Evaluation and Good Practice Team

Issues Affecting Education and Training in Sparsely Populated Areas

Learning+Skills Council

Contents

Foreword

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is concerned that issues for colleges and providers, and learners, in sparsely populated areas are identified and taken into account in developing and implementing policy and strategy.

The LSC has established a Rural Issues Task Group comprising executive directors, chairs and members of local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs). This group will advise the LSC on rural issues and will engage in discussions with a number of key external partners to make sure that related LSC developments are informed by the wider rural agenda.

This research undertaken by GHK Consulting is useful in highlighting the views of some colleges and other providers and learners in sparsely populated areas. This document is the full research report and does not represent the LSC view on any issues raised. The Rural Issues Task Group and other groups within the Council will take the outcomes of the research into account in taking the rural agenda forward.

Executive Summary

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned GHK Consulting to undertake a research project to identify issues affecting education and training in sparsely populated areas.

This research links closely to the Study of Area Costs, undertaken by Frontier Economics (2002), which developed measures to identify sparsity based on the electronic mapping of each college, and analysed each college's provision in terms of its breadth and costs. This study defined a sparsely populated area as one where the average number of persons per hectare was fewer than one.

Aims of the project

The project aims to identify:
- barriers preventing colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas from offering broad and inclusive education and training;
- barriers to participation in education and training faced by learners in sparsely populated areas;
- barriers to participation in education and training faced by persons from specific groups, such as those with disabilities or who are from minority ethnic communities; and
- good practice in overcoming such barriers.

Method of approach

The research draws on the findings of a review of existing literature on barriers to education and training in sparsely populated areas and strategies to overcome them, undertaken by the LSC early in 2002. Some information has also been provided by the LSC Rurality and Sparsity Executive Directors Group, which has identified initiatives for addressing issues related to the provision of education and training

in sparsely populated areas. The group identified six local LSC areas where further investigations might be carried out. These are:
- Cumbria;
- Derbyshire;
- Devon and Cornwall;
- Norfolk;
- North Yorkshire; and
- Shropshire.

Selected colleges and providers in these areas were interviewed to find out more about successful strategies for overcoming barriers to participation in education and training. The views of learners were collected through focus groups or one-to-one discussions. Interviews took place with all parties involved in the development and/or provision of education and training, including local LSC representatives.

To a large extent, the research findings reflect the perceptions and opinions of those who were interviewed. The purpose of the project is to explore the issues, not to evaluate the strategies highlighted.

Barriers for providers

Table 1 shows the key issues and barriers affecting colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas.

Although these issues are problematic, some may have advantageous consequences for learners. For example, staffing costs may be high because there is often low staff turnover in sparsely populated areas, but learners may then benefit from a stable and experienced workforce. Many learners enjoy being in small classes. Participation, retention and achievement rates are often high in sparsely populated areas and these may be partly attributable to the small size of many classes and the low staff turnover.

Barriers for potential learners

There are two key issues affecting learners in sparsely populated areas. The first is the range of provision. Many learners consider that the range of providers and courses available to them is narrow. The second is transport. It is essential for learners to have an affordable means of transport to allow them to get to and from providers' premises. Learners who benefit from a good local transport system or who have their own means of transport usually find the course they want by travelling further afield.

Transport is a key issue for learners with disabilities in sparsely populated areas. Appropriate transport for these learners can be hard to find and expensive. No significant issues from minority ethnic groups were identified, but in the areas covered by the project, the number of persons from such groups were small.

Good practice in overcoming the barriers

Collaboration and partnership

Collaboration between providers is one important means of making provision more widely available but can be expensive in terms of time and money.

A key challenge facing colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas is finding ways of achieving efficiency through collaboration and partnership. Through collaboration, colleges and providers may be able to:
- offer provision in specialist areas to meet local demand;
- fill gaps in their curriculum;
- make the best use of resources;
- share expertise;
- achieve viability in learner numbers;
- share costs, including those for management, staff, premises, equipment and the implementation of the curriculum;

Key issue	Barrier
Low number of potential learners	A sparse population usually results in low learner numbers and small class sizes which means that running some courses is not economically viable.
Sole-provider role	Colleges and providers are usually a long way from any other colleges and providers, and are expected to offer a broad, diverse and inclusive curriculum. Many colleges and providers are asking for a definition of such a curriculum.
Costs of provision	In sparsely populated areas, many courses are uneconomic to run.
Transport	The lack or high cost of transport.
Sparsely distributed small- to medium-sized employers	Providers in sparsely populated areas have particular problems recruiting work based learners because employers are sparsely distributed and their workforces tend to be small.
Visibility of learners who need help with their basic skills	In small communities, it is particularly difficult to reach those who need help with their basic skills owing to concerns that they will be identified and experience prejudice from others.

Table 1: Key issues and barriers affecting providers of education and training in sparsely populated areas.

- offer staff more challenging and responsible management positions;
- increase the range of provision, particularly for basic skills and work based learning programmes;
- take a strategic overview of provision;
- establish close links with learners in primary and secondary schools, adult learning and community centres, employers' premises, pubs and churches; and
- facilitate progression of learners from schools to further education (FE) and higher education (HE).

Identifying need

In examples of good practice, provision meets particular local needs and addresses local issues, such as:
- skills shortages;
- demand from 16-18 year olds for FE courses; and
- the desire of colleges and providers to widen participation.

In sparsely populated areas, the numbers of potential learners are comparatively low but unit costs can be high. It is crucial, therefore, that local needs are identified carefully and that provision is responsive to these. In some areas, learners themselves have been involved in the design of provision to meet their needs.

Use of information and communications technology

Information and communications technology (ICT) plays a vital role in removing barriers to learners' participation in education and training and is proving effective in facilitating collaboration between colleges and providers. Online learning allows learners who live some distance away from any college or provider to access provision in, or at a centre near,

their home. The establishment of a broadband network makes it quicker and more convenient for colleges and providers to communicate with each other electronically and makes sharing resources through e-mail more feasible.

To be of maximum benefit to learners, it is essential that both software and hardware are of good quality and learning materials are appropriate and meet learners' needs.

Through e-learning, learners can study on their own at a distance, using CD-ROMs, laptops and other portable devices. It is important for learners to have readily available access to sources of information, such as the Internet or colleges' and providers' intranets, and to be able to communicate with other learners and receive tutorial support electronically. It is essential that technical support is available to learners who work in isolation and at a distance from a college or provider.

As a medium of learning, e-learning is more effective on some courses than others. In examples of good practice, learners who study largely through e-learning provision also have regular face-to-face contact with tutors and other learners.

Outreach and mobile provision

Outreach centres, such as schools, community centres and libraries are key to any strategy for the effective provision of learning in sparsely populated areas. Outreach centres enable people to learn at a place closer to their home which reduces travelling time and costs. Mobile learning units are also particularly useful as a means of bringing training to employers' workforces.

Transport

Initiatives to help learners overcome transport difficulties include:
- use of government funding to provide special bus services through the Innovative Bus Scheme;
- provision of subsidised driving lessons for learners;
- provision of mopeds for learners;
- subsidised rail or bus travel;
- provision of taxis; and
- appointment of a rural transport broker to co-ordinate the initiatives in an area.

Marketing

Effective marketing can increase learner numbers. Joint marketing initiatives between a number of colleges have proved effective.

Basic skills

Learners who want to improve their basic skills make up an important target group in sparsely populated areas. In any community, and particularly those which are small, some of these learners feel embarrassed at having to seek help and don't want others to know they need it. Colleges and providers have been sensitive to these learners' concerns and have 'wrapped up' tuition in basic skills as part of, for instance, information technology (IT) or vocational programmes. In some instances, colleges and providers have worked collaboratively with other organisations, for example Connexions, and have exercised initiative and imagination in building basic skills into courses.

Further research

There is a need to carry out further research in the following areas:
- The range and scope of provision at a local level needs to be reviewed.
- Further research to find out whether colleges and providers, and learners face additional costs compared to colleges and providers, and learners in urban areas.
- The costs of providing outreach and mobile units and identification of the factors which make such units effective.
- Further research about why it is particularly difficult to provide vocational programmes economically in sparsely populated areas.
- Investigation of whether additional costs are offset by cost savings in respect of some factors of provision in sparsely populated areas and whether colleges in these areas distribute the LSC learner support fund differently from colleges in urban areas.
- Further research about how to offer a broad and inclusive curriculum in sparsely populated areas.
- ICT in sparsely populated areas.
- Identification of successful strategies to encourage employers to provide training.
- How demand for learning in sparsely populated areas can be increased, and the needs of those who currently choose not to learn can be identified.

Part 1

Introduction

Project aims

1   The LSC commissioned GHK Consulting to undertake a research project into the issues affecting education and training in sparsely populated areas. This report sets out the findings of the research. It aims to provide guidance to the LSC and colleges and providers on ways of removing barriers to participation in education and training in sparsely populated areas, and suggests areas for further research.

2   The project aims to identify:
   ● barriers preventing colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas from offering a broad and inclusive curriculum in education and training;
   ● barriers to participation in education and training faced by learners in sparsely populated areas;
   ● barriers to participation in education and training faced by persons from specific groups, such as those who have disabilities or are from minority ethnic communities; and
   ● good practice in overcoming the barriers.

3   This research links closely to the Study of Area Costs project, undertaken by Frontier Economics (Frontier Economics, 2002) for the National Rates Advisory Group of the LSC. That study developed measures to identify sparsity through electronic mapping of the catchment area for each college and it also analysed each college's provision in terms of its breadth and costs.

Policy context and developments

4   The LSC has a statutory duty to encourage participation in education and training, and the involvement of employers in the provision of education and training. Key priorities are widening participation and making sure that learning is inclusive. Local LSCs have been asked to draw up a local participation strategy to 'put individual learners at the heart of the system' (LSC, 2003). Local LSCs are addressing important issues, such as the provision of incentives to learn, meeting the learning and support needs of disadvantaged groups, and helping take forward the implementation of local social, employment and community regeneration policies.

5   A Rurality and Sparsity Executive Directors Group was set up. Its members were executive directors from some local LSCs which covered sparsely populated areas. This group steered the project in its early stages before the Rural Issues Task Group was established.

6   The Rurality and Sparsity Executive Directors Group agreed for the purposes of this project, a curriculum would be judged sufficiently broad and inclusive if it offered:
   ● provision at level 2;
   ● appropriate provision at level 3 for learners successful at level 2;
   ● full-time and part-time modes of study; and
   ● a wide range of general education and vocational courses.

7   The central issues in sparsely populated areas are the breadth and quality of the curriculum, and the costs of provision. Several colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas have maintained that these costs are disproportionately high. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that to ensure breadth of provision, some colleges in rural areas are running courses that are not cost effective. These issues are explored in Part 2.

8   The spotlight is on the future of rural communities. In its White Paper, A Fair Deal for Rural England (DEFRA, 2000), the Government has committed itself to take issues for rural areas into account in its policy making (rural proofing). The Countryside Agency was asked to monitor whether the various departments are ensuring that their policies are rural proofed, and it is expected that rural proofing will become routine practice.

