

# Learner Journeys Research – Discretionary Learner Support (Hardship)

March 2010

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

## Further information

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# LSC Learner Journeys Research – Discretionary Funding – Hardship

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## 1 Executive Summary

### 1.1 Background

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

Overall, 2,000 interviews were conducted amongst learners receiving *Discretionary Funding - Hardship*.

### 1.2 Engagement

More than a third of learners (37%) who had heard about the funding before deciding to do their original course may not have done the course if the funding had not been available.

Three-fifths (60%) of all learners were concerned about having enough money whilst on the course. There were also significant levels of concern about other costs, including affording course materials and transport.

More than three-quarters of learners (77%) found it easy to find out about Discretionary Funding - Hardship.

Just 38% of learners received general advice or guidance about financial support for learning. Clearly there is scope for wider access to advisory services.

### 1.3 Retention and persistence in learning

The retention rate (estimated by the survey) for learners supported by Discretionary Funding - Hardship is 89%. This is the aggregated figure for learners across the two academic years included in the survey (2006/07 and 2007/08). It is similar to the national average for all FE learners (87% in 2006/07, the most recent figure available).

Around three-quarters of those that have completed or were still on the course (73%/74%) feel that they could not have finished their course or would have struggled financially without the funding. Thus, the funding would appear to have a positive impact on retention.

The main reason for early leaving is a change in personal circumstances. However, financial issues are a significant factor and two-fifths (40%) of early leavers report that financial issues influenced their decision to leave their course.

However, amongst those who left the course before completion, general living costs is the most frequent cause of financial problems whilst in learning. Nearly half cite course materials (46%) and fewer (39%) cite transport costs.

## 1.4 Achievement

The success rate (estimated by the survey) for learners supported by Discretionary Funding - Hardship is 79%. This is similar to the national average for all FE learners (78% in 2006/07).

The majority of those completing their original course (88%) achieved a qualification. A large majority agrees that Discretionary Funding - Hardship helped them to achieve a qualification.

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

## 1.5 Learning progression

More than two-fifths of learners who are no longer on their original course have progressed into, or registered for, further learning and, of these, most (82%) have progressed to a higher level.

Of those who failed to complete their original learning and have not progressed, 66% said they would have considered more learning if more financial support had been available.

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

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

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

A third of those achieving a qualification from their further learning achieved a Level 3 qualification for the first time; and one in ten gained an NVQ equivalent qualification where before they had none.

## 1.6 Employment progression

The great majority (86%) of learners believe that the funding they received helped them progress in their work/career. Of these, more than half (48% overall) feel it helped a great deal.

Following learning, learners are more likely to be in employment or to be actively seeking employment, but the gains are largely due to the fact that many learners have now left the full-time learning they were in prior to the funded course. More than half the new employment is part-time. The proportion of those who are unemployed, both actively seeking work and inactive, has risen.

## 1.7 Personal and social benefits

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

## 1.8 Conclusions

### *Strengths*

- Funding through the Discretionary Hardship Fund has a significant positive effect on engagement, retention, attainment and learning progression.
- Information on the funding was easily available to its recipients. (However, the survey was, of course, only of Discretionary Funding - Hardship recipients. We did not survey young people who are eligible for the funding but did not receive it, but further research has been commissioned by the LSC to explore the needs of more disadvantaged learners and non-learners and will cover issues around access to IAG amongst those not in learning.)
- Retention and success rates amongst those receiving Hardship funding are similar to the corresponding national FE rates in each case. Thus, the funding could be said to place learners receiving it on a level playing field with those whose circumstances are more advantageous. This may be regarded as a strength.
- In addition to learning benefits, virtually all Discretionary Hardship Scheme-funded participants achieve and acknowledge social or personal benefits which may lead to future progression and development.

### *Issues to consider in the further development of the Discretionary Funding – Hardship*

- There may have been some historic weakness in the scope of provision of information, advice, and guidance on learning opportunities and on the funding available to support take up of those opportunities.
- Whilst there has been an increase in the number of learners in employment following the learning, this is largely at the expense of a reduction in the number of learners in full-time education. Outcomes are not particularly positive. 22% of supported learners have continued in education; 33% are in work, but 57% of these are in part-time jobs. 41% are neither in education nor employment, including 15% who are unemployed and seeking work and 7% who are not working and not seeking work. These findings suggest that many people need assistance towards the end of their courses to help them find positive directions when those courses end.



## 2 Background

### 2.1 Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 2.2 Methodology

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

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

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

Within the overall total, 2,000 interviews were conducted amongst recipients of *Discretionary Funds (Hardship)*. [Discretionary funding supports learners aged 16 plus taking part in LSC-funded learning. It is means-tested and prioritised for learners that are on a low income, have qualifications lower than NVQ equivalence level 2 and for learners that are otherwise disadvantaged). More information about Discretionary support (Hardship) can be obtained via the following weblink: [http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/FinancialHelpForAdultLearners/DG\\_10033131](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/AdultLearning/FinancialHelpForAdultLearners/DG_10033131). Interviews were undertaken by telephone with recipients living across England.

The sample data for recipients of Discretionary support was weighted to reflect LSC counts of all recipients for both the academic years 2006/07 to 2007/08. This ensures that sample estimates are representative of the views of learners from both years.

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

	2006/07	2007/08
Number of contacts	128,000	150,000
Achieved interviews (unweighted)	995	1,005
% of interviews (unweighted)	50	50
Achieved interviews (weighted)	920	1,080
% of interviews (weighted)	46	54

In addition, the data was weighted within each academic year by gender and age, to ensure that the sample accurately represented all recipients.

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

## 2.3 Sample profile

Recipients are most likely to be aged 26 plus (41%), with slightly fewer (37%) aged between 16 and 18. One in eight (12%) are aged between 19 and 21 and less than one in ten (9%) are aged between 22 and 25. There are a higher proportion of females than males amongst recipients (66% are female: 34% are male).

The sample includes more than half who received funding in the year 2007/08 (54%), with the remainder having received funding in 2006/07.

25% of Discretionary funding (Hardship) recipients represented an ethnic minority group. This compares with 23% across all funding schemes. Across England, people from ethnic minority groups account for 14% of 16 to 19 year olds, 16% of 20 to 24 year olds and 14% of 25 to 49 year olds. Thus, the representation of ethnic minority groups amongst Discretionary funding recipients is higher than average.

22% of recipients have a long standing illness, disability or infirmity. This compares with 10% across all funding schemes.

More than two-thirds of recipients (69%) are single. A further 22% are married or living with a partner and fewer than one in ten (8%) are separated, divorced or widowed.

The pattern of learners in receipt of Hardship funding demonstrates alignment with national policy to target the funds on learners identified as belonging to disadvantaged groups.

A third (33%) are parents or carers of children.

## 3 Engagement

### Key findings

Learners supported through the Discretionary Hardship Funds represent a range of ages but their reasons for learning are mostly straightforward. They want to get qualifications, either as an end in themselves or as a step towards higher qualifications and improve their skills. Many also recognise the significance of learning to future employment and career prospects but, at this stage, this is less often the main reason for learning.

Most learners who are supported by the Discretionary Hardship Funds had financial concerns before starting their learning. These mainly included general concerns about money and more specifically about course materials, books or equipment.

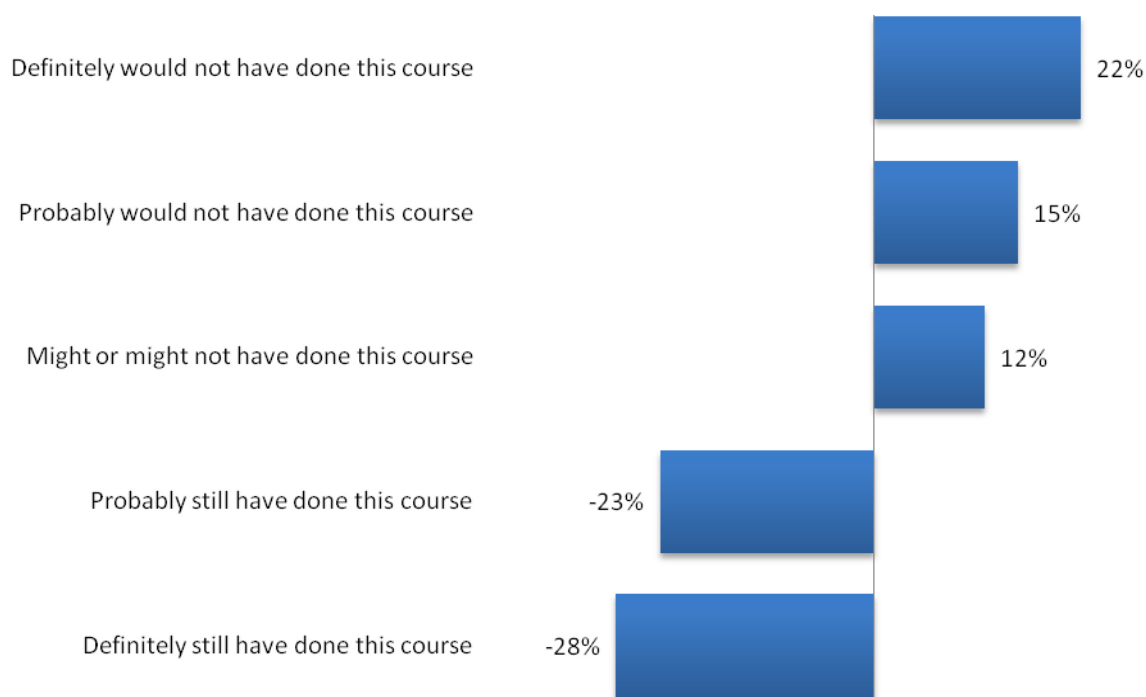
Just over half the learners were aware of the funding before they started their course but only half said they had received more general information, advice and guidance on the range of funding available. Where such information, advice and guidance had been received, it had usually rated as useful or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

However, Discretionary Hardship Funds funding appears to have limited leverage on supported learners' decisions to undertake the supported learning. Just over a third (37%) said they would not have entered the supported learning without the funding, thus, a higher proportion (51%) would have done the learning anyway.

