

Provider Perceptions regarding Non-Achievement on Work Based Learning Programmes

Research Report

prepared for

Learning and Skills Council Devon and Cornwall

by

IFF Research Ltd

16 June 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
	Research objectives	1
	Methodology.....	2
2	MANAGEMENT SUMMARY	3
	The main reasons for non-completion of WBL programmes.....	3
	Very early leaving.....	4
	Under Supported leavers	5
	Ad hoc leavers.....	5
	‘Nearly there’ leavers	6
	Concluding remarks	6
3	REASONS FOR NON-ACHIEVEMENT / NON-COMPLETION	7
	Reasons for early leaving (leavers).....	7
	Reasons for early leaving (LSC staff)	9
	Early leaving (providers)	9
4	THE VERY EARLY LEAVER	13
	Why do learners become Very Early Leavers?	13
	Who typically becomes a Very Early Leaver?.....	13
	What are the key challenges that Very Early Leavers present to providers?	15
	What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Very Early Leaving?	16
	Summary of recommendations for preventing Very Early Leaving	19
5	THE UNDER SUPPORTED LEAVER	20
	Why do learners become Under Supported Leavers?	20
	Who typically becomes a Under Supported Leaver?	21
	What are the key challenges that Under Supported Leavers present to providers?.....	22
	What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Under Supported Leaving?	23
	Summary of recommendations for preventing / reducing Under Supported Leaving ...	26

6 THE AD HOC LEAVER	27
Why do learners become Ad Hoc Leavers?	27
Who typically becomes an Ad Hoc leaver?.....	28
What are the key challenges that Ad Hoc Leavers present to providers?.....	28
What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Ad Hoc Leaving?	29
Summary of recommendations for preventing Ad Hoc Leaving	30
7 THE NEARLY THERE LEAVER	31
Why do learners become Nearly There Leavers?.....	31
Who typically becomes a Nearly There Leaver?	31
What are the key challenges that Nearly There Leavers present to providers?	34
What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Nearly There Leaving?.....	35
Summary of recommendations for Preventing Nearly There Leaving	39
Appendix A: The Topic Guide.....	40

Provider Perceptions regarding Non-Achievement on Work Based Learning Programmes

Research report prepared for **LSC Devon and Cornwall** by **IFF Research Ltd**

16 June 2005

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Learning and Skills Council Devon and Cornwall (LSCDC) management information indicates that approximately half of learners who start a work based learning (WBL) programme in the region do not achieve an NVQ, and only around a third achieve the full framework. This represents significant wastage, especially given that a large proportion of payment to training providers is based around starts and being on-programme.
- 1.2 In the past much of the focus has been about how to attract sufficient numbers of young people to WBL programmes. Clearly this issue remains important, but with the LSC nationally changing the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target from starts to completions, this has brought increased attention to the issue of how completion rates can be improved.
- 1.3 Research that has been carried out both locally and nationally among WBL learners sheds light on the reasons leavers give for not completing the programme, and also the related issues of what they knew about the programme when they started and what support was available and was needed. Research conducted for DCLSC in 2005 showed that only around a quarter of early leavers sought advice before leaving. For this reason, the views of providers as to the reasons for non-completion may be very different to those provided by learners as a whole.

Research objectives

- 1.4 The key objective of the research was to examine the provider perspective on reasons for early leaving and non-completion of Work Based Learning programmes, and to compare these reasons to those suggested by learners themselves. From the wider perspective, the study sought to understand how to increase completion rates for achievement of full frameworks and to reduce early leaving / non-completion.

- 1.5 More specifically the research objectives were to:
- Examine why providers think that early leavers do not complete, and how they establish the reasons behind non-completion
 - Identify any differences in the pattern of early leaving by the programme type, occupational sector or demographic or other variables
 - Identify the main points or stages of WBL programmes at which early leaving takes place, and to assess whether reasons for leaving vary by the stage at which it happens
 - Assess the impact of Key Skills and Technical Certificates in non-achievement
 - Assess what providers do, or would like to do, to prevent early leaving, what has worked effectively and whether this varies by the type of leaving they are facing
 - Examine what might improve achievement and completion.

Methodology

- 1.6 A qualitative approach was adopted for the study involving 20 depth interviews with both private and public training providers in Devon and Cornwall delivering WBL programmes.
- 1.7 Of the 20 discussions with providers, five took place in person at the premises of the training provider, and the remainder were conducted by telephone. Interviews lasted between 40 minutes and an hour on average. The topic guide for the survey is appended.
- 1.8 The sample for the survey was provided by LSCDC, and the twenty interviews were obtained from 23 names supplied. No quotas were set, although the sample was monitored to ensure a broadly representative mix of public and private providers (8 public and 12 private). The providers covered a wide range of occupational areas, with some offering learning in just one area and others, such as FE colleges, covering an extensive range of programmes. Similarly their number of current WBL learners varied greatly, from under 50 learners to in excess of 1,000.

2 Management summary

2.1 Devon and Cornwall LSC commissioned IFF Research to undertake a qualitative research project examining the views of providers as to the reasons for non-completion of Work Based Learning (WBL) programmes. This is in the context of almost half of learners who start WBL programmes in Devon and Cornwall not achieving an NVQ, and of only around a third achieving the full framework.

2.2 The specific research objectives were to:

- Examine why providers think that early leavers do not complete, and how they establish the reasons behind non-completion
- Identify any differences in the pattern of early leaving by the programme type, occupational sector or demographic or other variables
- Identify the main points or stages of WBL programmes at which early leaving takes place, and to assess whether reasons for leaving vary by the stage at which it happens
- Assess the impact of Key Skills and Technical Certificates in non-achievement
- Assess what providers do, or would like to do, to prevent early leaving, what has worked effectively and whether this varies by the type of leaving they are facing
- Examine what might improve achievement and completion.

2.3 The qualitative project involved 20 depth interviews with WBL providers (both public and private sector) within Devon and Cornwall. Five of these were conducted face-to-face.

The main reasons for non-completion of WBL programmes

2.4 The reasons for non-completion given by providers largely reflected the key reasons mentioned by both early leavers themselves (in the 2005 Devon and Cornwall Learner Satisfaction Survey) and by LSC Skills Development Officers. The following list indicates what providers perceive to be the main reasons for early leaving:

- The financial incentive associated with changing jobs
- Learners changing their mind about the occupational area
- Learners changing their mind about WBL
- Change of personal circumstances for the learner, including pregnancy, moving away and family problems

- Learners and / or the employers only valuing the NVQ, not the other elements such as Key Skills
- Learners not wanting to sit end exams or be in a classroom environment
- Learners not being happy in their job, having issues with their employer or poor general employer engagement
- Learners not being fully committed at start of course, or their not fully understanding what the course would entail
- The length of time required to complete the course being longer than expected
- Learners losing their job
- Learners having ASN/ALN and struggling with elements of the programme
- Staff changes within the employer organisation leading to difficulties in arranging training provider contact visits
- Learners having health problems

2.5 The reason for leaving was quite strongly associated with the stage during the programme at which the leaving took place, and there appear to be four main groups of leaver:

- very early leavers
- 'unsupported or under-supported leavers',
- 'ad hoc or troubled leavers', and
- 'nearly there leavers'.

Very early leaving

2.6 Very early leaving was felt by providers to have reduced over recent years, although there are still learners who find that the course is not as they hoped or expected, lack motivation, or are tempted away by a better job offer early on in their course. Improving induction is the key strategy for reducing very early leaving, and probationary periods or taster days were felt to be a good way to ensure learners were fully aware of what the course entailed, prior to signing up. More detailed induction procedures, or staggered inductions, which allow learners time to absorb and consider all the information induction entails, were also felt to be helpful. Procedures to pick up signs of early leaving (and act upon them), and better communication with employers to ensure their support were also useful means of combating very premature leaving.