9   Some of the outcomes of the first year of the rural proofing initiative will have implications for planning provision of education and training in sparsely populated areas.

10 Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have been allocated £30 million to establish pilot projects to support the rural roll out of broadband ICT, and UK On-line now targets rural areas specifically.

11 Following the publication of the Government's White Paper, Schools Achieving Success (DfES, 2001), smaller schools in rural areas are now pooling resources.

12 Disadvantaged communities in rural areas are specifically included in the priority groups which will benefit from Skills for Life, the national strategy to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of adults (DfES, 2001a).

13 Various bodies are involved in determining policy for sparsely populated areas. These include RDAs, local learning partnerships, local education authorities (LEAs) and Connexions Partnerships (for young people). Policy issues relate to transport, public services, information technology (IT) infrastructure, workforce training and skill shortages.

14 The Government's 2002 Spending Review stressed the importance of ensuring funding arrangements enable RDAs to play a full role in developing and implementing education and training provision. From April 2003, budgets for education and training for adults will be shared and co-ordinated by local LSCs and RDAs working in partnership.

15 In November 2002, the DfES launched its important policy initiative, *Success for All*. As part of this initiative, all local LSCs will undertake a strategic area review. The review will look at how well provision in an area meets the needs of learners and employers and will seek to identify areas of weaknesses and strengths.

16   The RDAs produced their first Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action in October 2002. These frameworks set out what needs to happen in a region to maintain and grow a healthy labour market. They are also intended to facilitate effective planning of education and training.

17   The following are expected to have a beneficial effect upon education and training in sparsely populated areas:
- area-wide inspections of provision for learners aged 16-19 by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (from March 2003 the inspections cover provision for learners aged 14 to 19);
- recommendations by Ofsted for improving education and training which will be implemented by local LSCs;
- strategic area reviews that are part of the *Success for All* strategy;
- developments to strengthen regional infrastructure such as the Frameworks for Regional Employment and Skills Action;
- legislative changes relating to the provision of transport for learners, which came into effect from January 2003;
- the requirement for LEAs to publish transport policy statements and continue to co-ordinate transport arrangements for learners under 19; and
- the availability, from September 2004, of education maintenance allowances (EMAs) of up to £1,500 a year for 16-18 year old learners.

Research method

18   The project is concerned with sparsely populated areas, which are not necessarily rural areas. The research drew on the findings of a review of existing literature on barriers to education and training in sparsely populated areas and strategies to overcome them, which the LSC undertook early in 2002 (Morris, 2002). This review took account of information provided by members of the Rurality and Sparsity Executive Directors Group.

19   This group identified six local LSC areas where research would be carried out. These were:
- Cumbria;
- Derbyshire;
- Devon and Cornwall;
- Norfolk;
- North Yorkshire; and
- Shropshire.

20   In each area colleges and providers were interviewed to find out what they considered to be the main barriers to participation in education and training, and how these might be overcome.

21   Views were gathered from learners, either through focus groups or one-to-one discussions, about their courses or programmes, and any barriers to participation in education and training they faced. Partner organisations were also interviewed to gather their views on what constituted barriers to participation, and how these might be removed or overcome. Those who took part in these interviews included representatives from the local LSCs, Connexions (in North Yorkshire and Cumbria), the LEA (in Shropshire), Information, Advice and Guidance

Network (in Norfolk), Government Office (in Devon and Cornwall) and a small number of employers.

22   Information about those interviewed and consulted is given in Annex A.

23   The researchers drew on existing research and evaluation reports, including relevant Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspection reports. A bibliography is provided at Annex B.

24   The researchers also interviewed colleges and providers who have developed strategies to overcome the barriers in sparsely populated areas elsewhere in England.

25   The findings from the research project reflect to a great extent the views and opinions of those who gave evidence. The project aimed to explore the key issues affecting education and training in sparsely populated areas and identify what further research should be carried out. The project did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies used to overcome barriers to participation in education and training in sparsely populated areas. Furthermore, the strategies identified are not necessarily put forward as models. Each sparsely populated area has its own specific characteristics and these will have to be considered carefully before deciding how any barriers to participation are to be overcome.

26   Detailed information about the case studies and key statistics for each area are given in Annex C.

Part 2

Barriers to Education and Training in Sparsely Populated Areas

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27   This part of the report presents the views of learning providers and of learners themselves on barriers to participation in education and training in sparsely populated areas. These barriers are not necessarily unique to sparsely populated areas. Ways of overcoming the barriers are explored in Part 3.

Barriers faced by colleges and providers

Scale of operations

28   Many colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas have comparatively small numbers of learners and small class sizes. There may be few potential learners who wish to attend sixth form colleges or schools with sixth forms in these areas. In some instances the revenue these institutions receive through provision for post-16 learners is barely sufficient to cover their overhead costs.

29   In some colleges, a class size of 10 is regarded as good and many groups are much smaller than this. The addition or loss of only a few learners can make a course viable or not. In some instances, colleges adjust course timetables to suit learners' needs and encourage learners to remain on the course.

30   One FE college principal reported that:
'The main issue is that whatever we put on tends to be uneconomic…group sizes of 10 people are considered good going for us.'

31   Where the number of potential learners is low, the cost of providing some courses can be correspondingly high. Some colleges in sparsely populated areas find it hard to cover course costs.

32   Most of the smaller providers suggested they were small by necessity rather than desire. The number of potential learners in their catchment area was too small to allow them to grow significantly. Some colleges make a deliberate effort to recruit learners from particular groups or areas, but the numbers involved were low. One college principal commented:
'We can't match the attraction of the city for other things students are looking for – accommodation, night-life…'

33   In order to maintain breadth of provision, colleges and providers allow successful and well-subscribed courses to subsidise courses with low numbers. In broad terms, it appears that funding income from courses for full-time students aged 16-18 is used to pay for some vocational courses for adults, particularly those in vocational areas which meet local needs. The private and voluntary and community sector organisations which participated in the project do not appear to face the same problems over the low number of learners on programmes. There may be several reasons for this. These organisations:
- often cover a wider geographical area;
- draw on a range of different funding sources;
- do not necessarily make provision of training their key objective but regard it as one of many revenue-earning activities; or

● make provision of training a main objective and concentrate on meeting the needs of a few specific client groups.

It is important that colleges offer a wide range of subjects to learners on AS/A-level courses. Walford and North Shropshire College offer as many as 25 subjects. In the case of some subjects, however, class sizes are small. For example, there are only four or five learners in AS music and German classes. The college faces a dilemma over whether or not it should continue to run some uneconomic courses which have low numbers. Their closure could seriously disadvantage some students who are taking these courses together with others which are more viable, as part of a coherent programme.

34 For example, in certain parts of Cumbria, there is a significant amount of training, which is supported financially by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). This training is specific and tends to attract particular client groups such as middle-aged, white women. The range of provision is somewhat narrow and learners follow courses on IT, personal health, languages for holidays and so on. A voluntary sector provider commented: *'The curriculum is quite narrow compared to an FE college but it is what local people have come up with based on local needs.'*

35 Private and voluntary and community sector organisations consulted during the project suggested that the non-training parts of their business, or profitable training activities, which took place elsewhere, helped to pay for some training courses in sparsely populated areas.

36 There is little doubt that if colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas withdrew courses which were not economically viable, then the breadth of provision would be significantly reduced.

37 As a general rule, colleges and providers are reluctant to offer new provision for which there is demand from only a few learners.

Isolation and breadth of provision

38 Colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas are usually some distance away from other colleges and providers and are not in competition with them. Colleges in sparsely populated areas were often the sole provider for the area and felt it was their responsibility to offer the broadest possible curriculum. Their mission statement often contained words such as:
'ensuring local people are not disadvantaged educationally by living in an isolated area.'

39 Several of the colleges and providers were uncertain what constituted a 'broad and inclusive' curriculum and felt this should be better defined. They believed that the establishment of such a curriculum should be part of an overall strategy for ensuring that provision meets local needs. The general view was encapsulated by the principal of an FE college who said:
'there is a potential role for the LSC to tackle the need for provision through planning and then pay colleges to provide it if it is required.'

40   The sole provider role was less of an issue where the organisation was not a college. Providers usually specialised in one type of course or programme, such as work based learning or education and training for unemployed people.

41   Colleges in sparsely populated areas feel a responsibility to offer the broadest possible curriculum but can also face difficulties in developing the specialist provision for which there is a demand.

42   The findings of reports carried out on behalf of the Tariff Advisory Committee of the FEFC (FEFC, 2000) suggest that the ratio of programmes to learners is higher in colleges in sparsely populated areas than in colleges elsewhere. Another FE college principal commented, 'we are too diverse for our own good', even though this particular college did not provide some specialised vocational provision that requires capital investment, such as hairdressing.

43   Findings of the area-wide inspections carried out by Ofsted and the ALI suggest that there are deficiencies in the range of provision in urban areas. In particular, in both types of area, the range of vocational provision in schools and of work based learning can be narrow.

44   Some colleges and providers collaborate in order to sustain courses with small numbers. They share tutors and engage in video conferencing. There are many benefits in collaboration (discussed in Part 3) and it can help many colleges overcome their isolation.

Transport

45   In sparsely populated areas, the cost of travel to reach a college or provider can be a barrier to participation in education and training. Travel times and costs may be high, even where distances involved are short.

46   In several cases, colleges and providers subsidised the transport costs of learners, many of whom also received financial assistance from their LEA. For example, one organisation used around £29,000 from the learner support fund to pay for transport for 16-19 year old students, mainly by helping them with the cost of public transport. Another college, with many sites, some of which could not be reached by public transport, incurred transport costs of around £116,000 a year, mainly through providing a fleet of vehicles for learners.

47   It is, however, unclear whether one main factor, or a combination of factors, makes it difficult for people in sparsely populated areas to participate in education and training. Factors include the cost of transport, the infrequency of transport, time that has to be spent on travelling, and the distance that has to be travelled.

48   A recent study for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) into the funding of transport for learners suggested the issues involved are complex (Steer Davies Gleave, 2002). The report concluded that the costs of transport may prove a major factor in the decision of some young people not to participate in FE.

Costs of provision

49 The problems associated with transport costs have been discussed above but there are other cost factors affecting provision in sparsely populated areas.

50 If a number of outreach centres are needed, rent and travel costs for staff can be high.

51 The costs of marketing education and training provision to widely spread communities can be high. It is, for instance, often necessary to advertise provision in several local newspapers covering different areas where there are outreach centres.

52 The cost of staff development in isolated areas is high because many staff may need to travel some distance to attend conferences and training, and may incur the costs of an overnight stay.

53 In some instances, colleges and providers try to offer the same equipment and IT facilities at an outreach site as they do at their main centres. If there are a number of outreach centres this can be costly. In addition, some colleges and providers offer learners the use of laptops which can be less robust and more costly to maintain than PCs.

54 IT connectivity costs can be higher for organisations not linked to a cable infrastructure, or which are dependent on leased lines (where cost relates to distance), or microwave links requiring expensive satellite infrastructure and licences.