### 3.1 Impact of funding on course take up

55% of Discretionary funding (Hardship) recipients had heard of the funding before they started on the course for which they received support. Of these, half say they would definitely (28%) or probably (23%) have undertaken the course even if funding had not been available. Fewer (37%) said they would definitely (22%) or probably (15%) not have done it:

Figure 1: Impact of funding on course take up (where heard about funding before deciding on course) Base = 1,106

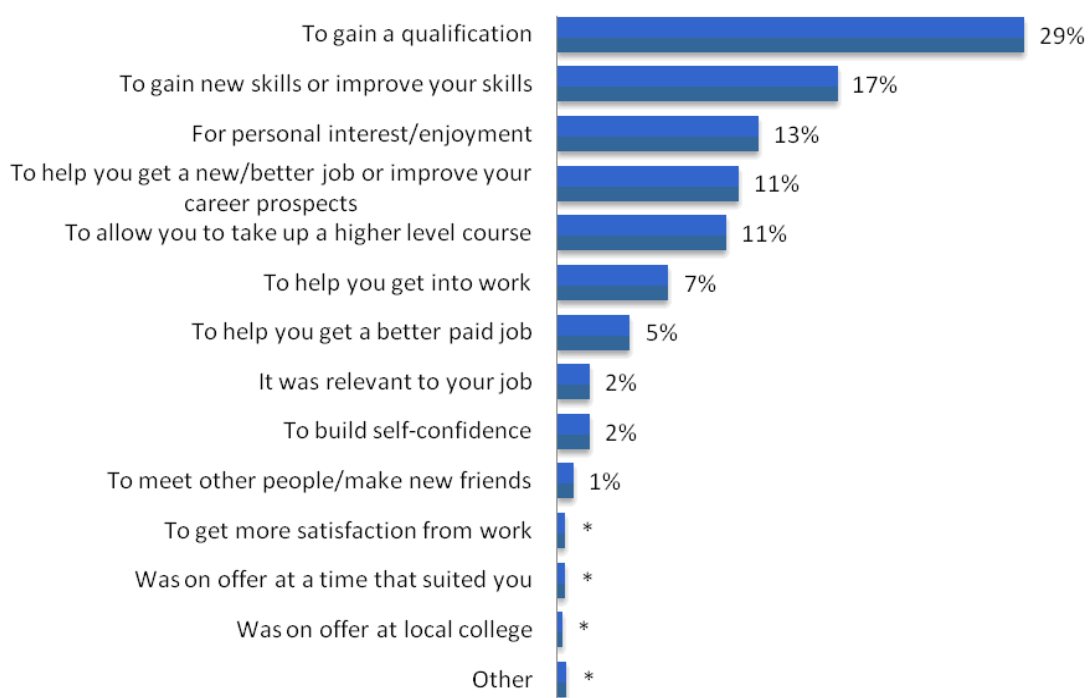


Older learners are significantly more likely to feel that they *definitely or probably would not* have done the course without the funding being available. 32% of 26 to 29 year olds and 41% of 30+ year olds say they would definitely not have done the course without the funding. This compares with just 9% of learners aged under 20. The proportion is also significantly higher amongst learners without qualifications prior to the funded learning (28%) and is higher than average amongst lone parents (38%).

### 3.2 Reasons for taking up the course

Few learners give just one reason for taking up a course. When prompted with a list of possible reasons, the one most frequently selected is that of 'to gain new skills or improve your skills' (94% of all learners). Only slightly fewer cite 'to gain a qualification' (91%). Other significant reasons include: 'for personal interest/enjoyment' (87%), 'to help you get a new/better job or improve your career prospects' (82%) and/or 'it was on offer at a time that suited you' (81%). When respondents were asked to identify just one *main* reason, then 'to gain a qualification' was the reason most frequently given, followed by 'to gain new skills or improve your skills' (17%). As would be expected amongst an older group of learners, the focus of motivation to learn is less on qualifications and more on developing skills for personal interest and career and employment benefits:

Figure 2: Main reason for course take up, prompted (all respondents) Base = 2,000 \*denotes less than 0.5%

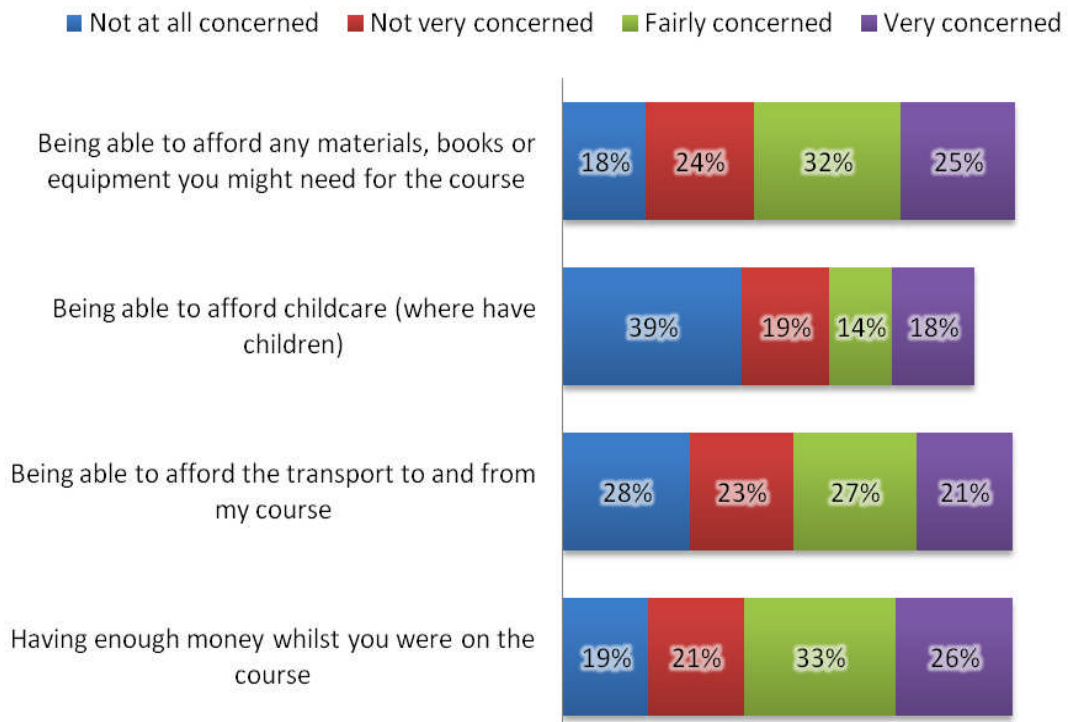


Wanting to get a new or better job or to improve career prospects is a more significant reason for those with prior work experience (16%). Those without qualifications prior to the original course are significantly more likely than those better qualified to cite 'to help you get into work' as the main reason for taking it up (11%). As expected younger learners are more likely to cite 'to gain a qualification' as the main reason for taking up the course (35% of under 20 year olds, compared with 24% of older respondents).

