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## Research report



### **Programmes for unemployed people since the 1970s: the changing place of literacy, language and numeracy**

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# Programmes for unemployed people since the 1970s: the changing place of literacy, language and numeracy

Karin Tusting and David Barton

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# 1 Executive summary

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This review is a survey of government initiatives and programmes for unemployed people and jobseekers since the 1970s. It draws out the differing place of literacy, language and numeracy in these programmes, and assesses their effectiveness in relation to LLN education. This report:

- documents programmes, providing a broad chronological history and situating them in their social, political and economic contexts
- examines the changing role of LLN education in these programmes
- assesses the impact of changing agencies and programmes over time
- presents some broad conclusions for future policy development.

The review begins by situating the issue historically, with the establishment of Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) in the early 1960s, followed by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) in 1973, which brought together government, industry, trade unions, local authority representatives and educational bodies. This was intended to be an employment and training organisation, but with the economic downturn of the 1970s, the MSC became the driving force behind a range of programmes for the unemployed. These included the Training Opportunities Scheme (TOPS), designed to offer adults training in key trades. Adults who needed support in developing literacy and numeracy skills were offered pre-TOPS courses – year-long courses in adult basic education, fully funded with expenses included. Despite some problems, these courses had a hugely significant impact on the adult literacy and numeracy field at the time. In 1978, the parallel Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) began a six-month ‘employment programme’, offering work experience, training and work preparation courses for unemployed school-leavers. It was widely criticised for offering inadequate training and not leading many participants into employment.

The collapse of the youth labour market also led to an influx of young people into further education. A Further Education Curriculum and Review Unit set up a study group to develop a full-time post-16 pre-employment course. The result, *A Basis for Choice* (FECRDU and Tolley 1982), aimed to balance core studies, including literacy, numeracy and communications skills, with vocational studies, and to take a student-centred approach.

Migrant workers in traditional industries were hit particularly hard by the mid-1970s economic downturn. The Industrial Language Training Service (ILTS) had been set up in 1970 to improve workplace communication between second language speakers of English and their colleagues, and some local ILTS units developed provision specifically for the unemployed, especially in Lancashire and the Midlands. They developed an integrated curriculum working with vocational teachers in which objectives and approaches were shared between trade and language teachers.

In the early 1980s, high levels of unemployment continued, despite a general economic recovery under the Conservative government between 1982 and 1989. It was argued that low levels of skills nationally increased the lag between increase in demand and decrease in unemployment, and that vocational training was needed to address this skills gap.

In 1981, the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) was introduced, aiming to ensure all under-18s had a place either in work, education or in training. It offered basic vocational training combined with work experience. This led to an increase in the quantity of vocational training, but many trainees failed to gain qualifications or jobs after participating in the scheme.

In further education, the REPLAN initiative, which ran from 1984 to 1991, funded local development projects that aimed to improve educational opportunities for unemployed adults. An evaluation suggested most of these bore little relationship to the lives of the students involved. In the same period, the MSC and the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) sponsored demonstration projects in basic skills, exploring the level of need for basic skills provision and developing appropriate content and methods. Key issues identified included the need for individual counselling and guidance, positive attitudes and methods from tutors, flexibility and responsiveness to local needs, the difficulty of identifying and assessing needs and the time taken for these needs to become explicit. Recruitment was more successful when basic skills provision was clearly linked to work-focused training.

The National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was established in 1986 to change the qualifications system, so as to encourage training opportunities more directly relevant to the needs expressed by employers. This reform of the delivery system of vocational education also aimed to increase the status of vocational learning. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were developed as a competence-based approach to training, in which literacy, numeracy and communication were not emphasised.

NVQs attracted criticism both for their lack of attention to core skills and for being insufficiently responsive to work-related needs. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) suggested they were too narrow to promote flexibility, and overlooked task context. In the early 1990s, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were developed, broad vocational qualifications available in FE colleges and secondary schools which provided pathways of progression into jobs and higher education. These included training in 'core skills', bringing literacy, numeracy and language back into an important place in vocational training.

In 1988, all existing programmes for the adult unemployed were combined into a single programme, Employment Training (ET). This refocused resources on helping the longer-term unemployed and on providing training rather than temporary employment. The programme was to incorporate a broad range of training, including basic skills, but also entrepreneurial, technological and motivational training. A Restart programme was also introduced, consisting of six-monthly interviews to provide in-depth advice and guidance to long-term unemployed people and link them into other programmes and opportunities. It was aimed particularly at people who needed extra confidence and motivational training before starting a training course. However, many long-term unemployed people with literacy and numeracy needs had serious reservations about undertaking any more education. Restart interviewers were perceived as having a policing function, which limited the possibility of clients forming supportive relationships with Employment Service staff.

In 1988, a private-sector direction was introduced to the national training programme when the establishment of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) was announced. These were designed to be legally autonomous bodies, set up on a local basis and run by private-sector employers, with the aim of making training more sensitive to local employers' needs. TECs dominated the training market until 2001, when they were replaced by Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs).

From the 1990s on, improving adult basic education was seen as an investment in human capital. The CBI developed national education and training targets including basic skills, which were endorsed by the Government in 1991. The *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* provided adult basic education with statutory recognition for national funding purposes. Employers and unions became increasingly interested in literacy for economic development. The ALBSU programme, *Basic Skills at Work (1991–1995)*, surveyed basic skills provision and employers' needs and explored new methods, finding employers had considerable demand for basic skills and much instruction at the time did not directly address workplace needs.

Pre-vocational pilot programmes (PVPs) were introduced from 1996, subsequently incorporated into the Training for Work (TFW) programme, which aimed to help people with multiple disadvantages access the training and support they needed to benefit from mainstream training programmes and subsequently move into employment. These were found to compare favourably with existing training programmes in addressing clients' specific needs, with an emphasis on self-help and peer support being valuable.

In October 1996, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) was introduced in the UK. This tightened the rules to ensure JSA claimants were actively seeking work. Approximately 13 per cent of JSA claimants in an evaluation study claimed to have difficulties with reading or writing. Under JSA, jobseekers could undertake educational and training courses, provided these did not interfere with their ability to search for work. In effect, this meant that participation in education and training by people claiming JSA was limited to part-time courses.

When the Labour government was elected in 1997, basic skills were an issue from the start. In 1999, the Moser report, *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy*, was published (DfEE 1999). It pointed out a national deficit in basic skills by the end of compulsory education and proposed a range of ways to improve adult literacy and numeracy. This led to the development of the Skills for Life strategy, launched in 2001 with substantial funding and ambitious targets, which raised the profile of literacy, language and numeracy in policy arenas across the board.

By the late 1990s, the move was towards welfare-to-work programmes focused on getting people into work rather than into training – most clearly exemplified by the New Deal programmes. These include a gateway period of supported job search, options which include education and training, and support from a personal adviser throughout. Evaluations of New Deal identify crucial elements for success as being the role of the personal adviser, accurate assessment of people's needs, and flexible, individually-tailored programmes. Subsidised employment seemed an effective way to achieve sustained employment. Placing clients quickly in unsubsidised work was less successful, since if clients were not job-ready, these jobs were not sustained for long. The most common complaint from providers of such jobs was that clients had not had enough basic skills and motivation training before coming to them.

Driven by Skills for Life, a national mandatory basic skills programme was introduced, under which anyone unemployed for more than six months was screened for a basic skills need and, where appropriate, referred onto a training course. Initial evaluations of the scheme showed that while needs were appropriately identified, many clients who went on to training still had the same needs afterwards, raising questions as to the effectiveness of the training in relation to those needs.

Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) at the foundation level also cater for some young people without jobs, although these are not intended to cater only for the jobless. They were introduced in 1994 as an attempt to offer a high-status vocational progression route, but have been widely criticised. There is enormous variation between apprenticeships in rates of pay, length and provision of training, and range of qualifications achieved. The system suffers from high attrition, low success rates in vocational programmes, and poor recruitment and retention. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and others have expressed widespread concern about unsatisfactory achievement. Key skills tests are not serving the purposes for which they were intended, and the generic nature of such tests goes against the embedded way such skills are taught in apprenticeships. In response partly to criticisms of apprenticeships, particularly at the foundation level, the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme began in 2003, aimed at young people doing work-based learning from entry level to level 1. It addresses the needs of a difficult group, and large numbers of young people are referred to it. The vocational skills element of the curriculum is well received, but concerns have been expressed about the basic and key skills element, with provision in this area being variable.

The final programme described is the Employment Zone (EZ), created in April 2000 in 15 areas of Britain. These zones emphasise a 'work-first' approach with supported job search and early entry to mainstream employment. Only one in six EZ participants had any form of external training. Key success factors included: skilled, committed personal advisers; a focus on individual solutions; flexibility; realistic action plans; and recognising improved employability as an achievement.

In summary, there has been a range of government measures to support and train the unemployed since the 1970s. Their primary focus has been to get unemployed people into work, and this has been the measure of their effectiveness. The level of educational support offered as part of this training has varied, but the introduction of Skills for Life has made literacy, language and numeracy issues more salient in this provision.

The review goes on to address some key framing issues. The first of these is the impact of basic skills education on employability in the short term. The effectiveness of programmes for the unemployed is normally mentioned in relation to employment entry and research literature suggests that improvement of basic skills in adulthood has little *immediate* impact on wages and employment probability. Nevertheless, possession of such skills is clearly linked to employability and life chances. LLN skills provide the foundations of capability in many spheres. Protecting against deterioration of skills is also important for life chances. And wider benefits of learning accrue to participation in education. Therefore, investment in basic skills education for the unemployed needs to be seen not as a 'magic bullet' to resolve individuals' histories of unemployment, but as part of a broader package of support which aims to meet their needs and aspirations and support them in their employment goals. It is also important to bear in mind that local labour market conditions play a central role in the success or otherwise of programmes for jobseekers and the unemployed. Improving people's skills alone will not enable them to gain employment if the employment is not there to be found.



The issue of compulsion is also addressed, particularly relevant in relation to the recent introduction of mandatory basic skills provision. Compulsion is not in itself detrimental to learning, but to be productive it needs to be used judiciously and in a context in which clients broadly feel they have choices about their participation. People accept it if they see it as fair.

