted among national, regional and local stakeholders involved in designing and delivering ALAs, Management Information (MI) analysis of the Learner Account Management System (LAMS) database, and a telephone survey of 886 learners registered on an ALA, and 448 comparison learners, conducted between May and June 2008.

## 1.1 Adult Learner Account trials

### 1.1.1 Policy background

The government White Paper *'Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances'* set out the trial of a new type of learner account from Autumn 2007. The ALA trials were launched in August 2007 in two Learning and Skills Council (LSC) regions: the South East and the East Midlands, targeting full Level 3 learners only<sup>1</sup>. The aims of ALAs are as follows:

- to offer a wider choice of providers offering full Level 3 learning, leading to an increased number of individuals being qualified to Level 3
- to support learners in making the right learning choices by better access to information, advice and guidance (IAG) on learning, work and careers
- to raise awareness of the support, costs and contribution that the state, employers and individuals are making through transparent financial statements.

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<sup>1</sup> Full Level 3 courses include courses such as NVQ Level 3, BTEC National Diploma, 2 or more A-levels, advanced vocational awards, or Access to Higher Education.

Individuals who register for an ALA are meant to receive the following:

- access to high quality independent IAG on career choices, Level 3 courses and providers
- receipt of an information pack setting out provider contact details and learning options
- a wider range of providers to choose from than they would have had otherwise
- regular statements showing details of their provider, course, total cost of tuition, contributions from the state and individuals/ employers (if relevant), learner support provided, and sources of further information on learning and support for learning.
- personalised support and IAG, during and on completion of the course, to help learners achieve their qualification aims and progress into work or further learning if they so wish.

ALAs are a virtual account: the learner does not receive any money directly. Learner funding is through standard FE funding arrangements using national fee remission categories and funding rates. Learners assessed to make a contribution to their course costs have the amount set to reflect the LSC's national fee rate for that year (in 2007/08 this was 37.5 per cent fees and 62.5 per cent public funding).

### 1.1.2 The design of the trials

The ALA trials are focused on full Level 3 learners only. Stakeholders deemed the focus on Level 3 learning to be appropriate in both the trial regions. In addition to the national policy aims, the two regions involved in implementing the trial also had supplementary objectives, reflected in the slightly different approaches to how and where the trial was set up in each region, although the 'learner journey' experienced by ALA learners remains the same, in principle, across both areas. Figure 1.1 summarises the approaches to the ALA trial in each LSC region.

## 1.2 About the evaluation

The evaluation of the ALA trials will run between 2007 and 2009, and includes two main strands across two years. The process evaluation strand is qualitative and explores the design, management and delivery of the ALA trials from the perspective of national, regional and local stakeholders. The quantitative evaluation strand comprises a longitudinal survey of ALA learners and a comparison sample of Level 3 learners outside the trial areas, alongside analysis of Management Information (MI).

This report contains findings from Year 1 of the learner survey and MI analysis of the LAMS database which contains information on learners who have been registered for an ALA.

Forthcoming in Year 2 of the evaluation will be:

- a follow-up process evaluation report
- a follow-up quantitative evaluation report, including Wave 2 of the survey and comparison of completion rates for ALA learners compared to other Level 3 learners, using the Individualised Learner Record (ILR)
- a synthesis report.

### 1.2.1 Research objectives

Table 1.1 sets out an evaluation framework mapping the research objectives against the relevant strands of the study.

**Table 1.1: Evaluation framework**

<b>Objective:</b>	<b>Covered in evaluation strand:</b>
Assess the characteristics of learners accessing Accounts and how they compare to those who access Level 3 provision in FE	MI including analysis of LAMS database and ILR analysis Learner surveys Provider second round interviews
Assess added value the Account offers the learner, over and above accessing Level 3 provision in FE	Learner surveys Provider second round interviews
Explore operational delivery arrangements, including collaborative working to deliver accounts	Depth interviews with national/ regional and local LSCs and local providers
Assess the additional administrative and programme costs of delivering Level 3 learning via Accounts	Depth interviews with national/ regional and local LSCs and local providers
Assess policy links between Accounts and other programmes, services and initiatives aiming to increase Level 3 participation and attainment (such as the Adult Learning Grant)	Depth interviews with national/ regional and local LSCs and local providers MI including ILR analysis in Year 2 Learner surveys
Measure the impact that Learner Accounts are having	Learner surveys MI including ILR analysis in Year 2 (completion rates) Provider second round interviews
Explore the effectiveness of the Learner Account in supporting Level 3 learning	Learner surveys MI including ILR analysis

*Source: IES*

Both the qualitative and quantitative strands of the evaluation provide a baseline in Year 1 against which to compare impacts and outcomes in Year 2.

### 1.2.2 Context: findings from Year 1 of the process evaluation

In this section we summarise some of the findings from the qualitative process evaluation, which focused on design and implementation of the trials. These provide valuable context for the findings from the learner survey.

### Approach

The aim of the process evaluation was to provide context for the survey as well as to focus on design and early implementation issues. The research comprised:

- Stage 1: face-to-face depth interviews with national-level stakeholders from within the Learning and Skills Council and Ufi/ learndirect (conducted August 2007).
- Stage 2: face-to-face depth interviews with regional and local-level stakeholders including the South East and East Midlands regional managers delivering the ALA trials (conducted September-October 2007).
- Stage 3: telephone interviews with 20 learning providers and five local nextstep IAG providers participating in the ALA trials (conducted December 2007-January 2008).

All the stakeholder interviews were qualitative in approach. It should be noted that the interviews were conducted during the set-up stage and the first few months of ALA delivery (September 2007 to January 2008). Views on the impact of ALAs are therefore largely based on perception rather than actual impact.

### Emerging issues

The process evaluation identified some key issues, which could potentially impact on learners' experiences of the ALA during Year 1. These were:

- Use of the ALA helpline was lower than anticipated, and some of the marketing materials and Account registration processes were not ready in time for learning providers to use them before or during their main enrolment period in August/September 2007. In practice, this meant that many learners enrolling on courses during the summer and early autumn of 2007 did not follow the planned 'learner journey' for opening an Account (ie register for an Account and then select a provider/course), but enrolled on the course first and were assigned an ALA at a later date. Some of these learners who were registered on an Account retrospectively may not have known much about it.
- Many college providers in particular did not register learners on an Account until 3-4 months after they had started their course. This was in part due to the absence of an automated/ integrated MI system. This means that many of the ALA learners registered in Year 1 will not have been offered access to independent, upfront IAG *through the Account* – although they may have had this anyway, or may not have needed it. Consequently, for many of the Year 1 ALA learners, the emphasis will shift to access to *ongoing* IAG, in particular IAG on progression routes at the end of their course. While some providers reported they offered this to all learners anyway, others were gearing up for increased demand and for delivering a more systematic IAG offer.



- All of the main learner-facing gatekeepers to opening an Account (the ALA helpline, nextstep, and learning providers) reported difficulties 'selling' the benefits of having one, mainly due its 'virtual' nature. There was concern among providers that the benefits of having an Account may not be particularly tangible to learners, other than seeing a financial statement.

## 1.3 Survey methodology

### 1.3.1 The sample

It should be noted that the learner survey was originally planned to run from November 2007 to February 2008. This was delayed by several months due to the time it took to register sufficient numbers of ALA learners on the Learner Account Management System database (LAMS), to make the survey viable.

An estimated 4,000 contacts for ALA learners was required in order to achieve the target of 900 interviews. By the time the survey sample was drawn from the Learner Account Management System (a census of all records as of the end of February 2008), there were 3,527 unique learners recorded on the system. However, the number of records containing a telephone number was lower, at 2,327: this increased to 2,558 after telephone tracing.

The comparison sample was defined as adult full Level 3 learners studying outside the ALA trial regions, who started their course during the 2007/08 academic year. A random sample of records was drawn from the Individualised Learner Record for 2007/08 in April 2008 (this excluded learners who had requested not to be contacted for research purposes, according to a flag on the ILR). Section 1.5 provides further detail regarding the sample profiles both for ALA and other Level 3 learners.

### 1.3.2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by IES in consultation with Ipsos MORI and the LSC. It was organised into the following sections:

- Section A: Screening and course verification
- Section B: Awareness and understanding of ALA, contact and satisfaction with helpline, perceived benefits of the ALA (asked of ALA learners only)
- Section C: Motivations for learning and pre-entry IAG
- Section D: Experience of learning so far
- Section E: Costs of learning and the financial statement
- Section F: Attitudes to learning and access to progression IAG
- Section G: About the learner (demographics).

### 1.3.3 Fieldwork and response rates

The survey was piloted in mid-March 2008 among ALA learners. The pilot raised a number of issues with eligibility, revealing that a large proportion of ALA holders were not aware that they had an Account and were therefore screened out of the interview. In conjunction with the LSC, it was decided to retain such learners in the mainstage survey. This was incorporated into the mainstage questionnaire, adapting the question wording and routing accordingly.

Mainstage fieldwork took place between 8 May and 29 June 2008. Unadjusted and adjusted response rates for both the ALA and comparison samples are shown in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: Sample breakdown and response rates**

	Total ALA sample	Total comparison sample
Total sample issued	2,558	2,415
Achieved interviews	886	448
<b>Unadjusted response rate<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Adjusted response rate</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>78%</b>
<i>Eligible sample:</i>		
Achieved interviews	886	448
Respondent refusal	226	125
<b>Total eligible sample</b>	<b>1,112</b>	<b>573</b>
<i>Ineligible sample:</i>		
Incorrect telephone number	469	516
Other ineligible (eg. screened out of survey)	101	18
<b>Total ineligible sample</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>534</b>
<b>Unknown eligibility</b> (eg. no contact after 15 tries, not available during fieldwork period, engaged/ no reply/ call back later)	<b>876</b>	<b>1,308</b>

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

## 1.4 Profile of ALA learners on the Learner Account Management System (LAMS)

A preliminary analysis of learners registered as having an ALA on the Learner Account Management System (LAMS) was undertaken, based on a draw of all learner records as of the end of February 2008 (N=3,527). This same draw formed the sample for the survey of ALA learners.

<sup>6</sup> Unadjusted response rate is the number of interviews divided by the total number of leads issued. Adjusted response rate is the number of interviews divided by the total eligible (used) sample.

The majority of these learners (84 per cent) were from the South East with the remainder (16 per cent) being from the East Midlands. A brief description is given below of the characteristics of these learners overall, followed by comparisons of the learners by region.

### 1.4.1 Learner and learning characteristics

Two-thirds of ALA learners were female (64 per cent) and one-third were male (35 per cent). Four per cent of those with recorded information had a disability. The majority of those for whom ethnicity information was recorded were white (77 per cent) although there was a sizeable Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) minority (23 per cent).

Two-thirds of learners were studying at a Further Education (FE) college (67 per cent) with a sizeable minority registered as studying in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) (24 per cent) – all of these learners were in the South East and most were doing Access to HE courses. Table 1.3 shows the distribution of ALA learners by their main course type. The relatively high proportion of Access to HE courses is a result of targeting by providers.

**Table 1.3: Main course of study among ALA learners**

	(%)
Access to HE course	37
NVQ Level 3	41
BTEC	18
Other Level 3	5
Base (N)	3,527

*Source: IES analysis of LAMS database (Feb 2008)*

### 1.4.2 A comparison by region

The gender profile of learners did not vary significantly between the two regions; nor did the proportion of learners recorded as having a disability. The greatest difference between the two regions (among those for whom ethnicity was recorded) was a higher proportion of BME learners in the East Midlands (28 per cent, compared with 22 per cent in the South East).

The vast majority of learners in the East Midlands (91 per cent) were studying at a FE college, whereas in the South East almost two-thirds (62 per cent) were studying at a FE college and just under one-third (30 per cent) at a HEI. There were no substantial differences according to programme type although Access to HE courses were slightly more prevalent in the East Midlands (41 per cent compared with 36 per cent in the South East) and NVQ Level 3 courses in the South East (41 per cent compared with 37 per cent).

## 1.5 Sample profiles: ALA and other Level 3 learners

### 1.5.1 Learner characteristics

The survey covered learners registered for an ALA and equivalent learners in regions outside of the trial areas; that is, adult (aged 19+) full Level 3 learners. Table 1.4 shows the profile of ALA and other Level 3 learners who took part in the survey, by learner characteristics. The two notable differences are by ethnicity and age group. ALA learners were more likely to be from a BME background (25 per cent compared with 20 per cent). They were also more likely to be over 25: 65 per cent were aged 25 or more compared with 52 per cent of other Level 3 learners.