### 3.3 Financial concerns before starting the course

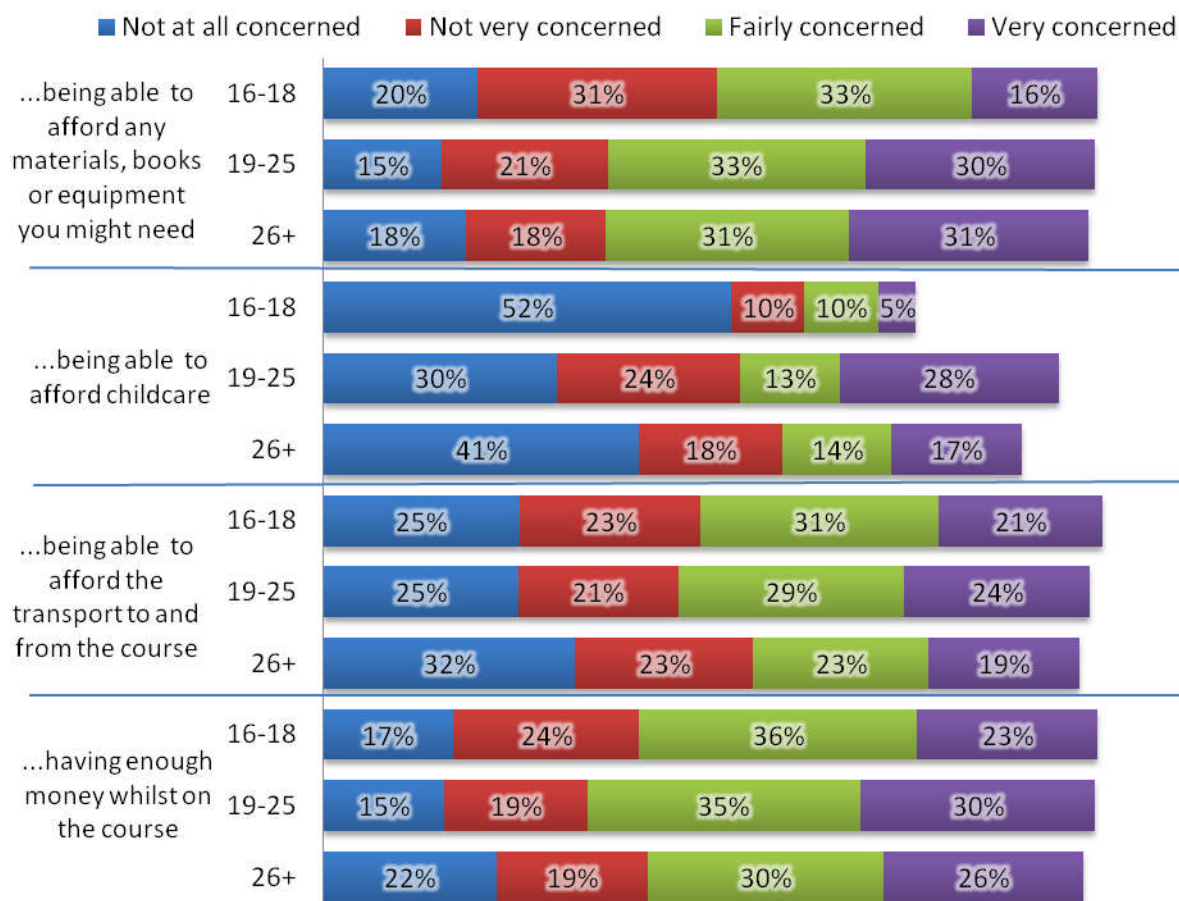
Learners were asked whether or not they had financial concerns before starting the course. Overall, more than half had one or more concerns. The most frequent concern was simply the general one which Discretionary Funding - Hardship is designed to alleviate – that of removing financial hardship as a barrier to learning. However, there are also significant levels of concern about being able to afford course materials and transport costs. Amongst the third of learners who have children, there is evidence of additional concerns about childcare costs:

Figure 3: Extent to which respondents were concerned about financial issues before starting the course (all respondents) Base = 2,000 Base (where have children) = 650 % that respond 'don't know' not presented



A review of concerns by age suggests that 16 to 18 year olds are most likely to be concerned with having enough money whilst on the course, whilst 26+ year olds are most likely to be concerned with affording any materials. The 19 to 25 year age group are more likely than younger and older recipients to have concerns about any of the financial issues. They are particularly likely to be concerned about having enough money whilst on the course.

Figure 4: Extent to which respondents were concerned about financial issues before starting the course, by age (all respondents) Bases vary Childcare issue (where have children) % that respond 'don't know' not presented



### 3.4 Information on funding

More than half the learners (55%) found out about the funding before starting the course. This proportion is slightly higher amongst learners that registered for their funded course in 2006/07 (58%, compared with 54% of those registering in 2007/08).

The proportion is significantly higher amongst 16 and 17 year olds (64%, compared with 59% of 18 year olds and 50% of older learners) and those previously in learning (61%).

Two in five learners (40%) found out about the funding after deciding to do the course, rising to 46% of those previously not in work.

The majority of learners (77%) found it easy to find out about the funding. Only very small proportions found it fairly (7%) or very difficult (4%). (8% replied that they found it neither easy nor difficult and 4% could not give an answer.)

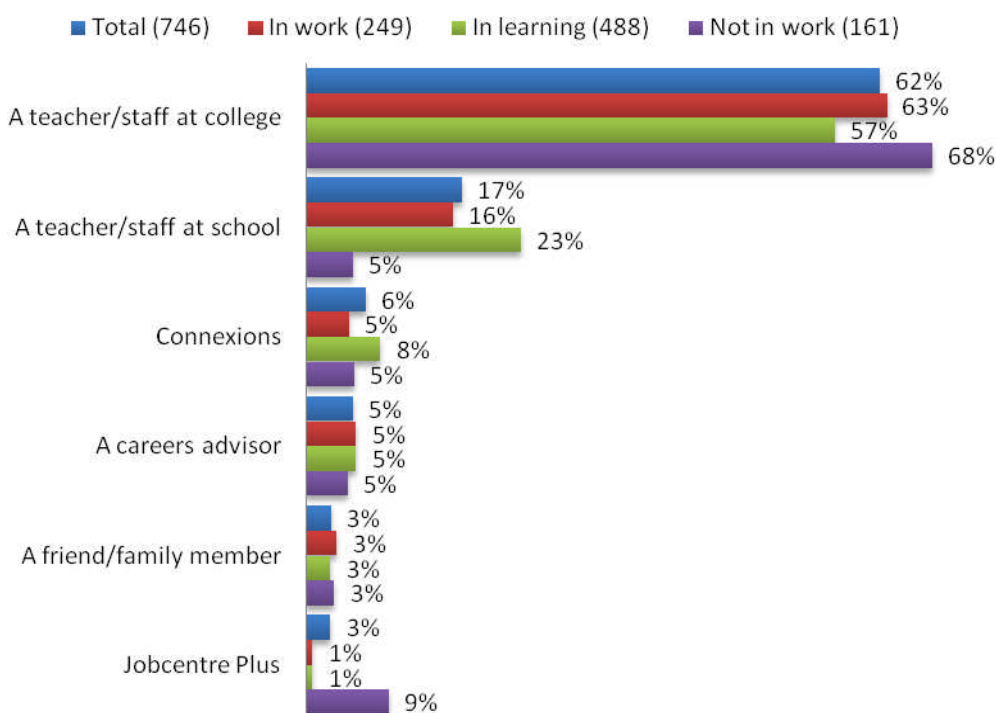


### 3.5 Information, advice or guidance on funding

More than a third of learners (38%) reported receiving information, advice or guidance (IAG) about the different types of funding available. This proportion is lower amongst learners aged 26 and over (28%).

The most frequently reported source of IAG was a teacher or other member of staff at a college (62%). This proportion is lower amongst 16 and 17 year olds (42%) who are more likely to cite their source as a teacher or member of staff at school (37% of 16 year olds and 27% of 17 year olds). These younger learners are also twice as likely as older ones to cite Connexions as a source (11%, compared with 3% of older learners). Previous economic status is also an important factor, with those not in work prior to the funded learning significantly more likely to cite Jobcentre Plus and staff at a college:

Figure 5: Most frequently cited sources of information, advice or guidance, by prior status (those receiving IAG)  
 Figures in parentheses are sample bases



The information, advice and guidance received is highly rated, with 96% finding it useful (including 63% rating it as very useful).

## 4 Retention and Persistence in Learning

### Key findings

Discretionary Funding – Hardship is estimated to generate a retention rate of 89% for its supported learners. (The retention rate is the proportion of learners who complete their studies whether they are awarded the qualification or not.) The national retention rate for all students in Further Education was stable at 87%, in both 2005/06 and 2006/07 (Book of FE Facts, dcsf, 2008). This latter statistic seems a reasonable benchmark against which to consider the 89% retention rate for supported learners. Essentially, the Hardship funding enables supported learners, who, by definition, have financial disadvantages, to complete at a rate which is typical for post-16 learners in general.

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

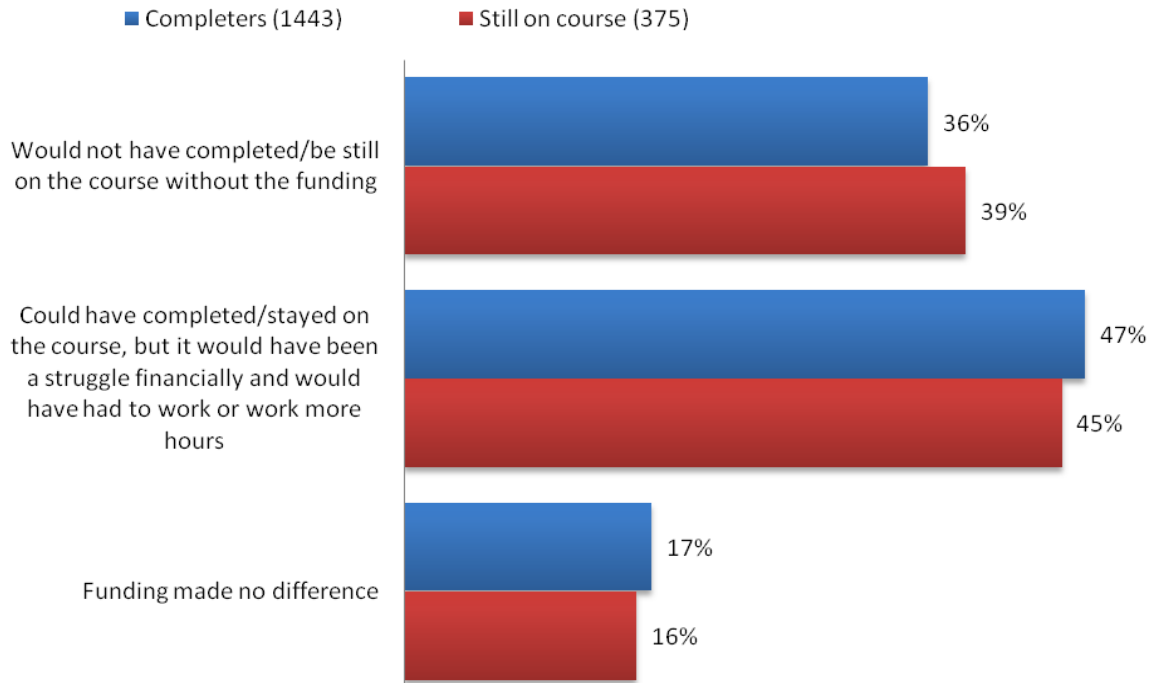
For learners who complete their studies, Discretionary Funding - Hardship is not a critical factor in most completions. Only 36% said they would definitely not have completed without it. Although a further 47% said they would have struggled financially without it, leaving us to conclude that the funding was significant in making life easier for learners.