55 Mobile training units are regarded as a very useful means of taking education and training to isolated areas and to employers' premises, but it is not clear what the net additional costs of operating mobile units are.

56 There was no clear consensus about staffing costs. Some colleges and providers, however, suggested that they had to pay some subject teachers comparatively high salaries, because of the difficulty of attracting qualified teaching staff to sparsely populated areas. The principal of one college said the main factor was low staff turnover, and as a result, staff were near the top of the pay scales. Other colleges and providers said the key issue was the difficulty in recruiting non-teaching staff such as those who carried out administrative or support roles. In some sparsely populated areas, the cost of housing was high and there were few incentives to attract administrative and support staff.

57 The problems relating to costs of provision are complex and there may be compensating cost savings. For example, costs associated with the security of premises may be lower than those in urban areas.

Low income generation

58 Many colleges and providers interviewed were working in areas where learners are not able to pay more than a token amount and the potential for gathering income through fees is low. One FE college principal said,
'most fees charged for courses are waived, even for leisure classes.'

59 Notional fees were charged for some community based courses. For example, learners paid £15 at the Community Development Centres in Cumbria, on the grounds that they may not value something which is entirely free.

60 The inability of learners to pay more than a token fee is found in urban areas of social deprivation. In some sparsely populated areas, however, the lack of fee revenue may have an adverse effect upon the range of courses. Each college or provider sets fees according to course costs and market potential. One college principal said that it was common practice to negotiate with part-time learners over fees and the length of courses.

Funding gaps

61 Some colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas are facing a revenue deficit which they attribute to uneconomic courses offered as part of a broad and inclusive curriculum.

62 A number of points were noted:
- some providers focus primarily on helping the local community meet its skill shortages and develop, rather than education and training courses for individuals;
- the courses that attract people, particularly adult learners, are non-vocational;
- many colleges and providers rely on funding from different sources, of which the LSC is only one, and the loss of funding from any one of these could threaten their overall viability; and
- many organisations receive funding that is time limited such as from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

ICT connectivity and use

63 While Internet connectivity can be a strategy for overcoming barriers, colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas face some issues over its use. For example, in some areas, such as North Devon, cable connectivity has not been established and North Devon College cannot link to other providers through broadband. Some colleges cannot connect to the Joint Academic Network (JANET), which connects colleges and universities. For example, in North Devon, integrated services digital network (ISDN), which uses wide-banded digital transmission through the public telephone network, is currently considered prohibitively expensive. Proposals have been developed, however, for a 34MB radio link with initial capital outlay of £250,000, to be funded by the RDA.

Staff workloads

64 Several people observed that managers and trainers have to work hard in sparsely populated areas because they have to travel to numerous sites and cope with teaching a broader range of subjects. One FE college principal commented:
'there are fewer people around to deliver and manage the provision, or they have to travel miles.'

65 Some colleges and providers suggested that the broad workloads for teachers led to absence and sickness, although there was no clear evidence to support this.

66 Providers said that staff who had heavy timetables were usually unable to devote much time to extra-curricular activities.

Lack of local facilities

67 Some providers said that full-time students did not have access to facilities for curriculum enrichment options. For example, good sports facilities were not available to them, or there was no suitable hall where music students hold concerts. Most providers laid on a programme of activities for students, including trips and visits. There were, however, two problems associated with such activities. The first was the cost of transport for visits. Secondly, the success of the curriculum enrichment programme was heavily dependent upon the goodwill of staff, but those who had heavy workloads were not always able to give enough time to arranging activities.

Involvement of employers and employees in training

68 Involving employers in education and training is difficult in all areas. Colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas however have particular problems with the provision of work based learning. The numbers of potential learners and employers are small in these areas. Colleges and providers struggle to find local businesses to act as sponsors for, and act as champions of, work based learning. The research found that in Shropshire some employers were not aware of what training is offered by local colleges.

69 Even colleges and providers in relatively large towns said that they had problems in finding work experience placements for learners. Several of the organisations involved in the study had identified barriers to securing the involvement of local employers in training, including:

- unwillingness of employers to meet costs associated with training, such as the cost of replacing staff who are being trained;
- lack of personnel staff, particularly in smaller family run businesses;
- lack of interest in formal qualifications;
- reluctance of older staff in small and medium-sized enterprises to return to learning;
- fear of some employees that training will expose their weaknesses in basic skills; and
- the distance of some companies from providers.

70 Training programmes with a rigid timetable are not necessarily convenient for small and medium-sized employers because they are not always able to provide cover for employees who attend them.

71 Colleges and providers face problems in arranging training to fit in with learners' work and domestic commitments. Furthermore, learners who receive training outside their working hours are often unpaid. In some instances, the learners' childcare costs have to be met and providers may have to secure additional funding for this. These problems, however, are not unique to colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas.

Low aspirations

72 In all areas, and not just those which are sparsely populated, there are many who are not interested in receiving training to develop their skills further. Findings from survey work with non-learners in all areas suggest that lack of motivation or interest in education and

training, rather than financial issues, is the major reason for non-participation in learning programmes (Wiseman, 2001).

Derbyshire's Household Survey showed that lack of time was the most frequently identified barrier (21% of all High Peak respondents), followed by family commitments (7%) and the cost of training (6%). Some people felt that they spent so much time at work, or travelling to work, that it was impossible to make time for learning as well.

73 In some areas where salaries are lower than the national average, comparatively few young people stay on in education or progress to training. For example, one consultee noted: *'although agencies are working hard to raise pupils' aspirations, parents tend to want children to find jobs rather than go to college.'*

74 If colleges and providers are to widen participation and engage more people in learning, then the low aspirations of many in the population will have to be addressed successfully.

Advantages

75 There are advantages associated with provision of education and training in sparsely populated areas, For example:
- a low staff turnover provides continuity of teaching for learners;
- a strong sense of community can be beneficial in encouraging learners to complete the course;
- flexibility in the way staff work can provide more options for learners; and
- many learners enjoy being in small classes.

Barriers for learners

Main barriers

76 The main barriers faced by learners in sparsely populated areas are:
- difficulties associated with transport to and from provision, including lack of convenient public transport; and
- the (sometimes) narrow range of accessible training provision.

77 Geographical distance from a suitable college or provider is not necessarily an issue for learners in sparsely populated areas if they have a reliable means of transport. The main problem for many learners, however, is that they are not well served by public transport and/or that such transport is costly.

Some students in rural areas are used to travelling a long way to school and would not be put off by a long journey. Many students spend a great deal of time travelling. Some students at East Devon College, for instance, have a journey of one hour and twenty minutes each way. However, excessive travelling time can make some students disaffected, with the result that they drop out from their course. For example, some students on two-year courses hang in for the first year but become tired of the long journeys and leave.

'Distances are negligible, but a crucial barrier if you don't have transport.'
Local LSC project manager

'It's like winning the lottery to live in a village where the bus comes at the right sort of time to get you to work/college on time and back.'
FE college principal

78 Most learners aged 16-18 do not have transport of their own. For transport to and from colleges' and providers' premises, they have to rely heavily on their parents, public services and the colleges and providers themselves. However, where public transport was available, many of the learners, particularly those from younger age groups, expressed a willingness to use it:
'I've got used to having to travel in order to take part.'
Young person on vocational training

'It's worth it to get here, even though it takes a long time.'
GCE A-level student

79 Adult learners also cited inadequate public transport as a barrier. In some areas, for example, Cumbria, potential learners said they did not see why they should have to travel extensively to participate in education or training. Most adults did not want to travel a long way to attend courses:
'Lack of transport can make it easier for Community Development Centres (CDC) in sparsely populated areas because it can make them more vital.'
CDC manager

80 A problem faced by adults who have their own transport is that parking facilities at some sites are not adequate.

81 The further learners in sparsely populated areas are prepared to travel, however, the more likely they are to find a breadth of provision and the course or programme which meets their needs.

82 Full-time students aged 16-18 in sparsely populated areas stressed the lack of curricular choice open to them, although most said that the programme they were following was good. It was, however, the only option available to them, unless they had a means of transport to take them to a school or college elsewhere which had a wider range of provision.

Other issues for learners

83 Some older learners, and people in employment, highlighted a range of other issues affecting participation in education and training. These issues are not necessarily found only in sparsely populated areas. For example:
- courses can be prohibitively expensive for those on a low salary;
- employers are not always prepared to give employees paid time off work to attend courses;
- it is difficult for people to find time to learn effectively when they have a full-time job;
- learners, especially parents with young children, must ensure that they meet their childcare responsibilities; and
- those who have not studied for many years need support when returning to learning.

84 Most of the colleges and providers consulted were working hard to establish learning communities. These were made up of groups of learners with similar interests and objectives. These groups, however, usually

contained few unemployed or low-skilled people. Some of those consulted suggested that some learning communities did not have a wide appeal to all members of the community. For example, some described learning communities as providing, 'edutainment' and 'entertainment for the middle classes'.

85 New Deal clients were split between those who saw their course as a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge and skills and those who had no choice but to follow it, or lose their benefit. The former valued the work they undertook. In some sparsely populated areas, however, the range of options offered by colleges and providers was extremely restricted and some New Deal clients did not receive training which met their needs.

86 None of the learners consulted cited problems associated with the cost or availability of childcare facilities as a barrier to participation in education and training. Other research, however, has identified lack of affordable and accessible childcare as a barrier to the take-up of employment, or participation in education and training programmes (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2001).

Retention

87 Retention rates on courses in some of the areas of focus studied were high and, in some cases, significantly above the national average. However, variations were found between groups and areas and it is difficult to generalise.

88 Learners who had to undertake long or difficult journeys to a college or provider were considered to be more at risk of dropping out, especially if they were also encountering problems with their learning.

Progression

89 The lack of clear progression routes in the vicinity for learners in sparsely populated areas was highlighted as a significant issue. To obtain the progression routes they want, many learners have to move away from, or travel outside, their area. For some people, particularly younger learners who aim to go to university, this is not necessarily a problem. For many older learners who do not want to travel or move away, the lack of progression routes in their vicinity constitutes a barrier to their further participation in education and training. As one consultee said, some learners 'lack experience of a larger place'. Some of those consulted considered that women were less likely to want to travel than men. In some communities, there was evidence that a two-tier population was emerging. One tier consisted of more affluent learners, often from families which had moved to the area. These learners had had experience of life outside the area and were usually prepared to travel. The other tier consisted of those who had always lived in the area and were strongly attached to it. In the case of established rural communities, some of its members were severely affected by poverty and unemployment and were less likely to take up progression routes elsewhere.

90 Within some of the areas covered by the project, there are few progression routes to level 4 or higher education courses.

91 Some learners said that they would not go to a college because this was a place for high-flyers only. They welcomed the intimate and friendly atmosphere generated by their small local provider.

Learners with disabilities

92 Although feedback from some learners with disabilities was gathered, this may not be sufficient to be representative.

93 Some people felt that older learners with disabilities were particularly disadvantaged by the lack of public transport in sparsely populated areas. Many younger learners with disabilities, however, were provided with transport to education and training by their LEA.