Finally, the review identifies themes which have emerged from programmes across the years and which are valuable to consider in future policy development. These include the importance of:

■ **Tailored individual solutions**

Flexibility and the ability to meet clients' needs and aspirations were crucial to the success of many of these programmes, supporting the policy goals of personalisation.

■ **Positive, supportive relationships with personal advisers**

Ongoing positive relationships with advisers enable programmes to be tailored to individuals.

■ **Subsidised jobs**

It is clear from much of this research that, in terms of getting people into work in the short term, subsidised jobs have proved to be the most successful approach.

The most appropriate approach to helping the unemployed and jobseekers get into work might therefore be to focus on subsidised jobs, while also offering support and training in literacy and numeracy to those clients who have a need and desire to engage in this, enabling them to develop the skills they need to stay and develop in those jobs. Providing LLN learning opportunities appropriate to clients' work situations and aspirations seems to be the key message.

## 2 Introduction

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This review is a survey of government initiatives and programmes for unemployed people and jobseekers since the 1970s. It draws out the differing place of literacy, language and numeracy in these programmes, and where evidence exists, assesses their effectiveness in relation to LLN education. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of the review to inform future policy and practice in the area.

There have been many government initiatives for unemployed people and jobseekers since the 1970s, some more successful than others. The place of LLN in such initiatives has changed over time in response to the broader policy context and changing ideas around education, training and employability. A range of different evaluations and reports of these exist, with differing levels of attention to the educational components and impact of the programmes. Most programmes were evaluated primarily in relation to their main goal – their effectiveness in increasing people’s chances of getting and retaining employment. However, it is important to address the significance of LLN in these programmes and the relative effectiveness of different approaches, in order to draw together what evidence of best practice exists for future policies in the area.

This report:

- documents programmes, providing a broad chronological history and situating them in their social, political and economic contexts
- examines the changing role of LLN education in these programmes, and assesses their effectiveness where evidence of this exists
- considers broader issues that frame the effectiveness of such programmes, including the relation between basic skills training and wages, labour market conditions, and the effects of compulsion
- makes recommendations for future policy development.

Drawing on research into and evaluations of the different programmes, we summarise recurrent features associated with successful programmes to provide relevant lessons for future policy making and practice. These relate particularly to the importance of flexibility in meeting clients’ needs, the crucial role of personal advisers and the benefits of offering work experience and subsidised employment, in addition to LLN support and education.

## 3 Initiatives for the unemployed and jobseekers

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### 3.1 Before the 1970s

In the years immediately preceding the 1970s, Britain experienced a period of full employment.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, training for employment was a key political issue. The consensus view was that Britain was lagging behind its international competitors because of a lack of training (Ainley and Corney 1990). A 1962 White Paper proposed tripartite training boards incorporating unions, employers and government, and the imposition of a statutory training levy on employers. This was expressed in the *Industrial Training Act 1964*, which introduced a Central Training Council to advise the Secretary of State for Employment. The Act established 29 Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) and a levy/grant system, by means of which employers could exempt themselves from the levy by providing training which met guidelines set out by the ITBs. The goal of the boards was to broaden the range of firms providing training, with those that provided training in effect being subsidised by those that did not. The system was criticised as being unfair from its early days. There was no way to distinguish between firms offering training of benefit to themselves only and firms offering transferable skills training of potentially broader national benefit (Jones 1988), and firms could score against the levy training they would have been offering in any case, such as health and safety training.

At the same time, there was an increase in the numbers of migrant workers. The 1950s and 1960s saw an expansion of semi-automated industries requiring additional unskilled labour, such as food processing, plastics manufacture and mass production engineering, at a time when traditional industries such as textiles, clothing and foundries were being deskilled and reorganised. Demand for labour in these areas, and in service industries in areas of labour shortage, drew in migrant workers from ethnic minorities, many of whom spoke English as a second language (Roberts et al. 1992). This laid down patterns of geographical settlement of migrant workers which led to these groups being hit hard in the labour market when the industries which had recruited them collapsed in later years, particularly in areas such as Lancashire and the Midlands. This raised particular issues in relation to the educational needs of second-language speakers of English that will be addressed later in this report.

### 3.2 1970–1979: Combating unemployment

#### 3.2.1 Manpower Services Commission

By the 1970s, major failings in the ITB system had become evident. Many industries were not

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<sup>1</sup> Unemployment figures are taken from claimant counts from the Office of National Statistics (ONS, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>); a historically consistent series is available from 1971 onwards.

covered by the boards. The system was overly bureaucratic. The levies were seen as unfair, particularly on small employers. It was hard to agree on criteria to judge whether employers were providing training adequate to exempt them from the charge. And as unemployment crept up, an increase in the pool of trained labour removed the incentive for employers to provide training.

In 1972, a consultative paper, *Training for the Future*, proposed alterations to the national training scheme, including the establishment of a Training Services Agency (TSA). In response to this, the *Employment and Training Act 1973* created the Manpower Services Commission, which had its first official meeting in January 1974 (Ainley and Corney 1990). The TSA transferred to the MSC in April 1974.

The MSC included commissioners from industry, trade unions, local authority representatives and educational bodies, with the government represented through the chairman under the direction of the Secretary of State for Employment. Introduced by the Conservative government, the initial plan for the agency was to act as a national employment and training body. Its goals included the abolition of the dichotomy between education and training, the creation of a pro-training culture, the elevation of the importance of vocational education and training, and an overhaul of Britain's education and training system.

The Labour party's victory in the 1974 election included a manifesto commitment to expand the role of the MSC. The aim was for it to become a 'powerful body responsible for the development and execution of a comprehensive manpower policy', as part of an interventionist approach to industrial strategy. However, this aspiration faded away as unemployment rose through the 1970s. Instead, the MSC became the driving force behind a wide range of programmes for the unemployed and jobseekers (Ainley and Corney 1990).

From 1970 to 1973 the British economy boomed, with growth and low unemployment figures: 2.4 per cent in 1971, 2.7 per cent in 1972, 1.9 per cent in 1973. But the OPEC oil crisis of 1973 had a disastrous economic impact. Between 1974 and 1975, the country experienced a rise in oil prices, a miners' strike, and a three-day week. By 1976, the pound had collapsed to 60 per cent of its 1971 value, and at the end of that year the International Monetary Fund had to step in to support Britain's almost exhausted reserves<sup>2</sup>. Unemployment went up, from 1.9 per cent in 1974 to 3.9 per cent in 1976 and 4.2 per cent in 1977. A fragile recovery from 1976 onwards was threatened by oil price rises, and a return to stagflation coupled with a collapse in pay policy led to the so-called 'winter of discontent' in 1979–80, with widespread strikes and industrial disturbances. Traditional manufacturing industries were particularly badly affected, with mass unemployment in the North and the Midlands in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In this context, particularly given the rise in unemployment, a concern with employability led to increasing debate about the relationship between education and employment. In 1976, a speech by Prime Minister James Callaghan at Ruskin College launched what became known as the 'great debate' around education. He expressed concerns that the curriculum in schools did not provide school-leavers with the skills and tools required by industry. This speech was seen as having played a key role in shifting the grounds of the debate towards more economically-focused goals, laying the grounds for the introduction of the national curriculum and more government control of the entire education system. Education and training for adults too became more focused on employment than on a welfarist agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> Unemployment figures from ONS claimant counts, as above. Economic facts and figures from <http://www.bized.ac.uk>

These difficult economic circumstances led to the abandonment of the initial grand design for the MSC. The principal role of the MSC, therefore, became to provide programmes to reduce unemployment, and the line became blurred between providing training and running schemes to reduce unemployment figures. By 1981, while the commission was still nominally concerned with employment, the vast majority of its services were catering for the unemployed (MSC 1981).

### 3.2.2 Training Opportunities Scheme

The most important initiatives for the unemployed during this period relating to literacy and numeracy were the TOPS (Training Opportunities Scheme) and pre-TOPS programmes. TOPS was initially designed to address skills shortages, rather than unemployment per se, by offering adults accelerated training in key trades. It began in 1972, and was later taken over by the MSC after its establishment (Cannell 2004). Adults who needed support in developing literacy and numeracy skills were offered pre-TOPS courses, year-long courses in adult basic education, fully funded with expenses included. The goal of these courses was to prepare adults for occupational training under TOPS, as the first rung on the ladder for those without the literacy and numeracy skills to participate in TOPS.

These pre-TOPS courses made up a fairly small proportion of the general TOPS provision. In 1979–80, 84 per cent of TOPS training was for skilled occupations. Of the 75,000 completions of TOPS courses in this period, only 3,600 were of the literacy and numeracy preparatory course (MSC 1981). Funding for them was not straightforward, and over time they were systematically reduced in hours and privatised. Their focus on discrete literacy and numeracy skills challenged ideas common elsewhere in the adult literacy field at the time, in which many teachers were seeking to help people develop critical literacy and promote empowerment through basic education (Hamilton and Hillier 2006). Some pre-TOPS courses ended up focusing on very narrow areas, for instance CV writing or getting people through employment-related tests such as the Army entrance maths tests.

Nevertheless, these courses had a hugely significant impact on the adult literacy and numeracy field at the time, and are remembered very clearly by practitioners as the first time that full-time adult basic skills courses were fully funded with additional allowances for students (Hamilton and Hillier 2006). They had a formative role to play in developing today's adult LLN field. Many who taught on them went on to make their careers in adult education and are now leaders in the area.

A review of TOPS in 1978 called for the TOPS approach to gear training provision as closely as possible to local labour market needs (reported by MSC 1981). The emphasis shifted away from literacy and numeracy and towards vocational activities which were seen as more directly related to employment – a move which aimed to restore the original skills objectives of the scheme.