Under Supported leavers

- 2.7 Learners who may leave due to a lack of support tend to leave midway through or towards the end of programmes. This was generally seen by providers in terms of a lack of *employer* support and was felt to affect some sectors more than others, partly due to the differing cultures around training. It was felt that this type of leaving was particularly likely to affect those with additional support needs, for example the less academically able.
- 2.8 Putting effort into building employer engagement was seen as the main means of tackling this issue, and making sure training was relevant and as tailored as possible to their business was seen as a key way to win employer support. Some providers also offered incentives for employers and their staff for supporting learners, for example subsidised training.
- 2.9 The relationship between the learner and the training provider contact was seen as being just as important as between the learner and employer / supervisor. Engaging someone in a specialist support role and having rigorous systems to identify any additional learner support needs, be they social or learning needs, was also essential for providing appropriate support. Delivering Key Skills and the Technical Certificate in an interactive way, and in a non-threatening (non-exam like) environment were also key for supporting this cohort.

Ad hoc leavers

- 2.10 Ad Hoc leaving covers a whole variety of reasons, such as moving house, pregnancy, sickness and changing job. Those on longer programmes were felt to be at the greatest risk from this type of leaving, which can happen at any time throughout the programme. Although in many cases this kind of leaving was felt to be out of the provider's ability to influence, learners changing job for higher pay (where this was often into jobs with few prospects) was an area that could be tackled. Attempting to persuade employers of the potential benefits (in terms of higher retention) of rewarding learners through increased pay when they complete certain elements of the programme was one approach. Others felt that emphasising at induction the medium and longer term salary and career prospects if learners achieve their WBL qualification could help reduce this kind of early leaving.

'Nearly there' leavers

- 2.11 'Nearly There' leaving is one of the more difficult types of leaving for providers, and it is still fairly common for learners to leave after completing the NVQ element, without achieving the Key Skills and Technical Certificate. It seems that there is still a cultural division between the NVQ and these other elements (this in the eyes of learners, employers and even among some provider staff). The degree of this type of leaving was again felt to vary by sector, and in some sectors the NVQ was seen as central with full framework achievement bringing little additional benefits.
- 2.12 Many providers have attempted to include Key Skills and Technical Certificates as a more holistic element in the programme rather than as an 'add on'. Other methods for encouraging completion of Key Skills and Technical Certificates include demonstrating the relevance of these aspects to employers, making assignments relevant within the workplace, making delivery and testing fun, portable and interactive, and looking at ways to combine the elements together to minimise the work required.

Concluding remarks

- 2.13 Overall, while most providers felt that they had taken significant steps to try to reduce non-completion on WBL programmes, and that there had been some success in this regard over recent years, nearly all felt that there was still plenty of scope for further reducing early leaving. Most recognised that this issue will become of increasing importance as the LSC targets move to completions rather than starts.

3 Reasons for Non-Achievement / Non-Completion

3.1 In this chapter we examine the main reasons that providers say explain early leaving from WBL programmes. This is done at a fairly 'headline' level since later chapters examine these issues in much more depth. First we provide comparison information from early leavers themselves, results presented being from the 2005 Learners' Satisfaction study conducted by IFF for LSCDC. We also present what LSC staff feel are the main reasons for early leaving.

Reasons for early leaving (leavers)

3.2 The LSCDC's Learners' Satisfaction Study conducted by IFF Research in 2005 involved a total of 1,250 interviews with learners. Of these 168 had left their programme early. Hence overall 13% of the sample of learners had left their programme before completing it. Perhaps a better measure of the level of early leaving (given the large proportion still on programme who may or may not complete) is the ratio of leavers who are early leavers. In 2005, 33% of all those interviewed who had left their programme were non-completers.

3.3 This varied hugely by programme as follows:

- 57% of E2E leavers were early Leavers
- 29% of Apprenticeship leavers were early leavers
- 28% of Advanced Apprenticeship leavers were early leavers
- Only 14% of NVQ leavers were early leavers (note low base sizes).

- 3.4 When asked why they had left early, a wide variety of reasons were given, with no one particular reason standing out. Findings suggest that the reasons for early leaving have remained broadly consistent over the last few years (comparative results for 2004 are shown in brackets). Listed are the reasons given by 5% or more in 2005:
- Not enjoying the programme: 19% (20%)
 - Not suited to the programme: 18% (13%)
 - Got a job: 14% (15%)
 - Laid off / the company going bankrupt / sacked: 9% (12%)
 - Health problems: 5% (7%)
 - Pregnancy / parenting issues: 5% (less than 0.5%).
- 3.5 Clearly the reasons given mix those which neither the employer nor the provider could reasonably be expected to be able to influence (health / pregnancy etc), those which relate mainly to the relationship between the learner and the employer (e.g. getting sacked) and then those that the provider has the potential to influence, such as not feeling they are suited to or their not enjoying the programme.
- 3.6 Reasons were found to vary relatively little by programme type, although Apprenticeship learners were more likely than others to leave because they were not enjoying the programme (23%), or because they felt they weren't suited to it (23%), whereas the most common reason for E2E Early Leavers to leave was because they got a job (24%).

Reasons for early leaving (LSC staff)

- 3.7 When Skills Development Managers were asked what they considered to be the key reasons for non-completion, many responses centred on the employer role and the influence they have over the learner's progress. LSC personnel saw the major reasons for early leaving as being:
- Employers not valuing Key Skills and Technical Certificates, and, related to this, many employers only really valuing the NVQ
 - Employers failing to support learners
 - Staff changes within the employer organisation leading to difficulties in arranging training provider contact visits
 - Staff turnover within the training provider organisations unsettling learners and leading to poor planning of assessments
 - Learners failing to attend off-the-job training sessions
 - Learners failing Key Skills tests and giving up after a number of re-sits
 - Learners not wanting to take end tests
 - Learners changing their minds and deciding that they do not wish to continue with the qualification or vocational area.

Early leaving (providers)

How are reasons for early leaving monitored by providers?

- 3.8 The qualitative research conducted amongst providers indicated that a variety of methods are used to monitor the reasons for early leaving. The majority rely on asking early leavers to fill out a short questionnaire or form, or attempting to discuss the reasons for leaving in a telephone call. Both approaches depend of course on being able to contact the leaver and getting their co-operation, and most admitted that they would benefit both from collecting greater detail and in getting this information from a greater number of early leavers. Some also felt that more specific outcome codes are needed on the LSC's forms.
- 3.9 Whilst almost all providers aim to conduct exit interviews wherever possible, they report varying levels of success with tracing early leavers, something which appears to be directly related to the tenacity of the provider. Those who only post out a self-completion questionnaire report a poor response rate, whereas persistent telephone calls seem to eventually achieve their aim.

- 3.10 A point to note here is that although contact with the learner is needed to monitor the 'final' reason for early leaving, there are many cases where learners at risk of early leaving have been identified, and in these cases, even if no post-programme contact is made, the reasons leading the learner to be deemed at risk are known by the provider.
- 3.11 A minority had developed more formalised monitoring methods, such as employing staff in a dedicated monitoring role or holding a meeting between the learner, employer and training provider contact to examine the reasons for leaving. If the learner was not available the views of the training provider contacts and employers were still sought, either through a formal meeting or through a questionnaire. This information would then be used when considering placing future learners with employers.

How many cases of early leaving are discussed with the provider first?

- 3.12 The quantitative research conducted for the LSCDC amongst learners found that around half of early leavers had discussed their future options with their employer or provider, and hence did not simply 'walk away' from the programme on the spur of the moment and disappear without trace. Providers confirm that cases where learners simply disappear are becoming increasingly rare, and that it is more common that a dialogue between the learner and the provider occurs before the early leaving.
- 3.13 The degree to which it is possible for providers to monitor the reasons for early leaving vary by the point at which the learner leaves. On the whole, providers were more informed about very early or very late leaving scenarios. For very early leavers this was because a number of providers had relatively sophisticated procedures in place such as a 'traffic light' warning system and an 'at risk register' (both of which are discussed in the following chapter). For those leaving relatively near to completion, in the majority of cases a good rapport and relationship had been built up between learner and provider (and the employer), increasing the likelihood that a discussion takes place with the learner.
- 3.14 Overall, given that there are many cases of early leaving where providers are unable to make contact with the learner, we would not expect the provider perspective on early leaving to necessarily be entirely consistent with the learner perspective.