94 A number of colleges and providers in rural areas have developed specialist provision to meet the needs of disabled learners. Most of the FE colleges have well-established foundation programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. North Devon College is developing programmes for people recovering from mental illness, and these are mainly provided in centres in the community. In North Devon, there are two schools for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Up to 14% of all units offered by North Devon College are funded as additional learning support.

95 Walford and North Shropshire College has its origin as a specialist college for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and provides full-time courses for adults with learning difficulties. The college also runs a specific course for adults living within a 50 to 60 mile radius who have received head injuries.

96 Schools in sparsely populated areas faced problems in finding suitable progression routes for pupils with learning difficulties. Evidence shows that many young people with learning difficulties drop out of courses if they have to travel some distance to attend them. Staff at Bishops Castle Community College in Shropshire expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of programmes below level 2 available to school leavers.

Minority ethnic groups

97 Overall, there were few learners from minority ethnic groups in the areas covered by the project. One FE college principal commented:
'There is a lot of discrimination in rural areas: people can be narrow-minded and guarded or ambivalent about minorities. However, young people from ethnic minorities in the area tend to be middle class and their parents are strongly in favour of education so they manage to overcome any difficulties.'

98 There were, however, small minority ethnic communities in some areas. In Skipton, for example, Craven College provided learners from the Muslim community with computers and Internet access in their local mosque.

Part 3

Overcoming Barriers – Key Conclusions and Lessons from the Case Studies

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99 This part of the report brings together all the information gathered at interviews with providers, learners and representatives of partner organisations, and also findings from other available and relevant research. The information and findings are summarised under three headings:
- engagement of learners;
- helping people to learn; and
- accessibility of provision.

Engagement of learners

Identifying need

100 The examples of good practice relate to the way particular needs are met, such as the remedying of skills shortages, provision of FE for 16-18 year olds and the imperative for colleges and providers to widen participation. In many sparsely populated areas, colleges and providers had carried out research to find out what needs should be met. They did this by sending questionnaires to households, and by consulting the learners themselves. In some areas, learners were involved in the planning of provision by working with a local advisory forum. In examples of good practice the preferred programme, location and mode of learning were researched carefully to make sure it met the needs of the target audience.

Information, advice and guidance

101 It is essential that learners receive good information, advice and guidance on the education and training opportunities available to them. In sparsely populated areas older people and people in work sometimes have difficulty in obtaining this information,

advice and guidance. Most young people in schools and colleges, however, usually have access to a Connexions Personal Adviser and Personal Advisors have responded to learners' needs on a peripatetic basis and through the use of information and communications technology (ICT).

102 The Connexions National Unit commissioned a study to identify the costs of providing Connexions services in rural and urban areas. This project is was carried out by the University of Hull and the project report was published in February 2003.

Marketing

103 Some colleges and providers spend a lot of money on marketing and they clearly feel that it helps to recruit learners. Some also pay a great deal to advertise over a wide geographical area. Collaborative approaches to advertising have proved to be effective.

104 To be effective, marketing needs to be well planned and properly funded. There are ways of marketing, however, that do not require funding. A number of providers and learners suggested that the most effective marketing is by word of mouth.

Basic skills

105 Learners in sparsely populated areas who need help with their basic skills are, as elsewhere, an important client group. Many of these learners feel that their weaknesses with basic skills may stigmatise them in their community, particularly when that community is small and one in which they can be easily identified.

106 Colleges and providers have tried to help these learners feel less vulnerable and conspicuous by 'wrapping up' basic skills tuition within other provision, such as ICT or vocational courses. Colleges and providers need to have a sensitive and creative approach to helping learners improve their basic skills.

Other issues

107 Tailoring provision to meet the needs of learners in sparsely populated areas is essential.

108 Colleges and providers have to take account of the cost of provision. Most of the provision referred to in the case studies is free for the learner, or is available for a minimal fee. However, the learner may incur other costs, such as those for transport or use of the Internet. Many of the learners interviewed said that they would not have enrolled on their course or programme if it had cost more. Some learners had been unwilling to pay £15 for an IT course.

109 Provision has to be made available at hours which suit potential learners. For example, parents with children at school said that they could only attend courses during school hours. On the other hand, people in employment may want courses in the evening or at the weekend.

110 Colleges and providers secure funding from a wide range of sources (for example, SRB, DfES, ESF, local LSCs). As a result of meeting funding criteria, colleges and providers may have to offer some courses to some learners free of charge, whereas other learners will have to pay for them. This means that provision in the area may not be available to all potential learners on the same terms.

Helping people to learn

ICT solutions

111 The case studies show that the use of e-learning is an important means of helping people to learn and overcoming some of the barriers to participation in education and training. E-learning allows learners to access provision in their own homes or at an outreach centre close to their homes. The emergence of learndirect has been important and there is a learndirect hub in all the areas covered in the research.

112 The case studies highlight some important points about e-learning. Colleges and providers must make sure that hardware, software and peripheral equipment, such as printers and scanners, are of good quality. The equipment must also give learners access to the Internet.

113 Learning materials must be appropriate. Colleges and providers maintain there is a clear link between good learning materials and high retention and achievement rates. In one instance, the learners' motivation and determination to succeed increased after the employer had invested in excellent resources.

114 Through ICT, learning can be provided at a distance. In many cases, learners use CD-ROMs, laptops or other portable devices. It is important that learners have access to the college or provider's intranet, and have a means

of electronic communication with libraries, other learners and tutors. It is also essential that learners have speedy access to the Internet, and also good wide area access through the broadband infrastructure, or microwave or satellite access.

115 Good technical support is important. Smaller providers may not have such technical support on site and this may be expensive to obtain. Some colleges and providers have trained tutors to provide some degree of technical support but they are not necessarily able to deal with major problems swiftly.

116 Security of equipment, including laptops, was a high priority for colleges and providers, particularly at outreach centres. Security was expensive, in terms of both time and money. Some tutors had to take laptop computers and other peripherals to each place of learning in their cars, unload them, set them up, and then take them away afterwards. These security issues are also faced by colleges and providers in urban areas.

117 The use of ICT alone is not enough. Learners who access e-learning still need to meet and talk with other students and tutors. Groups of online learners in sparsely populated areas need a great deal of support. Furthermore, e-learning may be better for learners on some courses than on others. For example, the case studies showed that ICT was not necessarily the best medium through which to learn certain practical skills.

Collaboration and partnerships

118 Through partnership arrangements, the negative effects of isolation can be reduced for both colleges and providers, and learners, and provision can be rationalised. Partnership requires collaboration rather than competition.

119 There is a need for strategic planning by collaborating providers to meet demand and share resources. Such planning is being carried out in some areas but in most instances, it is a recent development.

120 Effective collaboration is time consuming and expensive but can be facilitated by use of Internet connectivity and video conferencing.

121 By working together, colleges and providers can:
- offer some degree of specialisation;
- close gaps in their curriculum;
- make the best use of resources including staff expertise;
- achieve viable numbers of learners for courses;
- share course and programme costs; and
- share other key costs: management, staff, premises and capital equipment.

122 Most colleges and providers are working with other agencies, within and outside their local LSC area, to manage, fund and implement courses and programmes in sparsely populated areas. In the case studies, partnerships range from informal arrangements to systematic merging of provision. In some instances, partnership arrangements and closer working relationships have followed successful intervention by the LSC, and have involved employers.

123 Partnerships have also allowed some colleges and providers to obtain closer links with learners and with other organisations in the community. For example, some FE colleges are working with primary and secondary schools, school sixth forms, adult learning and community centres, businesses, libraries, pubs and churches. Through partnerships, colleges and providers are able to take learning to familiar institutions at the centre of sparsely populated communities. Many voluntary service organisations have been working in particular areas with specific groups of learners, such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and have helped them to overcome some initial barriers to learning by providing valuable resources, especially premises.

124 Links with schools, colleges and HE institutions can be used to secure progression routes for learners in sparsely populated areas.

125 Partnership between employers and, colleges and providers can be particularly effective in promoting training in the workplace. The appointment of 'learning champions' can prove crucial to successful day-to-day running and implementation of work based training. In sparsely populated areas, those involved in partnerships may have to spend a great deal of time travelling to meetings. Some partnerships with the necessary facilities have addressed this problem by holding video conferences.

126 Partnership working between local LSCs is also helpful in sharing good practice. The work that the Market and Opinion Research Institute (MORI) has completed for the LSC on identifying clusters of local LSCs that face similar situations will be useful for identifying where working across local LSC areas may be beneficial.

Project funding

127 Project funding has been a key feature in all of the case studies. This funding takes a variety of forms and its sources include SRB, local initiative funds (LIF) from the LSC, ESF and transport funding. It is important that this funding is used to ensure broad and balanced provision of education and training in sparsely populated areas and that local needs are identified carefully.

128 Project funding is demanding in terms of the time staff have to spend in bidding for it, and in managing and reporting on projects. The case studies contain several instances of projects which may not be sustainable. It is important that projects to establish provision are not short lived. Funding from some sources is only available for a year and it is not unusual for some projects to fold almost as soon as they have started. It is also important that projects which have proved successful include plans for sustainable funding after funding from a particular source has ended.

Employers and work based learning

129 The case studies include examples of work based learning which stemmed from initiatives on the part of the local LSC or individual employers who faced skill shortages and wanted a better trained workforce. In examples of good practice employers have:
- worked in partnership with other organisations;
- generated enthusiasm and commitment from employees

through the appointment of learning champions;

- consulted with employees to make sure that the courses met their needs; and
- promoted the initiative within the organisation and to the wider community.

130 Although learning in the workplace incurs costs for employers, it also has certain potential benefits. For example, the staff turnover rate can be lower and because employees do not have to go away from the workplace for training, productivity rates can be higher.

Accessibility of provision

131 A key barrier to participation in education and training in sparsely populated areas is the inaccessibility of provision for some potential learners. The location of provision is of particular importance to potential learners and access to information, advice and guidance. In sparsely populated areas, education and training can be made accessible to learners through provision of:

- good transport;
- outreach centres; and
- mobile units.

Transport

132 Various measures have been taken to provide transport for learners in sparsely populated areas.

133 Subsidised rail or bus travel schemes have been organised by LEAs in partnership with transport providers, many of which are for young learners up to the age of 19. Many colleges and providers top up subsidies for transport.

134 Colleges and providers have arranged transport, such as college bus services. In some cases these services, such as the Innovative Bus Scheme, have drawn on government funding. In most cases, the college bus service is distinct from the school bus service.

135 Assistance for individual learners has been provided through Wheels to Work initiatives (supported by the Countryside Agency). Such assistance for learners can be payment of their taxi fares, help with the cost of driving lessons, or provision of mopeds for their use.

136 There are many policy initiatives relating to transport for people in rural areas, including the local transport planning process, rural transport partnerships, the rural bus subsidy and the rural bus challenge.