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

### 4.1 Value of funding to completing/staying on the course

More than a third of learners who received Discretionary Funding - Hardship and who completed their course (36%) said that the funding was essential and that they would not have completed the course without it. A further 47% said that they would have struggled without it. Just one in six (17%) said that the funding had made no difference to their staying on and completing the course. The findings are similar amongst those still on the course:

Figure 6: Statements that best describes learners' feelings about the funding received (where completed or still on the course) Bases in parentheses



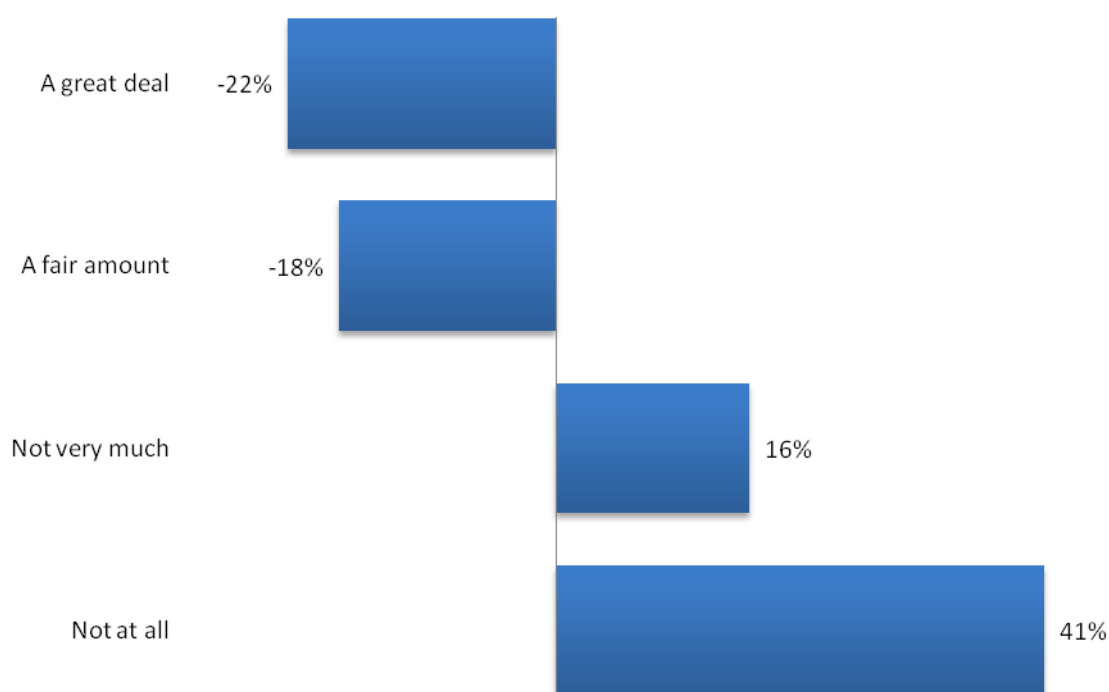
## 4.2 Completion and early leaving

The majority of those who are no longer on the course for which they received funding completed the course (89%). The remainder (11%) left their course early.

The main reasons for leaving the course before completion concern changes of circumstance, the fact that the course did not hold the learner's interest sufficiently and the need or desire to get a job.

Fewer than one in ten early leavers (7%) *spontaneously* stated that they could not afford to continue the course or that financial issues prevented them from continuing. However, when prompted, two-fifths of early leavers (40%) reported that money issues influenced their decision to a significant extent:

Figure 7: Extent to which money issues influenced their decision to leave the course (where did not complete the course) Base = 182



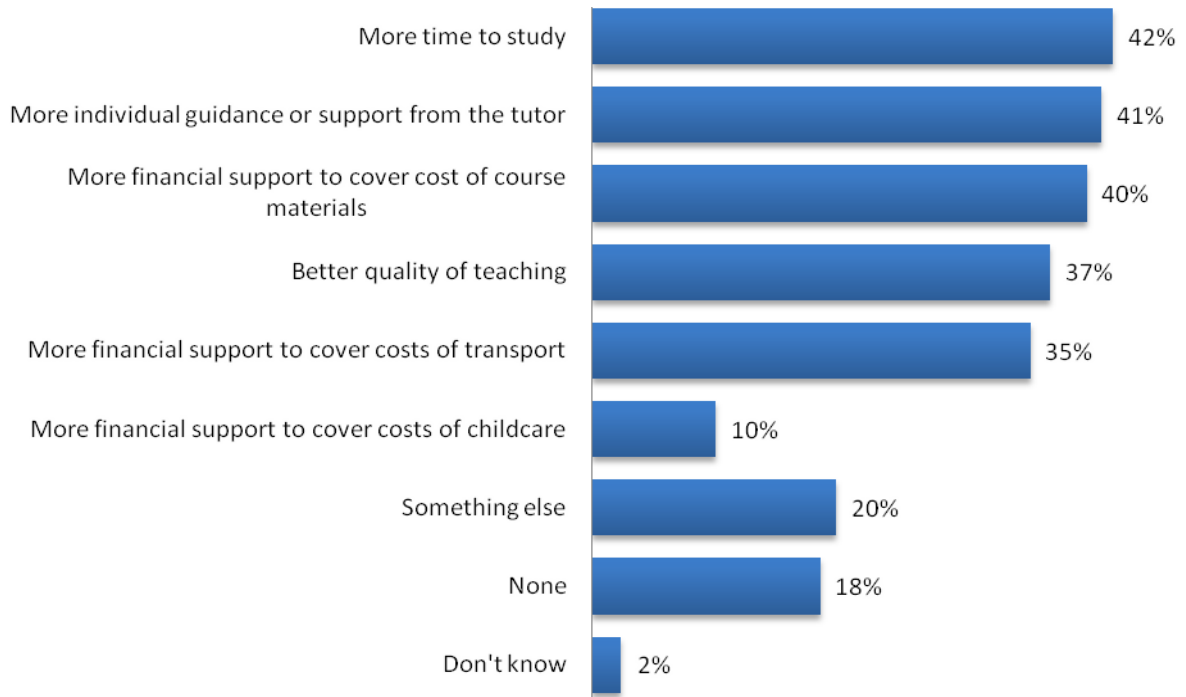
General living costs are most likely to be reported as the cause of financial difficulties (60% of those citing financial concerns). Nearly half (46%) reported concerns about the cost of course materials or books, with fewer reporting concerns about transport costs (39%).

When asked what might have helped them to complete their course, 'more time to study' was the most frequently selected option (by 42% of early leavers), and slightly fewer (41%) selected 'more individual guidance or support from the tutor'. A similar proportion cited 'more financial support for course materials' (40%) with just over a third citing 'more financial support for transport' (35%) (see figure below).

By age, younger respondents are more likely to feel that more individual guidance or support from a tutor would have helped them to complete their course (47% of 16-18 year olds, compared with 44% of 19-25 year olds and 34% of 26+ year olds). They are also more likely to feel that nothing would have helped them (25%, compared with 13% of 19-25 year olds and 16% of 26+ year olds). Older respondents are more likely to cite more financial support in respect of childcare costs as being useful in this respect (14% of 26+ year olds, compared with 11% of 19-25 year olds and just 4% of 16-18 year olds). However, overall, they are most likely to cite more time to study

(41%), as are respondents between 19 and 25 years of age (47%) who are also equally likely to cite better quality of teaching.

Figure 8: Ways that learners may have been helped to complete their course, prompted, multiple response (where did not complete the course) Base = 182



### 4.3 On-going or further financial assistance

Only a minority of learners that are still on or who have completed the course (7%) have received financial assistance other than Discretionary Hardship funds.

This is equally likely to help meet the costs of course materials (49% of those getting further financial assistance) and/or transport costs (48%).

## 5 Achievement

### Key findings

The great majority, 88%, of those who completed their Discretionary Funding – Hardship-supported course achieved one or more qualifications. Of all those who started a course (including early leavers), 79% achieved one or more qualifications.

More than a third (36%) of those who achieved qualifications, achieved at Level 3 or above.

Nine out of ten learners who achieved a qualification feel that the funding contributed substantially to that outcome.