In 1985, TOPS courses were replaced by the Job Training Scheme (JTS), an employer-based scheme for adults similar to YTS (see below). This introduced the principle of requiring people to work in return for benefits. It was a response to high levels of unemployment, and the high cost of many MSC training and employment measures. It was supposed to address the skills gap, by offering training and work experience. It was introduced very quickly, with no extra resources from government, and required funding to be diverted from existing programmes. This led to a significant reduction in pre-TOPS places, and the closure of other projects seen as having been successful (Sturgess 1988). There was a great deal of opposition to this

scheme, from as diverse voices as the MSC, the Civil Service Union, many city councils and local authorities, voluntary-sector representatives, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and unions representing low-paid workers. It was argued that the scheme had been introduced too quickly with inadequate resources; was likely to lead to job substitution effects rather than create more employment; had inadequate health and safety and discrimination safeguards; and would lead to a reduction in the options for unemployed people, reducing their eligibility for other work and training schemes. The Unemployment Unit argued that its provision of employer-led, short-term training would be unlikely to tackle the country's skills shortage, identifying significant tensions between the training needs of the unemployed and employers' interests (Finn 1987). A Further Education Unit (FEU) study found that some JTS trainees lacked the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to benefit from the more directed training offered by the scheme (Sturgess 1988). While the scheme achieved a reduction in headline unemployment, many argued it offered little for most participants beyond this (Cannell 2004).

### 3.2.3 Youth Opportunities Programme

In 1978, the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP) began, in response to increased levels of youth unemployment. Between 1975–1982, unemployment among 16 and 17-year-olds increased from 4 per cent of those not in full-time education to more than 25 per cent, despite the existence of programmes for unemployed youth provided by the MSC. Had it not been for these programmes, the MSC estimated that 57 per cent of 16-year-olds and 48 per cent of 17-year-olds not in full-time education would have been unemployed (Jones 1988).

YOP was a six-month 'employment programme', offering work experience, training and work preparation courses for unemployed school-leavers. It was partly designed to 'stagger' the influx of school-leavers into the labour market (Williamson 1981). This was the first scheme to establish the principle that all 16 to 18-year-olds not in full-time education or employment should be entitled to a government-funded programme of training (Dolton 1993). YOP offered a range of programmes for different groups, including work experience on employers' premises for the more job-ready, and project or workshop-based training and experience for those seen as less prepared for employment.

YOP was explicitly designed to be a relatively small-scale programme, created to absorb a temporary excess of youth labour. There was an expectation that once the economy had picked up, then youth unemployment would disappear, and there would be no further need for the programme. Therefore, the main emphasis was on work experience rather than training. Allowances were set low enough not to create a disincentive to continue education, and the objective was to help unemployed young people gain employment as quickly as possible (Bradley 1994). It began in 1978 with only 11,000 young people on work preparation courses and 29,000 on work experience. But the near collapse of the youth labour market in the early 1980s led to a vast increase in participation, with 368,900 young people on the scheme in 1981.

This increase in the programme's numbers served to highlight its weaknesses. It was criticised by young people, parents and trade unions for using young people as a source for cheap labour, offering inadequate training and not subsequently employing, or even aspiring to employ them (Fiddy 1983, Bradley 1994). The component of the programme that entailed work experience on employers' premises was strongly criticised, since there was no obligation on employers participating in the scheme to offer any form of structured training to participants (Jones 1988). The proportion of young people leaving YOP who gained permanent employment declined very rapidly, from 60 per cent in 1979 to only 24 per cent in June 1980.

### 3.2.4 Further education: A Basis for Choice

The collapse of the youth labour market also led to an influx of young people into further education, into both vocational training and the 'associated further education' related to the MSC's various schemes. The latter was normally arranged around basic and generic work skills seen as being relevant for a range of jobs, and was offered by many colleges at a time when recruitment to vocational training had been reduced (Bailey 2003). This prompted the Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit (FECRDU) to set up a study group in 1979 to examine full-time post-16 pre-employment courses, to determine whether they enhanced young people's career and future education opportunities and served their wider interests. The group surveyed existing courses, and designed a course which balanced core studies (literacy, numeracy and communications skills), vocational studies and job-specific studies. Built in to the approach was a student-centred ethos which considered student characteristics and vocational orientation in developing courses. The resultant programme, *A Basis for Choice* (ABC) (FECRDU 1982), was highly influential in FE. It was regarded as a seminal document at the time, providing a national framework around which many existing programmes could be fitted, suggesting a common core and focusing on processes as well as products, and reflecting a curriculum-led philosophy of assessment (Phillips 1986b). Although it was not initially designed as a programme for jobseekers (being aimed initially at young 'stayers-on' in education), it had an important role in shaping pre-vocational education in general, for the young unemployed as well as young people in unskilled employment and young stayers-on (Phillips 1986a).

### 3.2.5 The Industrial Language Training Service

The most significant development in this period relating to English language teaching for the unemployed and jobseekers came from the pioneering Industrial Language Training Service (ILTS). Established in London in 1970 to respond to the English language needs of migrant workers and to heighten awareness of related issues for their co-workers, it became a national service in 1974 when government funds were made available to local authorities under the Industrial Language Scheme. The National Centre for Industrial Language Training opened in 1975. It developed and supported 25 ILT units responsive to local needs throughout the country, fully funded by the training service division of the MSC (Roberts et al. 1992, Hamilton and Hillier 2006).

The focus of most of the work of the ILTS was on in-company language training, therefore most programmes offered were not designed for the unemployed and jobseekers. However, the service set itself much broader goals than simply to improve productivity in the workplace. Improving communication and human relationships were seen as being just as important, contributing to combating racial disadvantage and discrimination. The development of language skills through workplace programmes was seen as providing benefits in all aspects of people's lives, which included lessening the likelihood of unemployment in the future.

In addition to the in-company work, some local ILT units developed provision specifically for the unemployed. As described above, in certain areas of the country, particularly Lancashire and the Midlands, traditional industries collapsed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Members of minority ethnic communities were hit particularly hard by this, experiencing disproportionately high levels of unemployment. ILT research showed that, contrary to assumptions made by the MSC at the time, many of these were young men, well settled in Britain, with a reasonable amount of secondary education, willing to take any job available. However, they lacked enough experience in written and oral English to gain employment

easily or to be accepted for existing retraining courses (Roberts et al. 1992). Their needs were different from those of native English speakers engaging in retraining, and they were often left out of labour market analyses, despite being settled in the country.

Local ILT units in these areas, particularly in Lancashire, therefore felt there was a need to provide training programmes addressing the specific needs of these groups within the broader context of unemployment and discrimination. Roberts et al. (1992) document how these courses developed from pre-vocational courses teaching literacy, numeracy and oral communication, through courses integrating communications and vocational skills, then developing independent learning, and finally training which included both skills acquisition and orientation and development, in order to enable learners to benefit fully from the opportunities provided.

Ongoing research and evaluation identified two important characteristics of these programmes as being significant developments in vocational training provision for bilingual workers. The first was the development of an integrated curriculum, geared to employment and training prospects, in which objectives and approaches were shared between trade and LLN teachers. The second was making all aspects of the curriculum, and the learning strategies underpinning it, explicit to everyone involved.

The National Centre for ILT closed in 1987, and funding for the ILT service came to an end in 1989, in line with a broader move in Conservative government policy to move away from nationally-organised long-term funding and develop employer-led short-term contracts, to which we will now turn.

### **3.3 1979–1989: Focus on employment**

The Conservative government elected in 1979 continued to focus on training as unemployment levels rose. The Conservative government sought to change perceived negative attitudes to training, seeing it as a pre-requisite for industrial and commercial efficiency. The goal was to produce human capital to give the British economy a competitive edge, reflecting the needs of industry (Ainley and Corney 1990).

The years between 1982 and 1989 were broadly years of economic recovery and increased growth. However, inflation was also relatively high and unemployment levels – particularly youth unemployment – very high, hitting an overall claimant count of 10.5 per cent in 1986. The manufacturing industries were threatened, particularly the coal industry. A bitter year-long miners' strike from March 1984 to March 1985, sparked by pit closures and an overtime ban in the previous year, failed to prevent further closures. In 1983, the UK also saw its first ever manufacturing deficit. Industries which had traditionally provided employment in many industrial areas had closed down.

In this context, there was seen to be a need to change the training system to prepare people for a new type of economy, with service industries and an 'enterprise culture' encouraged. From the early 1980s there was a growing sense of discontent with the existing industrial training system. Industrial Training Boards were thought to be excessively bureaucratic. In the context of high unemployment (and therefore a ready labour pool) and companies cutting costs, few employers were inclined to invest in training. But there were also perceived to be skills shortages, particularly in high technology areas. It was argued that there was a need to



provide people with the skills necessary for employment in a new type of economy, and that the high levels of unemployment were exacerbated by a gap between the skills that were demanded and the skills that were available. This discontent led to the *Employment and Training Act 1981*, which empowered the Secretary of State for Employment to set up, abolish or change the scope of ITBs. The *Employment Training Act 1982* removed statutory status for all but seven ITBs, and removed their power to levy (Dolton 1993).

### 3.3.1 Youth Training Scheme

In 1980, the *New Training Initiative* White Paper set out objectives for the future of industrial training, including the introduction of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS). The aim was for all young people under the age of 18 either to continue in education or to have a period of work experience combining work-related training and education. The MSC initially identified three aims of the scheme: to provide a training option for school-leavers; to increase the productivity of firms by improving the labour skills of the workforce; and to increase the flexibility of the labour force for future economic development (Chapman and Tooze 1987).

YTS schemes began in September 1983, replacing the discredited YOP programme, at a cost of £1 billion to the Government. It initially offered one year's basic vocational training and experience for all otherwise unoccupied 16 to 17-year-old school-leavers, with at least 13 weeks off-the-job training or further education, designed to create transferable or general skills and so contribute to developing a more highly skilled workforce (Bradley 1994). It was delivered in three main ways, with numerous different local schemes being encouraged to offer flexibility. Mode A, employer-led schemes, covered between two-thirds and three-quarters of entrants. Mode B1, training workshops, community projects and information technology centres, run by local authorities and voluntary bodies, covered most of the rest, with less than 5 per cent of young people catered for in mode B2 provision, which was mainly college-based. Trainees in mode A schemes tended to be involved in productive work, with those on mode B more likely to do 'project' work, that is, projects developed for the sole purpose of providing YTS work experience. Trainees in mode B schemes were less likely to go on to paid work after finishing YTS (Gray and King 1986).