Outreach centres

137 Outreach centres play a key role in enabling people in sparsely populated areas to participate in education and training. Partnership arrangements between colleges and providers and organisations are important in helping outreach centres to be effective. For example, outreach workers can establish valuable links with local health care trusts and social workers.

138 Outreach centres include primary and secondary schools, community and adult learning centres, libraries and different sites of larger colleges. It is important that the location is considered carefully.

139 An organisation can have outreach provision on a number of sites. In examples of good practice, colleges had an office base in each of the market towns that provided administrative support and a base for meetings.

140 Learning centres are another form of outreach facility and these may be based in schools, colleges and employers' premises. In many sparsely populated areas there are learndirect centres.

Mobile provision

141 Mobile units, such as customised buses or coaches, were used as learning centres and also provided IAG services. There is, however, little detailed information available about their running costs and what makes them effective.

Retention, achievement and progression

142 In some of the areas, the achievement and progression rates of young people are higher than the national average.

143 The research found that tutors develop close and productive working relationships with learners in small groups. One work based learning tutor described the provision as, 'distance learning with masses of individual support'.

144 Colleges and providers with good assessment procedures identify learners' weaknesses in basic skills and rectify these by offering basic skills tuition as an integral part of courses.

145 Tutors give learners one-to-one attention. For example, at Bishops Castle Community College in Shropshire, care for students is considered a major strength. The progress of sixth formers towards achieving a target minimum grade is monitored closely. Students receive reports on their progress and discuss these with their tutors on a one-to-one basis every half-term.

146 The successful strategies outlined above would also be useful in urban areas.

147 Although small classes sometimes present a challenge for colleges and providers, they can have distinct advantages for learners. As two learners said:
'The courses are small and personal and we receive one-to-one attention.'

'It's not packed to capacity. You can always get to use the computers and other resources.'

148 Community, work based or outreach provision can be an important first step for adult learners, especially if it is their first experience of learning since leaving school. If learners wish to progress to more advanced courses, however, they usually have to move to another college or provider. Some colleges and providers develop links with each other to help learners' progression. They also take learners to open days offered by other colleges and providers.

149 Some adult learners in sparsely populated areas are daunted by the prospect of having their work assessed, especially if they are not used to taking examinations or having their work marked. In Shropshire, the use of paper-free assessment was thought to have raised the retention and achievement rates of work based learners.

150 Most successful colleges and providers made the giving of impartial information, advice and guidance an integral part of courses so that learners might be fully aware of all the options and progression routes open to them. In some areas, where there are no HE providers, e-learning courses for learners have been arranged with, for example, the Open University, or with FE colleges working in partnership with HE providers. In Shropshire, where there is no HE institution, the Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology offers HE courses through a franchise arrangement with Wolverhampton University.

Part 4

Recommendations for Further Research

Review of provision at a local level

151 It is important for providers in sparsely populated areas to collaborate to help learners overcome barriers to participation in education and training. Reviews of provision carried out by local LSCs can play an important role in determining key actions and priorities for colleges and providers and in exploring the scope for rationalisation.

152 The strategic area reviews that are part of the *Success for All* initiative aims to identify gaps in existing provision and provide information to allow local LSCs to plan effective support and collaboration between providers.

153 It would also be useful to look at the role that land-based colleges can play in meeting the needs of learners in sparsely populated areas.

Comparison of costs between areas

154 Although this research indicates that colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas incur some additional costs, it is not clear how much they are, or whether the overall cost of delivering provision in sparsely populated areas is higher than it is in urban areas.

155 Further research is needed to assess the scale and nature of the additional costs colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas incur in relation to transport for learners. It is known that LSC funding is being used to subsidise the cost of transport for learners in sparsely populated areas, and that the extent to which such funding is used in this way varies from one area to another. Transport for staff can also be more expensive in sparsely populated areas.

156 There is a need to find out the exact costs of the effective use of outreach and mobile units.

157 Further investigation should be carried out into why providers find it difficult to run some vocational courses in sparsely populated areas economically.

158 More research is needed on ways of identifying how cost savings can be made in the provision of education and training in sparsely populated areas.

Broad and inclusive curriculum

159 Research is also required in order to find out whether it is more difficult for providers in rural areas than those elsewhere to offer a broad and inclusive curriculum. Many providers interviewed during the project spoke of the difficulty they had in running courses that not only met the diverse needs of learners in sparsely populated areas but were also economically viable.

ICT

160 Research is needed to investigate:
- the extent of, and key issues relating to, broadband provision in sparsely populated areas;
- the role that RDAs play in ensuring that all colleges and providers can have access to the Internet;
- the use of e-learning in rationalising provision in sparsely populated areas and increasing access and choice for learners; and
- how ICT, including learndirect, is meeting the needs of learners in sparsely populated areas.

Quality of Provision

161 It would be useful to compare the quality of provision in sparsely populated areas with that of provision in urban areas.

Employer involvement

162 Many employers in sparsely populated areas are small to medium-sized and there have been particular difficulties in involving some of them in the provision of work based learning. Further research is needed on ways of helping such employers provide good and cost-effective training.

Needs of non-learners in sparsely populated areas

163 Evidence suggests that socio-economic factors, particularly deprivation, account for the fact that some people in sparsely populated areas choose not to learn. Further research is required to find out how to increase demand for learning, and to identify and meet the needs of those who choose not to learn. There is a particular need to find out what proportion of the population in sparsely populated areas requires help with basic skills.

Annexes

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Annex A

Consultees

Thanks are due to the many people who participated in this research and particularly to the following.

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Annex B

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Annex C

Case studies – profiles and initiatives

Sparsely Populated Areas

1   Sparsely populated areas are extremely diverse in terms of their characteristics. Many have some of the same characteristics but these may be shared by urban areas as well. Some of the characteristics identified through research are:
    - many agricultural and service sector employers;
    - few job opportunities for some people;
    - many people have to travel some distance to their place of work;
    - many low skilled jobs and poorly paid jobs;
    - many employees experience job insecurity;
    - many employees have little scope for career progression;
    - the majority of employment is concentrated in very small companies. For example, in Shropshire as a whole, 88% of companies have a workforce of fewer than 20 employees and in rural Shropshire 95% of employers employ fewer than five people;
    - little tradition of work related training;
    - many small employers do not have trained personnel staff;
    - employers face high costs in releasing staff for training; and
    - few employers offer work placements.

2   Many sparsely populated areas are still recovering from the adverse socio-economic effects of the Foot-and-Mouth epidemic of 2001.

Case Study Sub-areas: Key Sectors

3   Table 1 shows local LSC areas, case study sub-areas and the key sectors for each.

4   Many of the sub-areas covered in the research project had a low ranking in deprivation indexes. Many have received regeneration funding.

5   In all case study areas the proportion of people over retirement age is above the national average of 18%. South Shropshire in particular has an increasingly high proportion of older people. In South Shropshire, 47% of the population are aged over 44, compared with 38% nationally, and 21% are over 65, compared with 16% nationally.

6   Table 2 shows the local LSC and case study areas and corresponding index of deprivation

Local LSC areas

7   The six local LSC areas covered by the research all have a population density below the national average of 3.8 persons per hectare (for comparison, London has a density of 46.1 people per hectare). With over 1,000,000 hectares, Devon and Cornwall is the largest area, followed by North Yorkshire with 840,000 hectares. Shropshire is the smallest area with 350,000 hectares. The population density ranges from 0.7 persons per hectare in Cumbria to 2.5 in Derbyshire. This figure in Derbyshire, however, takes into account the population of the city of Derby and disguises the fact that there are many sparsely populated areas across the county as a whole. The proportions of

Local LSC	Case study sub-area	Key Sectors
Cumbria	N/A	Cumbria has over 8,500 employers and a workforce of just under a quarter of a million people. Two important sectors are tourism and agriculture, which provide employment for over 11% and under 12% of the workforce respectively. Cumbria may be divided broadly into two regions: the western region which now benefits from regeneration/renewal projects and includes rural districts, such as the Eden valley which is a deprived area; and South Lakes with a largely affluent retired population, but which contains pockets of deprivation.
Derbyshire	High Peak	Industry was developed primarily around cotton in the north-west of High Peak, and around the limestone deposits in the south and east. Textiles and quarrying are still important occupational areas in High Peak, but the industrial base there is now broader and includes tourism, plastics, food and engineering. High Peak is less than an hour's journey from Manchester Airport, Manchester, Sheffield and Derby, and easily accessible from the M1 or M6 or by public transport.
Devon and Cornwall	North Devon	North Devon is significantly below the national averages in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and income per head. Much employment is in the low wage sectors of agriculture and tourism. Other employment areas include sales, vehicle maintenance, social work and education. The unemployment rate is low. Comparatively few people are highly skilled and have well-paid occupations.
North Yorkshire	Craven	There is severe socio-economic deprivation in certain areas of rural North Yorkshire. The GDP in some areas is about 25% below the national average.
Norfolk	Norfolk Broads – Broadland	The unemployment rate for Broadland remains well below the average for Norfolk, at 2.2% in January 2001. In 1998, there were 2,338 businesses in Broadland employing 24,866 people. Broadland Business Park is the largest business park in East Anglia, and has significant growth potential.
Shropshire	South Shropshire	South Shropshire has a low unemployment rate, but many jobs are in low-wage sectors such as agriculture, tourism and manufacturing.
	North Shropshire	Agriculture is the main industry. The unemployment rate is low (just over 2%). Wage levels in the North Shropshire parliamentary constituency are the third lowest in England.

Table 1: Local LSC areas, case study sub-areas and key sectors

persons from minority ethnic groups in these areas are well below the national average and range from 0.4% in Cumbria to 3.0% in Derbyshire.

8   The participation rate of 16-17 year olds in education and training ranges from 73% in Norfolk to 89% in North Yorkshire. In all areas except Norfolk, this rate was above the national average for England of 79% (DfES figures, 2000). In 2001, in all areas, the proportion of year 11 pupils who gained grade C or above in five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subjects was above the national average of 49.2%. This proportion is highest in North Yorkshire at 58%. In all areas except Shropshire the proportion of adults who have obtained 5 or more GCSEs at grade C or above is below the national average.

Local LSC sub-areas

9   All the local LSC areas contain both sparsely and densely populated districts. Table 3 shows the population density of the sub-areas focused on in the research.