### 5.1 Achievement of qualifications

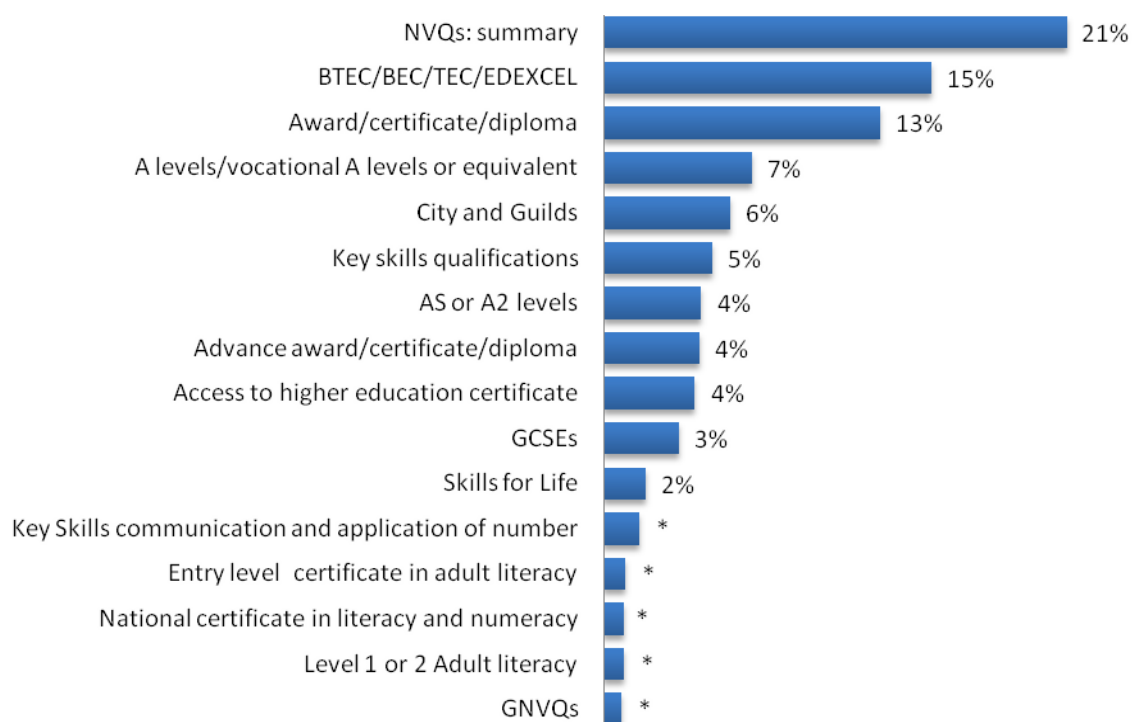
Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) of learners who completed their course were able to achieve a qualification. (Of those achieving a qualification: 22% achieved at Level 1, 33% at Level 2, 34% at Level 3, and 2% at Level 4. A further 9% received a qualification without an NVQ equivalence, that is, below Level 1.) The proportion of completers achieving a qualification is consistent between the two years during which learners were registered for funding (89% in 2007/08 and 88% in 2006/07).

Learners are very positive about the contribution that the funding made to their achievement of these qualifications. Although the majority do not feel the funding was essential to enabling them to undertake the learning, 58% feel the funding helped ‘a great deal’ and a further 32% consider that it helped ‘a fair amount’.

The proportion who feel that the funding helped a great deal/a fair amount is high even amongst those who would definitely still have done the course without the funding (87%) or for whom (in their view) the funding made no difference to the likelihood of completion (69%).

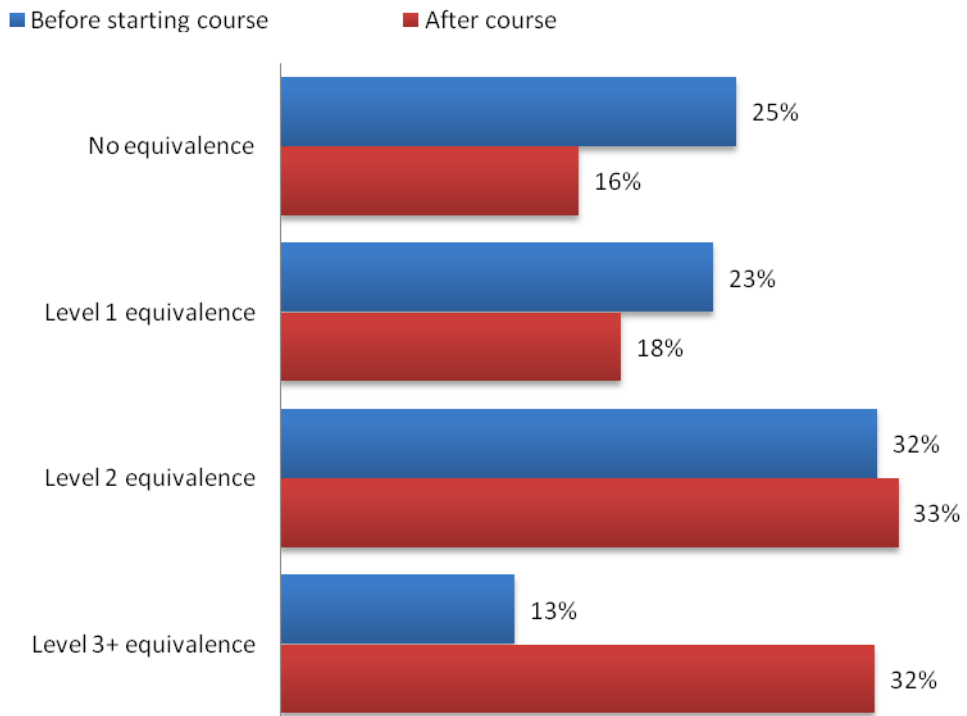
The qualifications which were achieved are set out in more detail in the following figure:

Figure 9: Qualifications achieved from the funded course (where achieved any qualifications) Base = 1,274  
 \*denotes less than 0.5%



A comparison of the NVQ equivalence of learners' qualifications before and after the course for which they received the funding (based on all respondents) shows a significant increase in qualification levels. The proportion without a qualification with any NVQ equivalence fell from 25% to 16% and the increase in the proportion with Level 3+ qualification is particularly significant (from 13% to 32%):

Figure 10: NVQ equivalence before and after the course for which received funding (all respondents) Base: 2,000





## 6 Learning Progression

### Key findings

There is clear evidence that participation in Discretionary Funding – Hardship-supported learning promotes significant further learning beyond the original course:

27% have taken up further learning.

86% of those who have completed this further learning got a qualification.

A further 15% have registered for further learning.

Of those not registered for a further course, 30% say that they definitely intend to progress on to a further course.

In total, a third (32%) of ex-Discretionary Hardship funded-learners report that they have learned or are now learning further, they are registered to learn, or they intend to register to learn.

82% of people who have taken up or registered for further learning have learned, are learning, or will learn towards a *higher qualification* than that at which their Discretionary Hardship funded course was targeted.

There is clear evidence, too, that financial support is important to this progression. Of those who have undertaken further learning, 55% have received financial support, with learners moving on to other grants, such as student loans/bursaries in more than a third of cases. A large majority (97%) of these people report that funding was important to this further participation.

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

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

### 6.1 Learning progression

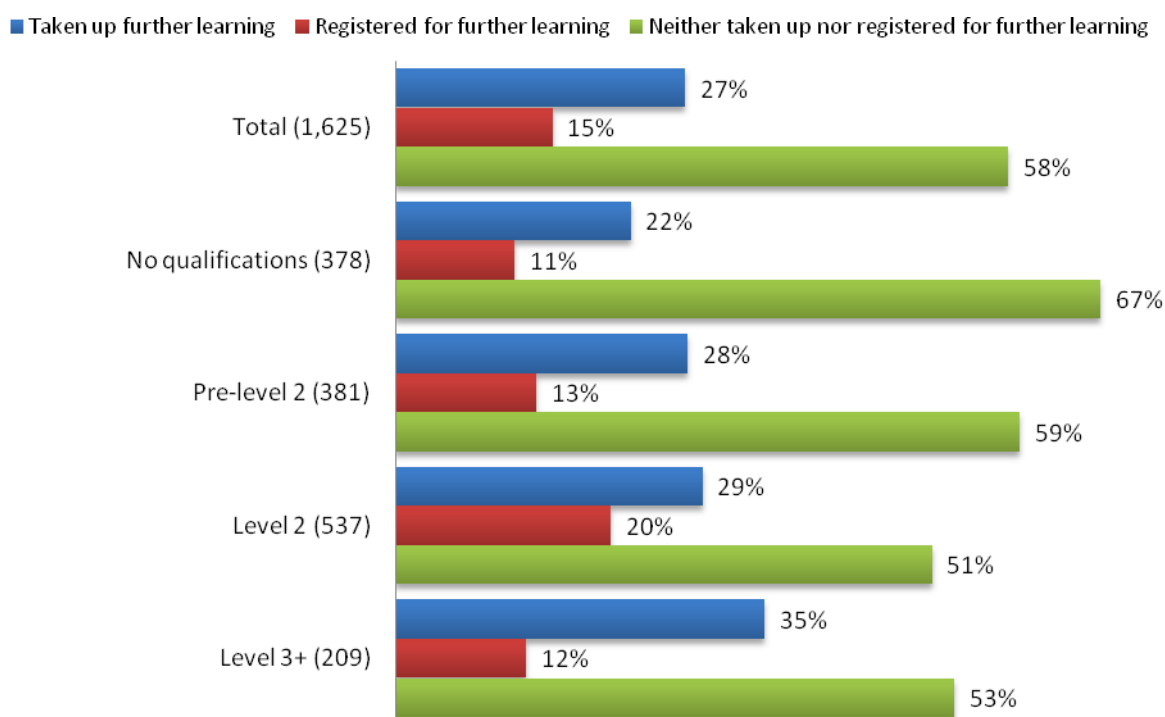
27% of those no longer on the original course for which they received the Discretionary Funding - Hardship report that they have taken up other learning since leaving that course. Those who completed their original course are significantly more likely than early leavers to have gone on to further learning (28%, compared with 20%).