**Table 1.4: Profile of survey participants, by sample status (ALA and other Level 3 learners)**

	ALA learners (%)	Other Level 3 learners (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	33	37
Female	67	63
<b>Age band</b>		
19-25	34	48
25-34	26	17
(19-34)	(60)	(65)
35-44	25	22
45-54	12	9
55+	2	3
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	75	80
BME	25	20
<b>Disability</b>		
Has a long-term health problem/ disability	8	9
No long-term health problem/ disability	91	91 <sup>7</sup>
<b>Work status</b>		
Employed	70	72
Not employed	29	27
Total N	886	448

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

<sup>7</sup> Excluding those who preferred not to divulge this information (N=36).

## 1.5.2 Learning characteristics

Table 1.5 presents the profile of ALA and other Level 3 learners by known learning characteristics (ie. course type and subject). If the learner was doing more than one course the main (highest) type was coded. This shows that ALA learners were twice as likely to be doing Access to HE courses: we know from the process evaluation interviews with providers, that some of them were targeting learners on Access courses for ALA registration. ALA learners were also more likely to be doing BTECs and less likely to be doing NVQ Level 3 courses (although this was still the most common type of course among them).

The main variations by subject were that ALA learners were significantly more likely to be studying Science/Maths (mainly via Access to HE courses), Visual Media and Performing Arts (mainly via BTECs) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

**Table 1.4: Profile of survey participants, by sample status (ALA and other Level 3 learners)**

	ALA learners (%)	Other Level 3 learners (%)
<b>Course type</b>		
NVQ Level 3	42	54
Access to HE	34	17
BTEC Diploma/Certificate	18	11
Other Level 3	6	18
<b>Course subject</b>		
Health and Social Care	35	35
Business Admin, Management, Professional	22	19
Science/Maths	20	13
Visual Media and Performing Arts	10	5
English Language and Communication	8	6
Information and Communication Technology	8	4
Construction	5	7
Hospitality, Sports, Leisure, Travel	5	5
Engineering Technology and Manufacturing	4	9
Hairdressing/ Beauty therapy	4	6
Retail, Customer Service, Transportation	1	1
Humanities	4	2
Other/ don't know	3	4
<b>Total N</b>	<b>886</b>	<b>448</b>

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

The regional profile of ALA learners taking part in the survey matched that of the sample overall (16 per cent were in the East Midlands and 84 per cent in the South East). Around two-thirds of these learners studied at a FE college (63 per cent) with 29

per cent at a HEI and the remaining eight per cent at a private training provider or other type of training organisation.

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## 2 Opening an Adult Learner Account

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This chapter explores learners' awareness of the Adult Learner Account; how they first heard about it and where they got their information; and how well-informed they feel about it. Evidence in this chapter is drawn from the interviews with ALA learners only.

### 2.1 Learners' awareness of the ALA

#### 2.1.1 Not all ALA learners knew they were registered for one

ALA learners were given a short description of the ALA and asked if they had registered for one. In response, three-quarters said yes (73 per cent) – nine per cent reported they were not registered on an ALA and 18 per cent did not know whether they were registered or not.

Those most likely to acknowledge they were registered for an ALA (without further prompting) were more likely to:

- be aged 35 to 44 (77 per cent) or 45 to 54 (80 per cent), rather than younger learners (recognition of having an ALA was 70 per cent among those aged 19 to 34)
- be from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background, rather than white (82 per cent compared with 70 per cent)
- have a prior qualification at Level 2 or below, rather than at Level 3 or higher (79 per cent compared with 68 per cent)
- and (as we might expect) were more likely to have received an ALA information pack (87 per cent compared with 76 per cent of those who had not) or to feel well-informed about the ALA (85 per cent compared with 60 per cent of those who did not).

To open an Account, learners must be registered on LAMS. This is done *either* by Broadsystem (who operate the central ALA helpline) – possibly via an IAG provider such as learndirect or nextstep – *or* directly by an ALA learning provider. At the point

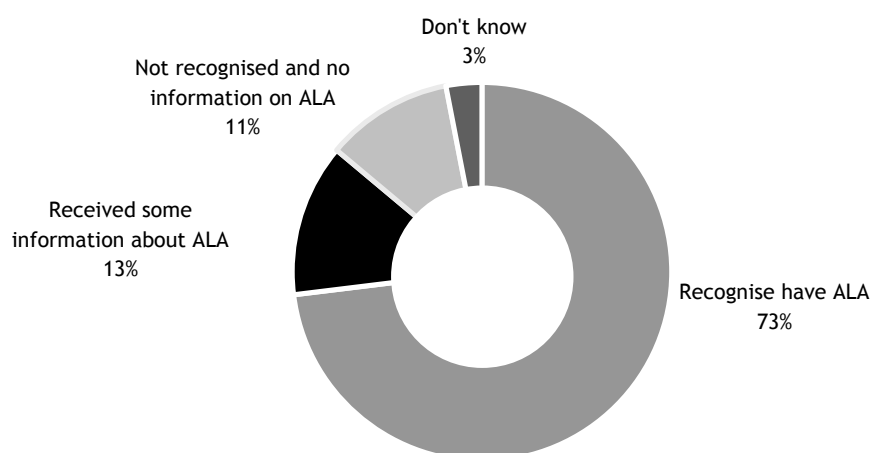
of registration, learners receive a LAMS account number but this does not become active until they enrol on a relevant course at one of the contracted providers. Alternatively, learners can enrol on the course first and be registered as having an Account at a later stage, as the course enrolment and Account registration processes are separate. Opening an Account is therefore based on a 'no wrong door' approach covering three entry points – the ALA helpline, an independent IAG provider such as nextstep or learndirect, or the learning provider themselves.

The learner journey assumes that the learner will register for an Account before they select and start their course. However, evidence from the qualitative process evaluation has already found that this was not the case, and in particular among some providers where the ALAs were rolled out retrospectively and sometimes targeted at all learners on a particular course, for example if the provider felt they would benefit from an enhanced offer of IAG. This retrospective approach may explain why not all learners were fully aware that they had been registered for an ALA.

The 27 per cent who said they were not registered for an ALA, or did not know were then asked whether they had received any information about an ALA since June 2007. They were prompted with examples such as a welcome pack or letter about the ALA, or a conversation about it with an adviser or someone at their learning provider. When prompted, half of those asked reported that they had received some form of information about the ALA (49 per cent) but 42 per cent said they had not (a further nine per cent did not know). This did not vary significantly by learner characteristics.

Overall, this equates to a further 13 per cent of ALA learners with some knowledge of the ALA, bringing the total to 86 per cent altogether (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: Learners' awareness of whether they were registered for an ALA**



Base: All ALA learners surveyed (886)

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008



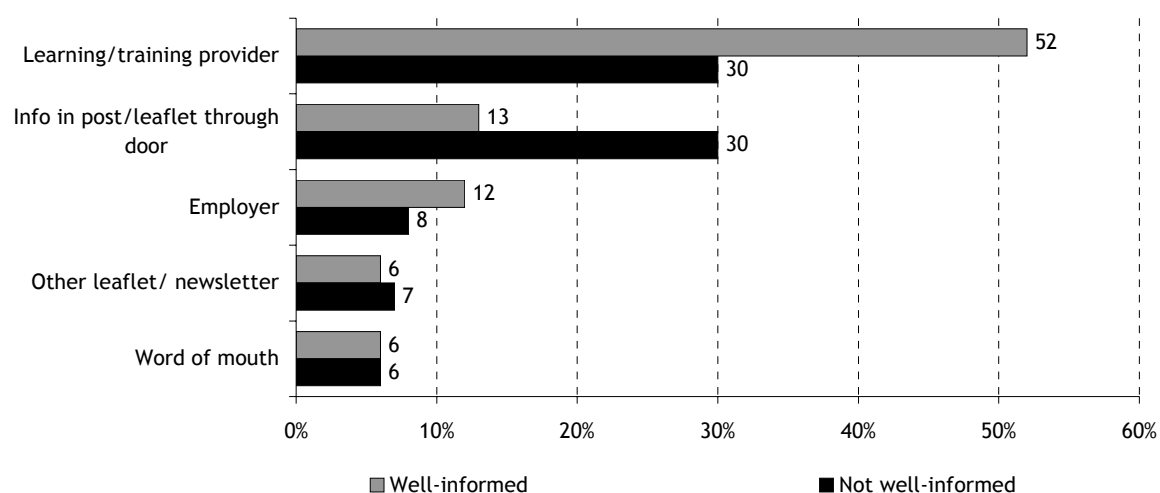
## 2.2 How do learners get information about the ALA?

### 2.2.1 The most common way that learners first heard about ALAs was via their provider

Learners who recognised they had an ALA or who reported receiving any information about it were asked how they first became aware of ALAs. By far the most common means was via their learning or training provider (42 per cent), followed by receiving information in the post or a leaflet through the door (20 per cent).

Figure 2.2 shows that learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were more likely than those who did not to have first heard about it via their provider (52 per cent compared with 30 per cent); those who did not feel well-informed were more likely to have first heard about it via information in the post or a leaflet through the door (30 per cent compared with 13 per cent who did feel well-informed). This suggests that those who first heard about the ALA via a letter or leaflet in the post may have needed more follow-up information in order to better understand it.

**Figure 2.2: How ALA learners first heard of the ALA, by how well-informed they felt about it**



Base: All ALA learners who were aware of ALAs (764)

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

We know from the qualitative process evaluation that some providers wrote to learners about the ALA and enrolled them on it retrospectively, without their active involvement. At the time of fieldwork, there was mixed feedback from learning providers about how much of their own marketing they had done on ALAs. Some had been very proactive, for example through placing advertisements in local press and through liaison with local partners such as nextstep and Jobcentre Plus. Several providers were also marketing the Accounts to employers via their business recruiters or through networking with their local Chamber of Commerce.

Several colleges had marketed the Accounts to their existing students through mailshots but reported very low or non-existent levels of enquiries (for instance one out of 500). Eventually, some colleges registered existing students by running opt-outs rather than opt-ins and ‘badging’ learners with Accounts retrospectively.

### 2.2.2 Providers were also the most common source of information on ALAs, generally

As well as being the most common way that learners first heard about ALAs, learning or training providers were also the most common source of information about them, more generally. Two-thirds of learners who had heard of ALAs had received information about them from their learning provider (67 per cent) – by far the most common source (Table 2.1). The next most common source was via a learndirect or nextstep careers adviser (nine per cent).

**Table 2.1: Sources of information about ALAs, by ethnicity (all mentions over 5 per cent)**

	Acknowledged ALA learners or who had received information on ALAs		
	Total (%)	White (%)	BME (%)
From a learning/ training provider	67	66	69
learndirect or nextstep careers adviser	9	6	17
Letter/ leaflet	6	6	5
Local LSC	6	4	11
Work/ colleagues/ employer	5	6	4
From the ALA helpline	5	5	7
Don't know/ can't remember	8	9	7
Base (N)	764	565	197

*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

ALA learners from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups were significantly more likely than white learners to have received information about the ALA from a learndirect or nextstep careers adviser (17 per cent compared with 6 per cent) or via their local LSC (11 per cent compared with four per cent). This is in line with the finding (discussed in Section 3) that BME learners were more likely to have received IAG from nextstep or learndirect. National figures<sup>8</sup> also show that the nextstep service sees a higher proportion of clients from BME groups than are represented in the general population. The most recent figures (July 2008) found that 22 per cent of nextstep customers were from BME groups compared with 8 per cent in England as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> LSC IAG MI Performance Overview for nextstep (July 2008), downloaded from: [www.nextstepstakeholder.co.uk](http://www.nextstepstakeholder.co.uk)

Learners who received information via the ALA helpline or their local LSC were much more likely to have also had advice from a learndirect or nextstep careers adviser, than those who received information from their learning or training provider. One-third (33 per cent) of those who used the helpline, and one-fifth (21 per cent) of those who used the LSC, had also received information from learndirect or nextstep, compared with just nine per cent of those who received information from their provider.

Evidence from the qualitative process interviews with nextstep providers (carried out in January 2008) suggested that the number of referrals from learning providers had been very limited and was lower than initially expected.

### 2.2.3 Five per cent of ALA learners recalled using the ALA helpline

Initially, callers ringing to enquire about ALAs go through to a dedicated ALA helpline where their eligibility is determined and their details recorded on LAMS, after which they are sent an information pack. If the caller wants some advice on learning or careers they are then referred to an IAG provider, via direct transfer to the learndirect telephone advice line, or referral to a local nextstep office if they prefer to have face-to-face contact. From January 2008, this service was provided exclusively by the Careers Advice helpline, which offered advice and assessed eligibility at the same time.

The national ALA helpline went live in June 2007 in advance of the main college enrolment period but, by late August 2007, the volume of enquiries had not been as high as anticipated: ufi/learndirect reported that 583 calls had been received (of which 199 were registered on the LAMS database), compared to an anticipated volume of around 4,000 by early September. Between January and August 2008, a further 459 calls were answered of which 92 resulted in a learner being registered on LAMS. Nine in ten of these learners were based in the South East; 61 per cent were women and around half (52 per cent) were aged 25 to 49.