10 Figure 1 shows comparative statistical data for the local LSC areas covered in the research.

Local LSC	Case study area	Index of Deprivation*
Cumbria	Allerdale	112
Cumbria	Carlisle	122
Cumbria	Copeland	72
Cumbria	Eden	236
Cumbria	South Lakeland	264
Derbyshire	High Peak	193
Devon and Cornwall	North Devon	127
Norfolk	Broadland	279
North Yorkshire	Craven	276
Shropshire	South Shropshire	160
Shropshire	North Shropshire	147

*2000, ranked out of 354 districts with the first being the most deprived and the 354th the least deprived

Table 2: Local LSC and case study areas and index of deprivation

Local LSC	Case study area	Population density (persons per hectare)
Cumbria	Allerdale	0.8
Cumbria	Eden	0.2
Cumbria	South Lakeland	0.7
Derbyshire	High Peak	1.7
Devon and Cornwall	North Devon	0.8
Norfolk		
North Yorkshire	Broadland	2.1
Shropshire	Craven	0.4
Shropshire	South Shropshire	0.4
	North Shropshire	0.8

Table 3: Case study sub-areas: population density

	Cumbria	Derbyshire	Devon and Cornwall	Norfolk	North Yorkshire	Shropshire	England
Total Population(1)	491,800	974,100	1,569,600	796,500	747,600	432,300	49,752,900
% change 1991–2000 (%)	0.3	3.7	4.9	5.9	4.8	5.9	3.7
Working age population (16 to 59(F) or 64(M) (2000) (3)	295,100	602,600	933,100	475,700	455,600	266,200	30,903,60
% population under 15 years	18.9%	20.4%	18.6%	18.5%	18.9%	20.3%	20.2%
% population over retirement age (59(F), 64(M))	21.0%	18.7%	22.6%	22.3%	21.7%	18.7%	18.0%
% Ethnic minorities (2)	0.4%	3.0%	0.6%	0.9%	0.7%	1.6%	6.7%
Size of local LSC area(hectares) (1)	682,000	391,000	1,023,000	537,000	840,000	350,000	
Population density (person per hectare)	0.7	2.5	1.5	1.5	0.9	1.2	3.8
Population of 16 to 17 year olds (2000) (3)	11,800	22,700	37,500	18,000	18,400	11,100	1,819,000
% Year 11 achieving 5+ A*-C Grades (2001)	51%	51%	(51% Devon; 53% Cornwall)	50%	58%	54%	49%
School leavers with fewer than 5 GCSEs at grade C or above (2000)	2,928	5,629	8,344	4,301	3,621	2,579	292,095
Participation of 16 to 17 year olds in education and training in 1999-00 (%) (6)	87%	86%	80%	73%	89%	83%	79%
% achieving level 2 by age 19 (2000)	83%	72%	73%	77%	78%	86%	75%
% achieving level 3 by age 19 (2000)	46%	38%	43%	41%	50%	49%	51%
Adults achieving level 3 (% of 18 to retirement economically active population) (2000)	44%	42%	40%	41%	44%	49%	46%
Employees in employment (4)	194,656	368,444	557,153	284,816	318,039	182,447	21,831,529
Claimant unemployment (June, 2002) (5)	3.0%	2.8%	(1.9% Devon; 2.9% Cornwall)	2.4%	1.7%	1.7%	3.1%
Economic activity* (4)	76.4%	80.6%	78.5%	81.4%	81.3%	81.2%	79.4
Employment* (4)	72.3%	77.0%	74.7%	77.4%	77.8%	78.4%	75.3
ILO unemployment** (4)	5.2%	4.3%	4.6%	4.8%	4.2%	3.3%	5.0%

Figure 1: Comparative statistical data for local LSCs

*As a proportion of the working age population
**Denominator is the economically active population
Sources: (1) Statsbase (ONS); (2) 1991 Census; (3) DfES; (4) Labour Force Survey: March–May 2002;
(5) Labour Market Statistics: July 2002; (6) DfES, Statistical Bulletin 14–200

Case studies – initiatives

11   Table 4 summarises the range and nature of the organisations involved in the case studies.

Local LSC	Organisation	Comment
Cumbria	Community Development Centres (CDCs)	There are 72 CDCs throughout Cumbria and three additional link centres.
Derbyshire	Swizzels Matlow Ltd – Learning Centre	Swizzels Matlow manufactures sugar confectionary and is the biggest employer in New Mills, employing nearly 620 people, of whom about 450 are full time. The company was established on the current site in 1939 and has an annual turnover of £38 million. A learning centre was recently set up at the company in partnership with Derbyshire County Council and LSC Derbyshire.
Devon and Cornwall	North Devon College	North Devon College is a medium-sized tertiary college. Two-thirds of enrolments are for full-time courses. There are about 140,000 people in the college's catchment area. Barnstaple is the largest centre with a population of 20,000.
	East Devon College	East Devon College has 797 full-time students, and about 3,700 enrolments for part-time courses, (mainly adult learners). There are 370 learners on work based programmes. The college runs BTEC national and first diploma courses, and AVCE, GNVQ foundation and intermediate level courses. Courses are offered in 27 GCE A-level subjects and NVQs in 24 occupational areas. The college usually enrols just under 80 students with learning disabilities each year.
Norfolk	Broads Authority	The Broads Authority, in addition to its primary function of managing the Norfolk Broads, is currently the only work based learning provider in the Broads area. There are 100 full-time staff, six of whom provide training and they are assisted by four volunteers.
	Haines Marine	Haines Marine in Catfield was established in 1980. It builds motor cruisers for the charter market. Of these 80% are exported to Europe and Ireland. The company has 30 employees, including the two owners. Of these, 20 are craftsmen, three are engineers and the remainder are support staff. The Norfolk Broads is the second largest centre for the boat building industry in Britain (after Southampton).
North Yorkshire	Craven College	Craven College has a catchment area of 600 square miles with a population of 40,000. The main centre is Skipton (population, 12,000). There are 800 full-time and 6,000 part-time students.
	Wensleydale School	Wensleydale School is an 11-18 comprehensive school with about 500 pupils (20% of them in the sixth form). Feeder schools include the eight primary schools in Wensleydale, some over 19 miles away. Few pupils are from ethnic minority groups (0.8%). Just under a quarter of pupils have learning difficulties.

Table 4: Summary of the main providers included in the case studies

Local LSC	Organisation	Comment
Shropshire	Bishops Castle Community College	The Community College is an 11-18 comprehensive school, designed as a community college, with a community arts and education programme. There are 570 full-time students, of whom about 50 are in the sixth form. About 50% of pupils in Year 11 stay on and most take GCE A-level courses. The college runs a course in business at intermediate level.
	Walford and North Shropshire College	Walford and North Shropshire College was created in 2001 as a result of the merger of a specialist land based college and a tertiary college. The largest town in its catchment area is Oswestry (population, 15,000). In 2002, the provision in Oswestry will be moved to a purpose-built centre. A diverse curriculum is offered covering most areas of learning, including work based training. In autumn 2001, the college had 9,626 enrolments, 757 full-time and 4,506 part-time students. Of these students, 13% are aged 16 to 18 and 87% are aged 19 and over. Just over 63% of full-time students are aged 16-18, but this age group only accounts for 4% of part-time students (Ofsted, 2002). The Walford Campus was quarantined throughout summer of 2001 because of the Foot-and-Mouth epidemic.
	Ludlow College	Ludlow College is a sixth form college, and is the largest provider of adult/community education in South Shropshire and the Marches. There are approximately 400 learners on full-time courses, 300 on part-time leisure courses and recreational courses and 900 on part-time vocational courses (Ofsted, 2002). The nearest towns are Ludlow (population, 9,000) and Church Stretton (population, 4,200).

Table 4: Summary of the main providers included in the case studies

Cumbria

Mapping needs

12   In Cumbria, provision has been mapped to find out what is available and how it can be better co-ordinated. The Cumbria Learning Partnership cited what it described as 'federated provision' as the result of effective co-ordination. Staff from a provider in a town take education and training out to centres in several villages. Ulverston (a town) has an adult education centre. Tutors from this centre take laptops to Ulpha (a small village) and run courses in what was formerly the village school. The same provision is then taken to smaller hamlets on a more sporadic basis. For example, a village-link project in Dalham covers 12 villages and provides courses in languages, health and IT. People from these villages can also take Open University courses through e-learning. In Carlisle, there is a learndirect hub and there are also CDCs. Some FE colleges have outreach projects. For example, Kendal College has worked with the voluntary and community sector and a development worker identifies the needs of learners in remote areas.

Community development centres

13   CDCs were set up following research into ways in which primary schools can help to meet the educational needs of the community. A pilot project was launched, financed initially from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), ESF and school budgets. SRB funding of £8.53 million was secured for the period 1995 to 2002. Some £21 million of additional funding has been generated. The CDCs were set up in urban areas before they were established in sparsely populated areas. In 2000, the CDCs won the Secretary of State's award for Partnership in Regeneration, and a National Training Award in 2001.

14   The CDCs are overseen by a board, comprising the local director of education, and representatives from the local statutory and voluntary sectors, including primary schools, FE colleges and industry and commerce. At the local level, CDCs are managed by Cumbria Credits. Each centre has a manager (usually part time), and an advisory forum with members drawn from the local community, including employers.

15   Most CDCs are based in primary schools. Some are in libraries, voluntary and community sector organisations, and community and social housing facilities. The most effective means of marketing what the centres have to offer is by word of mouth. About 75% of learners at CDCs are women. Many are young mothers whose children attend the schools where the centres are based. CDCs have found it more difficult to attract young men, and older workers who have been made redundant.

16   Each CDC is usually equipped with a dozen PCs, ISDN links, video conferencing and standard software packages. Courses are wide-ranging and usually include computer training, modern languages and health. Specific short courses include aromatherapy. In addition, employers in some isolated areas use the CDCs to provide vocational training for their own staff.

17   Most courses are tailored to the needs of the particular groups of learners. All tutors receive training and must be

licensed before they can teach on a CDC course. The majority of tutors (70%) have been CDC learners.

18 CDCs are open both day and evening. Initially, courses were free but learners are now charged a minimum fee of £15, because it is believed that they would not value education and training that was provided free of charge.

19 In 2000/01, the CDCs were used 36,000 times by some 4,000 learners. A total of 87% of learners have achieved an NVQ at level 2. For many learners, it is the first time they have achieved a worthwhile qualification. Last year, 374 learners obtained jobs. For many learners at the centres employment is not a goal.

20 In general, retention rates at CDCs are high. Learners help one another a great deal and they know that to drop out is to let their friends down. Usually, learners leave courses for a positive reason, such as taking up a job.

21 It is important however, that learners at CDCs have clear progression routes and are thereby motivated to engage in lifelong learning. CDCs work with FE and sixth form colleges to help learners progress to further courses.

22 A CDC manager commented:
'If you want to embed learning in communities then it is a slow process and there are particular ways of doing it.'

23 The main priority for CDCs is that they help as many people in the community as possible. There are plans for CDCs to facilitate distance learning and also broaden their curriculum to include courses in basic skills and in vocational areas, such as tourism and retail.

Derbyshire

A learning centre on an employer's premises

24 Swizzels Matlow Ltd set up a learning centre on the New Mills site which opened in April 2002. The company has a history of providing vocational training for staff to enable them to obtain NVQs in food and drink, warehousing and administration. It is the company's vision that open learning should be available to the employees in order to give them greater satisfaction, enable them to attain their own goals and help the organisation achieve its business objectives.