A *further* 15% of learners no longer on their original course have registered for further learning but not yet begun it. The proportion is twice as high amongst those who completed their original course than amongst those who left early (16%, compared with 8%).

Thus, more than two-fifths of learners no longer on the original course (42%) have taken up or registered for further learning.

The propensity to have taken up or registered for further learning is greater amongst learners that were previously better qualified. This is shown in the chart below, which shows progression by previous qualification level:

Figure 11: Take up of further learning by qualification level prior to the funded learning (where no longer on the original course) Figures in parentheses are sample bases



## 6.2 Level of further learning

The great majority (82%) of the 42% of learners who have taken up or registered for further learning, undertake learning at a higher level than their funded course. The proportion is significantly higher amongst those who completed their original course than amongst those who left their course early (83%, compared with 65%).

## 6.3 Funding of further learning

More than half (55%) of those who have taken up further learning have received further financial assistance. This is most likely to have involved other grants for learners, including student loans/bursaries<sup>1</sup>, although nearly 3 in 10 of these who have received further assistance have received a further Discretionary funding award:

<sup>1</sup> As far as we can be sure, given that responses are based on respondents' sometimes imperfect recall and understanding of the various funding schemes, this funding is independent of Discretionary Funding - Hardship

**Table 1: Schemes from which learners have received funding for further learning (where received further financial assistance) Base = 239 \*Base = 429 (where taken up further learning and still on it/completed it)**

Received funding for further learning*	55%
Did not receive funding for further learning*	45%
Other grants for learners including student loans/bursaries	37%
Discretionary funds – for transport, books and learning materials	29%
Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)	16%
Adult Learning Grant (ALG)	8%
Discretionary funds – 20+ childcare	4%
6 <sup>th</sup> form College Childcare scheme	1%
Residential support scheme	<0.5%
Don't know	15%

Less than one in twenty learners (3%) who have received funding for further learning has also received other financial assistance that is in addition to that from one of the schemes in the previous table.

Where further financial assistance (from any source) has been received, it is most likely to help with buying course materials (56%) and/or to pay for transport (31%).

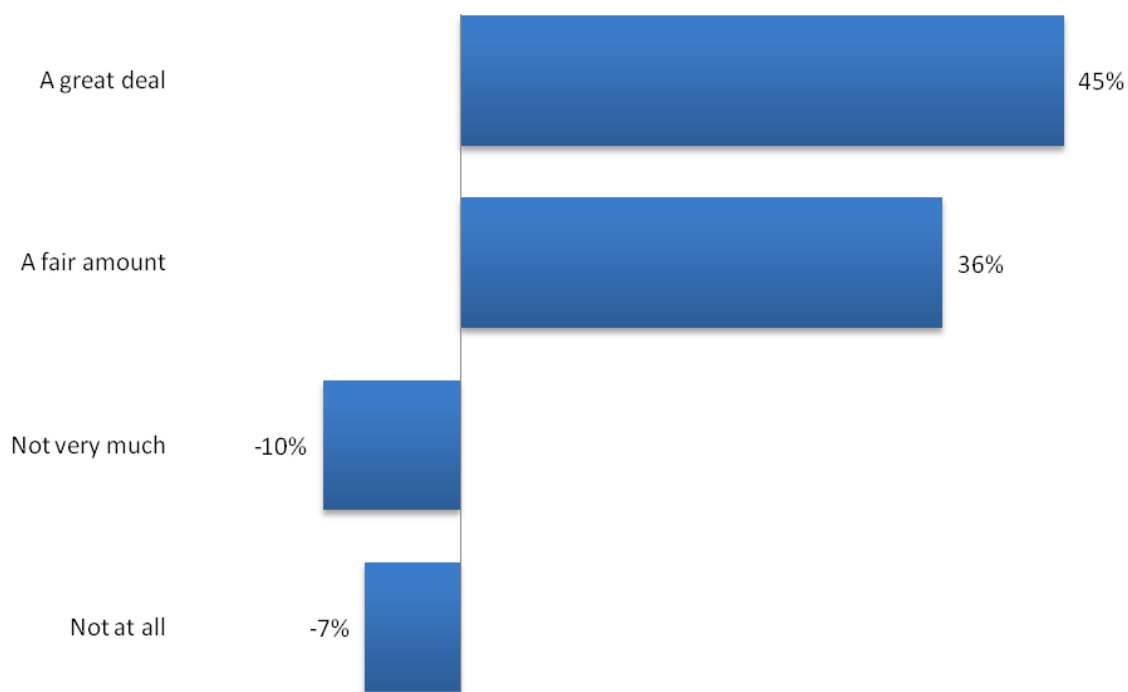
More than half the learners (54%) who have *completed* a further course of learning and received funding to support that further study feel they could not have completed the course without that funding. The majority of the remainder (43%) feel they would have struggled financially without it.

Similarly, more than half the learners who are *still on the further course* and receive funding (54%) feel they would not still be on the course without it and, again, most of the remainder feel they would still be on the course without the funding but would struggle financially (34%).

#### 6.4 Impact of Discretionary Funding - Hardship on learning progression

Discretionary Funding - Hardship has a strong influence on progression into further learning. Most learners (81%) feel that the funding has helped them move on to further learning. This includes 45% who feel the funding helped them a great deal:

Figure 12: Extent to which funding has helped learners to move on to further learning (all respondents) Base = 2,000



Of those not yet registered for a future new course, 30% definitely intend to go on to a further course.

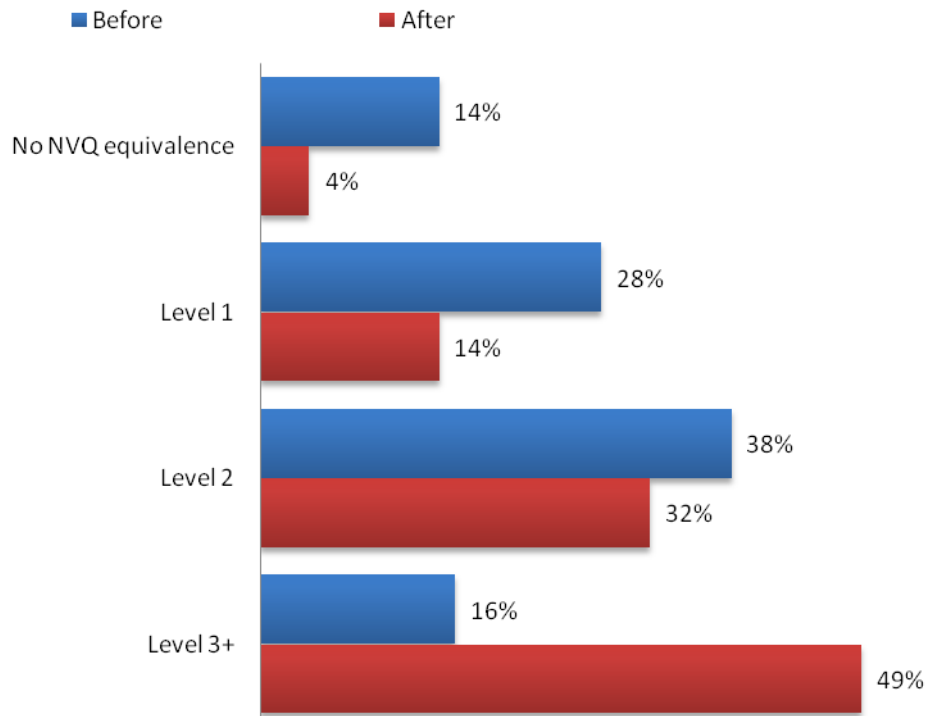
## 6.5 Achievement from further learning

Nearly all learners (99%) *still in* further learning report that they are aiming to achieve qualifications from this further learning.

The majority of learners (86%) who have *completed* a further course have achieved a qualification from it.

As a result of qualifications achieved from their further course, the proportion of these learners (that is, those who have gone on to further learning and achieved a qualification from it) who are now without an NVQ equivalent qualification has fallen (from 14% to 4%) and nearly half are now qualified at level 3 or above:

Figure 13: NVQ equivalence before and after further learning (where achieved a qualification on further course)  
Base = 76

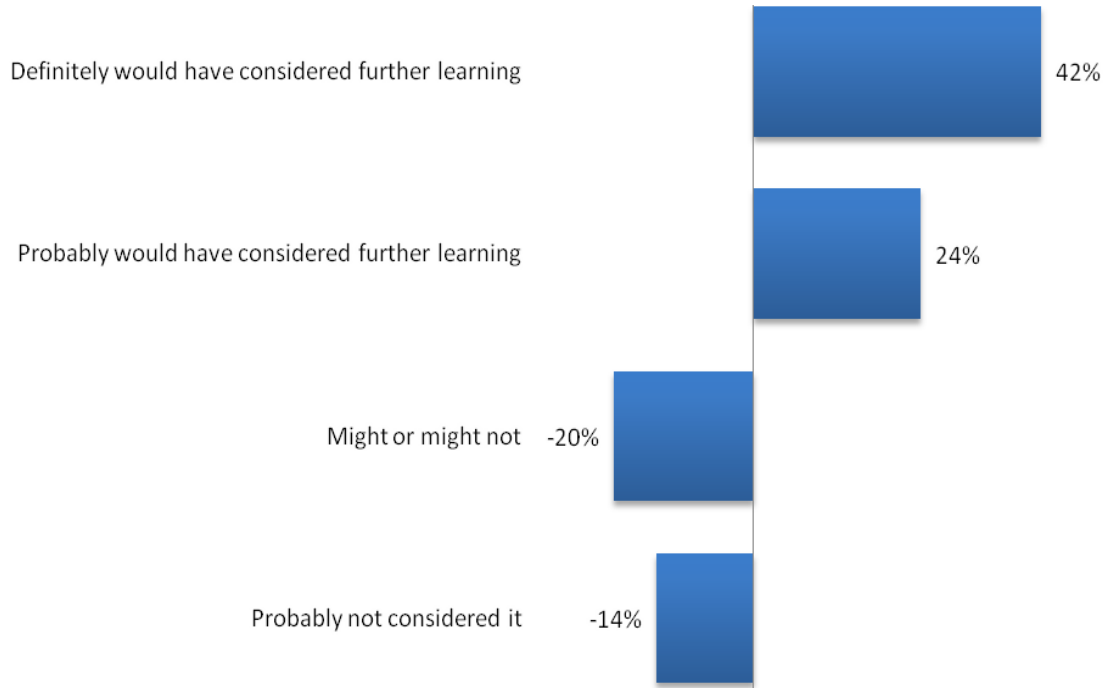


All the learners who achieved a qualification from their further learning and received funding whilst on the course believed that the funding helped them to gain the qualification.