Provider perspective on reasons for early leaving

- 3.15 While the provider survey did not seek to quantify the reasons why learners leave their WBL programme early, it was possible to obtain an impression of the frequency by which particular reasons were experienced. The following list indicates what providers perceive to be the main reasons for early leaving, in order of importance:
- The financial incentive associated with changing jobs
 - Learners changing their mind about the occupational area
 - Learners changing their mind about WBL
 - Change of personal circumstances for the learner, including pregnancy, moving away and family problems
 - Learners and / or the employers only valuing the NVQ, not the other elements such as Key Skills
 - Learners not wanting to sit end exams or be in a classroom environment
 - Learners not being happy in their job, having issues with their employer or poor general employer engagement
 - Learners not being fully committed at start of course, or their not fully understanding what the course would entail
 - The length of time required to complete the course being longer than expected
 - Learners losing their job
 - Learners having ASN/ALN and struggling with elements of the programme
 - Staff changes within the employer organisation leading to difficulties in arranging training provider contact visits
 - Learners having health problems
- 3.16 Finding a new job and no longer enjoying the chosen programme were commonly mentioned by both learners and providers. However, a number of reasons that were perceived by providers to have a notable effect on completion rates were much less commonly mentioned by learners. These include specific problems with employers and explicit mentions of the Key Skills or Technical Certificate (though it could be that learners struggle to extricate dissatisfaction with these elements from 'not enjoying/not suited to the programme').

Stages and types of early leaving

- 3.17 The diverse reasons for early leaving listed above are often very closely linked with the point in the programme at which early leaving occurs. Furthermore, providers perceive that reasons often cluster together, with some reasons proving either masks or catalysts for other reasons.
- 3.18 Four relatively discrete groups of early leavers emerged when analysing the provider perspective on early leaving. The groups can be defined as follows:
- Very early leavers (leaving within the first ten to twelve weeks of the programme)
 - Unsupported or under-supported leavers (leaving at various points in programme, mainly middle/end)
 - Ad hoc or troubled leavers (leaving at various points in programme – often middle/ end)
 - Nearly there leavers (leaving once they have completed the NVQ element but not the full framework)
- 3.19 These groups are very difficult to quantify within the scope of the survey, though it is possible to say that generally speaking providers felt that very early leaving was becoming much less common, and that they had recently started to make headway on the ‘nearly there’ leavers. The un- or under supported leavers and the ad hoc/troubled leavers are both relatively large groups which hold significant challenges for providers.
- 3.20 The next four chapters of the report discuss each of these groups in turn, and detail their characteristics, outline the challenges that they present to providers and seek to suggest what can be done to combat the causes for their early leaving.

4 The Very Early Leaver

Why do learners become Very Early Leavers?

- 4.1 The majority of providers agreed that leaving very early in the programme was becoming increasingly rare, as most had realised this was a period of high risk and put procedures in place to try and avoid this happening. However, some very early leaving occurs, which can usually be attributed to one or more of the following:
- finding that the job role is not what the learner hoped or expected
 - finding the course is not as they anticipated, for example feeling unprepared for the requirements of the course
 - lacking motivation, often resulting from having chosen the programme as something of a last resort or at least second best
 - finding / being offered an alternative job or better paid role.

Who typically becomes a Very Early Leaver?

- 4.2 Although very early leaving is relatively uncommon, it was generally felt to be more likely to affect the very youngest learners (those aged just 16 particularly). In part this was because older learners generally appreciate more the importance of qualifications. They may also have done some training already and be re-entering training, making them more aware of the kind of issues that can be a surprise to learners early in the programme.
- 4.3 One provider commented that very early leaving is much more common amongst learners who join a course at a slightly unusual time (i.e. not at the main 'intake' periods, such as September). This was because of the learners tend to be in smaller learning groups (so the social side of the study, which the National Learning Satisfaction Study showed to be so important to learners is perhaps lacking), and also that the very fact they joined later may suggest that they were less sure about what they were undertaking as a possible career, and had perhaps 'fallen' or been 'pushed' into it.

- 4.4 Certain occupational areas are more susceptible to very early leaving. *Retail* was felt to be particularly vulnerable, as it can often be less of a 'vocation' than other areas and more the sort of career area that people may enter if they are unsure what they 'really' want to do. After a short period of training learners may change their mind, or get a job within the same occupational area which is higher paid and does not involve training.
- 4.5 An uninformed or unrealistic expectation of job role can often cause very early leaving. Providers felt that this is often the case in *animal care*. One provider spoke of learners thinking it would be 'looking after cuddly animals all day long', when the reality it can be 'more menial tasks, like yard duties, or repetitive jobs'.
- 4.6 The same was true for *childcare* courses, where providers felt that some very early leaving was attributable to the occupational area being more demanding than learners had anticipated:

'Childcare is a problem. People were leaving because they came to it with the wrong expectations...it wasn't what they thought it was. I think the key problem is that if people choose a course like construction they expect it to be hard work. People enter childcare with the view that it is going to be playing with children, whereas the reality is different, and they become disillusioned.'

What are the key challenges that Very Early Leavers present to providers?

- 4.7 Imparting accurate and thorough information at the induction stage is vital in ensuring the learner has a realistic view of what the programme will entail. However, a minority of providers felt this to be a complex issue; giving too thorough an induction was sometimes felt to deter learners from beginning the course (the introduction of targeting on complete frameworks, rather than starts, will probably bring about a change in this perception).

'They take a basic skills test, then we go through the details with them, show them how a portfolio will work, how they can build it up, how it is related to their employment, and talk through the Key Skills without putting them off. We go through it, but try to be wary that we don't out them off.'

Although most providers had put some effort into improving their induction procedures, many still felt there were difficulties with the overload of information. Despite staff carrying out thorough inductions not all of it could 'sink in' with the learner, especially information relating to the length of the course (it was felt that this was particularly difficult for a 16 year old to comprehend). As one provider put it *'we have to tell them more and more; equal opportunities, appeals etc, and there comes a stage where they are just drunk on information'*.

- 4.8 Educating both the employer and the learner in what will be expected of them is paramount in combating very early leaving. The majority admitted that 'more could be done' at the induction stage to clearly communicate to and engage both groups.
- 4.9 It may be that learners start a programme in an area of learning that is not suitable for them, and that with guidance they could be restarted in a different occupational area or programme. However, in the cases of very early leaving, it was felt that advice or guidance was seldom sought or received, possibly because a strong relationship with the training provider contact has yet to be formed. The impact of this is usually that there is no real opportunity to encourage the learners to continue with their chosen course, or assist them in changing to a more suitable course.

What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Very Early Leaving?

- 4.10 Most providers felt considerable progress had been made in combating very early leaving, and some felt that it was no longer a real issue within their organisations. Those that had enjoyed real success in this area had made changes to:
- Selection and induction procedures to ensure both learners and employers were fully committed and informed;
 - Methods of assessing the suitability of the learner to their chosen programme/area of learning;
 - Strategies to identify learners who may be at risk from the very beginning of learning;
 - Frequency of visits by training provider contacts in the very early stages of the programme being increased to build relationships quickly and solve any initial problems.
- 4.11 A few providers offered 'probation' periods for learners, and these providers spoke extremely positively of the idea. In these cases, learners are inducted and the course begins as usual, but the provider does not actually sign them up and apply for funding until the training provider contact feels that the course is right for the learner, and that the learner is both settled and committed. During this time they may receive extra visits, and be given small tasks to complete, and any failures to do so would result in making an 'action plan' to encourage them to complete the task by the next visit.
- 4.12 The obvious disadvantage of this from the provider perspective is that there is no financial incentive for this activity, although some have got round this in part by asking the employer to contribute towards learner travel costs during this period. The advantages are that the learner can sample the area of work as well as the course, whilst the training provider contact can monitor them quite closely and look out, and tackle, any early warning signs. Other providers had not gone quite as far as offering a full probation, but tried to provide 'taster' days, to allow the learner to at least gauge what the job may be like on a day-to-day basis and whether they thought the environment would suit them.