25 Swizzels Matlow provides the space for the centre and a contribution towards its capital costs. The learning centre is run in partnership with Derbyshire County Council (DCC), and also LSC Derbyshire, which provided local initiative funds (LIF). Learning support is provided by the Adult Community Education Service Centre in New Mills, which helped with the design of courses. The aim of the centre is to allow workers to extend their knowledge, improve their skills and increase their self-confidence. By establishing the learning centre on its premises, the company aimed to remove some of the key barriers to participation in education and training faced by potential learners. Employees are given time for training and they do not have the inconvenience of having to travel.

26 With DCC, the company bid for funding for the centre from LSC Derbyshire. It was also decided that the project would include a learndirect centre with online learning resources.

Swizzels Matlow and DCC were clear about what they wanted to do and before the two organisations launched the project, they established a close working partnership.

27 Open days were held at Swizzels Matlow to show the employees what the centre could offer. A survey was carried out of employees' learning needs. Employees were consulted from the outset about what the learning centre should offer. Staff from Swizzels Matlow and DCC visited another learning centre at British Aerospace to find out how this operated.

28 A funding package of over £100,000 was made available to set up the learning centre. This was made up of about £50,000 of local initiative funding from LSC Derbyshire, and contributions of roughly £30,000 from Swizzels Matlow and £20,000 from DCC. The centre was equipped with seven high-specification PCs. When funding for the centre runs out in summer 2003, further funding will be sought and the future direction of the centre will be reviewed.

29 Two learning champions have been appointed. One is based with DCC and the other is based at Swizzels Matlow. These champions have a broad range of responsibilities, including:
- record-keeping and reporting on the centre's progress to the steering group;
- gathering information on users;
- gathering information on employees' needs through use of a questionnaire;
- promoting the centre and encouraging its use; and
- evaluating learning materials and identifying new materials.

30 It was considered crucial that the learning champions should be current members of the company's staff and known and trusted by employees.

31 The 600 responses to the questionnaire administered by the learning champions, showed the courses the people wanted were in basic skills, mathematics, Spanish for beginners and IT. Courses were put on to meet employees' needs. Learners can work towards computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) awards and the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). Learners can work at their own pace. They can either visit the centre when a tutor is there to help them, or they can drop in to it when they wish. Fifty-five learners are currently using the centre, and about 12 do so on a 'drop in' basis. Provision has expanded to meet increasing demand from employees. Employees are offered guidance on how their learning needs can be met and some are advised to follow courses offered at the Adult Community Education Service Centre in New Mills, or at local colleges.

32 This case study shows that for a partnership between an employer and a public sector learning provider to be successful, both sides must have enthusiasm and experience. Partners must want the project to succeed and have the will to drive it forward successfully.

33 There must also be mutual under-standing between the partners. During the formative period of the partnership both parties took time to visit and understand each other's organisation.

34 Good promotional skills are also needed. Swizzels Matlow used the local press to alert local people to what was happening at the centre. The local MP and representatives from DCC, the LSC, learndirect, and the local press, were invited to the opening of the centre on 21 May 2002.

35 The learning champions consulted employees about their learning needs. They play a vital role in the day-to-day running of the centre.

36 Employees who used the centre were very positive about their learning experience. They welcomed being able to follow courses at their place of work and the support they received from colleagues. Those who had not been engaged in any formal learning for many years were appreciative of the help they were given. Some learners felt that they now had the confidence to progress to further courses.

Devon and Cornwall

37 This case study is mainly concerned with FE colleges in Devon and Cornwall. While the case study focused primarily on North Devon College, East Devon College was also consulted as part of the fieldwork. North Devon College is located in a particularly sparsely populated area, whereas East Devon College is close to some large centres of urban population, although the transport links to some of these are not good.

Transport

38 In Devon, many students are accustomed to having to spend a lot of time travelling to a place of education. It is the cost of travel which is a disincentive to participation in education or training.

39 East Devon College runs bus services for students. It spends £170,000 (4.4% of its annual budget of £3.9 million) on subsidising students' bus passes. This college is the main provider for an area of nearly 700 square miles.

40 North Devon College made a successful bid for funding under the Government's Innovative Bus Scheme and received a £1 million grant. This was used to provide some new buses for the local bus company and give students a travel card, at an average cost of £100 per student. Possession of the travel card entitles each student to one free bus journey to and from the college each day, with no restrictions on destination. Since the introduction of the card, there has been a 30% increase in the number of daily bus journeys to and from the college and a decline in the use of cars. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that participation overall has increased as a result of this initiative.

41 North Devon College has many people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in its catchment area. Financial assistance from the ESF has enabled the college to run a special transport project for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities which involves a buddying system. This project will terminate shortly when the funding comes to an end.

Outreach

42 North Devon College has a number of outreach centres in community centres and libraries. Outreach centres are regarded as essential for learners who need help with basic skills but may not want to come to college to seek help and may not have enough money to travel. The Skills for Life Project in Devon is helping learners to improve their basic skills. The Linking to Learning project in Cornwall is considered to have been a particularly successful model and has been commented upon favourably in Ofsted inspection reports.

43 East Devon College operates outreach centres in Honiton, Axminster and Exmouth, Crediton and Tiverton; which provide courses in subjects such as IT and business. There are five outreach centres and the leasing of them incurs additional costs for the college.

44 Staff from East Devon College work very closely with external partners to attract hard-to-reach learners. They work with the Mental Health and Disability Trust and the NHS Primary Care Trust. Health visitors, community nurses, social workers, Jobcentre staff and probation officers pass on information to their patients or clients about the college's courses in a sensitive way. There is a Prescription for Learning scheme, whereby outreach workers bring information about education and training courses to medical practitioners' surgeries. East Devon College offers one-to-one basic skills training to adult learners in their own homes with the aim of increasing their confidence so that they can continue their learning at college. This provision involves small numbers of learners and incurs high running costs, some of which are defrayed by additional funding.

45 Some funding for small projects comes from sources such as the Local Initiative Fund (from local LSCs), ESF and local charities or foundations. Bidding for funding is time-consuming, however, and between 50% and 60% of bids are unsuccessful. College staff take laptops into venues such as village halls and pubs, and work with small groups of people, who may be young offenders, people with mental illness, lone parents, or people who are disaffected in some way. They teach computer skills, which can also help people to improve their literacy skills. Adults can be motivated to learn through an initial course in computer skills. The low student-to-teacher ratio in outreach work is effective but expensive to sustain.

Mobile units

46 Under the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) initiative, North Devon College was successful in securing a number of mobile units. These mobile units were intended primarily to bring education and training to small- to medium-sized employers. Analysis of the performance of these mobile units shows that in 2000/01, although their use increased, the mobile units lost money. It is not clear, however, how effectively these mobile units have been deployed. The college acknowledges that they may not have marketed the units sufficiently and that there is a lack of a clear business plan for their use. They are seen, nevertheless, as an important means of widening participation but it is not clear what the net additional costs of operating them are.

Ufi/learndirect

47 There is a single Ufl/learndirect hub covering Devon and Cornwall, with 30 learning centres. Learning providers agreed that these have proved effective and have helped learners to improve their ICT skills. The centres are not, however, able to help learners with basic skills.

ESF

48 North Devon College has been the largest recipient of ESF in Devon, receiving £2 million in 2001/02. It has clearly benefitted from being in a region classified by the ESF as among the most remote in the European Union (EU) and therefore eligible for additional financial support under objective 1 of the fund. The college has been successful in securing funding from different sources but staff anticipate that less funding will be available from these in the future.

Links with schools

49 East Devon College has developed a curriculum for year 10 pupils in vocational subjects, such as hospitality, engineering, hair and beauty. These pupils are either bussed to the college to take courses, or staff from the college go out to the schools to teach them and help them complete a module as part of a vocational GCSE course. The programme serves as a means of fostering links between the college and local schools. Some disaffected school pupils with behavioural problems attend the college. College staff try to help these pupils overcome their disaffection and raise their self-esteem. They encourage them to enrol at the college after they leave school.

50 East Devon College would like to expand the programme for 14-16 year olds and offer vocational GCSE course modules to more students in areas such as ICT, business, leisure and tourism, engineering, health and social care.

51 College staff face difficulties in gaining access to pupils in local schools to tell them about the programme, partly because of sensitivities relating to data protection. To overcome this problem, the college recently held an event on a Saturday to allow pupils to come and find out more about the college. Over 100 attended. There is, however, a need for closer co-operation between schools, colleges and Connexions with the aim of making pupils of all abilities fully aware of what further education and training has to offer.

Partnerships

52 Partnerships have enabled colleges and providers to co-ordinate provision and make minority courses, (that is, those which enrol few students), viable. For example, some students from Crediton Sixth Form College attend language courses at East Devon College. By the same token, students from East Devon College attend music courses at Crediton Sixth Form College. Exeter College, East Devon College and North Devon College have a working agreement to contact each other if one of them closes a course, to find out if it is being run at one of the other two colleges. If it is, arrangements are made for students affected by the closure to join the course at the partner college if they so wish.

53 A feasibility study is being conducted to see whether four colleges in the area (East Devon College, South Devon College, Exeter College and Bicton College) could provide a range of courses on the same site. This would be a centre of excellence in agriculture, engineering and construction. The views of students, parents and employers will be taken into account. The new college would have residential facilities to accommodate students who live some distance away.

54 East Devon College also has links with the University of Plymouth and will be running four HE courses at Tiverton leading to degrees in subjects including social work, tourism and business. The college may also run catering, computing and early years courses in conjunction with Plymouth College. The catering courses will aim to produce chefs, to meet skills shortages in the South West.

55 Maintaining partnerships in a comparatively remote area such as North Devon is both time consuming and costly. The lack of broadband connectivity in the area means that providers cannot engage in video conferencing. With support from the RDA, LSC and UfI, a Regional Support Unit is being set up with the aim of improving networking in the area, and providing support and training for tutors.

Marketing

56 In 2001/02, several colleges pooled their resources to mount a TV marketing campaign that cost £65,000. Following this, applications for courses increased by 10%. In 2002/03, East Devon College will be spending £42,000 on another TV campaign.

Norfolk

57 The case study focuses on the experiences of those providing New Deal and work based learning to address skills shortages in Norfolk.

New Deal and work based learning providers

58 The Broads Authority provides training in environmental and basic skills for volunteers and New Deal clients. The authority has set up its own training facility. Half of its learners are volunteers and the remainder are New Deal clients, aged 18-24. The authority set up this training facility with the following objectives:
● to provide a core of skilled workers for a wide range of construction and land/water management projects;
● to foster links and a close working relationship with local people;
● to provide work experience, training and environmental education through the New Deal and a volunteering programme; and
● to raise awareness of the Broads as an environmental resource.

59 Although many volunteers from the authority's training centre make use of the skills they have acquired in the voluntary sector, only about 20% of New Deal clients gain paid employment in the environmental sector. The authority is the only New Deal training provider in the area. At its training centre, priority is given to helping New Deal clients develop important skills such as teamworking. New Deal clients value the specialist skills they are able to acquire through outdoor work and these make them more employable.