Information available on the occupational distribution of trainees and the duration of off-the-job training points to a substantial increase in the quantity of foundation training as a result of YTS (Jones 1988). However, a large proportion (76.8 per cent) of trainees on one-year YTS programmes leaving between April 1986 and January 1988 failed to gain any qualifications, and those that were gained were mostly at a basic level. This may have been partly due to the lack of obligation for trainees to attend appropriate external courses or to the restricted provision of courses in areas such as retailing. Another contributing factor was a mismatch between the educational qualifications required to register on some of the more widely available courses and the educational attainments of many trainees. One response to this was the introduction of new one-year courses aimed at school-leavers with more modest academic qualifications.

The 1985 White Paper, *Education and Training for Young People*, reviewed developments and progress since the 1981 White Paper, extending the focus on improving the skills of the workforce for economic growth. It announced a major expansion of the YTS to two years, with an emphasis on increased vocational training leading to recognised qualifications. The goal of the MSC was to make high quality vocational training open to all (Bradley 1994). With this extension came a much greater emphasis on the role of the scheme as a vehicle for skills, rather than 'foundation' vocational training.

The YTS attracted 370,000 entrants in its first year, approximately 60 per cent more people than had entered YOP (Jones 1988). This could be related to the fact that benefits sanctions were introduced against those who refused or prematurely left a place on YTS (Ainley and Corney 1990). Despite its large number of participants and ambitious goals, YTS was never regarded as much more than a palliative for unemployment. The perception among parents and the public was that YTS treated young people as cheap labour and did not lead to qualifications, and that many ended up being sacked as soon as their traineeship ended (Fuller and Unwin 2003). The training allowance offered was around half the average youth wage, and so many trainees left early if a job opportunity came up, leading to a high drop-out rate once labour market conditions improved in the early 1990s.

In 1990, YTS was rebranded Youth Training (YT), with new aims of encouraging young people to acquire broad-based skills, to acquire a minimum of NVQ level 2 qualifications (see below), and so to increase the quantity and quality of intermediate skills in the workforce. YT was designed as a more flexible programme of variable length, with different amounts of off-the-job training for different occupations and local variations in funding arrangements. The focus in funding was on outputs – achieving NVQs, employment and successful completion of placements (Bradley 1994). For the first time, a place was guaranteed to all 16 to 18-year-olds without a job (Dolton 1993).

Evaluation of the impact of YTS on the employment prospects of young people is not straightforward. Participation in YTS and YOP was not random. Young people entering these programmes were likely to be the less able and more poorly motivated, making comparison between participants and non-participants an ineffective measure. Evaluations show a positive effect on the probability of employment, but estimates of the extent of this vary considerably (Bradley 1994). It is even possible that participation in YTS actually had a negative effect on future earnings. An analysis of evidence from the Youth Cohort Study (Dolton et al. 1994) suggests that young people whose only training was on YTS typically earned less than comparable individuals without formal training, and that people undertaking off-the-job training or apprenticeships typically earned less if they had participated on YTS than if they had not.

### 3.3.2 REPLAN

Between 1984 and 1991 a wide range of local development projects providing further education for unemployed people was funded by the Department of Education and Science through the REPLAN programme (see Watts and Knasel 1985 and FEU/National Institute of Adult Continuing Education 1990 for case studies). This initiative aimed to improve educational opportunities for unemployed adults in flexible ways by developing innovative projects geared to the needs of the local community. The curriculum planning checklist (FEU/NIACE 1990) recommended negotiation of the curriculum with learners (see also Johnston et al. 1989), researching the local context in order to respond most effectively to learners' needs, distinguishing learning and assessment from adults' memories of schooling, ongoing evaluation and monitoring of projects, and staff development. An evaluation of the programme (FEU and Percy 1989) concluded that the programme overall had made advances in curriculum development for education and training of unemployed adults. However the achievements of the different projects were mixed and the evaluation was cautious as to the overall efficacy of the programme. The authors pointed out that most REPLAN initiatives were based in colleges and centres, and that these sorts of courses bore little relationship to the realities of the lives of most unemployed people, who had left school as soon as possible. The evaluation called for more focus on outreach projects, carefully planned to address the needs of unemployed people.

### 3.3.3 Basic skills projects for unemployed adults

The *A Basis for Choice* research from the late 1970s and early 1980s, described above, showed how core literacy, numeracy and communication skills could form part of a vocational curriculum (FECRDU 1982; FECRDU and Tolley 1982). In 1984, the MSC and ALBSU agreed to jointly sponsor six local demonstration projects which aimed to identify the level of need for basic skills provision and to explore content and methods to help organise that provision (ALBSU and MSC 1987). Projects were split into two strands. One strand focused on adults who would be unable to reach the threshold of training or employment without basic skills support. The other focused on adults already taking part in MSC work-preparation courses who still needed some help with basic communication skills to progress.

The first strand established two projects that related employment skills to basic communication skills teaching. It was found that the availability of individual counselling and guidance, and positive attitudes and methods from tutors were key to motivating students. Flexibility was crucial, with programmes developing to meet local needs, for instance by creating units on communication skills related to specific job requirements. These projects appeared to be successful in raising attainment levels and thereby improving people's chances of employment. While the link with work-related content was particularly important, staff on both courses felt there was a need for considerable basic education input first, to give confidence and a foundation on which to build. In some cases, at least half the time was spent on basic education.

The second strand explored ways in which basic skills needs could be identified and met while trainees undertook a work-preparation course. Four projects were established which developed methods and approaches to identify basic skills needs; training approaches, teaching strategies, curriculum design and materials; approaches to assessment and recording achievement; and assessment of the implications of new approaches for other providers. These courses were anticipated to cover occupational skills sampling and job-seeking skills, as well as literacy and numeracy.

All the projects experienced difficulties in identifying and assessing needs, and in finding appropriate approaches for meeting identified needs. It proved hard arbitrarily to separate adults into those needing significant help and those only needing some help; for many clients, it was only as the project developed that their real level of need began to emerge. The projects showed that many staff involved in helping the unemployed needed guidance in recognising basic skills difficulties among trainees, as well as in how to make help available.

The report on these projects (ALBSU and MSC 1987) argued that adequate basic skills provision alongside or prior to work-related training was needed, but that this was more successful in recruiting people when the basic skills provision was clearly linked to work-focused training.

### 3.3.4 Qualifications and skills

Following a 1986 review of vocational qualifications (De Ville 1986), the National Council for Vocational Qualifications was set up to develop NVQs. These qualifications attempted to identify the specific competences required by particular jobs, and to support training in workplaces as far as possible (Sharp 1998). The NVQ framework had five levels, with level 1 considered equivalent to GCSE grades D–G, level 2 to GCSE grades A–C, level 3 to A-level, level 4 to degree and level 5 to postgraduate level. This competence-based approach, as it was initially constructed, largely ignored the significance of basic or core skills such as

literacy, numeracy and communication, although the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) later included these.

In 1989, Kenneth Baker, Secretary of State for Education and Science, made a speech to the Association of Colleges in Further and Higher Education conference calling for regeneration through curriculum development. He wished to see 'core skills' permeating all FE courses. These 'core skills', later renamed 'key skills', included communications (oral and written) and numeracy skills, but also team-working, leadership and familiarity with technology. This speech challenged the perceived trend, associated with NVQs and a narrow competence-based approach, of allowing employers' demands to squeeze general education out of the vocational curriculum (Sharp 1998, Whitston 1998).

At around the same time, a task force had been set up by the CBI, the UK's leading employers' organisation, to make recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of the nation's vocational education and training. This report (CBI 1989) questioned whether NVQs were meeting the training needs of the nation, suggesting that they were too narrow to promote the development of flexibility, and that the emphasis on task competence overlooked the overall context. The report called for common learning outcomes to be developed; 'generic' units of competence like Baker's core skills which were common to a wide range of jobs.

By the late 1980s, it had become clear that there were serious problems with NVQs. They were being developed very slowly, their take-up was small and there was a political demand for major reorganisation of NCVQ. In the early 1990s, this led to the development of GNVQs, broad vocational qualifications available in FE colleges and secondary schools that provided pathways of progression into jobs and higher education. These included training in 'core skills', bringing literacy, numeracy and language back into an important place in vocational training.

### 3.3.5 Employment Training and Restart

By the late 1980s, there were so many different local training and job-creation schemes and programmes for the adult unemployed that FEU/REPLAN projects were being set up to assist people to negotiate this 'bewildering multiplicity' (FEU 1987a). It became increasingly challenging for unemployed people to engage in learning without incurring loss of benefit. Colleges found themselves 'picking [their] way through labyrinthine regulations' (FEU 1987b) in an attempt to provide learning opportunities without breaking the rules on availability for employment.

In 1988, the *Training for Employment* White Paper called for all existing programmes for the adult unemployed to be combined into a single, unified training programme, called Employment Training (ET). This replaced a range of programmes: JTS; the Community Programme which offered project-based training; the New Workers' Scheme, a subsidy for employers taking on young unemployed; and Job Release Scheme, in which older workers retired early with an allowance and were replaced with a young unemployed person. Running from September 1988, ET refocused resources on helping the longer-term unemployed and on providing training rather than temporary employment, in the hope that this would motivate and upskill people to get longer-term jobs. The programme was to incorporate a broad range of training, including basic skills, but also entrepreneurial, technological and motivational training. Training was offered in a range of contexts and locations, including practical and employer-based training, project-based training for the longer-term unemployed, and 'directed training' with FE colleges or other education and training providers. The budget for

this programme was almost £1.5 billion, and it provided training for up to 600,000 people a year.

In 1987, the Restart programme was introduced, consisting of six-monthly interviews to provide advice and guidance for long-term unemployed people and link them into other programmes and opportunities. They were aimed particularly at people who needed extra confidence and motivational training before starting a training course. A cohort study of its effects (White and Lakey 1992) showed that the process reduced the time claimants spent on the unemployment register and the average time taken to enter jobs or self-employment, and significantly increased the amount of time individuals spent on Employment Training and other government programmes. The interviews acted as a gateway to a range of programmes, services and follow-up actions.