## 6.6 Take up of further learning by early leavers

Two-thirds (66%) of those who dropped out early from their original course because of financial issues and who have not taken up or registered for another course, said that they would probably or definitely have considered doing more learning had more financial support been available. This suggests that lack of financial support (or knowledge of its being available) has had a significant negative impact on the extent to which these learners were able to progress into further learning. Please note that these findings should be treated with caution as they are based on a small base of 55 learners.

Figure 14: Impact of further financial support on take up of further learning (where left original course early for financial reasons and have not taken up further learning) Base = 55 Caution: small sample base



## 7 Employment Progression

### Key findings

The effect of Discretionary Funding - Hardship on participants' labour market positions is ambiguous. It appears that the impact of the supported learning on actual circumstances is modest.

Because Discretionary Funding - Hardship frequently supported those who were already in education to complete a course, the proportion now in learning (despite the progression noted in the last section) has fallen significantly.

Then, of the other three main statuses subsequent to ending their course:

Inactivity<sup>2</sup> has fallen a little (from 21% to 19%).

Employment has risen somewhat (from 18% to 33% with more than half of the increase coming from increased part-time employment).

But unemployment has also risen (from 7% to 15%).

For those in work following the course, 70% feel their career benefited from participation. Those who now have a job and also had a job prior to participation report an average increase in annual salary of more than £5,000. And of all those who completed a funded course, 86% feel the course was helpful to their career even if (as in most cases) they have not yet got a job.

### 7.1 Extent to which funded learning helped career progression

Learners who completed a funded course are very positive about the contribution that the funding has made to progress in their career. Overall, 86% of these learners feel it has helped them at least 'a fair amount', including 48% who feel it has helped 'a great deal'.

The proportion who feel that the funding has helped 'a great deal' to progress their career, either now or in the longer term, is higher amongst learners aged 30 and over (53%) and amongst those not in work prior to the funded learning (54%).

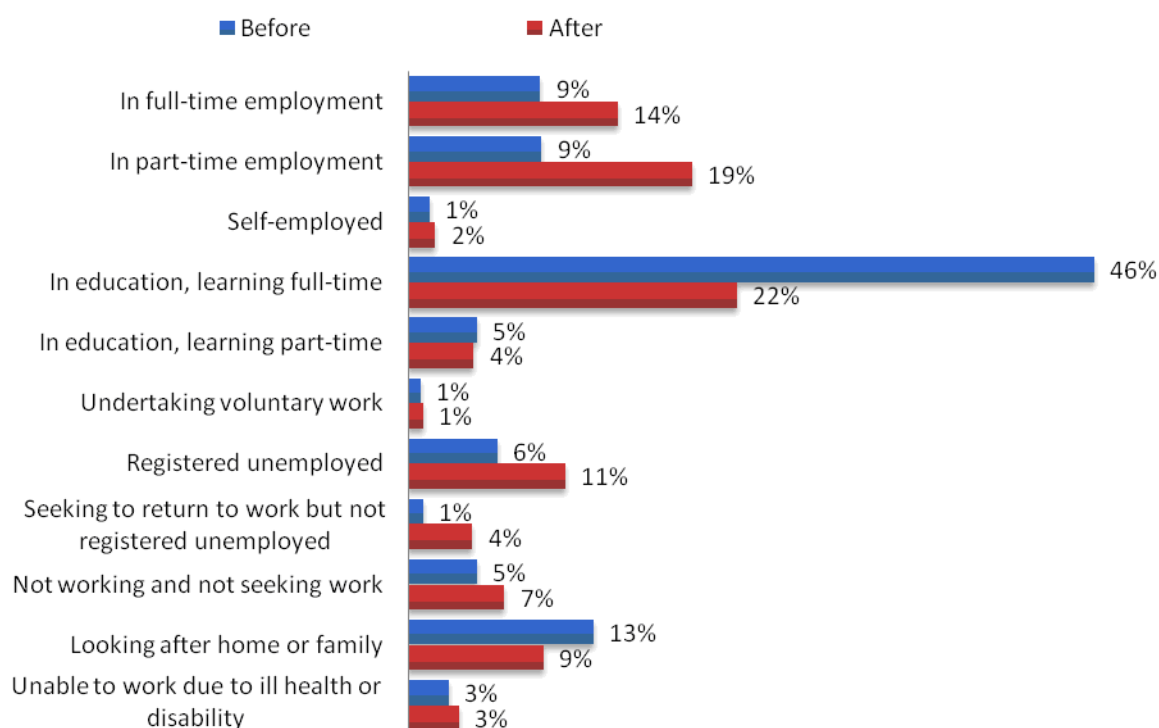
### 7.2 Employment status: before and after the original course

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

---

<sup>2</sup> Inactivity: neither in work nor seeking work

Figure 15: Employment status: before and after the funded course (all respondents) Base = 2,000



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

- A third (33%) are in work (with 57% of these being in part-time work);
- 27% have continued in education;
- 37% are not working including 11% who are registered as unemployed, 4% who are seeking work but not registered as unemployed and 22% who are 'inactive';
- 3% are unable to work due to ill health or disability.

More than three-quarters (78%) of all those in full or part time employment after their course are in a permanent job. This compares with a similar proportion before the learning (74%) and therefore presents a consistent picture in this respect.

### 7.3 Financial benefits

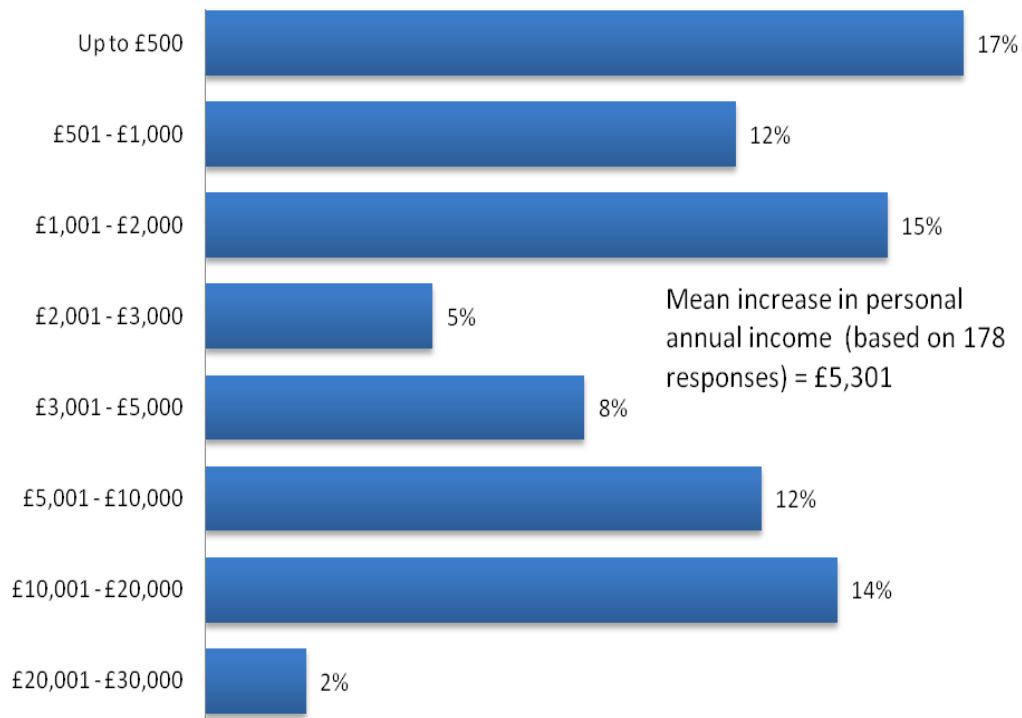
A quarter of learners (25%) report that their annual personal income has increased since they started their original course.

More than four-fifths of learners (86%) who were in employment both before and after the learning and who report an increase in their personal income were able and willing to provide an estimate of the size of the increase. The average (mean) increase in



income amongst those in employment both pre- and post- learning is £5,301 per annum.