- 4.13 Other providers, some of whom had not implemented these procedures, spoke of making induction procedures more detailed, with extended discussion of individualised learning plans, and a series of assessments such as vocational awareness tests to both manage their expectations and check their aptitude for the career they wish to pursue. Some felt that quite a large concern was ensuring that learners were actually capable of completing the course they had chosen. If a learner did wish to partake in a course that was more than a level above their current one, most providers felt that there were pathways available to raise their skills to the required standard.
- 4.14 One provider had tried to tackle the problem of making the induction process manageable through implementing a two, or even three stage induction process. On the first occasion they may watch a video about the training and the provider and have a talk and do some of the tests, whilst on the follow up session they may have a practical session and an interview. The provider who offered the more extended three stage induction described the process:
- 'They do the first sign-up, then have a week to think about it. Then we do some testing, and at the third stage put together their personal learning plan. All that is before they go on the actual programme, so they can see what it is about, and what is expected of them. It also gives the employer a chance to see what is expected of them.'*
- 4.15 Another spoke of trying to focus staff training for induction around the fact it is something to do 'with' the learner rather than 'to' them, so should be interactive wherever possible, rather than a monologue of details from the person giving the induction.
- 4.16 Providers felt that more could be done to improve understanding of WBL amongst Connexions advisers. A handful believed that learners were not receiving accurate information or adequate advice from Connexions, and as a consequence were susceptible to very early leaving.
- 4.17 It was felt that for reducing very early leaving one of the key elements of was to be able to react quickly to any emerging issues and begin to solve them immediately. The 'traffic light' system was one of the most common ways to pick up, and monitor problems early, and a learner may be placed on amber or red if they continually 'forgot' their portfolio, took time off work frequently, did not seem to be progressing at work, or seemed unhappy in any way. Amber would indicate the need for closer vigilance and perhaps extra visits (some felt up to once a week in the early stages), while red would prompt a meeting between employer, learner and training provider contact or even a change of job role if this was seen as necessary.
-

- 4.18 Other organisations had an ‘at risk’ register rather than a traffic light system, and one had a specific retention officer who worked with learners from the very start of the induction process to determine whether there were any risk factors that may need to be monitored within the early weeks and throughout the course. These factors are not necessarily to do with the attitude or ability of the learner, but can be to do with logistical issues that have often proved to be barriers to completion. This is assessed through the completion of a form during induction, which is later analysed:

‘On day one everyone completes a form, after which some people will go on an “at risk” register...we ask them how far they have to travel to get here, and general questions about their work environment. If they say they have to travel twenty five miles and get two buses for example, we immediately put them down as at risk in case they give up.’

- 4.19 Having a strong staffing structure and clear procedures for addressing issues was felt to be vital to support the traffic light system or any other means of preventing early leaving. One such system was that each vocational team had a senior staff member who held short weekly meetings to go through any ‘at risk’ cases. This was followed by a weekly management meeting to discuss the solutions to the problems, and what should be done about to prevent early leaving, as well as agreeing an action plan to put actions into motion immediately.
- 4.20 On the employer side, it was very common to have some form of employer charter that had to be signed by the employer, which confirmed the employers understanding of the requirements of the course and what their commitments were (such as permitting day release), along with statutory requirement such as a health and safety inspection.
- 4.21 One provider mentioned a further means of encouraging employer ‘buy in’ at this stage, which is to outline the standards employers must attain to be eligible for European Social Funding for tools or clothing, thereby giving employers a financial incentive to raise standards for the learner.

Summary of recommendations for preventing Very Early Leaving

- **Probation periods and taster courses, though clearly having a resource implication, allow the learner to gain an increased understanding of both the demands of the occupational area and the workload**
- **Induction taking place over a number of shorter sessions can reduce information overload and increase the chance of the information 'sinking in'. Sessions needs to involve the learner as much as possible, as opposed to information simply being imparted**
- **Checking aptitude for the programme and area of learning through occupational skill tests and assessments is the ideal**
- **Implement procedures to pick up at risk warning signs and act on them rapidly, ensuring these are communicated effectively and consistently amongst all staff**
- **Ensure that employers sign and understand an Employer Charter and look at ways to make participating in training programmes more advantageous for them**

5 The Under Supported Leaver

Why do learners become Under Supported Leavers?

5.1 By an un or under supported leaver we mean those where the provider indicates that a key contributory factor behind their leaving are such factors as:

- A lack of support from employers is provided to the learner;
- This lack of support from employers is not identified and resolved by the training provider contact;
- An effective relationship is not built up between learner and training provider contact;
- Learners with additional needs or those less academically able are not identified early in the programme.

5.2 Although these leavers typically leave midway or nearer to the end of the programme, the causes of their leaving are likely to have been in place in the early stages of the programme.

'Early leaving can be to do with historic poor support, even if it has been improved a great deal by the point of leaving. It is so important to have good support right from the start.'

5.3 A lack of support from *employers* was felt by providers to be by far the main cause of learners feeling un- or under-supported. In theory, employers should have signed a charter stating that they will provide the time and help to assist the learner with their qualification, but this does not always happen in practice once the course is underway. The most serious instance of lack of support from employers is seen by most providers as not allowing learners their day release, and, in the most extreme cases, actively discouraging them from achieving the full framework. Conversely, strong support from employers was felt to have a strongly positive effect, and increase the chances of a learner completing:

'They definitely influence the learner, there's no doubt about it. They are vital. If the employer is committed, the chance of getting the NVQ is very good, and vice versa.'

5.4 Poor support from the provider was, perhaps unsurprisingly, less often mentioned, but a couple did admit that staffing problems or organisational change had been damaging for learners.

- 5.5 Where learning difficulties existed, a general dislike of academic work was often a problem, and the Key Skills and Technical Certificate aspects of the training programme were particularly unappealing. A lack of support in completing theoretical work was often a key barrier to completion.

Who typically becomes a Under Supported Leaver?

- 5.1 The majority of providers felt that under supported leavers did not seem to fall into any particular demographic groupings, as this was a problem more in the delivery than the type of person affected by it.
- 5.2 Employers in some sectors were perceived to be less supportive of learners completing their WBL programme than employers in other areas of learning:
- The *retail* sector, which providers felt was often understaffed leading to employers lacking time to encourage and support learners, and in extreme cases showing reluctance to release learners for assessment meetings and day release;
 - In *animal care*, a minority of providers felt that some employers saw learners as a form of inexpensive labour, rather than someone to develop.
- 5.3 On the other hand, employers in *childcare*, *health and social care*, *hairdressing* and *business administration* were felt to be more supportive of both learners and providers, and to value the qualification more highly (although we will see later that is not always the case that all elements of the programme are equally valued).
- 5.4 Providers noted that different occupational areas tend to attract learners with different academic abilities and identified *mechanics*, *retail* and *hairdressing* courses as those where a higher proportion than average may need further support and encouragement with theoretical elements of the course:

Mechanics tend to want to take an engine to pieces, not build up a portfolio, but this is less the case with Business Administration.'

What are the key challenges that Under Supported Leavers present to providers?