A study at this time of attitudes to training among long-term unemployed people with literacy and numeracy needs (Hamilton and Davies 1993) showed that many of these people had serious reservations about undertaking further training and education. It was only those with specific occupational goals, for instance to become a mechanic or an electrician, who could see connections between training and improved job prospects. Many could not see any potential benefits from training, seeing it rather as a period in which they would have to survive without making any money, and potentially replicating negative previous school experiences. Many saw training as something associated with childhood or youth.

Hamilton and Davies suggested that these attitudes to training could be altered if people were offered a reasonable income during the training period; if they could be convinced that training would improve their job prospects; if the training was perceived as high quality; and if trainers respected them, understanding that, despite problems with reading and writing, these people should not be seen as 'stupid'. ET was perceived as failing to meet any of these conditions. It was seen by these participants primarily as a device to get people off the dole, rather than to offer high-quality training, and was entered into only reluctantly, after pressure was brought to bear during Restart interviews. These interviews were perceived not as supportive careers counselling, but as having the primary function of policing people's access to benefits. This limited the possibility for clients to form a relationship with the interviewer, trust their advice and have an honest and helpful discussion. Restart courses were seen as having little to offer people. Hamilton and Davies called for the development of a different system of guidance and training for adults which incorporated non-stigmatising accessibility, trust and quality specialist knowledge.

In September 1988, the TUC voted not to co-operate with this programme (Price 2000). This led Norman Fowler, the Secretary of State for Employment, to end the corporatist approach to running labour market programmes which had been born with the MSC and had continued with the short-lived Training Commission, and to introduce a private sector direction to the whole national training programme through setting up Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), announced in December 1988.

### **3.3.6 Training and Enterprise Councils**

TECs were legally autonomous bodies, set up on a local basis and run by a board of non-executive directors made up of private enterprise employers. They were allocated public funds and could also raise private money to fund discretionary activities. The aim was to attempt to solve the problems of local labour markets by making training more sensitive to local employers' needs, and therefore having a significant impact on growth. They were designed to

shift control of training planning from educationalists to employers, having primarily a strategic rather than a delivery role (CBI 1993). They were responsible for funding youth training and adult training programmes, which were normally delivered through intermediaries rather than by the TECs themselves. They promoted and developed other training programmes in a range of ways, for instance through marketing, by acting as brokers and by setting up one-stop shops, helplines, education business partnerships and business award schemes (Crowley-Bainton 1993). They attracted criticism for their lack of local accountability and lack of clarity as to their role (CBI 1993, Crowley-Bainton 1993, Haughton et al. 1995a, 1995b, Embleton et al. 1999). There were concerns that their output-related funding led to reductions in training quality, and fears were expressed particularly in relation to provision for people with special educational needs (Haughton et al. 1995b). The TECs were major players in the training market until their replacement by Local Learning and Skills Councils in 2001. Their local focus meant that the availability of LLN provision in general, and for the unemployed in particular, varied greatly depending on the assessment of the local TEC as to the importance of such provision, a problem identified by the Moser report (DfEE 1999).

### 3.4 1989–1996: Focus on skills

In the early 1990s, the dominant discourse on education from both government and international bodies was increasingly focused on improving skills to support competitiveness and employment. Within this, improving adult basic education began to be seen as an investment in human capital. A report from the European Commission's Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) in 1990 raised concern about skills shortages in Europe, relating a lack of economic growth to skills shortages in the labour market. This was followed by a 1991 EC Memorandum on Higher Education which moved away from the elitist model of HE towards one of widening access, supporting the knowledge-based economy, and developing continuing education.

This focus on widening access and developing higher-level skills was mirrored by developments in UK policy. In 1989, the CBI developed National Education and Training Targets which were endorsed by the Government in 1991. At around the same time, the Investors in People scheme was developed, initially administered by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), and from 1994 onwards through an independent organisation sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This voluntary scheme provides businesses and organisations with the opportunity to be assessed against best-practice indicators, with the aim of improving organisational performance through improving planning, implementation and evaluation of learning and development programmes. The 1991 White Paper, *Education and Training for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, sought to improve the nation's skills base and ensure all individuals could make a fuller contribution to the economy. In particular, it aimed to increase the proportion of young people acquiring higher levels of skill, to ensure people were more committed to developing their own skills throughout their working lives, and to increase employers' commitment to training.

A gradual shift away from Thatcherite policies in the early 1990s was accompanied by a greater willingness to spend public money on basic skills training. The *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* made adult basic education a statutory requirement for the first time. In 1994, the White Paper, *Competitiveness: Helping Britain to Win*, compared the UK to other developed countries, linking concerns about employability with education. This White Paper supported the move towards lifelong learning, and sponsored work to agree a national

standard for basic skills, extending the remit of the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), and encouraging employers to tackle shortfalls in employees' basic skills. The White Paper also included an agreement from the UK to participate in the International Adult Literacy Survey.

Throughout the early 1990s, employers and unions became increasingly interested in and involved with literacy for economic development. A 1993 report by ALBSU estimated that poor basic skills in the workplace were costing the UK more than £4.8 billion a year (though since this figure is based primarily on ad hoc estimates from employers, its validity is questionable). In general, even before the adult literacy survey, basic skills were becoming an issue in relation to employability.

Between April 1991 and March 1995, ALBSU managed the Basic Skills at Work programme, funded by the Department for Education, the Employment Department and the Welsh Office. The aim was to help improve the competence of the workforce in England and Wales in literacy, numeracy and communication skills. It had three main elements: local surveys of the basic skills required by employers; surveys of existing vocationally-related basic skills provision; and pilot projects intended to explore new methods of providing basic skills, with TECs working in partnership with local providers, mostly FE colleges.

The majority of these pilot projects worked with the employed. Training was delivered to more than 7,400 people, all but around 240 of these being in employment (BSA 1996). A total of 73 of the 82 TECs participated. The surveys indicated that employers perceived very few jobs could be done without competence in basic skills, particularly reading and oral communication, and showed considerable demand for higher-level basic skills. Results of the second stage indicated that much basic skills instruction did not directly address the needs of the workplace.

These pilot projects were considered a success. In nearly three-quarters of them, work continued after the programme funding stopped, and the programme was referred to favourably in the Moser report, *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy*, (DfEE 1999) as having increased basic skills training in the workplace and made TECs more aware of basic skills needs. The report was critical that central funding was not available to continue the programme, with continuation being left to the commitment of individual TECs, colleges and companies.

#### **3.4.1 Pre-vocational programmes**

Between 1990 and 1994, TECs ran 'taster and tester' and pre-vocational courses for some groups, designed to increase access and commitment to training. These were particularly beneficial for individuals with little experience of employment and training. Some TECs combined tuition in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with vocational training, which was felt to increase retention and contribute to successful outcomes (Rolfe et al. 1996).

In April 1996, pre-vocational pilot programmes (PVPs) were introduced in 57 English TECs and subsequently incorporated into Training for Work, with the aim of operating as a gateway to work preparation. The goal of the pilots was to help people with multiple disadvantages in the labour market to access the support they needed to benefit from mainstream training programmes and subsequently move into employment (Atkinson and Kersley 1998). The client group broadly consisted of long-term unemployed individuals who were not ready to progress into employment through Training for Work, but who would be likely to be capable of

progression given adequate support (Dewson et al. 1997).

Most clients were assessed as having basic and key skills needs (particularly IT and communication skills) and required assistance in developing life skills or addressing social problems. In the sample surveyed by Atkinson and Kersley, more than half of the participants in PVPs had basic skills needs, and nearly 40 per cent said literacy or numeracy problems had held them back. The most widely cited problem was lack of formal qualifications, with two out of three recognising this as having held them back. Participants had had considerable exposure to Jobcentre-based interventions, but much less participation in training and employment-based programmes.

An evaluation study of PVP case studies (Dewson et al. 1997) suggested the main lessons to learn from these pilots were to:

- get the right people referred onto the programme
- develop seamless progression to assessment and training delivery
- have sufficient time for induction and assessment, focusing on identifying client needs in a supportive and non-threatening environment, and developing an appropriate training package
- have on-going assessment, advice and guidance
- provide a range of options for training and work experience.

They found PVPs compared favourably with other training programmes in addressing participants' specific needs. The emphasis on self-help and peer-group support was also valuable. The report claims the success of the PVP was attributable to its flexibility in providing a programme tailored to individual needs, including in terms of its duration.

Atkinson and Kersley studied the outcomes of these projects. Participants were on PVPs for an average of 14.6 weeks. Around a quarter left the programme earlier than planned. Training providers had made significant efforts to assess individual needs, with 80 per cent of participants having received some form of individualised attention. More than half of all respondents took part in activities aimed at helping to improve literacy and numeracy skills, and a third in activities designed to help their English language. Seventy-one per cent studied towards a qualification, with 26 per cent gaining a full qualification and 23 per cent part of a qualification. A total of 45 per cent of respondents had been identified as having basic skills needs and received training; 12 per cent had required this training, but did not receive it. While some participants felt the programme had helped their literacy and numeracy, a substantial proportion did not.

For many, a gain in self-confidence was one significant outcome of participating in the programme. Having a work taster or work experience more than doubled the chance that PVPs would improve self-confidence. Having received help with job searches, using computers, and reading and writing also raised self-confidence, but to a lesser extent.

Only a fifth of participants found that PVPs had improved their value to employers through enhancing their skills. The motivational effect was more important, with two-thirds of participants saying the programme had strengthened their motivation to seek work.

On leaving the programme, 7 per cent of participants went into work. A fifth went straight on to Training for Work, with the likelihood of this being greater the longer people stayed on PVPs. A small minority left for economic inactivity, often related to caring responsibilities.



Slightly more than half became unemployed and were looking for work. Individuals' personal circumstances had the greatest effect on their chances of getting a job. These included having had a shorter period of unemployment prior to PVPs, having a partner in work, and having access to private transport. Chances of going into employment were also higher for those participants who had had the opportunity to discuss their needs with the provider.

Following the success of the pilots, pre-vocational training (PVT) became available in all TECs in England in 1997–98, offered to clients aged 25 and older (since younger clients were eligible for New Deal programmes, see below).