The relatively low volume of calls is reflected in the finding that just five per cent of ALA learners (N=40) could recall using the helpline. Caution should be exercised due to the relatively small base size; but there were no significant differences among survey respondents by learner or learning characteristics, in terms of likelihood of using the helpline. The profile of learners who reported using the helpline was broadly in line with the profile of learners registered on the LAMS database, overall.

When asked about their reasons for calling the helpline, the majority of callers said they had wanted to find out more about Adult Learner Accounts (58 per cent). Around one-quarter (23 per cent) had contacted the helpline to get information on a specific course they wanted to do and one-fifth (20 per cent) had called to find out about sources of funding for training and studying, more generally.

The vast majority of ALA learners who used the helpline were satisfied with the helpfulness of the Adviser (93 per cent in total) – including 50 per cent very satisfied and eight per cent who were extremely satisfied.

Satisfaction ratings for the usefulness of the information provided were slightly lower, although these still high at 85 per cent satisfied overall. The slightly lower rating here may be linked to learners' reasons for calling the helpline – some who wanted more specific learning or careers advice, or information on funding for courses, may have been disappointed if they could not get the information they required or needed to be referred to learndirect or nextstep. Unfortunately due to the small base size it is not possible to further disaggregate responses at these questions.

#### 2.2.4 Three-quarters recalled receiving an ALA information pack

All learners registered for an ALA are meant to receive an information or 'welcome' pack containing a welcome letter and Account number, provider contact details, and information on learning options. When asked whether they received an information pack about ALAs, three-quarters of learners said they had (76 per cent). Almost one-fifth (18 per cent) said they had not received a pack, with a further seven per cent who could not remember.

Learners who had completed their course at the time of the survey were more likely than those still learning to report they had not received an information pack (30 per cent, compared with 15 per cent). Reports of not receiving an information pack were also more common among learners who were not aware they were registered for the ALA, did not feel well-informed about it, were not satisfied with the IAG they had received, and were not satisfied with their learning experience, overall.

#### Two-thirds found the information pack useful

Those who did cite that they received an information pack were asked how useful this was. Two-thirds reported it was either very or fairly useful (67 per cent) including 21 per cent who said it was very useful. Just one-fifth reported that the information pack was not useful (22 per cent).

Those who did not feel well-informed about the ALA were more likely than those who did to say the information pack was not useful (43 per cent compared with 12 per cent). This may have been related to when their Account was opened. The pack contained some information geared towards course choice, such as a list of providers offering the ALA, which may not have been particularly useful to learners who received it after they had already enrolled on their course. Analysis by where learners received information on the Account appears to support this, in that those who found the pack most useful were more likely to have received information from the ALA helpline or a specialist adviser (which are sources likely to have been used upfront, prior to enrolling on a course), than from their learning or training provider (Table 2,2).

Table 2.2: Usefulness of ALA information pack, by sources of information used

	All who received an information pack	ALA helpline	nextstep/ learndirect adviser	Learning or training provider	Local LSC
Very useful	21	51	38	22	47
Fairly useful	46	34	40	48	28
Not very useful	14	14	9	13	9
Not useful at all	8	-	7	7	6
'NET' useful	+45	+71	+62	+50	+59
Don't know	11		4	10	9
Base (N)	578	35	58	398	32

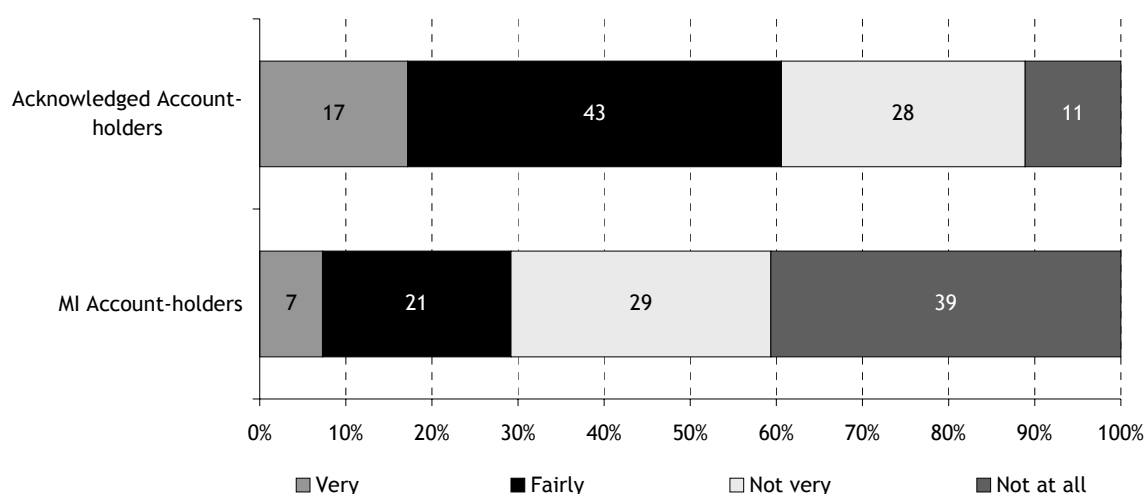
Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008

## 2.3 How well-informed learners felt about the ALA

Half the registered learners felt well-informed about the ALA (51 per cent), with slightly fewer saying they did not feel well-informed (47 per cent). Men were more likely than women to say they felt well-informed (56 per cent compared with 49 per cent); as were learners from BME backgrounds (57 per cent compared with 49 per cent) – these learners were also more likely to have received information from sources other than their learning provider (such as learndirect/ nextstep).

Figure 2.3 indicates that 'acknowledged' ALA learners, that is, those who recognised they were registered for an Account, were twice as likely as those who did not to say they felt well-informed (60 per cent compared with 28 per cent).

Figure 2.3: How well-informed learners felt about the ALA, by whether or not they recognised they had one



Base: All acknowledged Account-holders (N=645) and all MI Account-holders (N=241)

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

Among those who had received information about the ALA, learners who had dealt with the helpline, a learndirect/ nextstep adviser, or the LSC were much more likely to say they felt *very* well-informed, compared with those who received information from their provider. In particular, Table 2.3 shows that the 'net' rating for feeling well-informed about the ALA was twice as high among those who got information from a specialist IAG adviser than among those who got it from their learning or training provider.

**Table 2.3: How well informed learners felt about the ALA, by sources of information used**

	ALA helpline	nextstep/ learndirect adviser	Learning or training provider	Local LSC
Very well-informed	28	31	16	30
Fairly well-informed	43	44	46	44
Not very well-informed	23	20	27	16
Not well-informed at all	8	4	10	9
Don't know	-	-	1	-
'NET' informed	+40	+51	+25	+49
Base (N)	40	70	510	43

*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

Having received an information pack was linked to feeling well-informed about the ALA. Learners who had received an information pack were twice as likely to feel well-informed than those who had not (65 per cent, compared with 32 per cent).

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## 3 Choice of Course and Pre-Entry IAG

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This chapter examines learners' motivations for starting their Level 3 course and explores the 'fit' between how important they rate having a choice of course and provider, and how far they felt they had a choice in practice. It also explores learners' use of and satisfaction with Information Advice and Guidance (IAG), before they started their course (in the remainder of this chapter, this is referred to as 'pre-entry' IAG).

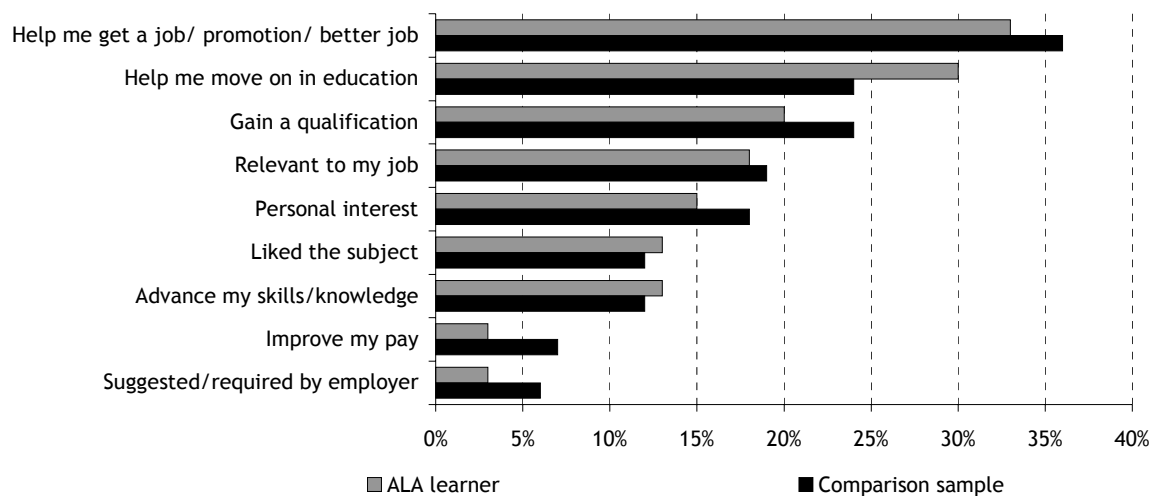
### 3.1 Learners' views on their choice of course

#### 3.1.1 ALA learners more likely to be motivated by moving on in education

All learners were asked about their main reasons for choosing the particular Level 3 course they were doing. Comparison between ALA and other Level 3 learners (Figure 3.1) largely reveals similar motivations for learning across the two groups, the main exceptions being:

- ALA learners were more likely to say they were learning to help them move on in education (30 per cent compared with 24 per cent).
- Other Level 3 learners were more likely to say they were studying to improve their pay (seven per cent compared with three per cent) or because their employer suggested it (six per cent compared with three per cent).

Figure 3.1: Motivations for choice of course, ALA and comparison sample (all mentions over 5 per cent)



Base: All ALA learners (886) and Comparison sample (448)

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

The distinction here is likely to be related to differences in the types of course that ALA and other Level 3 learners were doing<sup>9</sup>. ALA learners were more likely to be doing Access to HE courses, which are designed as entry routes into higher-level study. Indeed, process evaluation interviews with providers revealed that some of them had targeted Access to HE learners to register for ALAs, as they felt these learners could most benefit from the additional access to IAG offered by having an Account.

### Differences among ALA learners

Exploring differences in motivation for learning between ALA learners finds some interesting distinctions, although getting a job or a promotion/ better or different job was the most common among all types of learners. On other factors, there were some key distinctions:

- By age group: learners aged 19 to 34 were more likely than those in older age groups to be motivated by moving on in education (37 per cent, compared with 24 per cent of those aged 35 to 44, and 17 per cent of those aged 45 to 54). In contrast, learners aged 35 and over were more likely to be motivated by reasons related to their current employment, such as relevance to their job, advancing skills and

<sup>9</sup> Although there was a differences between the two samples by age group (with the comparison sample having a higher proportion of younger learners aged 19 to 25), analysis showed that once these age differences were controlled for, ALA learners were still more likely to be motivated by moving on in education. For example, 36 per cent of ALA learners aged 19 to 25 were motivated by moving on in education compared with just 25 per cent of 19 to 25 year olds in the comparison group.



knowledge in their job, or being advised or required to study by their employer. When these reasons are grouped together, they were mentioned by over one-third of 45 to 54 year olds (38 per cent) and around one-quarter of 35 to 44 year olds (24 per cent), compared with just 15 per cent of learners aged 19 to 34.

- By work status: learners who were not in paid employment were more likely than those who were to be motivated by moving on in education (39 per cent compared with 27 per cent), from personal interest (21 per cent compared with 13 per cent) or because they liked the subject (20 per cent compared with ten per cent).
- By ethnicity: White learners were more likely than those in BME groups to say they were motivated by relevance to their current job (20 per cent compared with 11 per cent); those in BME groups were more likely to say they were motivated because they liked the subject (18 per cent compared with 11 per cent). This is related to the work status and age profiles of white and BME learners (white learners were more likely to be older and to be in paid work).
- By disability: Learners who reported a long-term health problem or disability were twice as likely to be motivated by interest in the subject (24 per cent compared with 12 per cent of other learners).
- By whether the learner had paid towards the course fees or not: those who paid some or all of their course fees were more likely than those who had not to say they were studying to move on in education (37 per cent compared with 24 per cent) or because they liked the subject (16 per cent compared with 11 per cent). Conversely, those who had not paid towards their course fees were more likely to be motivated by reasons related to their current job – for example, that the course was relevant to their job (23 per cent compared with 12 per cent) or because their employer had suggested or required them to do it (six per cent compared with zero among those who paid towards their course).

There were no significant differences between learners who were and who were not aware that they were registered for an ALA.