- 5.1 Advice is not often sought by those experiencing problems with employers, although providers felt that they would usually be aware of the problem. Providers felt that if they were given warning by a learner that they may leave a course because of an unhelpful employer, they would make every effort to find a new placement, although at the same time most admitted that this was not always possible.
- 5.2 Identifying problems with employers requires monitoring of the learner within the workplace. Effective communications with the employer are then needed to resolve these problems.
- 5.3 Providers did tend to be sympathetic towards the circumstances under which employers work, and in many cases they felt it was a failing on the behalf of training provider contacts that employers did not fully 'buy into' the NVQ. One key continuing challenge is to make the programme seem genuinely relevant and advantageous to the employer's business.
- 5.4 Barriers to increasing the effectiveness of the relationship between employer, learner and training provider contact centre largely around lack of time and resource. Many providers felt that there was scope for improvement of employer interaction and that effort to encourage the employer to spare them the time to go through parts of the course that they may not appreciate or understand would be valuable, particularly so in the case of the Key Skills and Technical Certificates, as will be seen in Chapter 7.
- 5.5 Another key challenge is to encourage those that need extra support to seek advice and guidance. Those with learning difficulties present particular challenges here. One provider stated that on average they found that approximately half of childcare learners had basic skills needs, particularly in application of number.

What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Under Supported Leaving?

- 5.1 One provider, who had built up very strong relationships with most of their employers despite not having a specialist liaison person, emphasised the need to make sure the learning is genuinely, and not just theoretically, valuable to the workplace:

'We work with the employer to make sure the learning will be useful in their workplace. We ask if there are particular enhancements they need, such as fork lift training, or something like that, maybe a particular computer system?'

- 5.2 Some providers had specialist staff who offered support to employers involved in WBL, to elicit their particular needs and work with them to find out how learning can be made as bespoke as possible to suit them. Some providers mentioned they had changed the day of day release to suit particular employers, or were offering evening classes if day release really could not be granted. This tailoring also extended to the nature of the course itself and the type of training offered.
- 5.3 One provider had implemented a scheme whereby providers who had not taken apprentices for some time were paid a small incentive in return for allowing weekly visits from training provider contacts. It was felt that this helped the employer feel more involved and committed to the training, as not only did they earn money for having the apprentice, but also they felt reassured that the apprentice was being supported and stood a strong chance of completing the course.
- 5.4 Another provider had set up a system within hair salons to reward staff who supported learners with either training opportunities or money, and it was felt that these reciprocal systems were powerful in building good relationships, leading to supportive employers. While several providers talked about giving employers a financial incentive as the only way to get the level of support that was required, there were plenty that did not feel that this was necessary, and it is perhaps best to concentrate on solutions that ensure genuine commitment, rather than attract employers for financial reasons solely.

- 5.5 One solution introduced by a minority of providers to bolster support for learners was the creation of a new position with a dedicated support focus. This role (covering a variety of titles such as Learning Support Counsellor or Retention Officer) was separate from that of the training provider contact, and was reported to be very successful in providing additional support for learners. In some cases this was someone qualified in counselling, while for others it was more of an all round, non-academic pastoral role.
- 5.6 In one case this person had done the course recently themselves, and was recruited in part because she was relatively young and near the age of the people she was dealing with. The provider felt the value of this role (a person dedicated to this pastoral role to help learners deal with personal, academic and employer related problems) was highlighted when this employee went on maternity leave after which point the level of early leaving rose.
- 5.7 The relationship between the learner and the training provider contact is equally as important as the relationship with the employer. A couple of providers had a scheme in place where a customer satisfaction team contacted learners by telephone at frequent intervals during the course to make sure that the relationship between training provider contact and learner was functioning effectively and there were no personality clashes or support needs that were not being picked up by the training provider contact themselves. These providers felt that learners did feel able to speak openly during these conversations and problems were picked up through this process.
- 5.8 Smaller caseloads for training provider contacts were also a way of improving the support offered to learners, and allowing identification of issues at an early stage. One provider spoke in terms of the importance of the training provider contact taking ownership of their cases, and smaller numbers of learners was seen as one way to do this, as it allows closer relationships to develop and more regular visits if required. One company had lowered training provider contact caseloads from eighty to sixty.

- 5.9 To combat learners leaving early due to their having unmet additional learning support needs, one provider had introduced streaming as a way of monitoring learners against others of similar ability. This helped highlight when a learner had fallen behind in comparison to those of similar ability. This streaming was done on the basis of a basic skills test at the beginning of the course and was felt to have the dual advantage of identifying problems earlier than they may be picked up otherwise and also helping with resource planning.
- 5.10 Identifying particular learning or social needs at induction stage is an important first line of approach, and one that providers recognise as important. Many had recently tried to improve testing mechanisms during induction to pick up on potential problems early, although many felt that careful monitoring during the early weeks of the course was also necessary to pick up any less 'formalised' issues. One provider explained that they had a 'Skills for Life' team who were responsible for building any particular learning and social needs into learning plans.
- 5.11 Some providers talked about having training provider contacts who were trained in recognising and responding to basic skills needs, and one provider had a member of staff dedicated to helping with the Key Skills and Technical Certificate, and her time was directed particularly towards one-on-one time with learners with special learning (or social) needs.

Summary of recommendations for preventing / reducing Under Supported Leaving

- **Every effort needs to be put into engaging employers and making sure that the training is as relevant and bespoke to their particular work environment and business needs as possible**
- **Consider incentives for employers or their staff which reward their supporting learners, whether money or some kind of training**
- **Employing someone in a dedicated support role is clearly the ideal, and the fact that support is available for learners both for academic and personal issues needs to be stressed and re-emphasised throughout the course of the programme**
- **Ensure there are systems in place to pick up signs of additional social or learning needs at the induction stage and during the early weeks. When additional learning needs have been identified or the learner has difficulties with theoretical elements of the programme support needs to be provided quickly and consistently**
- **Make sure there are interactive ways of delivering the Key Skills and Technical Certificate, and try to provide the testing in an informal and familiar environment as possible.**

6 The Ad Hoc Leaver

Why do learners become Ad Hoc Leavers?

- 6.1 Leavers falling into this category are a diverse group, as a variety of reasons can account for their non-completion. The most common reasons are:
- Illness;
 - Pregnancy;
 - Relocation;
 - Financial pressures;
 - Promotion at work.
- 6.2 Leaving for these reasons can occur at any point in the programme but is usually during the middle stages, or when the learner is approaching the end of a course. In these cases the provider often tries to help them achieve at least part of the final qualification, if at all possible.
- 6.3 One provider said that they had found that when personal reasons were cited as a reason for leaving very early on in the programme it was often a 'smokescreen' for something else, whereas when they were given as a reason near the end of the programme they were more often 'genuine'.
- 6.4 One form of 'ad hoc' leaving that some providers felt was of particular concern in terms of it often reflecting short-sightedness rather than personal circumstances, was leaving due to financial reasons. Several providers felt that learners were lured away due to attractive pay for seasonal work, even if it was in lower skilled jobs offering no real long term prospects.

Who typically becomes an Ad Hoc leaver?

- 6.1 Those on longer programmes (such as engineering and construction) were felt to be particularly at risk. It was felt that by the age of 20, learners often have friends who have gone into jobs without training on better pay than their own, and these learners can easily become disillusioned.

‘One of the things we find here, because we are a low pay culture, what impacts is that if someone gets reasonably skilled on a low wage, they are frequently poached to a higher, better paid job because they have a few more skills. In those cases we will try and continue the training with the new employer, but they will often say; “We’re paying him £200 a week for five days work, not to train.”

- 6.2 In terms of demographics, there is no ‘typical’ ad hoc leaver. Pregnancy obviously affects women primarily, although some providers stated that men are more likely to leave a programme if their wife or girlfriend becomes pregnant as it is often a catalyst for feeling that they need more money.

What are the key challenges that Ad Hoc Leavers present to providers?