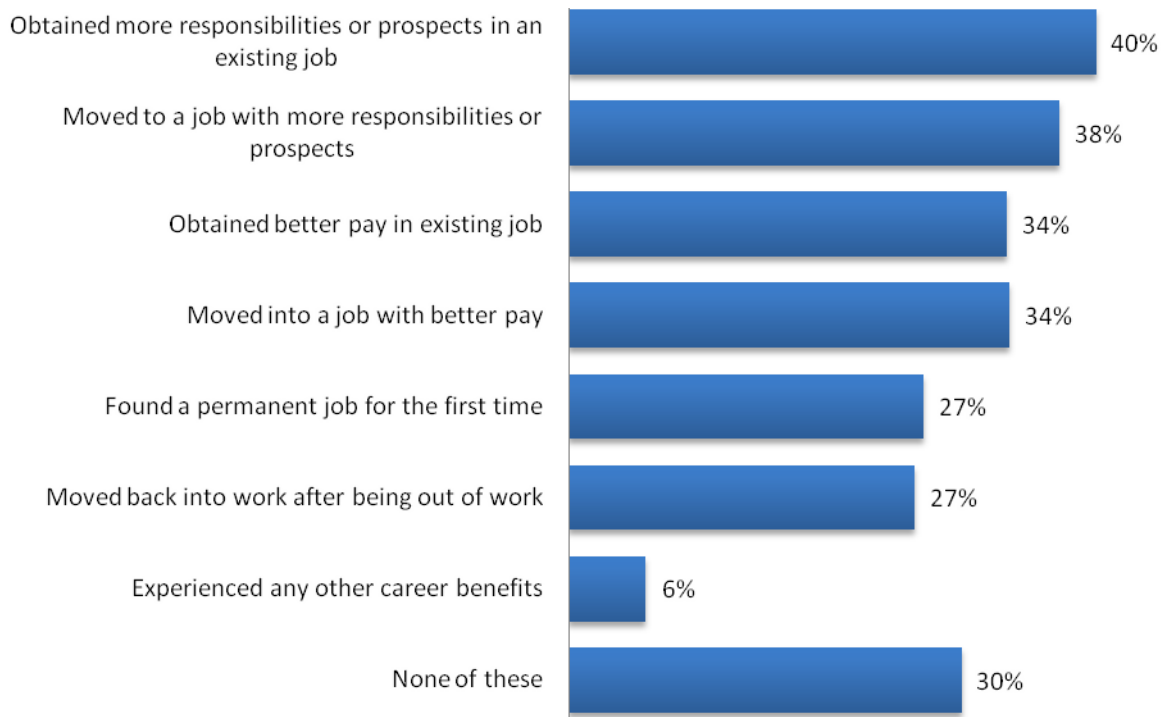
Figure 16: Approximate increase in annual personal income (where in work before and after learning, report that their annual personal income has increased and provided a response) Base = 178



### 7.1 Career progression

The majority of learners (70%) who are now in work following completion of a funded course feel their career benefited in at least one way. These benefits are summarised in the figure below:

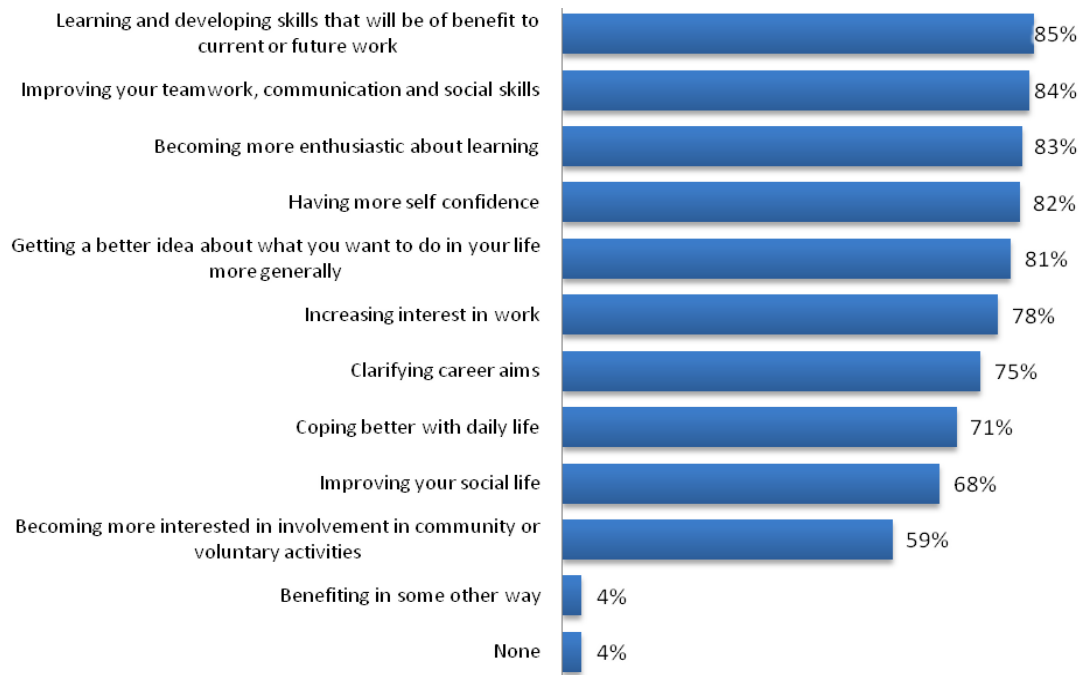
Figure 17: Career benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (where completed any funded course and in work) Base = 607



## 8 Personal and Social Benefits

The majority of learners selected every item in a list of possible benefits which resulted from undertaking the course for which they received funding. This shows that benefits of learning are wide-ranging and widely perceived; only 4% of learners could identify none of these benefits:

Figure 18: Benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (all respondents) Base = 2,000



Learners who failed to complete their original course or who did not achieve a qualification from it are both a little less likely to report some of these benefits. One in ten (10%) of those failing to complete their funded course and one in seven (14%) of those not achieving a qualifications from the funded learning reported none of the specified benefits. This compares with 3% of completers and 2% of learners achieving a qualification.

Whatever impacts Discretionary Funding - Hardship has on achievement of qualifications, and on employment progression, it is quite clear that receiving this funding significantly improves learners' morale and sense of direction, which may have a positive impact upon their future employment prospects.

## 9 Overview

Key indicators based on Discretionary funding (Hardship) survey responses are:

<b>Engagement</b>	
Definitely/probably would not have done course without the funding	37%
Concerned about having enough money whilst on the course	59%
Easy to access information on Discretionary funding (Hardship)	77%
Received IAG on funding available	38%
Where received, IAG was helpful	96%
<b>Retention</b>	
Proportion who completed (Benchmark for all in FE in England = 88%)	89%
Funding important or essential to completion	83%
<b>Achievement</b>	
Funding important or very important to achievement of a qualification	89%
Proportion of starters who achieved a qualification	79%
<b>Progression</b>	
Proportion who had undertaken further learning or have registered to do so	42%
Proportion of those who have undertaken further learning who have received financial assistance to support that learning	55%
Proportion of those in employment following funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)	33% (+15% points)
Proportion of those in learning following funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)	27% (-24% points)
Proportion of those unemployed or inactive following funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)	37% (+8% points)
Proportion reporting a positive personal or social ('soft') benefit from funded learning	96%

Using these indicators suggests the strengths and weaknesses of Discretionary Funding - Hardship and of the learning participation it supports:

#### *Strengths*

- Funding through the Discretionary Hardship Funds has a significant positive effect on engagement, retention, attainment and learning progression.
- Information on the funding was easily available to its recipients. (However, the survey was, of course, only of Discretionary Funding - Hardship recipients. We did not survey young people who are eligible for the funding but did not receive it, but further research has been commissioned by the LSC to explore the needs of more disadvantaged learners and non-learners and will cover issues around access to IAG amongst those not in learning.)
- Retention and success rates amongst those receiving Hardship funding are similar to the corresponding national FE rates in each case. Thus, the funding could be said to place learners receiving it on a level playing field with those whose circumstances are more advantageous. This may be regarded as a strength.
- In addition to learning benefits, virtually all Discretionary Hardship Funds-funded participants achieve and acknowledge social or personal benefits which may lead to future progression and development.

#### *Issues to consider in the further development of Discretionary Funding – Hardship*

- There may have been some historic weakness in the scope of provision of information, advice, and guidance on learning opportunities and on the funding available to support take up of those opportunities.
- Whilst there has been an increase in the number of learners in employment following the learning, this is largely at the expense of a reduction in the number of learners in full-time education. Outcomes are not particularly positive. 22% of supported learners have continued in education; 33% are in work, but 57% of these are in part-time jobs. 41% are neither in education nor employment, including 15% who are unemployed and seeking work and 7% who are not working and not seeking work. These findings suggest that many people need assistance towards the end of their courses to help them find positive directions when those courses end.

## 10 Appendix

### 10.1 Sample error

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

To give an indication, a finding of 50% on a base size of 2,000 interviews has a confidence interval of +/-2.2% at the 95% level. That is to say that if the survey returns a finding of 50% for a particular question there is a 95% probability that the “true” figure (amongst all those learners in the population, not just those interviewed) will lie within +/-2.2% (i.e. between 47.8% and 52.2%) of that finding.

When looking at sub-groups within a sample this confidence interval increases. So for example, when looking at a sub group like those that registered for a course in 2007/08 (with a base size of 1,005 interviews in this study) statistical confidence is reduced further still (to +/-3.1% in this case).

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

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

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

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