### 3.1.2 ALA learners more likely to say that choice of course and provider was ‘very important’

One of the objectives of the ALA is that learners should feel they have a wider choice of course and provider than they would have had otherwise. In the qualitative process evaluation, interviews with national and regional stakeholders found they were pleased with the breadth of provision procured for ALAs and felt that the new provision mix would offer a wider choice to Level 3 learners in the trial areas.

All learners were asked how important it was for them to have a choice about which course they did and which college or training provider they used, then asked how much choice they felt they actually had about each. An overwhelming majority

regarded having a choice about which course they did as being very or fairly important (90 per cent of ALA learners and 89 per cent of other Level 3 learners). ALA learners were more likely than other Level 3 learners to think having a choice about their course was ‘very’ important (71 per cent compared with 63 per cent).

Choice of college or training provider was a slightly lower priority, but still deemed important by 80 per cent of ALA learners and 76 per cent of other Level 3 learners. Again, ALA learners were more likely than others to regard this as being ‘very’ important (53 per cent compared with 48 per cent).

**3.1.3 But they were no more or less likely to say they had a choice**

When asked how much choice they felt they had over which course they did, almost three-quarters of learners said a great deal or a fair amount (72 per cent). There were no significant differences between ALA (71 per cent) and other Level 3 learners (74 per cent).

Fewer learners said they had a great deal or a fair amount of choice about which provider they used (59 per cent) – as might be expected given the range of constraints such as location, timing, availability of transport etc., which could impact on this. There was no significant difference between ALA learners (58 per cent) and other Level 3 learners (62 per cent).

It is worth comparing importance of choice against how much choice learners felt they had. Table 3.1 shows that the gap between these was higher for ALA learners than for other Level 3 learners (particularly on choice of provider), mainly because ALA learners accorded choice a higher priority.

**Table 3.1: Views on importance and extent of choice about course and provider (ALA learners and comparison sample)**

	Choice very or fairly important (%) (A)	Had great deal or fair amount of choice (%) (B)	Difference (A-B)
<b>Choice about course:</b>			
ALA learner	90	71	19
Other Level 3 learner	89	74	15
<b>Choice about provider:</b>			
ALA learner	80	58	22
Other Level 3 learner	76	62	14

*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

**Differences among ALA learners: choice of course**

Among ALA learners, having a choice over which course they did was more important to BME learners (84 per cent regarded this as being very important,

compared with 66 per cent of white learners). Course choice was also more important to the following:

- Learners who had paid some or all of their course fees (75 per cent regarded having a choice over which course they did as very important, compared with 67 per cent of those who did not pay towards course fees).
- Learners who were satisfied with their learning experience so far (72 per cent compared with 61 per cent of those who were dissatisfied).
- Learners who were likely to undertake further learning within the next three years (72 per cent, compared with 58 per cent of those who were not).

ALA learners who were more likely to feel they had a great deal or a fair amount of choice over which course they did included all the groups identified above, for whom having a choice was more important. In addition, learners aged 19 to 34, those who were not in paid work, and those qualified at Level 2 or below were also more likely to consider they had a great deal or fair amount of choice over which course they did, compared with learners aged 35 and over, those in paid work, and those already qualified at Level 3 or higher.

Learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were more likely than those who did not, to consider that they had a great deal or fair amount of choice about their course (76 per cent compared with 66 per cent). The same was true of learners who were satisfied with the pre-entry IAG they had received (74 per cent compared with 57 per cent of those who were dissatisfied).

#### Differences between ALA learners: choice of provider

Having a choice about the college or training provider they used was more important to women than to men (56 per cent compared with 48 per cent regarding this as very important) and, again, to BME learners rather than to white learners (60 per cent compared with 51 per cent). Others who were more likely to regard choice of provider as being very important were:

- Learners who were not in paid work (60 per cent compared with 51 per cent). This may be related to the greater likelihood that those in paid work were doing work-based training or training which had been specified by their employer (therefore had less scope for choice of provider).
- Learners who had paid some or all of their course fees<sup>10</sup> (58 per cent compared with 49 per cent). Overall almost nine in ten learners who contributed towards their course fees regarded having a choice of provider as important (86 per cent compared with 75 per cent of those who did not pay).

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<sup>10</sup> Analysis on paying towards the course fees is presented in Section 4.3.

Having a choice of provider was notably no more or less important to satisfied learners than it was to dissatisfied ones, unlike having a choice over which course they did.

When it came to perceptions about choice over which provider they used, learners aged 19 to 34 were again more likely than those aged 35 and over to consider they had a great deal or a fair amount of choice. Aside from age, the main distinctions were related more to learners' experiences than to their demographic characteristics. The likelihood of having a great deal or fair amount of choice about which provider they used was higher among:

- Learners who felt well-informed about the ALA (63 per cent compared with 51 per cent of those who did not).
- Learners who paid some or all of their course fees (67 per cent compared with 50 per cent of those who paid nothing).
- Learners who were satisfied with the pre-entry IAG they had received (61 per cent compared with 41 per cent of those who were not) or who were satisfied with their learning experience overall (60 per cent compared with just 43 per cent of those who were dissatisfied).

Notably, fewer than half the early leavers felt they had a great deal or a fair amount of choice about which college or training provider they used (48 per cent) – compared with 60 per cent of those still in learning.

## 3.2 Use of and satisfaction with pre-entry IAG

### 3.2.1 Almost all learners had received some form of pre-course IAG

All learners were asked which, if any sources of information, advice or guidance about education, training or work they had used before starting their current Level 3 course. Almost all learners had used at least some form of formal or informal IAG (97 per cent of ALA learners and 96 per cent of other Level 3 learners). Overall, the most common route was via a teacher, tutor or admissions adviser at their learning or training provider, followed by more informal sources like friends or family, or their employer (Table 3.2).

The main reason learners said they had not accessed any pre-entry IAG was that they did not need any.

### 3.2.2 There were few significant differences between ALA and other Level 3 learners

Table 3.2 suggests there were few significant differences between ALA and other Level 3 learners, in terms of the sources of pre-entry IAG they had used. Most notably,

other Level 3 learners were more likely to have used friends or family (44 per cent compared with 33 per cent), although this is related to the younger age profile among this group, overall. Comparing ALA and other Level 3 learners within age group finds that among the 19 to 25 year olds, ALA learners were more likely to have consulted an admissions adviser or tutor at their learning or training provider (67 per cent compared with 53 per cent of the comparison group); and less likely to have used friends and family (39 per cent compared with 51 per cent).

**Table 3.2: Sources of pre-entry IAG used (mentions over 5 per cent only)**

	ALA learners (%)	Comparison sample (%)
Teacher/tutor or admissions adviser at learning provider	62	59
Friends or family	33	44
Employer	30	33
learndirect telephone advice line or website	16	13
nextstep centre	7	11
Other internet/ websites	6	6
Base (N)	886	448

*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

The other key difference is that other Level 3 learners were more likely to have used the nextstep advice service than learners registered for an ALA (11 per cent compared with seven per cent). Findings from the qualitative process evaluation found that, although interviewees from nextstep were supportive of the ALA trials, generally they had received very few referrals or enquiries about ALAs between September 2007 and January 2008. The low volume of referrals they experienced relative to their expectations may be explained by the fact that many of the learning providers were already Matrix-accredited<sup>11</sup> and could therefore offer quality-approved IAG to learners directly. Indeed, the vast majority of providers interviewed viewed the IAG offered as part of the ALAs as a service provided by internal staff rather than by their external partners. Many providers also stated that the IAG offer to ALA learners was no different to that offered to other learners on similar level courses.

The other explanation for this apparent lack of distinction between ALA and other Level 3 learners is that, in many cases, learners were not registered as having an ALA until after they had enrolled on their course, when the most opportune time for providing additional independent pre-entry IAG had already elapsed.

<sup>11</sup> The Matrix standard is the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work.

### Differences between ALA learners: sources of pre-entry IAG

There were some distinct patterns in the use of different sources of pre-entry IAG across different types of learner and learning experience:

**Learning providers** were more commonly used as a source of pre-entry IAG by learners who were not in paid work (70 per cent, compared with 58 per cent of those who were working), and by learners aged 19 to 34 (63 per cent) and 35 to 44 (64 per cent), compared with those aged 45 to 54 (50 per cent). Notably, learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were also more likely to have received some pre-entry IAG from their learning provider, than those who did not (67 per cent compared with 57 per cent).

Information or advice from **friends or family** was most commonly used among learners at the younger end of the age spectrum (aged 19 to 34), compared with those aged 35 and over (38 per cent, compared with 25 per cent of those aged 35 to 54).

IAG from **employers** was used most frequently among learners who were aged 35 to 44 (41 per cent) or 45 to 54 (47 per cent) compared with those aged under-35 (21 per cent). It was also used more commonly among women than men (33 per cent compared with 24 per cent) and among white learners compared with those in BME groups (34 per cent compared with 18 per cent). Forty-four per cent of learners who did not pay towards their course costs received pre-entry IAG from their employer, compared with just 14 per cent of those who did. This is related to motivation for learning – those more likely to be learning because they were expected or required to in their job were also more likely to have their course costs covered by their employer.

### Use of learndirect and nextstep among ALA learners

In total, 16 per cent of ALA learners had accessed IAG via learndirect and seven per cent via nextstep. The use of these two sources was much more common among BME learners compared with white learners (Table 3.3).

**Table 3.3: Use of learndirect and nextstep among ALA learners, by broad ethnicity**

	White (%)	BME (%)
learndirect (telephone or website)	13	24
nextstep	5	15
Base (N)	667	217

*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

Use of learndirect and nextstep was also more common among ALA learners who felt well-informed about the ALA: 20 per cent of these had used learndirect and ten per cent nextstep, compared with 12 per cent and five per cent of those who did not feel well-informed.

Generally, learners who received information about the ALA from the helpline, a specialist adviser, or via their local LSC, were significantly more likely to have also received pre-course IAG from learndirect or nextstep compared with those who received information via their learning provider (Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4: Use of learndirect and nextstep among ALA learners, by sources of information about the ALA**

	ALA helpline	nextstep/ learndirect adviser	Learning or training provider	Local LSC
learndirect (telephone or website)	43	36	18	37
nextstep	20	33	8	26
Base (N)	40	70	510	43

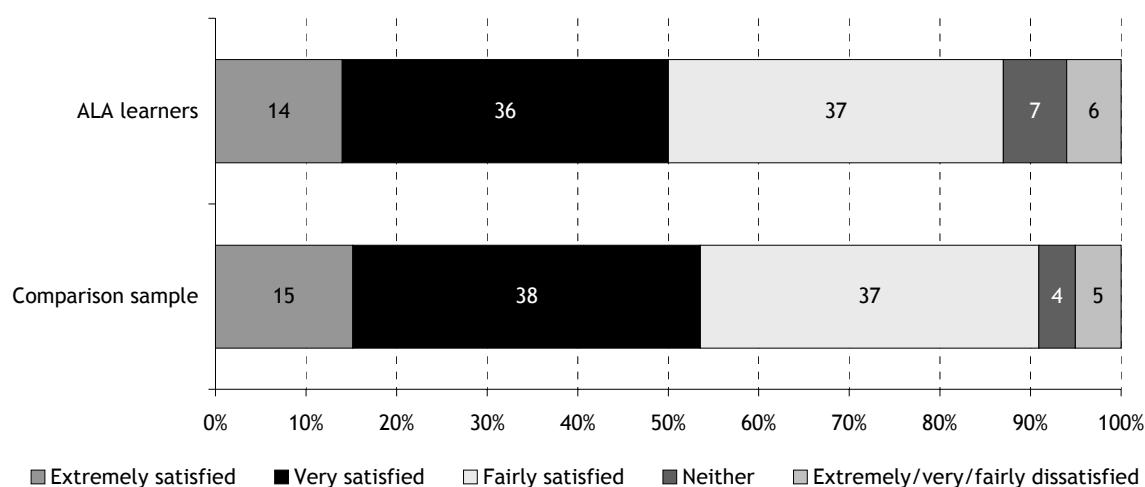
*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

One-third of learners who had used either learndirect or nextstep for pre-course IAG *and* had used the ALA helpline (N=40) said they had been referred for the IAG after their initial telephone call. It is worth commenting on this because, in the original learner journey for ALA learners, one of the main conduits to independent and upfront IAG was planned to be referral to learndirect, via the ALA helpline. Lower than anticipated use of the helpline therefore means that fewer ALA learners were referred to learndirect or nextstep via this route, for independent upfront IAG.

### 3.2.3 Overall, around nine learners in ten were satisfied with the pre-entry IAG they received

Satisfaction with pre-entry IAG was high across the board. Figure 3.2 shows that ALA learners were slightly less likely to be satisfied with the pre-entry IAG they had received than other Level 3 learners (87 per cent compared with 90 per cent), although they were no more or less likely to be dissatisfied.