- 6.1 In cases of ad hoc leaving, the advice or guidance of the training provider contact is seldom sought by learners, hence some providers found it hard to record an outcome code that was not extremely vague. Sometimes learners are in a position where they have no option to continue with learning, and thus do not discuss the matter with the provider. Providers did indicate however that there may be cases where learners feel that there is no point in discussing these issues with the training provider contact because they assume it is a fait accompli, when in fact useful discussions could be had about, for example, returning to learning when the issue is resolved.

What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Ad Hoc Leaving?

- 6.1 Thinking specifically about those who leave for a better paid position with a different employer, the key message which needs to be communicated to the learner (by both the providers and the original employer) is the longer term rewards to gaining qualifications over and above short term gains of changing their job. A key part of induction should be a discussion of the job prospects that the WBL qualification offers, and this should ideally discuss issues such as likely salaries and other benefits both immediately after qualification and in the longer term. Clearly encouraging employers to reward those on long training programmes who may be carrying out their job very efficiently by the second or third year of the programme is one means of demonstrating this.
- 6.2 From a non-completion point of view it is clearly critical that if a learner changes employer then every effort is made to contact the new employer to encourage them to finish their qualification.
- 6.3 Pregnancy is often cited as a barrier to completion, particularly within childcare and hairdressing. However, some providers felt that pregnancy was not such a major cause of early leaving as was sometimes alleged, and one actually reported a 75% return rate of pregnant learners within a year. This particular provider attributed this impressive result to staff maintaining touch with learners during their maternity period, encouraging them to come in and collect assignments to do whilst at home, and inviting them to bring the baby into the learning centre to maintain the contact.
- 6.4 Some providers felt that LSC regulations on maternity leave and similar situations where a learner may complete 'out of funding' are unclear. There was concern that a learner may be defined as an early leaver despite them fully intending to complete the programme at a later date.
- 6.5 There is funding available to providers to supply help in special circumstances, although there is some indication that not all providers are aware of this. One means of preventing ad hoc leaving may be for the LSC to promote the availability of this funding and the types of scenario for which it can be used. An example extra 'catch-up' tutoring can be arranged where the learner has been of sick.

Summary of recommendations for preventing Ad Hoc Leaving

- **Consider working with employers to provide a pay scale, especially for learners who may be on longer courses and at risk from poaching from other employers. This would benefit both the employer (in terms of retention and return on their investment in training), and the learner (allowing them to complete the course).**
- **Induction needs to inform young people about the job / career prospects that the qualification offers, with this discussing issues such as likely salaries, benefits, hours of work etc. both after qualification and in the longer term. The importance of thinking in the medium and long term needs to be stressed to minimise leaving for a few extra pounds to jobs which offer no real prospects.**
- **The quantitative study conducted among learners in 2005 indicated that half of early leavers would, if given the opportunity, return to the programme. Clearly it is important to keep in contact with these early leavers and make clear that opportunities remain open.**

7 The Nearly There Leaver

Why do learners become Nearly There Leavers?

7.1 This is a frustrating form of leaving for training providers, who will often feel that a learner is more than capable of completing the Key Skills and Technical Certificate, but has to watch them leave once the NVQ element has been completed. There are several types of reason for this form of leaving:

- a lack of support for the full framework from employers (either because they do not fully understand what these components are or because they do not value them);
- a lack of willingness to continue to study on the part of the learner, who may feel that the NVQ is 'enough' for them;
- a lack the time within the learner's working week to complete the work necessary for the Key Skills and Technical Certificate;
- a distrust or dislike of a classroom environment and a reluctance to sit end exams.

'They are only interested in the NVQ part, whereas we only get funding for the full framework, so we have to get it across to them that they have to do the other areas or we can't give them the qualifications. That can cause some unrest...they feel the Technical Certificate and the Key Skills are not appropriate or relevant to them, or they can't be bothered because there's no financial element, or they didn't enter (WBL) to do maths and English because they did it at school.'

Who typically becomes a Nearly There Leaver?

7.2 It is often the less academically able learners that leave without completing the Key Skills and / or the Technical Certificate. Providers reported instances of learners attempting and failing the tests once or twice before eventually giving up. However, the majority of providers felt that a more common scenario was learners leaving before even attempting the tests once.

7.3 The value placed on the Key Skills and Technical Certificate by learners was found to be heavily influenced by the view of the employer. Unsurprisingly, if an employer sees the Technical Certificate as a useful tool for developing relevant skills, the learner is significantly more likely to strive to achieve this. A lack of commitment to the Key Skills and / or Technical Certificate from the employer suggests to the learner that these elements are not a prerequisite for succeeding in the industry.

7.4 Commitment to the Key Skills and Technical Certificate by employers varied quite significantly by area of learning.

7.5 *Childcare, leisure, and retail* were felt to be among the worst industries for encouraging completion of the Key Skills and Technical Certificate. Within the *retail* and *childcare* sectors it was often a case that day release had to be missed due to needs 'on the shop floor', and learners were simply not able to take the time off to work on the Key Skills and Technical Certificate as they progressed through the course.

7.6 A provider of sport programmes felt that employers within the sector just did not see the point of Key Skills:

'Employers know how to support industry skills like a lifeguarding qualification, but they cannot see why basic literacy and numeracy is useful to do the job. All they want is the lifeguarding skill and they don't want to support anything further'

7.7 The opposite was true in business administration, where learners were felt to have more time to work on the Key Skills and Technical Certificate elements, and where the sector was supportive of theoretical work:

'We have very few problems in Administration...I think it's because of the sector, the employees are not customer facing so they have more time to do the work.'

- 7.8 Providers gave examples of employers in some occupational areas 'picking and choosing' elements of the framework that were most applicable to their business needs and displaying low levels of support for the remainder. Some examples of this situation are:
- *Childcare*, where employees only need to have an NVQ to be legally qualified;
 - Learners participating in *gas installation* programmes found that employers may not continue supporting learning once CORGI certification has been achieved (an element of the NVQ);
 - *Hospitality* employers were often thought to be satisfied by the food hygiene element alone (an element of the Technical Certificate), completion of this element represents satisfaction of statutory requirements for working in the sector.
- 7.9 Providers had mixed views on this issue. Whilst they understand that targets are moving to full completion of the framework and thus are frustrated by the lack of commitment shown by some employers, some also expressed the view that achievement of any element by the learner should be recognised by the LSC.
- 7.10 The more 'professional' industries, such as business administration, engineering and construction were felt to put greater emphasis on the importance of completing the full framework. Some providers felt that this could be attributed to the fact that it was easier to integrate the Key Skills and the Technical Certificate with the NVQ in these areas of learning:

'Engineering is our strong area. I think that is the strongest area because the course is more structured and there is more integration between the Key Skills and the rest of the course, it is more relevant and embedded. The Technical Certificate fits in neatly as well.'

What are the key challenges that Nearly There Leavers present to providers?

- 7.11 It seems that advice and guidance is seldom sought when a leaver is contemplating leaving before completing the full framework, although in the cases where the learner does consult the provider they have often been able to tailor solutions to help them complete, such as providing extra support, organising sessions within the workplace if there are enough learners to merit it, and helping to set up childcare arrangements when tests need to be taken out of working hours.
- 7.12 Providers felt that it was rarely the case that learners at this point in the programme would just 'disappear without trace'. However, at the point at which the learner informs the providers of their intention it was felt that they had often made their mind up. It would seem that a lack of interest in these elements of the course, either because of poor commitment from the employer or because of an aversion to theoretical work, have become deeply ingrained by the point at which the learner leaves. The challenge is thus to tackle these issues early on in the programme when the learner may more receptive.
- 7.13 Most providers felt that learners, employers and even some of their own training provider contacts viewed the NVQ, Key Skills and Technical Certificate as discrete sections of the qualification. They saw difficulties in attempting to change this mindset if the structure of the programme remains the same.