A follow-up study of PVT in 1999 explored the experiences of the 'discontented' group of participants identified by the Atkinson and Kersley report (BMRB International 2001). This report found 12 per cent of participants overall were not confident about their job prospects and saw PVT as being just a scheme to keep people off the unemployment register (down from 18 per cent in the Atkinson and Kersley study). Slightly less than 40 per cent of participants had literacy or numeracy needs, while 66 per cent felt they were hampered by a lack of qualifications. They had mixed experiences on PVT, with around a third thinking the course was not adapted to their needs. Almost 25 per cent of respondents were in a job after PVT, with nearly 60 per cent unemployed, 8 per cent in education and training, and 6 per cent inactive.

The 'discontented' participants differed from the rest of the group in terms of their life experiences. Most had negative memories of school and had spent most of their lives unemployed or in low-wage jobs. They were often poorly informed about the nature and purpose of PVT. Few knew whether their learning and training needs had been assessed. Feedback was perceived to be inadequate. Course content was seen to be at an unsuitable level, or not to be related to their job aspirations. They felt tutors were of variable quality and facilities were deemed unsatisfactory. As one might expect, the most positive responses came from those whose training and work experience package was closely related to their work aspirations.

The research recommended improving induction processes, providing job counselling, addressing barriers identified during the job counselling process, and developing a tailored programme focused on people's needs and job goals. It called for professional, well-motivated trainers and flexible timescales for completion of the course; a high quality job-skills programme; guaranteed and relevant work placements; and progress reviews, exit reviews and follow-through to maintain participants' motivation.

### **3.4.2 Higher-level basic skills pilots**

In 1997, a small programme of higher-level basic skills pilots was introduced in 12 TECs. These pilots aimed to help adults on Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) to reach level 1 as opposed to entry level, on the basis that people become significantly more employable at this level. The pilots had a low take-up. It was hoped that 300 level 1 qualifications would be achieved in 1997–98 and 700 in 1998–99. Only 50 per cent of the first target was reached and 30 per cent of the second. Contributory factors included a low level of referrals to WBLA generally, because of the impact of New Deal and a 'tighter' labour market; problems with the WBLA infrastructure, with resources and systems already under pressure; and problems along the management chain, with the small scale of the pilots meaning they were not given high priority.

DfEE research on the value and performance of these pilots (CRG Research 1999) found that trainees involved in the pilots responded positively, whether they achieved a certificate or not. They often valued level 1 qualifications as something to go for, but might not include them on CVs or job applications, because this would raise questions as to why they needed to take them in the first place. Some trainees supported under these pilots had high levels of need, and hence were unlikely to reach the level 1 targets. The report recommended that future programmes bear in mind that reaching level 1 could be a lengthy process for a proportion of the client group.

### 3.4.3 Jobseeker's Allowance

From the mid-1990s on, a 'welfare-to-work' strategy focused primarily on getting people into jobs, ahead of improving their employability. Unemployment fell in the late 1980s, rose again with the economic recession in the early 1990s, but fell steadily from 1993 onwards, making welfare to work a more realistic strategy since there were now more jobs available and fewer people competing for them.

In October 1996, Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) was introduced in the UK, replacing both Unemployment Benefit and Income Support. This shift included shortening the length of time contributory payments were made, with Unemployment Benefit falling from 12 months to six. Rules were also tightened to ensure people were actively seeking work by giving legal backing to a Jobseeker's Agreement, drawn up at an initial interview, in which clients agreed to follow a job-search plan. This enabled Employment Service advisers to give a formal direction to jobseekers to undertake a particular activity, and to impose sanctions if they failed to comply (Price 2000). After 13 weeks, jobseekers were required to accept work outside their normal field if it became available. After 26 weeks, jobseekers were required to attend a Restart interview where the agreement was reviewed. It was at this point that people might be referred onto a variety of work experience or help with job-search schemes.

According to a summary of research findings (Rayner 2000), JSA led to a large increase in movements off the claimant count in its first year of operation, and thereafter smaller but significant increases in movements off, especially in areas of low unemployment and among longer-term clients. Its introduction led to more jobseekers making regular job applications, although in high unemployment areas this did not lead to a corresponding increase in movements into work. Fewer than half of jobseekers found the Jobseeker's Agreement useful, although most followed it to some extent.

Approximately 13 per cent of JSA claimants in an evaluation study (McKay 1999) claimed to have difficulties with reading or writing. On average these people had been unemployed for a longer period than those without such difficulties. Eight per cent said they had difficulties with numeracy. Under JSA, jobseekers could undertake educational and training courses, provided these did not interfere with their ability to search for work. In effect, this meant that participation in education and training by JSA claimants was limited to part-time courses. JSA had little impact on the level of participation in courses of study; 13 per cent of jobseekers participated after JSA was introduced, compared to 14 per cent before. These tended to be those jobseekers who were already well-qualified. More than three-quarters of those studying were working towards a qualification. Nearly a quarter of respondents were unaware that clients were allowed to study whilst claiming unemployment-related benefits (McKay 1999). The possession of academic and vocational qualifications increased the chances of moving off JSA after six months by 25–35 per cent; but taking an educational course while on JSA reduced the probability of leaving by a third.

A Workskill pilot was introduced in some areas, enabling some longer-term unemployed clients to attend full-time courses. However, they had to give up these courses if offered a job. An evaluation of this scheme (Thomas et al. 1998) found JSA clients felt that education and training were generally discouraged, rather than encouraged, by Jobcentres. Jobcentres were seen as poor places to obtain education and training advice. There was caution about discussing education and training with Employment Service staff in case this led to loss of benefit or incurred other sanctions. The staff were not perceived to have expertise in this area or to encourage people to engage in education and training. Thomas found that Employment Service staff thought that they were 'not to actively promote' Workskill. The range of courses available was very limited, and the scheme was badly advertised and only ever taken up on a limited basis.

### 3.5 1997 onwards: New Labour, New Deal

In the later 1990s, the economy continued to improve, with ongoing growth and record low levels of unemployment. The Labour government elected in 1997 planned to restructure the welfare state, balancing people's rights with their responsibilities, and encouraging a culture of greater individual responsibility and less state dependency. This included the continuation of the approach that sought to move the unemployed from welfare into work, for both economic and social reasons. Discourse on education also shifted slightly, maintaining a focus on the economic benefits of education and training, but also underlining the importance of education in the drive to develop social inclusion.

These goals were reflected in policy documents and legislation. The February 1999 *Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill* required all claimants to have a work-focused interview before being entitled to benefits. Education and training were made a priority by the Government, seen as being central to achieving social change. For instance, the Department for Trade and Industry 1998 White Paper, *Our Competitive Future: Building the Knowledge-Driven Economy*, emphasised the importance of developing higher-level skills in order to engage in innovation.

The 1999 White Paper, *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning*, proposed to reform the structure of post-16 education and training, with TECs and the Further Education Funding Council being superseded by Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) in April 2001. A single advice and support service was set up in 1997 to help steer 13 to 19-year-olds through the system. Launched as Investors in Young People, in 1999 it was re-developed and renamed Connexions. Also in 1999, the Social Exclusion Unit policy action team report, *Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16 to 18-year-olds not in Education, Employment or Training*, proposed an 'action plan' which included the extension of educational maintenance allowances to homeless and disabled young people.

The issue of basic skills was raised from the start by the Government. In the 1997 consultative paper *Learning and Working Together for the Future*, David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education, called for views and contributions to help develop strategies. Basic skills and lifelong learning were also mentioned in the 1998 *Learning Age* Green Paper. The Moser report (DfEE 1999) pointed out a national deficit in basic skills by the end of compulsory education and proposed a range of ways to improve adult literacy and numeracy. This led to the development of the Skills for Life strategy, launched in 2001, with substantial funding and ambitious targets. It raised the profile of literacy, language and

numeracy in policy arenas across the board, including provision for the unemployed and jobseekers, which, after this point, included a much greater focus on basic skills.

By the late 1990s, the move was towards welfare-to-work programmes. This was a shift in labour-market policy, from the 'human capital' model of the early to mid-1980s which focused on increasing people's skills and employability through training, to a 'work-first' approach which proposed that the priority for unemployed people should be to take any available job (Hales et al. 2003).

Welfare to work sought to change the relationship between Employment Service staff and claimants, taking the service from a policing to an advising and supporting role. It was a huge investment, the cornerstone of the 1997 Parliament's social inclusion strategy. A promise to end youth and long-term unemployment, and to reskill the workforce to face the employment challenges of a globalised economy, was at the heart of Labour's commitment to a stakeholder economy (Coates and Lawler 2000). Despite the shift in labour market policy mentioned above, education was seen as being at the heart of this more general economic strategy, with 'new growth theory' substituting human capital for technological change as the principal engine of growth (Stedward 2000).

One important development was the introduction of Jobcentre Plus, designed to be a 'one-stop shop' for welfare and employment issues. Launched in 56 Pathfinder areas in 2001 and covering more than 50 per cent of the country by 2006, the Jobcentre Plus initiative brought together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefit Agency dealing with people of working age. It was designed to be a single, work-focused, integrated service for both employers and benefit claimants of working age. It takes a work-focused approach; that is, the primary consideration is that people of working age should consider work before proceeding with other benefits claims. All clients work with personal advisers, which can lead to a tension between the welfare and disciplinary roles of the adviser, particularly where compulsory programmes are involved.

### **3.5.1 Welfare to Work – the New Deal**

The 'work-first' active labour market approach is most clearly exemplified by the New Deal programmes. There are six main programmes, with different target audiences, aims, eligibility rules, conditions, types of support and relationships to other policy measures. The programmes have been extensively evaluated as part of the Government's commitment to evidence-based policy and practice.

#### *3.5.1.1 New Deal for Young People*

The first step in this programme was the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) programme, which replaced Youth Training in 1998, first in pilot areas and then, before the end of that year, nationwide. This was initially viewed as a time-limited initiative (funded through a £3.5 billion windfall tax on the excess profits of privatised utilities). It was designed to address the issue of the 'lost generation' affected by the earlier levels of high youth unemployment who had not stayed on at school, college or training, but had drifted into long-term unemployment and benefit dependency. Welfare to work aimed to break this spiral, by getting people off welfare and into jobs, and promoting personal responsibility and employability (Hodgson and Spours 1999). NDYP combined a stricter benefits programme with an emphasis on one-to-one help, high quality education and training and follow-through, promoting a 'right-to-work' ethic.