Figure 3.2: Satisfaction with pre-entry IAG



Base: All ALA learners (859) and comparison sample learners (431) who received pre-entry IAG

Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008

### Differences between ALA learners

In the main there were few significant differences in satisfaction with pre-course IAG. The most obvious exception was that learners who had dropped out of their course were significantly less likely to be satisfied (even so, 81 per cent of early leavers were satisfied, compared with 86 per cent of those still studying and 96 per cent of those who had successfully completed).

Table 3.5 shows that learners who were satisfied with their learning experience overall were also more likely to be satisfied with their pre-course IAG (91 per cent compared with 52 per cent of those who were unhappy with the course). Also associated with this was feeling well-informed about the ALA (92 per cent satisfied with pre-entry IAG) or about the cost of the course fees (at 90 per cent satisfied).

Table 3.5: Satisfaction with pre-entry IAG by satisfaction with the learning experience overall, ALA learners

Satisfaction with pre-course IAG	Satisfaction with learning experience	
	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)
Extremely satisfied	15	3
Very satisfied	40	9
Fairly satisfied	36	40
Neither/nor	5	17
Fairly/ very/ extremely dissatisfied	4	29
Don't know	*	2
Base (N)	752	65

Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008



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## 4 Experience of the Course

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This section explores learners' satisfaction with their learning experience overall and with the support offered to them by their learning or training provider. It also explores reasons for leaving early from courses. Finally, the chapter explores the extent to which learners contributed towards the costs of their course, and how well-informed they felt about how much their course cost and how it had been paid for.

### 4.1 Satisfaction with the learning experience

#### 4.1.1 Satisfaction around ninety per cent for both ALA and other Level 3 learners

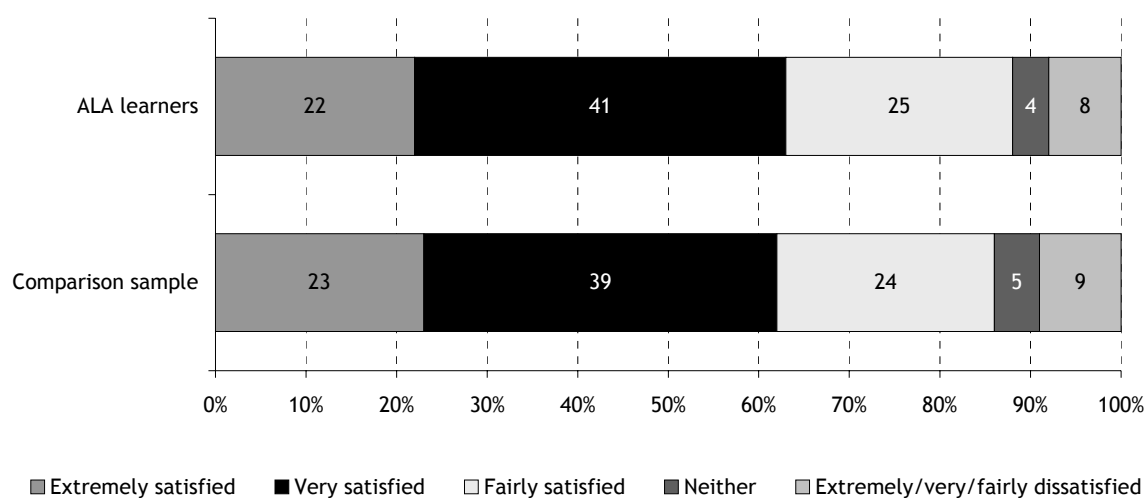
Overall, 87 per cent of the Level 3 learners surveyed were satisfied with their learning experience, including around one-fifth who said they were extremely satisfied (22 per cent). There was no distinction between ALA and other Level 3 learners in terms of satisfaction (Figure 4.1) – at 88 per cent and 86 per cent satisfied, respectively.

Although the survey populations are somewhat different<sup>12</sup>, satisfaction levels are comparable to those found in the National Learner Satisfaction Survey (NLSS) 2007, which found that 90 per cent of Level 3 learners were satisfied with their learning experience overall.

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that the NLSS 07 figure is based on all Level 3 learners (not just full Level 3 learners) and also includes Level 3 learners aged 16 to 18.

Figure 4.1: Overall satisfaction with learning experience, ALA learners and comparison sample



Base: All ALA learners (883) and comparison learners (432) who started their course

Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008

#### 4.1.2 Nine learners in ten felt their course was meeting their needs and that there was support available to help them carry it out

In line with the high levels of satisfaction among learners overall, around nine learners in ten agreed both that their course was meeting their needs and that there was support available to help them carry it out (87 per cent each).

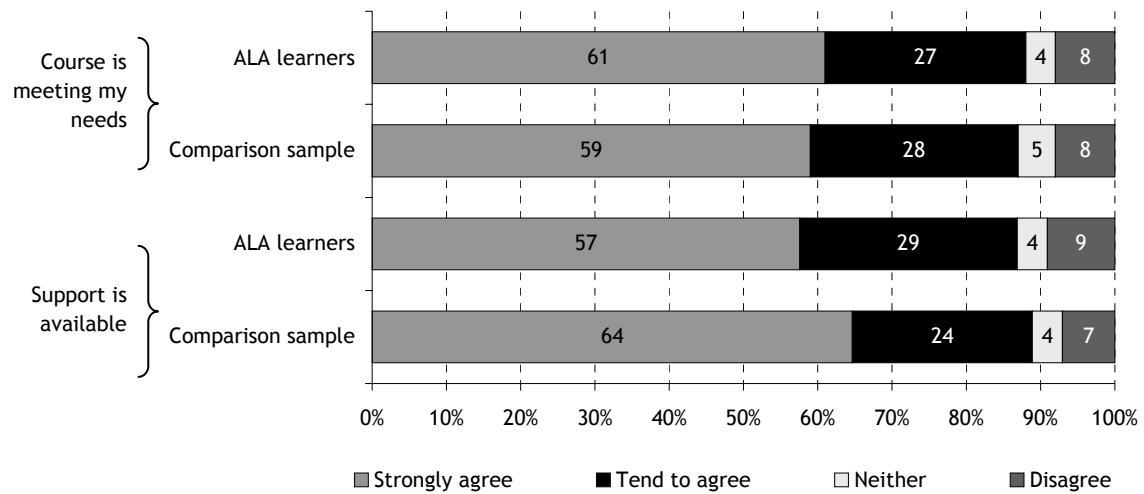
There was no significant difference between ALA and other Level 3 learners in terms of overall agreement or disagreement with each statement (Figure 4.2). However, other Level 3 learners were more likely than ALA learners to strongly agree that there was support available to help them carry out their course (64 per cent compared with 57 per cent).

#### Differences among ALA learners

There were few significant differences between ALA learners, partly because agreement levels were already so high.

In terms of whether or not the course was meeting their needs, learners from BME groups were more likely to agree (93 per cent overall), and in particular to agree strongly (69 per cent compared with 59 per cent of white learners). However they were no more or less likely to consider that there was support available to help them carry out their course.

Figure 4.2: The needs of learners and the support available, ALA learners and comparison sample



Base: All ALA learners (883) and comparison learners (432) who started their course

Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008

Learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were more likely than those who did not to feel that the course was meeting their needs (90 per cent compared with 85 per cent) and that there was support available to help them carry out their course (91 per cent compared with 81 per cent). Similar to the pattern for other findings, this was also the case among learners who felt well-informed about their course fees and who were satisfied with their pre-entry IAG.

As we might expect, learners who were dissatisfied with their learning experience overall were the least likely to agree with either statement. Just 43 per cent felt the course was meeting their needs (compared with 93 per cent among satisfied learners), and just 36 per cent agreed that there was support available to help them carry out their course (compared with 92 per cent of those who were satisfied).

Early leavers were also more likely to disagree with each statement than those who were still in learning or who had completed their course. One-quarter of early leavers disagreed that the course was meeting their needs (26 per cent) or that there was support available to help them carry out their learning (24 per cent).

### 4.1.3 Types of support available

Table 4.1 shows the most common types of support available to learners and indicates no significant differences between ALA and other Level 3 learners.

**Table 4.1: Types of support available, ALA learners and comparison sample (mentions with over 5 per cent)**

	ALA learners (%)	Comparison sample (%)
Help or assistance from teacher/tutor when needed	91	88
Advice/one to one meetings with appropriate staff	85	87
Personal tutor	76	76
Financial support or advice on financial support for learning	57	52
Base (N)	883	432

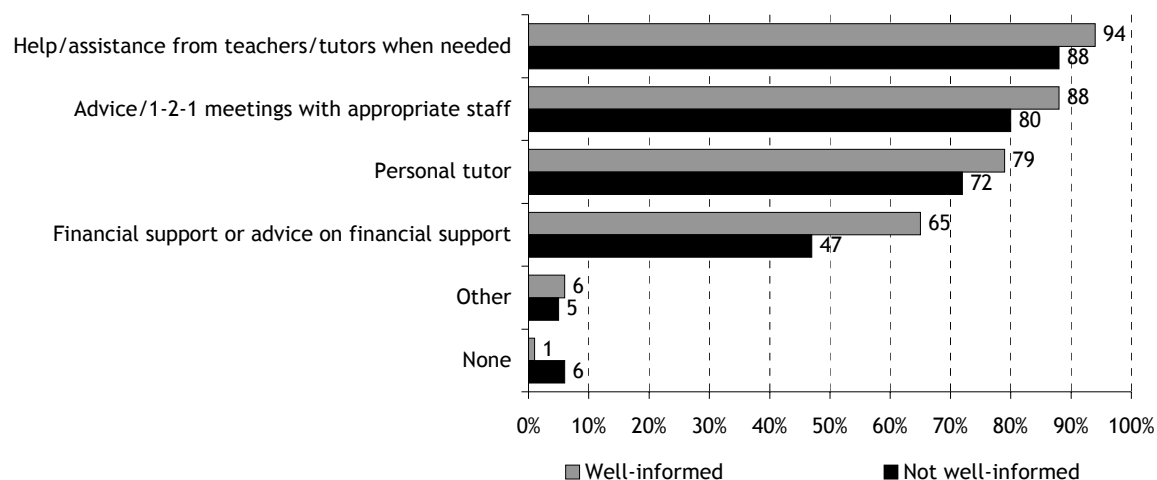
*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

Among ALA learners, those aged 19 to 34 were more likely than older learners to have received support from a personal tutor (79 per cent) or financial support/ advice on financial support for learning (62 per cent). Financial support or advice on financial support for learning appeared to be targeted at learners who were not in employment (69 per cent received this compared with 51 per cent of those who were working), and those who did not have to pay towards their course fees (61 per cent received financial support or advice, compared with 46 per cent of those who did pay some or all of their fees).

Figure 4.3 shows that ALA learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were significantly more likely than those who did not to have received each type of support, especially financial support or advice on financial support for learning. This is linked to having received a financial statement<sup>13</sup> (61 per cent reported they had received financial support or advice compared with 54 per cent of those who had not received a statement). To a lesser extent, it may also be linked to joint marketing of ALAs with the Adult Learning Grant, which some learning and IAG providers had undertaken.

<sup>13</sup> The financial statement includes information on financial support received.

**Figure 4.3: Main types of support for learning received, by whether learner felt well-informed about the ALA**



Base: All ALA learners who felt well-informed about the ALA (453) or not (410)

Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008

## 4.2 Early leaving

### 4.2.1 Extent of early leaving

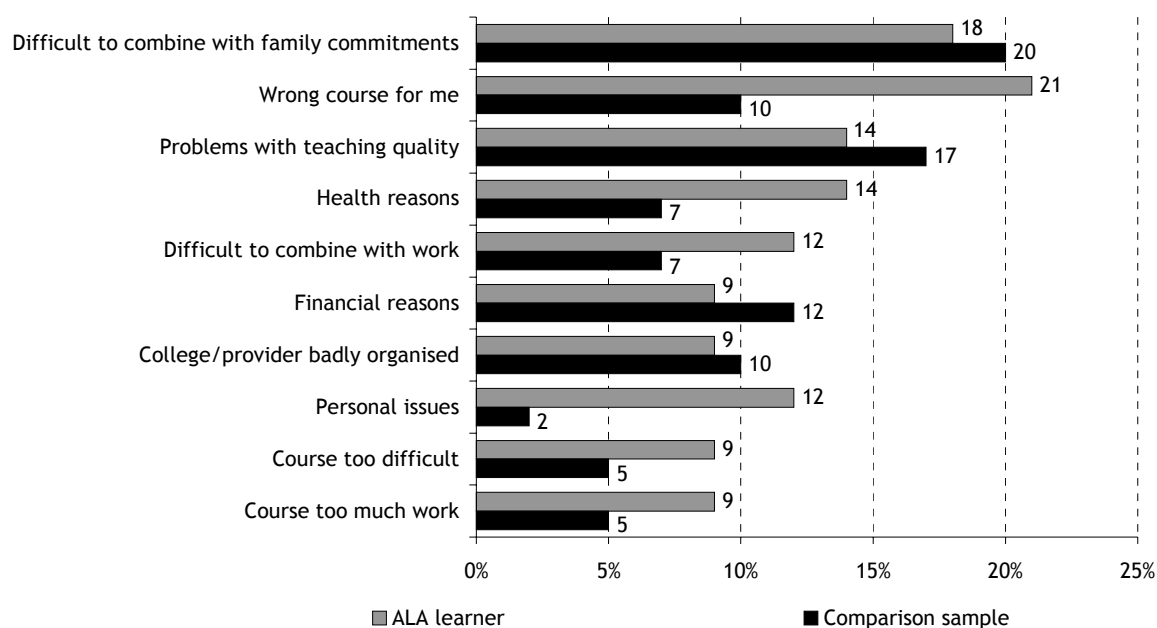
At the time of the survey, seven per cent of ALA learners had decided not to continue with their course, compared with nine per cent of other Level 3 learners. In Year 2 of the evaluation, we should be able to compare completion and retention rates among ALA and other Level 3 learners more extensively, via comparison using the Individualised Learner Records (ILR).