'The perception that there are three distinct elements is de-motivating for learners and employers. This is very damaging and creates an impression of being able to pick and choose, as well as making it more complicated than it needs to be'

What can providers do to tackle the reasons for Nearly There Leaving?

- 7.14 Providers are using a wide variety of techniques to try and minimise this late leaving, and some feel that they are experiencing a considerable level of success in helping employers to understand the value of these components and gain their support in encouraging learners to complete the full framework.
- 7.15 Most felt that if the jargon surrounding the Key Skills and Technical Certificate could be removed it would be easier to communicate the relevance and benefits of these elements to the employer. Providers advised describing the Key Skills as involving 'basic generic skills', and the Technical Certificate as a 'means of underpinning knowledge':
- '[The Technical Certificate teaches them] why they need to do the things they do in the workplace and the implications of doing them incorrectly.'*
- 7.16 Interestingly, employers often tend to criticise the level of basic generic skills, and levels of literacy and numeracy amongst learners and recruits generally. If the objectives of the Key Skills were adequately communicated to employers there is scope for greater commitment to this element.
- 7.17 Some providers had increased employer commitment to the Key Skills and Technical Certificate by illustrating how supporting the learner in these elements could bring real business benefits. One provider was able to provide quite a striking example of an occasion on which work done as part of the Key Skills or Technical Certificate had actually enhanced the employers business. This anecdote involved a car parts merchant who had, fairly unenthusiastically, allowed a learner to carry out a survey on whether men or women were most likely to make a purchase in the shop. Much to his, and his colleagues' surprise, the results showed that women were resoundingly more likely to buy, and once this finding filtered back to Head Office, company policy was amended to make sure that a woman shopper was helped in preference to a man, if a situation arose where a choice must be made.
- 7.18 This was an isolated example within the study, although other surveys of work based learning have thrown up similar instances of projects being sufficiently enlightening that the employer has made changes as a result of them (one such was in South London where a learner's design for a play area was so insightful that the employer had the plans commissioned).

- 7.19 These examples could be instrumental in promoting the value of Key Skills and Technical Certificates to employers. Publicised case studies outlining clear business benefits in straightforward language (as opposed to the slightly technical language of the qualification guidelines) could be valuable in encouraging employers to allow the training provider contact to help them find assignments within the workplace that could count towards these elements of the framework.
- 7.20 Realistically, examples such as those described above will be rare. In the majority of cases providers felt that working with employers to integrate the Key Skills and Technical Certificate into daily work was the key to getting them on board. Application of number can be applied within the workplace through a pricing project, such as asking a learner in a decorating company to calculate the cost of wallpapering a room. This benefits learner and employer alike, as new skills are developed alongside completion of one of the assessment criteria.
- 7.21 Providers agreed that a strong relationship between training provider contact and employer would facilitate communication of the benefits of the Key Skills and Technical Certificates, and provide scope for tailoring or integrating these elements to best suit the employer.
- 7.22 As well as improving the levels of commitment of employers, almost all providers recognised that they needed to work with learners to tackle barriers.
- 7.23 A review of teaching aids and modes of delivery were thought to be a good starting point. Some providers had put considerable effort into trying to design ways of working through the material that would be palatable for learners as well as flexible if they were having to do shift work or lived a long distance from the provider:

'We have now introduced workbooks and logbooks, so they don't have to come in for training sessions, and can do it all in their own time. We have also used CD-ROMs and DVDs to enable them to work off site, although this does take self-discipline, and encouragement from the employer, which does not always happen.'

- 7.24 Other providers offered similar packages and methods of interactive learning, and in some cases they were designed to be done with the training provider contact, on a laptop in the workplace. This approach tackles both problems of self-motivation on the part of the learner, and reluctance for day release from the employer. One provider had used games to embed some of the messages of the Key Skills and Technical Certificates.

'These pupils need interaction and creative ways to learn. Worksheets get "tired" and just remind the learner of school. We need to design toolkits and resources for use in teaching, for example games to explore Health and Safety issues, or something on observing children for our childcare learners.'

- 7.25 The introduction of the use of IT for tests had been effective in encouraging full completion. As well as reducing the need for learners to take whole days away from work, completing a test online is psychologically preferable to sitting a paper based test to many learners.

'The main barrier we had was getting them in to do the tests. We used to have, for example, three different tests three days in a row, and that made it difficult for people to get the time off. It was also paper based so it took two or three months for the results to come back. The IT really has been a help.'

- 7.26 Some providers had formulated ways of combining the Key Skills and Technical Certificate. For example, childcare learners, who have to design a play area as part of their Technical Certificate, could design it on squared paper and calculate a ratio of pupils to space, and it would qualify for the application of number element of the Key Skills. Reducing the amount of work involved and tackling the perception of the Key Skills and Technical Certificates as disparate workloads was seen to be highly effective.

- 7.27 Many providers had begun to 'front load' the course by introducing the Key Skills and Technical Certificate elements at the very start of training thereby getting learners into the habit of doing tests and assignments all the way through the course. As well as attempting to normalise the method of assessment it was felt that any elements left to the end could be neglected out of sheer impatience to 'complete':

'There is no resistance to Key Skills now because they see it as part and parcel of their normal training day. We don't make an issue of it. We don't highlight it and say "you've got to do your Key Skills now"...this has had an impact.'

- 7.28 A handful of providers had resorted to offering learners incentives to do the Key Skills tests and Technical Certificate. The success of this has been mixed; one provider stated that it had not made any difference, and that if a learner's mind was made up financial incentives were not effective. Conversely, another had found that it works:

'We'll actually offer financial incentives if we need to. We have an awards system as well, so when you achieve parts of your qualification, we will give you vouchers for CDs or driving lessons. That has been very positive. If a learner has one Key Skill test to do, and they will not, we have sometimes offered them £50 – I wasn't keen on that at first, but it works.'

- 7.29 Providers were more supportive of the idea that employers could be encouraged to offer rewards or pay rises to the learner when elements of the Key Skills or Technical Certificate were completed. This would link the benefits of achieving these elements firmly with career progress in the learner's mind. However, for this to happen employers first need to recognise the benefits of the Key Skills and Technical Certificate.

- 7.30 Almost all providers felt that the solution to combating the barriers both learners and employers have in relation to the Key Skills and Technical Certificates was full integration with the NVQ (although a minority of the providers felt that there should be an option not to do them at all, and that the NVQ should represent full completion).

- 7.31 Several providers also felt that addressing the disparity in workload and difficulty of the Key Skills and Technical Certificate across areas of learning would help them standardise methods of boosting completion.

7.32 This psychological benefits to learners of 'disguising' the Key Skills or Technical Certificate were stressed by several providers, whether in terms of 'frontloading'; combining the Key Skills and Technical Certificate where possible; tailoring them to the daily work of the employer; or presenting them interestingly as interactive packages or games. The need to disguise these parts of the qualification at all suggests the discomfort providers continue to feel with the Key Skills and Technical Certificate, and shows that there is still work to be done in terms of changing the way these components are perceived.

Summary of recommendations for Preventing Nearly There Leaving

- **Reduce the jargon of the guidelines for the Key Skills and Technical Certificate and explain them in terms of real business benefits for the employer, possibly through using case studies**
- **Make assignments relevant to the workplace, tailor them to the employer's needs to reduce burden on both learner and employer**
- **If the employer is supportive of the Key Skills and Technical Certificate suggest they offer the learner pay rises for completing elements of them**
- **Review delivery methods and teaching aids. Make delivery and testing portable, fun and interactive**
- **Combine Key Skills and Technical Certificate assignments where possible to minimise work for learner (and employer)**
- **Deliver Key Skills and Technical Certificate throughout the course to avoid it being seen as 'a final hurdle' and integrate as much as possible**

Appendix A: The Topic Guide

Topic Guide

Introduction

- Introduce yourself and IFF Research (independent market research company)
- We are working on behalf of the Devon and Cornwall LSC – your contract manager will have spoken to you about this research
- Aim of the research: Devon and Cornwall LSC is working on improving its success rates and completion rates. Research is therefore being undertaken to enable Devon and Cornwall LSC to better understand, from a provider perspective, the reasons why young people leave the programme, what might increase success/completion rates
- Focus of this research is solely on work-based learning
- (If you have any queries about this, you can contact Isabel Hopkins at IFF Research on 0207 250 3035 or Elizabeth Scott at the Devon & Cornwall LSC on 01752 754 186)
- Everything is confidential, unless you are happy for things you say to be attributed. Otherwise nothing will be identified to an individual or organisation, and where we use quotes in the final report this will just say ‘one provider felt’ etc.