NDYP aims specifically to reduce youth unemployment. The programme begins with a gateway period in which a personal adviser works with the young person to support their job search. Those who have not found work after the gateway period choose between four options for the next six months: subsidised employment, full-time education and training, voluntary work or working for an environmental task force. Following completion of the options stage, participants who have still not found work re-enter the gateway process in a stage called follow-through.

The programme is generally acknowledged to have been successful in getting more young people into work than would otherwise have been the case. Slightly less than 440,000 young people had been through NDYP by February 2000, and about 200,000 had found jobs, 146,000 of these lasting 13 weeks or more (Millar 2000). A report for the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) concluded that NDYP had reduced unemployment by 30,000–40,000 over an 18-month period (Wilkinson 2003). Blundell et al. (2004) find, based on the pilot period of the programme, an economically important and statistically significant effect on outflows to employment, of on average 5 percentage points. They estimate 1 percentage point of this to be due to the gateway services, such as job search. White and Riley (2002) bring together estimated reductions in the level of youth unemployment of between 35,000–45,000, accompanied by little or no evidence of associated falls in employment for other age groups. This suggests that the New Deal is supporting the creation of new jobs for young people, rather than moving different age groups around the employment market. More intensive approaches to the gateway process were associated with higher exit rates from unemployment. An assessment of a range of research placing New Deal in the perspective of broader labour market trends (Brewer and Shephard 2005) concludes New Deal does appear to have a sustained, if relatively small, effect on the number of individuals moving into long-term employment.

The National Audit Office report on NDYP (2002) found evidence that the programme had improved participants' long-term employability, and that it had grown national income by a minimum of £200 million per year, at a cost of approximately £140 million per year. They found performance remained stable over two years, despite an increasing proportion of participants who were harder to help, having multiple barriers to employment. They recommend extending the gateway for those who would benefit from it; expanding the role of subsidised jobs; assessing the cost-effectiveness of work experience other than subsidised jobs, since evidence to date suggests these have more limited effectiveness; and developing more targeted help for those who have been through the programme already or have severe barriers. They suggest full-time education and training might still be the most suitable outcome for participants with multiple barriers, as this offers greater scope for addressing their underlying problems.

The different options have different results. The 'work-first' elements of NDYP seem to have a particularly important role in the programme's success. In an analysis of NDYP administrative data, White (2004) found that factors leading to success in getting people off welfare included closely-spaced repeat interviewing of jobseekers, persistent follow-up with a large number of interviews, the use of sanctions, high expenditure on providing services for clients from external sources (thereby sparing caseworkers to focus on job-ready clients), and using short courses sparingly, enabling clients to choose work experience or educational options. This is broadly consistent with US findings showing a positive role for such 'work-first' practices, despite very different contexts and systems.

The education and training option has consistently been the most popular New Deal one

(Blundell et al. 2003), with subsidised employment being less popular than initially expected and becoming less used over time. Blundell et al. suggest one reason for this may be the bureaucracy associated with the subsidy for employers, particularly the requirement to allow participants one day a week in training. Despite this, a careful examination of the evidence leads them to conclude that the employment subsidy has probably been more important in creating jobs than is often believed, with New Deal overall leading to a modest increase in the numbers of jobs – their estimate is that it raised employment by approximately 17,000 a year. They found no convincing evidence of the impact of the programme on raising human capital.

An analysis of the effects of NDYP on the labour market status of young men (Dorsett 2004) found that the employment option was significantly more favourable for eventual job entry than all the others. Levels of satisfaction were much higher for this option, with the key difficulty being only the shortage of vacancies. The voluntary sector work and environmental task force options both had reluctant participants and low satisfaction levels. They compare their findings to US and European Union research, in which wage subsidy programmes typically lead to a positive effect on employment, while public sector job creation schemes, such as the environmental task force, are typically less successful – having a negative effect in some countries. They conclude that a period of subsidised employment is the most effective means of exiting unemployment and securing unsubsidised work, and that remaining on the gateway is more effective than the other options. The report also suggests that employers may be looking for basic ability and general work readiness, rather than specific job-related skills and expertise.

Similarly, in a qualitative study of young people's views and experiences, Woodfield et al. (2000) found that they viewed the four options very differently. Work experience was perceived to be highly valuable, and workplace training positively appraised. Formal training on the other three options was often harder to arrange, with difficulties in matching the provision to the young person and in completing the course during the six-month period. Ongoing contact with the personal adviser was crucial. Where the option was appropriate for the young person involved, it could have a significant impact on employability, interpersonal skills, motivation, confidence, vocational plans and optimism about the future. However, where they were not well matched, it could have the opposite effect.

A study of the voluntary-sector option (Dewson and Eccles 2001) found that most of the difficulties people experienced came early in the participation process. Many young people had not received an in-depth assessment of their job-related skills and other basic skills, although this is something they would have welcomed. Young people on this option were more likely to have spent longer in the gateway than their counterparts, less likely to feel they had got the necessary support from their personal adviser, and less likely to feel they had been directed towards suitable training opportunities. However, later on in the programme, high levels of satisfaction were reported throughout.

A study of young people's experiences of New Deal by O'Connor et al. (2001) found that key barriers to employment for participants included lack of skills – basic, vocational and job-attainment skills – and/or qualifications, lack of confidence and self-esteem, and lack of work experience. Different groups of people had different requirements from NDYP, and it was important to meet individuals' particular needs, but the opportunity to acquire work experience was positively received by all groups. For the most vulnerable, such as young offenders and the young homeless, with multiple needs and the experience of repeated patterns of failure, the qualities of and relationship with the personal adviser were crucial.

Option completion is a key ingredient in ensuring successful outcomes, making the match between young person and the option and the support of the personal adviser through the option particularly important. They found a danger that weak follow-through could erode earlier benefits gained from the programme.

A qualitative study that focused on the follow-through part of the programme (O'Connor et al. 2000) found again that clients in this part of the programme were very diverse, making the match between their needs and the activities of follow-through important. Particular attention needed to be given to continuity of involvement with the personal adviser. This study also argued for a more comprehensive needs assessment. Again, option completion was key to successful outcomes. This research underlined the importance of effective matching of client and option, and the key role of the personal adviser in this process. It also found that while opportunities for gaining formal training and qualifications were almost universally seen as desirable, there were disappointments at the outset when difficulties arose in accessing the training supposed to be on offer.

Similarly, Hodgson and Spours (1999) identified early problems with the college-based option. Qualification at level 2 (equivalent to GCSE) became a priority for the programme as a whole, meaning that some young people on Jobseeker's Allowance who were already on level 3 (A-level equivalent) or access to higher education courses risked being moved off them. Flexibility of college provision was also an issue, with a college year starting in September not necessarily coinciding with young people's start points on their options.

In summary, NDYP seems to work best when it is tailored to meet people's needs. Assessment of these needs and an appropriate option placement are very important. For most participants, subsidised jobs seem to have the most beneficial effect. The relationship with and qualities of the personal adviser are pivotal to success in the programme, with continuity of the advisory relationship, particularly at key points such as when settling into the option, being key. Intensive approaches to job search had a particular importance.

### *3.5.1.2 New Deal 25 plus/New Deal for the Long-Term Unemployed*

After the establishment of NDYP, other New Deal programmes were introduced for particular client groups. The variant of New Deal for the older unemployed, New Deal 25 plus/New Deal for the Long-Term Unemployed (NDLTU), was developed more quickly than expected, as the numbers of 18 to 24-year-olds eligible for NDYP dropped rapidly in an improved economic climate – from 250,000 in 1997 to 150,000 at the beginning of 1998 (Hodgson and Spours 1999).

NDLTU was introduced in June 1998. It is similar to NDYP, but with a slimmer gateway and fewer options. It is targeted at those aged 25-plus who have been unemployed for 12, 18 or 24 months, depending on the area. Personal advisers offer advice and support, and the main two options are subsidised employment and education/training. By February 2000 around 238,000 people had been through NDLTU and about 38,000 had found jobs. Of these, 32,000 were in jobs for 13 weeks or more – around 13 per cent of the total participants. More than half of those who leave the programme go back on benefits (Millar 2000).

A qualitative survey of participants (Molloy and Ritchie 2000) found that people needed a wide range of help to assist them in finding work, including building skills, qualifications and confidence levels, work experience, help with self-employment, career reorientation and advice, job-search skills, and help to boost their motivation. Of their sample, 80 per cent had

left education at or before the age of 16 without achieving qualifications. The main types of assistance provided were advice and help with job search and CVs, and selecting training courses. Some people in the sample needed LLN skills, although there was resistance, particularly from older people, to attending classes, with some feeling that it was too late in life to return to education. There was also scant evidence of people being referred for literacy and numeracy training at this point, and the comprehensiveness of people's needs assessment at the gateway stage was variable.

In pilot areas, a mandatory 13-week intensive activity period began on completion of the gateway. This involved job search, training, work experience or a mix of these. Responses to this were most positive when people felt they had a choice, and when activities were felt to address people's own obstacles in finding work. They were least positive when people felt they had little choice about what to do and therefore gained little benefit from the activity. There was a widespread dissatisfaction with activities seen as merely 'time-filling', for example, repeating courses. There was also a reluctance to engage in full-time community work, with people wanting a fair wage for their efforts.

Very few people had taken up education and training opportunities. Where they had, positive responses were associated with training perceived to be of good quality. Negative responses came when people felt training did not correspond to their needs or lead to a desired qualification. Mechanisms for monitoring attendance were felt to be heavy-handed. Overall, people's appraisals were equally divided between positive and negative, primarily based on what NDLTU had delivered and whether it had met expectations. The most consistent message from this research was the importance of focusing on equipping people for jobs in the modern labour market.