60   The training centre can accommodate about 35 learners. The authority has just been granted funding for four New Deal 25+ placements. Only half the students live in a rural area. The rest come from urban areas such as Great Yarmouth. Because of its relative affluence, the area does not qualify for funding from sources such as the SRB. Great Yarmouth, however, is the fifth most deprived area in Britain and its workers are subject to seasonal unemployment.

61   Training at the centre leads to a number of the authority's own qualifications (not externally accredited) in environmental management, such as brush cutting, wetlands ecology and coppicing, as well as qualifications in computing and leadership. The centre also offers a number of externally moderated environmental and non-environmental courses. Learners work towards NVQs, for example, in landscape and ecosystems and qualifications in integrated business technology.

62   One fifth of New Deal clients go on to use their environmental skills in a job. The remainder develop life skills, such as working in a team, to make themselves more employable.

Employer-led training

63   Apprenticeships in boat building were phased out in the 1980s, as was the course in boat building at Norwich City College. Haines Marine and other employers approached their trade association, British Marine Federation, about reviving training in boat building. The British Marine Federation authorised a training provider on the south coast, ITE, to establish a boat building course in the Broads. This course is run in association with Lowestoft College, and is funded partly by the LSC. It is a two-year NVQ course with 20 students, who spend one day a week at the college. A minibus takes students from the Broads to Lowestoft College.

Transport

64   Minibuses pick up learners and New Deal clients from all over the Broads and take them to the authority's training centre. Journeys can take up to an hour. Taxis collect some learners and clients from particularly remote locations and take them to the minibus.

65   There are other initiatives in the area to help learners and clients overcome transport problems. For example, through the Kickstart Moped scheme, 10 mopeds are made available to those for whom travel by any other means is impracticable. Users receive training on how to ride a moped and they pay £5 a week towards the costs of using the machines. If a New Deal client needs a car to get to his or her place of work, the Extended New Deal will pay for the client to receive driving lessons if he or she does not hold a driving licence.

North Yorkshire

66 Research focused primarily on provision made by Craven College and Wensleydale School in North Yorkshire.

Transition to post-16 provision

67 Links between Craven College and Wensleydale School are funded through the North Yorkshire Business and Education Partnership. Wensleydale School has a sixth form and offers GCE A-level courses. Through its partnership with Craven College, the school can now offer vocational courses and an adult and community learning programme.

68 The adult and community learning programme takes place on one day a week at the school over three terms. In the first term, learners receive careers guidance, in the second term they are given an introduction to Craven College's range of courses, and in the third term they have a work placement with a local firm. Courses run at Wensleydale School include, for example, those in computing, languages and arts and crafts.

69 Staff from both the school and the college provide vocational training. The school now runs the City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education course. Areas covered by this course include tending animals, plants and land, extracting and providing natural resources, construction, engineering, manufacturing, providing and transporting goods and services, communication and entertaining, health and social care, and business services. Courses at the school will become more diverse over the next two years and it is expected that

student numbers for these will increase by 20 a year. The school claimed that the costs of these vocational courses were greater than those for GCE A-level courses in non-vocational subjects.

Sharing resources

70 Colleges and providers in sparsely populated areas have to decide the economic break even point in terms of the minimum number of learners on courses. It was suggested that, for Craven College, the break-even point is eight students, and it is difficult to achieve this number on some courses. If these courses do not run, however, then the breadth of provision is diminished. Craven College, which is based in Skipton, has sought to widen participation by running courses in places such as schools and community centres. With the help of EU funding, the college has been able to extend its provision by setting up learning centres in schools and community centres.

71 Craven College also provides community education through the College of the Dales, which is a partnership between the colleges and schools and community centres in the region. Craven College has close relationships with six schools and is liaising with four more.

72 Connexions works in partnership with the voluntary and community sector to provide information, advice and guidance for young people. Connexions maintains PC and video conferencing facilities for voluntary sector organisations in rural areas. The aim is to provide first or one-stop facilities in rural areas by sharing premises and making use of, for example, PCs and

telephones in rural post offices, and by providing a freephone helpline. Many careers centres in sparsely populated areas have closed, but careers advisers go out to rural areas and meet with young people.

73 At Richmond careers centre, the Careers Service and the Youth Offending Team use the same building on different days. Youth services in North Yorkshire make contact with potential learners through use of three mobile centres.

Transport

74 The lack of convenient public transport in North Yorkshire is a key barrier to participation in education and training. To overcome this barrier, colleges and providers in the area have provided learners with:
● driving lessons;
● mopeds; and
● bus services.

75 They are also in negotiation with local transport companies to obtain cheaper fares for learners at off-peak times.

Shropshire

76 Research focused on Ludlow College, Walford and North Shropshire College, Bishops Castle Community College, which has a small sixth form, and County Training, which is the largest provider of work based learning in Shropshire.

77 In Shropshire and the surrounding areas (including Wales), there is a wide range of provision for learners aged 16-19. Although colleges compete strongly with one another to enrol

learners, they co-operate in areas such as marketing through the Shropshire Colleges' website. Some staff at colleges in England claimed that some Welsh colleges had laid on transport across the border in order to poach students from England.

Maximising the number of learners

78 The FE providers were seeking to increase the number of courses they offered, including those for which there was less demand. One strategy for growth is to work with a partner organisation.

79 Walford and North Shropshire College provides courses at the learning centre in Wem, which it runs jointly with the County Council Library Service.

80 Bishops Castle Community College has links with King Edward's School at Solihull in the West Midlands. It is considering ways in which the two institutions can share resources in order that they may run courses with low numbers economically, such as those in Spanish, psychology and sociology.

81 Distance learning is also organised by the two colleges. For example, Walford and North Shropshire College has over 500 distance learners, many of whom are the only student on their course and need a great deal of tutorial support. To facilitate distance learning, the college has used video conferencing and a broadband microwave system, linking Walford and North Shropshire College's main sites to Staffordshire University. At Bishops Castle Community College, learners can study some subjects for which there is low demand such as

psychology, sociology and electronics, by using learning packs they can work through on their own, and video conferencing facilities.

82   Walford and North Shropshire College aims to grow. Its buildings are being improved and a new campus is being created. Staff hope that the changes will attract more young people. At the same time, however, the college has to make sure that it is does not lose its appeal to adults. As one principal said: *'coming into college when returning to formal learning is too much for most adults… it's a psychological barrier.'*

Partnership arrangements

83   Ludlow College works in partnership with Shrewsbury Sixth Form College. There is a joint management team made up of three senior managers who work at both colleges. However, this arrangement was seen as only a partial solution to the problem of reducing high operational costs. As one member of staff said: *'pooling is not an answer to making huge cost savings unless we can teach students in bigger groups.'*

84   There are no HE institutions in Shropshire. Walford and North Shropshire College arranges for students to visit Staffordshire University to find out more about HE. The college is also a part of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation and offers some HE provision. Ludlow College arranges similar trips to Oxford and other universities. Students are also provided with a programme of careers advice, involving visits from outside speakers.

85   The colleges have obtained funding from a range of sources. Shropshire has

benefited from funding from national regeneration budgets and the EU. Many voluntary and community organisations have also received funding from the EU and voluntary groups have been able to run their own centres with courses provided by the local college.

Transport

86   There are many sparsely populated areas in Shropshire and some of these are not well served by public transport. Action has been taken to help learners with transport costs, or provide them with a means of transport to their place of learning.

87   Shropshire County Council operates a transport assistance scheme for 16-19 year olds. If their nearest designated college or provider (as determined by the LEA) is over three miles away from their home, learners may be eligible for assistance with transport. The assistance is usually in the form of a travel pass (term-time only) for use on public transport. In some cases, learners' travelling expenses are paid. Learners are usually required to make a contribution of £220 a year towards the cost of their assistance. Usually Ludlow College pays this contribution for them out of funding from the learner support fund.

88   Colleges provide financial help for those students who are not eligible for assistance from the LEA.

89   Walford and North Shropshire College run a fleet of 12 minibuses, primarily for taking full-time students and those with learning diffuclties from outlying towns to the two main campuses at Oswestry and Walford.

90   Shropshire has a well-established Wheels to Work scheme (currently funded through the Countryside Agency and managed through the Community Council). A rural transport broker administers the scheme. Through this scheme, learners aged 16-25 are loaned a moped if they cannot get to and from their place of education and training by public transport. The loan is usually for six months, and participants have the option to buy the machine at end of the loan period. Under the scheme, learners also receive financial assistance towards the cost of driving lessons and, where appropriate, with vehicle maintenance. The transport broker carries out spot checks to make sure that there is no fraudulent use of the scheme.

91   A similar scheme for learners aged 16-25 has been launched recently in Telford and the Wrekin, through the Rural Transport Partnership.

92   There is consensus that provision of assistance to learners with transport problems:
- helps learners to remain on their course; and
- brings in learners from a wider area.

Adult learners

93   Ludlow College and Walford and North Shropshire College meet the needs of full-time and part-time learners, including employees, and individuals seeking non-vocational courses. An increasing number of older adults in South Shropshire wish to follow leisure courses. Some older people, however, join younger students on part-time, second-chance GCE A-level courses.

94   A great deal of adult education is provided at outreach centres, and in the community. Walford and North Shropshire College offers provision at 97 different sites, including some in very small hamlets. There is a lack of public transport in some parts of the county and it is the college's policy to provide people with education and training in the area where they live. As one person said:
'It's not just about geography… it is about providing an environment in which adult learners feel comfortable.'

95   Walford and North Shropshire College provides a great deal of IT training for adults at outreach centres and uses over 40 venues, such as village halls, pubs, primary schools, community centres and chapels for this purpose. The outreach programmes are taught by a team of nine staff who use laptops. This team has an office in each of the main market towns in the county.

Work based learning

96   The research also covered work based learning programmes. In South Shropshire, a great deal of employment is in care homes, the tourist industry and the service sector. Many employees are female and part-time. Employees have to work unsociable hours and many face job insecurity. Ludlow College carried out its own research into the training needs of carers. Recent legislation requires 50% of people who work as carers to be qualified to level 2 by 2005. The local LSC is encouraging colleges and providers to work together to enable this target to be met.

97   Ludlow College drew on various
      sources of funding to promote
      training to employers on their own
      premises. These included an RDA-
      funded Rural Development Project,
      and a Rural Opportunities Project
      (University of Wolverhampton).
      More recently, LSC Shropshire has
      provided local initiative funding to
      facilitate training for carers. A
      programme for care home staff is
      now well established. This leads to
      an intermediate diploma in care
      (originally developed by Basildon
      College). Learners receive their tutorials
      in the care homes. Twenty-two
      employers are now involved with this
      programme. Effective features of this
      programme include:
      ● a close relationship between the
        college and care home owners;
      ● personal contact with learners
        through workplace tutorials;
      ● effective initial assessment of
        learners' basic skills;
      ● good support for learners who need
        help with basic skills; and
      ● a paper-free NVQ assessment
        package whereby learners provide
        evidence of their attainment orally
        and on video.

98   Ludlow College is hoping to use this
      programme with learners in other
      employment areas, such as
      childminders, classroom assistants and
      staff in restaurants and pubs.

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