Among ALA learners, drop-out from the course was most common among learners who were dissatisfied with their learning experience overall (21 per cent compared with six per cent of those who were satisfied), and, linked to this, those who were dissatisfied with the IAG they had received (16 per cent, compared with seven per cent among those who were satisfied).

### 4.2.2 Reasons for early leaving

The most common reasons for early leaving reveal no statistically significant differences between ALA and other Level 3 learners (Figure 4.4). Choosing the wrong course was the most common reason among ALA learners overall, followed by difficulty combining the course with family or other commitments (which was the most common reason among the comparison group). Figures should be treated with caution due to the small base sizes involved.

Figure 4.4: Reasons for early leaving, ALA learners and comparison sample (Top 10 mentions)



Base: All ALA learners (66) and comparison sample (41) who left their course early

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

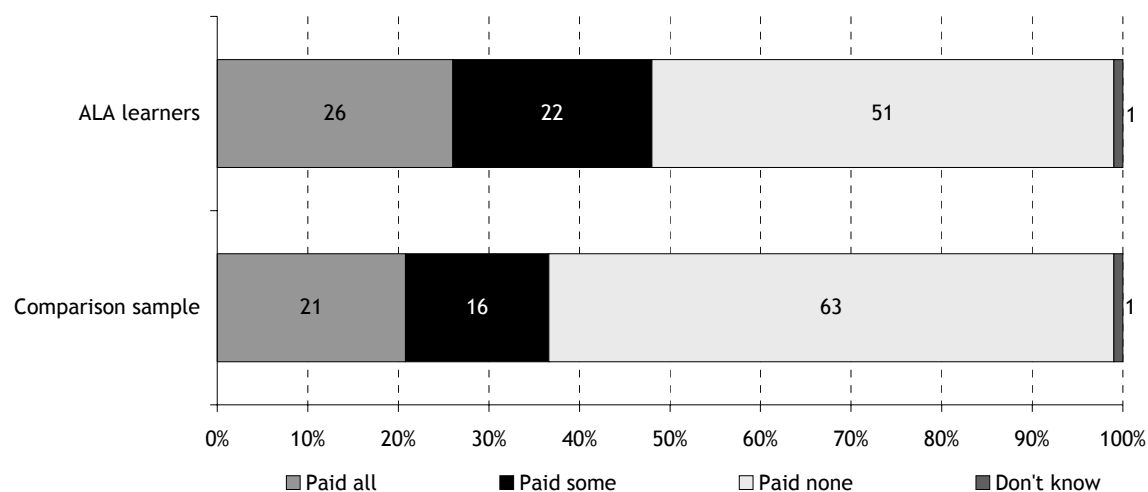
## 4.3 Learners' financial contribution to the cost of their course

### 4.3.1 ALA learners more likely to have paid towards the cost of their course

Learners were asked whether they personally had made any financial contribution towards the cost of their course fees. One-quarter of ALA learners reported they had paid for the course in full (26 per cent) compared with one-fifth of other Level 3 learners (21 per cent). Overall, almost half (48 per cent) of ALA learners had made a financial contribution to the cost of their course fees, compared with around one-third of other Level 3 learners (37 per cent). Interestingly, comparison of the results within age group finds that younger ALA learners in the 19 to 25 and 25 to 34 age groups were more likely to have contributed towards their course costs than their counterparts in the comparison sample (around half had paid at least some of the course cost compared with one-third of the comparison sample, in the equivalent age group). This is in part related to the course profile of ALA learners compared with other Level 3 learners (ALA learners were more likely to be doing Access to HE and other types of course which learners contribute towards). The recent evaluation of

Level 3 (Wave 1 report)<sup>14</sup> found that – among all Level 3 learners – making a contribution to the fees was particularly likely among those doing Access to HE (29 per cent of learners on Access courses had paid all and 19 per cent had paid some of their course fees).

**Figure 4.5: Whether learners had made a financial contribution to the cost of their course fees, ALA learners and comparison sample**



Base: All ALA (886) and comparison (448) learners

Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008

### Differences among ALA learners

Learners aged 19 to 34 were more likely than older learners to have paid towards their course costs (52 per cent), compared with 42 per cent of 35 to 44 year olds and 38 per cent of 45 to 54s. Interestingly, those who were not currently in paid employment were more likely to have paid something towards their course (56 per cent, compared with 44 per cent of those in work) – mainly because more paid partial course costs. This is because more people in work had their course costs paid for them by their employer.

Having paid towards the cost of the course fees was linked to satisfaction with the learning experience overall (Table 4.2): those who were dissatisfied were more likely to say they paid the full course costs (38 per cent, compared with 25 per cent of those who were satisfied). It is likely that those who pay have higher expectations about their course (because they have invested some of their own money in doing it) and are therefore more likely to report dissatisfaction if these are not met.

<sup>14</sup> Ipsos MORI and Experian (2008), Interim Evaluation of Level 3, Wave 1 Report, Learning and Skills Council, Coventry

**Table 4.2: Whether ALA learners made a financial contribution to the cost of their course fees, by satisfaction with learning experience overall**

	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)
Yes- paid all of it	25	38
Yes- paid some of it	22	26
No	52	36
Don't know	1	-
Base (N)	771	72

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

Learners who had said that they received a financial statement were more likely to say they had paid the full course costs than those who had not (34 per cent compared with 19 per cent) – although this could be influenced by learners being more likely to review the statement if they had paid towards the costs of the course. Among ALA learners the mean contribution made, among those who paid part of the course fees, was 32 per cent of the total cost.

#### 4.3.2 The amount paid towards the course

Table 4.3 shows the amount paid for or towards course fees by ALA and other Level 3 learners. Differences are related more to the type of course being undertaken and to learner characteristics such as age and prior qualifications, than to whether the learner had an ALA or not.

**Table 4.3: Amount paid towards course fees among those who paid, ALA learners and comparison sample**

	ALA learner(%)	Comparison sample (%)
£99 or less	17	13
£100-£299	24	22
£300-£499	12	19
£500-£999	34	22
£1,000 or more	12	20
Don't know	3	4
Base (N)	421	164

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

Among ALA learners who reported they paid some or all of their course cost, the mean contribution paid was £591, slightly lower than the mean paid by learners in the comparison sample, at £649.



### 4.3.3 Reasons why learners did not pay all of their course costs

Learners who did not contribute towards their course costs, or who only paid for them partially, were asked why they did not pay the full amount. Around half the ALA and other Level 3 learners said that the main reason they did not pay the full amount was because the government/ LSC was paying the difference (53 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively). Around one in three (27 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively) said their employer was paying for it. There were no significant differences between ALA and other Level 3 learners.

Among ALA learners, those aged 19 to 34 and 35 to 44 were more likely than those aged 45 to 54 to report that the government/LSC was paying for it. The younger age group (aged 19 to 34) were also more likely to say they were exempt from paying the fees, or that some of the course fees were waived. Older learners aged 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 (who were more likely to be in paid work) were significantly more likely than those aged 19 to 34 to report that their employer was paying some or all of their course costs (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4: Reasons why ALA learners did not pay the full course costs, by age group**

	19-34 (%)	35-44 (%)	45-54 (%)	55+ (%)
Course paid for by govt/ LSC	56	54	39	61
Course paid for by employer	18	34	50	39
Course paid for by individual such as parent or partner	5	-	-	-
Learner exempt from paying course fees	15	8	10	11
Some of the course fees were waived	10	6	2	-
Other reason	1	1	1	-
Don't know	2	3	6	-
Base (N)	372	176	82	18**

\*\* Very low base, ineligible for significance testing

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

Among those who did not pay the full course costs, other learners more likely to report that the government./LSC was paying for some or all of their fees were those not in paid work (69 per cent) and those in BME groups (60 per cent) (there is some overlap between these two categories as BME learners were less likely than white learners to be employed).

Learners with a disability or health problem who did not pay the full course costs were more likely than others to say this was because the fees had been waived (21 per cent compared with seven per cent).

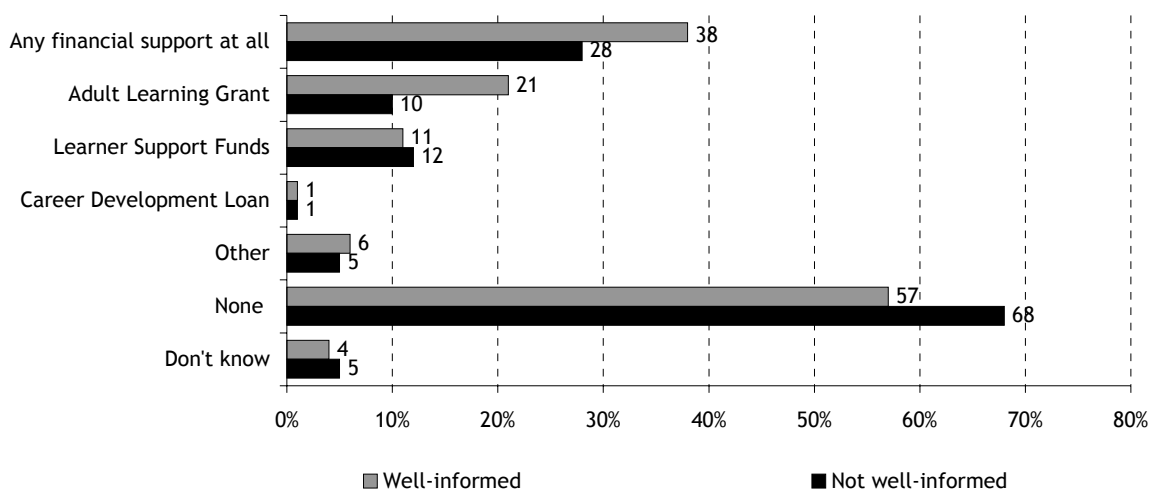
#### 4.3.4 Access to financial support for learning

All learners were asked whether they had received a number of different forms of financial support for learning. One-third of ALA and other Level 3 learners alike had received some form of additional financial support (33 per cent each).

The main distinction between them was that ALA learners were more likely to report receiving the Adult Learning Grant (ALG) (15 per cent, compared with 11 per cent). This was especially likely among younger learners aged 19 to 34, where a fifth reported they received ALG (20 per cent, versus 13 per cent of learners in the comparison sample, in the same age group).

Learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were also more likely than those who did not to report they received ALG (21 per cent, compared with 10 per cent). This may be related to joint marketing of ALG and ALAs by some providers.