S1) **CHECK WITH NAMED PERSON ON SAMPLE: Can I just check, are you the best person (or one of the best people) in your organisation to talk to about work-based learning and success rates in Devon and Cornwall?**

()

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	COLLECT NAME OF BEST PERSON AND ASK TO TRANSFER _____
		RE-INTRODUCE

Background Information

- 1) **Before we start, can I just check that some of the background information that we have is correct – am I right that:**

CHECK:

WBL: programmes and areas of learning involved in, and main ones in terms of numbers

Operate nationally; regionally (SW) only; Devon and Cornwall only

ASK ALL

- 2) **Thinking now about completion rates, am I right that your overall WBL completion rate (that is the proportion of candidates achieving the FULL framework) is <insert completion rate from information provided>?**

Probe:

What are your views on this completion rate - good, acceptable, room for improvement, poor? Why do you say that? IF POOR / ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT: what sort of success rate do you think is achievable? IF GOOD / ACCEPTABLE: When you say this what (who) are you comparing this to? (national WBL providers / D&C providers / providers offering similar programmes/areas of learning / other parts of your organisation?)

- 2a) **Am I right that the proportion who achieve an NVQ is <insert completion rate from information provided>?**

Probe: Again, what are your views on this completion rate - good, acceptable, room for improvement, poor? Why do you say that? IF POOR / ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT: what sort of success rate do you think is achievable? IF GOOD / ACCEPTABLE: When you say this what (who) are you comparing this to? (national WBL providers / D & C providers / providers offering similar programmes/areas of learning / other parts of your organisation?)

Non-completion

- 3) **I'm interested to know about WHEN people tend to leave the programme before achieving the full framework. At what stage in the process do you find most non-achievers leave the programme?**

Probe for:

- Is it more common at the start of the programme or nearer the end (what proportions in each category)? IF YES: why do you think this is?
- Does the point at which early leaving occurs vary by programme? (e.g. is there a difference between advanced apprenticeships and apprenticeships). If so, why?
- Does it vary by the area of learning? If so, how (i.e. in which areas) and why?
- Are there any links between the type of learner (i.e. gender, age etc) and the point at which they are most likely to leave? If so, why do you think this is?
- Has the pattern of when early leaving occurs changed at all in the last few years? If so, how? Why do you think this is?

4) Could you describe for me what typically happens when a learner leaves early?

Probe:

- Do learners just stop turning up or do they tend discuss it with you first?
- How do you become aware that they're not turning up? What do you do about it?
- In roughly how many cases do you discuss issues with the learner? Does this vary by programme/area of learning/the stage at which the learner is leaving?

5) Do you have any systems in place to monitor the reasons for early leaving?

Probe for:

- Are exit interviews conducted? If so, in all cases?
- Are the reasons for them leaving recorded anywhere? Or is the process more informal?

6) What are the main reasons why learners do not finish the programme? What other key reasons are there?

Probe for:

- How do reasons vary between those leaving very early stages vs those who leave relatively late?
- Do reasons vary by programme? Or by area of learning? How? Why do you think this is?
- Do reasons vary by type of learner (i.e. gender, age etc)? What sort of personal reasons may typically cause a learner to leave early? How common are these sorts of reasons compared with other reasons?

7) Thinking now just about those who leave BEFORE completing the NVQ element of the programme, what are the reasons given for this?

Probe for:

- How do reasons vary by programme? Or by area of learning? Why do you think this is?

8) What role do you think employers have in encouraging learners to complete the NVQ? How important is their level of commitment and what influence do they have on the learner?

Probe for:

- Are there sectors where employers tend to be less interested / involved / committed with the progress of the learner? Why do you think this is? Are these the sectors where non-completion is highest? Have you done anything to address this problem (and is there anything that could be done)?

9) Are there procedures in place at the *selection and induction stage* to try and ensure individuals / employers starting are committed?

Probe:

- On what basis is this high risk-of-early leaving judgement made? What is done to support those learners who are identified as being at-risk? What, if any, information, advice or guidance is offered? Is counselling offered? Who provides this? Is it successful?
- How do you ensure learners have a good idea of what the programme entails? How is this communicated/evaluated? How could this be improved?

10) Once the learning is underway, could you describe what steps or processes are in place to try to prevent non-completion?

Probe:

- What mechanisms are in place for identifying 'at risk' learners? What steps would then normally be taken? Is counselling offered? What form does this take? Is this sometimes effective in preventing early leaving?
- What happens when learners fail to attend?
- What support is offered if learner falling behind with work?
- What do you offer in terms of 'pastoral' care?

11) I'd now like to talk about the learners that achieve the NVQ but do not achieve full completion (i.e do not complete the Key Skills and/or the Technical Certificate). What are the reasons for these learners not completing the full programme?

Probe for:

- Are there particular barriers specifically associated with completing the Key Skills? What are these?
- Are there particular barriers specifically associated with completing the Technical Certificate? What are these?
- Do these reasons vary by programme? Or area of learning?

12) What do you do to encourage learners to do the Key Skills and Technical Certificates?

Probe for:

- Are there any cases where you have persuaded a learner to complete these elements when they were considering leaving? How did you do this?

13) What role do employers have in getting learners to do the Key Skills and Technical Certificates?

Probe for:

- Do you think employers value the Key Skills and Technical Certificates? If so, as much as the NVQ? If not, why not? What influence does the employer have on the learner?
- Do opinions of and commitment to the Key Skills and Technical Certificates vary by employer? By sector? By size?
- What do you do to encourage employers to get learners to do the Key Skills and Technical Certificates? Where/when has this been successful? When hasn't it been as successful? When does it become impossible for the provider to persuade the employer to get the learner to complete?

14) What more could be done to encourage learners to complete the Key Skills and Technical Certificates?

- What could have persuaded learners that left early to complete these elements in your opinion?
- Are there any changes that could be made to the programme itself? Or the nature of the Key Skills and Technical Certificates?
- (IF APPLICABLE): What help or support would you need to make these changes?

- 15) **Thinking now again about early leaving generally, are there any steps you have taken over the last few years to try and reduce the levels of non-completion?**
- What steps are these?
 - How successful have they been / which have had a positive effect?
 - Have completion rates improved over the last few years or got worse? Why has this been?
- 16) **What more do you think you as a provider could do or would you like to do to lower levels of non-completion?**
- What are the barriers to this happening?
 - What sort of help if any would you need to take these steps?
 - What would the likely impact of such changes be?
- 17) **What more do you feel the LSC could do to reduce levels of non-completion, or what further support could they provide?**
- 18) **What about the information, advice and guidance services available to young people in Devon and Cornwall (via Connexions and others) – do you feel better advice and guidance would mean more suitable / committed learners would be attracted to WBL programmes.**
- Probe:**
- What steps could Connexions take that would reduce levels of non-completion?
- 19) **How much collaboration, if any, do you have with other providers? Do you share ideas of how to prevent non-achievement? If not, would this be something you think would be helpful? Why/why not?**
- 20) **Is there anything else you would like to add on the issues we have been discussing?**
- 21) **It would be very valuable to us to be able to attribute some of your comments. Would you be willing for this to happen?**