**Figure 4.6: Access to financial support for learning among ALA learners, by whether learner felt well-informed about the ALA**



Base: All ALA learners who felt well-informed about the ALA (453) or not (413)

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

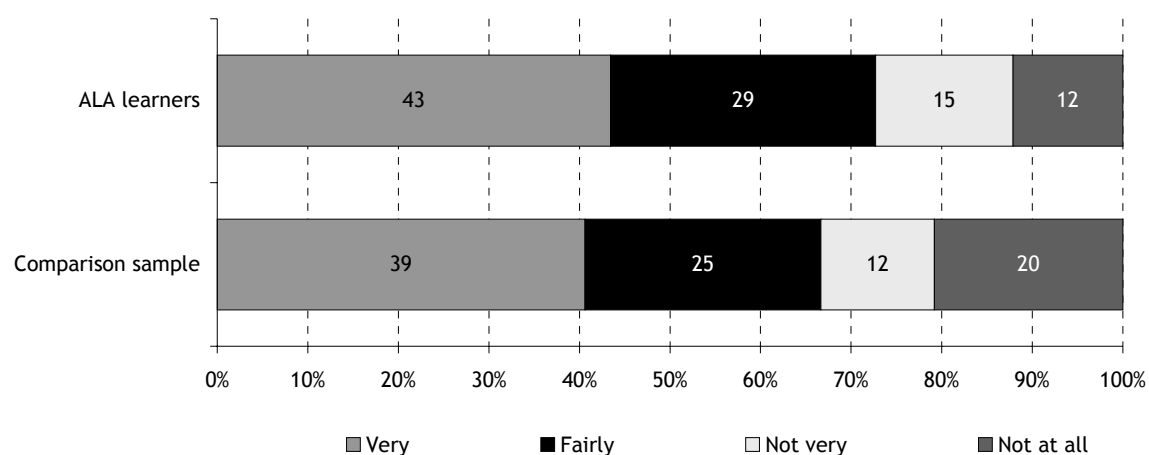
Among ALA learners, those in the 19 to 34 age group were generally much more likely than older adult learners to report receiving additional financial support (39 per cent overall, compared with 27 per cent of those aged 35 to 44, and 13 per cent of those aged 45 to 54).

#### 4.3.5 ALA learners felt more well-informed about the full cost of their course

Three-quarters (73 per cent) of ALA learners felt well-informed about the full cost of their course, significantly higher than other Level 3 learners (64 per cent) – although this is associated with them being more likely to have paid towards the course. Figure 4.7 indicates that other Level 3 learners were particularly more likely to report they

felt not at all well-informed (20 per cent compared with 12 per cent of those with an ALA). This is important given that better information about the monetary value of the course is key to one of the ideas underpinning the Adult Learner Account, that learners who know more about the full cost of their course and how it has been paid for, may be more likely to feel committed to completing it, potentially resulting in improved completion rates.

**Figure 4.7: How well-informed learners felt about the full cost of their course, ALA learners and comparison sample**



Base: All ALA learners (886) and comparison sample (448)

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

### Differences among ALA learners

The likelihood of feeling well-informed about the full cost of their course was higher among:

- Learners aged 19 to 34 (75 per cent) and aged 35 to 44 (74 per cent) compared with those aged 45 to 54 (60 per cent). Over one-third of learners in the latter age group did not feel well-informed about the full cost of their course (36 per cent) – although this is likely to be related to the fact that they were less likely to have paid towards the course themselves.
- Learners who were still in learning (74 per cent) compared with those who had left their course early (67 per cent).
- Learners who had received an information pack about the ALA, compared with those who had not (75 per cent compared with 66 per cent).
- Learners who said they had received a financial statement (84 per cent, compared with 63 per cent of those who had not). It is interesting to note that almost two-thirds of those who did not receive a statement felt well-informed about the cost of their course – a similar percentage to other Level 3 learners (64 per cent).

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## 5 Experience of the Adult Learner Account

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This section examines some of the core components of the ALA: the financial statement and access to IAG on future learning or training opportunities (which we have termed 'progression IAG'.) It also explores learners' perceptions about the benefits of having an ALA. Apart from access to progression IAG, the rest of this section is based on interviews with ALA learners only.

### 5.1 The financial statement

#### 5.1.1 Background from the process evaluation

The learner's financial statement was initially expected to be available to learners from October onwards but this was delayed. Stakeholders felt that this was not an issue because of the lag in enrolling learners onto the Accounts. The aim was a 28-day turnaround between learners registering for an Account and receiving the first statement.

National and regional stakeholders emphasised the importance of the financial statement as a mechanism for showing learners the true cost of their learning, with a view to increasing commitment to completing the course and therefore improving retention and achievement rates. Some providers felt that, while it could be useful for learners to see the full cost of their course and how it had been paid for, this might have limited impact on retention as learners were more concerned with course quality.

The process for learners to enquire about information on the statement is to their learning provider in the first instance or to the national ALA helpline if preferred.

At the time of fieldwork with learning providers (November 2007-January 2008), only one provider had issued any statements. There was a concern, voiced by several providers, that the statement calculator only provided the LSC subsidy figure for the statement and that a lot of additional work was required across management information platforms to collate the other information on fees, financial support and

employer contributions. It was felt to be crucial that information on fees paid was completely up to date to avoid confusion among learners.

### 5.1.2 Almost half the ALA learners recalled receiving a statement

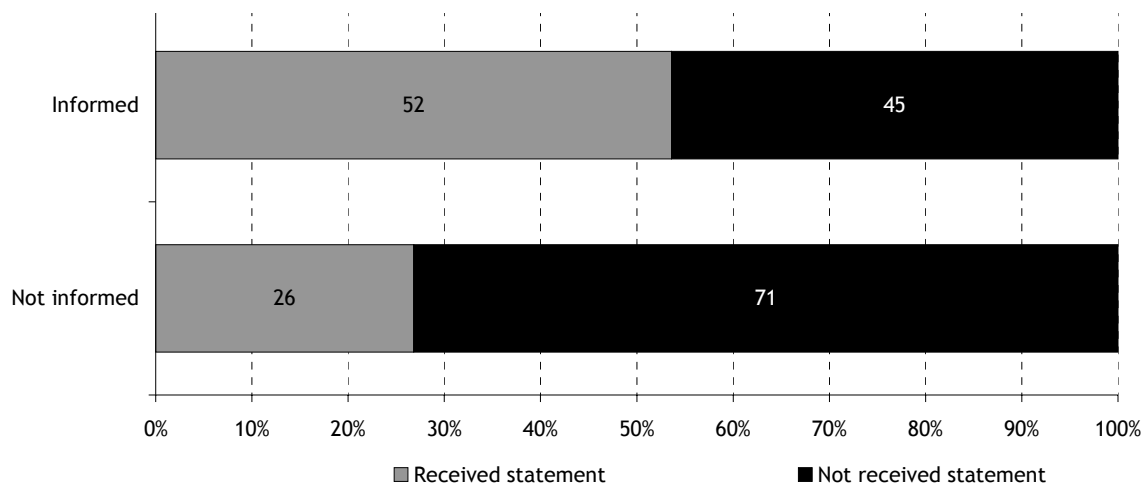
When asked whether they had received any financial statements showing the full cost of the course and how it had been paid for, just less than half the ALA learners said they had (45 per cent) and slightly more (52 per cent) said they had not.

Given that the survey fieldwork took place during the summer term of 2008, and most of the learners enrolled on their course between September and December 2007, this figure appears lower than we may have expected. It does not appear to be associated with limited awareness of being registered for an ALA as there is no significant difference according to whether learners recognised they had an ALA or felt well-informed about it.

Noting to have received a statement was more likely among those learners who said they had paid some or all of the course fees themselves (53 per cent reported they had received a statement, compared with 38 per cent of those who did not pay anything).

Figure 5.1 shows that learners who felt well-informed about the cost of their course and how this had been paid for were twice as likely as those who did not to have received a statement (52 per cent, compared with 26 per cent).

**Figure 5.1: Whether ALA learners had received a statement or not, by how well-informed they felt about the cost of their course**



Base: All ALA learners who felt informed about the cost of their course (643) or not (232)

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

### Almost all of those who received a statement found it easy to understand

Almost all the learners who noted that they had received a statement felt that it was very or fairly easy to understand (92 per cent), including over half who felt it was very

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easy to understand (55 per cent). Learners who felt well-informed about the ALA found it easier to understand the statement than those who did not (95 per cent, compared with 89 per cent). This emphasises the importance of keeping learners informed about the ALA. The relatively universal ease of understanding the statement (among those who recalled receiving one) suggests that providers' concerns about the potential for misunderstanding among learners were somewhat misfounded.

## 5.2 Progression IAG and likelihood of further learning

### 5.2.1 Background from the process evaluation

The majority of national and regional stakeholders identified access to independent IAG as one of the main elements of 'added value'. Many providers also emphasised the importance of independent IAG and that it could be a critical part of the learner experience. However, many providers felt this was something which they were offering to learners anyway.

*'For the candidates the in-depth advice and guidance is there. That is of massive benefit to clients. That's a good selling point in a way but across our other contracts we integrate advice and guidance anyway.'*

Learning provider (private, specialised provision)

A longer-term aim regarding learners is to improve retention rates and stimulate more progression from Level 3 to Level 4 (via more active modelling of access to and engagement with IAG towards the end of the Level 3 course). Several providers said that ALAs would result in a more systematic approach to delivering *ongoing* IAG to learners on particular courses such as Access to Higher Education (HE), which could eventually improve progression rates to Level 4.

### 5.2.2 Four learners in five likely to undertake further learning in the next three years

All learners were asked how likely or unlikely they were to undertake further learning (in addition to their current course) within the next three years. Four learners in five said they were likely to do so (84 per cent of ALA learners and 82 per cent of other Level 3 learners).

Table 5.1 shows that among ALA learners, those aged under-45, who had already completed their course, and who were satisfied with their learning experience, were more likely to say they would undertake further learning in future. Those most committed to further learning were not currently in paid work and from BME groups (among whom, 73 per cent and 77 per cent respectively said they were very likely to undertake further learning).

Table 5.1: Likelihood of further learning in next 3 years among ALA learners

	Base N	Very likely (%)	Fairly likely (%)	Unlikely (%)	Don't know (%)
<b>Age</b>					
19-34	532	68	18	13	1
35-44	224	62	25	13	1
45-54	105	50	20	26	4
55+	22**	27	41	32	-
<b>Work status</b>					
Employed	623	59	22	18	1
Not employed	261	73	17	8	2
<b>Ethnicity</b>					
White	667	58	22	18	2
BME	217	77	16	6	-
<b>Completion status</b>					
Still in learning	718	61	22	15	2
Dropped out	66	64	20	17	-
Completed	95	74	13	12	1
<b>Satisfaction with learning experience</b>					
Satisfied	771	64	21	14	1
Dissatisfied	72	49	15	28	8

*\*\*Very small base ineligible for significance testing*

*Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008*

### 5.2.3 Access to progression IAG was relatively high among both ALA and other Level 3 learners

Around three learners in five had received some form of IAG on further education, training or work opportunities they could do after their current course: 58 per cent of ALA learners and 63 per cent of other Level 3 learners.

#### Differences among ALA learners: access to progression IAG

Learners aged 19 to 34 were more likely than older learners to have received progression IAG (65 per cent) as were those not currently working (64 per cent).

Notably, learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were more likely than those who did not to have received progression IAG (Table 5.2). The most likely learners to have received progression IAG were those who got information about the ALA via the ALA helpline (78 per cent of whom had accessed progression IAG), suggesting they had been signposted to follow-up IAG services to use once they had started their course.

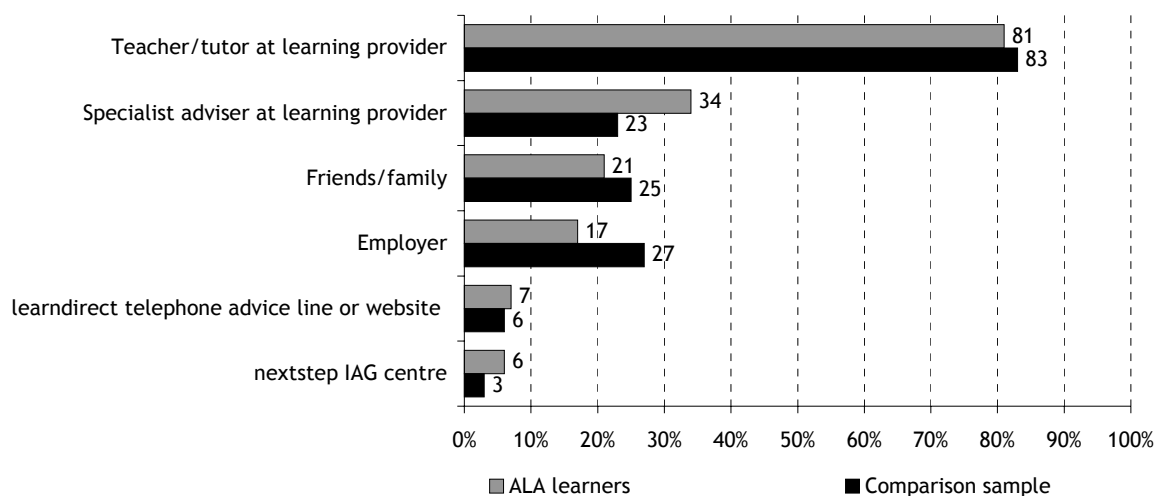
**Table 5.2: ALA learners' use of progression IAG since starting the course, by how well-informed they felt about the ALA**

	Well-informed (%)	Not well-informed (%)
Received progression IAG	64	52
Not received progression IAG	35	47
Don't know	1	1
Base (N)	427	370

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

### ALA learners more likely to access progression IAG via a specialist adviser

Figure 5.2 shows that ALA learners were more likely than other Level 3 learners who had received progression IAG, to have done so via a specialist adviser at their learning or training provider. This is a key 'added value' component of the ALA, therefore it will be important to follow up in Year 2 of the evaluation to ascertain whether accessing this type of IAG has an impact on actual progression unto further learning.

**Figure 5.2: Sources of progression IAG used, ALA learners and comparison sample, (mentions over 5 per cent)**

Base: All ALA learners (474) and comparison sample (248) who had received progression IAG

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

The information that ALA learners received about the Account clearly had an impact on how they subsequently got progression IAG. Learners who received information about the ALA via the helpline or via nextstep or learndirect were more likely to subsequently receive IAG from a specialist Adviser at their provider (58 per cent and 50 per cent respectively, compared with 36 per cent of those who got ALA information from their provider), whereas those who received initial information on ALAs from learndirect/ nextstep were more likely to also receive progression IAG from the same source (32 per cent compared with 14 per cent of ALA learners overall).



**Table 5.3: Where ALA learners received their progression IAG, by where they got information about ALAs**

	ALA helpline (%)	nextstep/ learndirect adviser (%)	Learning or training provider (%)	Local LSC (%)
Teacher/tutor at learning provider	84	82	83	75
Specialist adviser at learning provider	58	50	36	33
Friends or family	29	26	20	33
Employer	13	24	16	25
learndirect (telephone or website)	13	11	7	13
nextstep	10	21	7	17
Other source	19	5	7	4
Don't know/ can't remember	-	-	*	4
Base (N)	31	38	297	24**

\*\*very small base, ineligible for significance testing

Source: IES/ Ipsos MORI 2008

## Almost all learners who had received progression IAG found it useful

Almost all ALA and other Level 3 learners who had received progression IAG rated it as very or fairly useful (96 per cent and 97 per cent respectively). Among ALA learners, the most likely to have found this very useful were learners in BME groups (65 per cent) and those not currently working (62 per cent): importantly, both groups who were more likely to be interested in further study.

## 5.3 Perceived benefits of having an ALA

### 5.3.1 Background from the process evaluation

Many stakeholders felt that the 'virtual' nature of the ALA made it difficult to 'sell' to learners. This was consistently raised by all of the three main gatekeepers into opening an account (the national helpline, IAG providers, and learning providers). Providers themselves commented that ALA learners would not necessarily be getting anything 'additional' from their learning experience, other than access to a financial statement on the full costs of the course and how these had been covered:

*'If you had one person with an ALA sat next to another person without an ALA doing the same course, there would be no difference between them except that one person would know the full funding behind the course and the other wouldn't. It's hard to market to students when they're not getting anything extra compared with the person sitting next to them.'*

Learning provider (college, general provision)

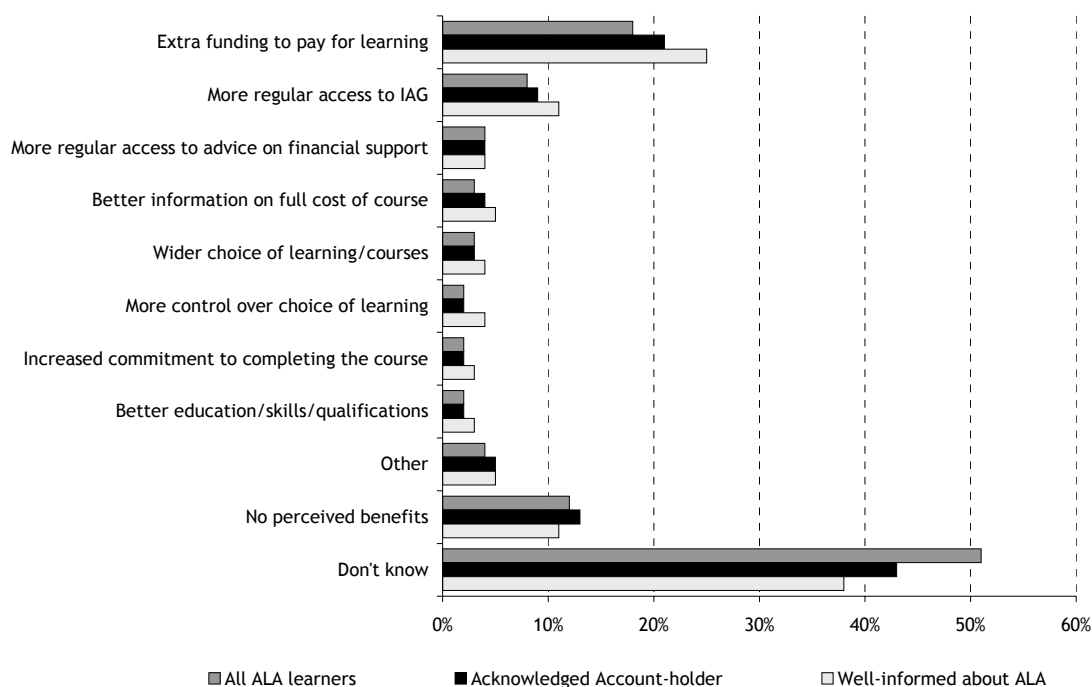
### 5.3.2 Can learners identify the benefits of having an ALA?

All ALA learners were asked what they perceived to be the benefits of having an ALA. A short description of the ALA was provided for those who were not aware that they were registered and had not heard of ALAs previously.

Figure 5.3 shows the results overall, by whether or not learners recognised they had an ALA, and by how well-informed they felt about it. Overall, half the ALA learners did not know what the benefits of having an ALA were (51 per cent): but this decreased to 43 per cent of those who were aware they had an ALA and 38 per cent of those who felt well-informed about it.

The most commonly mentioned perceived benefit of having an ALA was extra funding to pay for learning (cited by 18 per cent of all ALA learners). Those who recognised they had an ALA and who felt well-informed about the ALA were progressively more likely to cite this as a benefit, even though, in actual fact, ALA learners do not get any additional funding to pay for their course.

**Figure 5.3: Perceived benefits of having an ALA among ALA learners**



Base: All ALA learners (886); All acknowledged ALA learners (645); All who felt well informed about the ALA (453)

Source: IES/Ipsos MORI 2008

Figure 5.3 shows that learners who felt well-informed about the ALA were significantly more likely than those who did not to cite the planned benefits of having an Account: more regular access to IAG, better information on the cost/ value of their course, more control over their choice of learning; and increased commitment to completing the course. This underlines the importance of keeping learners well-

informed about ALAs. It will be important to ask this question again in Year 2 of the evaluation, in order to ascertain how far learners have an improved perception of the benefits of their Account.

There was no distinction between learners who had received a financial statement and those who had not.

#### Why did some learners say there were no perceived benefits?

Around one learner in ten said there were no perceived benefits of having an ALA (12 per cent) – this did not vary significantly by whether they knew they had one or by how well-informed they felt. When prompted further on this, the main reasons why learners cited ‘no perceived benefits’ were:

- the ALA was not relevant to them/ they had no need of it
- they did not know enough about it
- they could not get any direct financial support to pay for learning, via the Account.

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## 6 Conclusions and Implications: Year 1

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In this section we summarise the key learning points from Year 1 of the ALA evaluation and identify further issues for follow-up in Year 2.

### 6.1 Conclusions from Year 1

#### 6.1.1 What are the ALA trials trying to test?

ALA trials are testing a set of hypotheses about the benefits of having an Adult Learner Account. The aims of the ALA trials are summarised in Chapter 1 of this report. These objectives mean that, in comparison to other Level 3 learners, we might expect ALA learners to be:

- more likely to have independent, pre-learning IAG
- more likely to have a choice of provision
- more likely to know about the full cost of their course and how this has been paid
- more likely to be offered progression IAG.

As a result, the hypothesis is that ALA learners will have a better learning experience (ie be more satisfied), have higher attainment / retention levels, and be more likely to progress to further learning.

#### 6.1.2 Key messages from Year 1 of the evaluation

Regarding the hypotheses listed above, findings from the Year 1 learner survey indicate that:

- ALA learners were no more likely to have had pre-entry IAG or to feel that they had a choice about which course they did or which learning provider they used. There was a degree of mis-match between the ALA learner journey as originally conceived and what happened in practice for those learners starting their courses

in September 2007. This meant that access to upfront independent IAG before enrolment, *through* an ALA, was limited, as most learners identified a course, and enrolled on it, before they were identified or registered as having an Account.

- ALA learners were more likely to feel well-informed about the full cost of their course and how this had been paid for, and this was more likely among those who reported they had received a statement (even so, a majority of other Level 3 learners also felt well-informed about the cost of their course, as did a majority of ALA learners who reported they had not received a statement). The financial statement showing the full value of the course and how it has been paid for is key to one of the main ideas behind the policy – that learners who appreciate the full value of their course will feel more committed and be more likely to complete it. It is therefore important to ensure that all ALA learners get a regular statement. The time lag in sending out statements (which was caused by the time taken for providers to register learners on the LAMS system) may mean that the impact of getting a statement has been reduced because drop-out is more likely during the initial stages of a course and learners did not start getting statements until November onwards.
- There were no differences between ALA learners and other Level 3 learners on satisfaction with the learning experience overall, or the range of support learners had been given by their provider. (Satisfaction was high among both groups).
- It is too early to tell whether there are any differences in learner retention or attainment.
- There is no difference as yet on use of progression IAG, although the nature of progression IAG provision does appear to be different for ALA learners, who are more likely to have received this from a specialist adviser at their learning provider.

### 6.1.3 Why is there little difference between experiences of ALA and other Level 3 learners?

There were some early issues with the implementation of the ALA trials which meant that the main window for providers to market ALAs alongside their August-September enrolment window was missed. Among some providers (mainly colleges, which have the bulk of their enrolments in September) this, combined with delays caused by the need for dual-entry MI, resulted in a retrospective 'catch-up' in which learners were enrolled on Accounts after they had already started their course.

The survey has found that among around one-quarter of ALA learners (27 per cent), there is an 'information gap' in terms of whether they realised they were registered on an ALA or not, ie although the MI indicated they were registered, they were not themselves aware of this. Evidence from the process evaluation suggests that this is because some learners were enrolled on the ALA retrospectively.

Just over half the ALA learners felt well-informed about the ALA. However, around half did not feel well-informed. Evidence shows that learners who received upfront information via a specialist adviser or the ALA helpline felt the most well-informed about the ALA: these are learners who most closely followed the design of the learner journey, as it was originally conceived.

Providers were both the most common way that learners first heard about ALAs and the most common source of information about them. Not all learners will have the need or inclination to visit an IAG specialist at their learning provider and therefore it is likely that individual course tutors need to be better informed about the ALA in order to make learners more aware of them and any additional IAG or other support that may be on offer.

More fundamentally, and as many of the providers raised in the process evaluation, ALAs are mainly a 'virtual' product being tested, about which few learners could articulate the benefits. In some ways this could be anticipated given that the process evaluation found that all of the learner-facing stakeholders (providers, ALA helpline, nextstep) identified difficulties in 'selling' the benefits of having an Account. Better understanding among learners will be achieved through better information – but also, having something tangible associated with the Account, as concrete evidence to learners of what the benefits are. Currently, the only tangible thing associated with the Account as such is the financial statement and only half of ALA learners reported having received one of those, at the time of the survey. It may help learners to understand the benefits of having an ALA if some way of associating opportunities for progression IAG and additional support (such as information on financial support for learning, like the ALG) can be more explicitly linked to having an Account.

## 6.2 Issues for Year 2 of the evaluation

Year 2 of the learner survey will follow up those who agreed to be re-contacted in order to monitor their experiences and assess the impact of having an ALA over full duration of their course (among those on 2-year courses) or in terms of progression to further learning (among those who have already completed). Issues for examination include:

- Whether learners' awareness of having an Account increases
- Whether more learners can identify the benefits of having an Account
- Whether more learners have had access to a financial statement
- Whether more learners have had access to progression IAG – and where from – has this increased and has it led to progression?
- Whether learner satisfaction with the support they have received and with their learning experience overall has been maintained or increased

- Learner perception that their course is value for money, and willingness to invest in further learning
- Completion/ drop out rates over time (including analysis using the ILR).

An issue for Year 2 of the evaluation will be the roll-out of Skills Account pilots in the same regions as the Adult Learner Account trials. Where possible, those learners who have an ALA will be ring-fenced so that they do not receive communications on Skills Accounts. This should help to 'isolate' any impacts of the ALA from the introduction of Skills Accounts.

Learning and Skills Council  
**National Office**

Cheylesmore House  
Quinton Road  
Coventry CV1 2WT  
T 0845 019 4170  
F 024 7682 3675  
[www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)

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