### *3.5.1.3 New Deal for Lone Parents*

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), a voluntary programme launched in prototype areas in mid 1997 and rolled out nationally in October 1998, is aimed at helping lone parents into work, improving their job readiness, and supporting them in employment. It consists of an initial interview with a personal adviser, case-loading, job search and in-work support. Its principal target group is lone mothers who have been on Income Support for six months or more, with a youngest child aged five years and three months or over. About 133,000 lone parents had attended an initial NDLP interview by February 2000, with 39 per cent of those who had left NDLP going into employment and 43 per cent back on Income Support. The additional employment effect was estimated at 20 per cent for the prototype scheme (Millar 2000).

A study comparing lone parents participating in the programme with ones who were not (Lessof et al. 2003) found that 7 per cent of lone parents took part in NDLP. Those most likely to participate were people with higher educational qualifications, recent work experience and a driving licence. They were also more likely to have older children, be actively applying for jobs and living in an area with a lower proportion of people from minority-ethnic groups. Participation normally included just one or two meetings with the personal adviser, with additional telephone or postal contact. Overall, participants viewed the programme favourably, and it seemed to have had a large positive impact on entry into work, with 43 per cent of participants entering work after six months compared to 19 per cent of matched non-participants. However, as a voluntary programme, it is probably the case that those who had signed up for NDLP were already more interested than non-participants in moving into the labour market.



#### 3.5.1.4 *New Deal 50 plus*

The New Deal 50 plus (ND50+), launched in April 2000, is a voluntary programme for people aged 50 and over who have been receiving benefits for six months or more. Its principal component is a personal adviser who helps clients with job search and training opportunities. The programme also offers an increased amount of Working Tax Credit for the client's first 52 weeks in work, and an in-work training grant.

A qualitative evaluation (Kodz and Eccles 2001) showed a client group highly motivated to find work, with a very positive general impression of the programme. Participants particularly appreciated having a personal adviser able to build up an understanding of their circumstances through seeing them regularly. They were largely positive about the increased employment credit, with around one-third saying this credit was the key factor for them in taking a job.

A later study sought to assess the longer-term outcomes of ND50+ (Atkinson et al. 2003), especially how far clients had stayed in work after the wage top-up had expired. It found high levels of retention in work, though low levels of progression and advancement – largely due to a combination of lack of skills and a widespread and strong aversion to risk. The report found an employment survival rate of around two-thirds towards the end of the second year. This is very high in comparison with other New Deal programmes. The authors suggest this is largely because of the voluntary character of the programme and the sorts of individuals attracted to it, people who dislike being on benefits and have a strong commitment to working for a living. Despite this apparent success, the report's authors point out that successfully using ND50+ to move on in a career was rare, and suggest that there may be a case for more active intervention, for instance by promoting the training grant to clients more intensively.

The training grant was not well understood, with very low take-up overall. The main barrier to taking up training was perceived to be age, though lack of time and training opportunities were also factors. Many participants felt their employer would provide them with any training necessary. The eligibility criteria (with training having to be relevant to the current job) were felt to be problematic, with some feeling the grant would be more appropriate if it could be offered before a job was secured.

#### 3.5.1.5 *New Deal for Partners*

The New Deal for Partners (NDP) is a voluntary programme aimed at partners of unemployed jobseekers. It offers two alternatives: voluntary participation in NDYP for those aged 18 to 24 without children, or access to advice and guidance from a personal adviser for those aged 25-plus or those at any age with children. Most participants were married women with children, some with very little recent employment experience. While in general people felt the programme was a good idea, there were doubts as to whether the programme could tackle people's barriers to work, with child care being a particular issue. There were also concerns about gender roles and role reversal, with women not being keen on finding work while their partners remained unemployed, concerned that this could cause friction within families. Initial interviews with personal advisers were well evaluated. People felt they had been treated as an individual and given new advice and information. There was some disappointment with the follow-up programme, with little evidence of forward planning or progression. Those participants taken on by personal advisers tended to be those who were already job-ready or had work potential (Stone et al. 2000).

### *3.5.1.6 New Deal for Disabled People*

This is another voluntary programme, which aims to help people on incapacity benefits move into sustained employment through access to advice and information from a personal adviser. It is delivered by a national network of local job brokers, made up of public, private and voluntary sector providers. An evaluation of participants' responses (Kazimirski et al. 2005) found in a survey of 4,082 registrants that more than half had no or low qualifications (though a sizeable minority were highly qualified), with 16 per cent of participants reporting basic skills needs. Nearly half of registrants gained work between registration and the second survey interview, with those with no problems with basic English or maths being more likely to get work. Respondents with basic skills needs were more likely to take more than a year to enter their first post-registration job than those without. Basic skills needs were also the only personal characteristic relevant to levels of pay, with those with problems earning less per hour, as well as being less likely to have responsibility for other employees. The survey concludes that areas for development include training, though the NDDP is not currently established to offer this.

### *3.5.1.7 Basic skills mandatory training*

In response to Skills for Life, the Employment Service implemented a national basic skills programme in April 2001, under which jobseekers who had been unemployed for at least six months or were entering New Deal were screened for a basic skills need. If a need was confirmed, they were then referred onto a training course: either basic employability training, short intensive skills training or full-time education and training.

Initially, take-up of these opportunities was low, and a number of small-scale pilots were run to look at the impact of sanctions and incentives on participation in this process. These suggested that incentive payments did attract some people to provision, while it was unclear whether sanctions had an impact (Joyce et al. 2005). An extended 12-month mandatory pilot scheme was introduced in April 2004 to explore this more thoroughly, and a longitudinal evaluation of this scheme commissioned from BMRB Social Research and the Policy Studies Institute (Joyce et al. 2005).

Initial findings from the first stages of this research found that overall, delivery of fast-track and independent assessment had been successful in identifying people's basic skills needs, and raised the profile of basic skills within the Jobcentre as a whole. Basic skills training was promoted using a package of incentives, including financial ones, but also highlighting other personal benefits clients might gain from participation. The financial incentives were not felt to be effective if people were resistant to attending training, although they were seen as 'a nice bonus' for those who were already willing to attend. In general, people seemed to understand the mandatory nature of training in order to claim benefits. The threat of sanctions was deemed to be effective in encouraging customers to attend training, but it also had other impacts, such as people signing off, changing benefits or being sanctioned. There were some problems with the accessibility and availability of provision, particularly in rural areas. Views on training were mixed overall, with the level of inactivity and the wide range of student ability on some courses being deemed problematic. Where other students exhibited disruptive and aggressive behaviour, this caused particular problems.

The level of impact on basic skills varied. In some cases, clients were unable to discern any tangible benefits resulting from their attendance at training, although these tended to be those who had left the course early. Generally, participants believed their basic skills had improved, with some reporting substantial improvements in literacy and numeracy and others

smaller improvements. People felt variability in impact related to factors such as their prior level of skill, eagerness to learn, and the quality of the course itself.

Advisers expressed concern about the number of people who returned to the Jobcentre, only to be re-assessed as having a basic skills need, fearing some clients could end up on a 'basic skills training loop'. They were worried about the longer-term consequences of this, concerned that it could weaken their ability to sell the programme and ultimately undermine the programme overall. Advisers usually felt this lack of impact related to clients' attitudes and willingness or otherwise to engage in the programme, and in part to some clients entering the programme with low levels of literacy and numeracy, though some also questioned the quality of the provision. They felt the training tended to have a more positive impact on younger participants.

Other outcomes included improved job-search skills, development of soft skills, gaining qualifications, increased employability and employment. The development of soft skills was seen as being particularly important. These issues will be explored further in later evaluations of the programme.

#### *3.5.1.8 New Deal overall*

Several key messages come out of the range of New Deal evaluations (Institute for Employment Research 2001, Millar 2000). The first is the crucial role of the personal adviser, with evaluations showing just how important the relationship between adviser and client is to a successful outcome. Good interpersonal skills and continuity of relationship are particularly important, as is a friendly attitude, but people also wanted their needs accurately identified and the right sort of practical help offered. Both participants and providers would like the personal advisers to do even more than they do already. Employers want clients to be better prepared by advisers before coming to work; clients want more help with their specific needs.

This leads to the second key message: the diversity of the client population and the need for individually-tailored programmes. The most successful New Deal programmes have been those that allowed flexibility, offered a wide range of provision and matched support to clients' needs. While labour market programmes will always be more effective for those closest to employment, people with multiple disadvantages and special needs, including LLN needs, are found in all the New Deal client groups and these are more difficult to address. Some clients' multiple disadvantages could not be addressed by New Deal and were better served by referral on to other forms of support. Where negative views were expressed about the programmes, it tended to be where they were felt not to be meeting needs (Millar 2000). There was some evidence from the evaluations that personal advisers were less good at dealing with people with multiple problems and needs, particularly as the programme moved to a national level and as case-loads increased.

Generally, participants in New Deal have positive attitudes towards work in general, although they may be pessimistic about their own chances of finding a job. Principal barriers to work for all groups include lack of skills and work experience, inadequate or inappropriate job search, psychological factors, the opportunities available in the local labour market, and employer attitudes, with the balance between these barriers depending on the group concerned (Millar 2000).

The completion of a New Deal activity, particularly training and work placements, was found to be very important to the longer-term outcome. Non-completion ran the risk of reinforcing

clients' existing problems with confidence, self-esteem and motivation. Training providers such as colleges and TECs had difficulty in matching supply to demand, with the requirements of New Deal programmes not necessarily closely matching existing systems of education and training, particularly when many college courses work with an autumn start and New Deal requires flexibility throughout the year. There was over-contracting of college places in the early stages of NDYP in particular, and difficulty in providing a range of courses at appropriate levels (Millar 2000).

The Institute for Employment Research review also suggests that the emphasis on placing clients in *unsubsidised* jobs may need re-examining, now that more information about longer-term outcomes is available. Sustainability of such jobs depends on clients' employment readiness. Where clients were not job-ready, many exits from gateway to employment were not sustained for long. New Deal works best where clients are well prepared for jobs, including developing basic skills, social skills and work skills; so the report claims that a principal challenge is to assess and meet clients' needs adequately. It suggests that in the longer term it may be better to work towards employability rather than place an unready client into a job vacancy. On LLN in particular, the most common complaint from providers of jobs involved in New Deal was that there was not enough basic skills training and motivation boosting before clients came to them. Specific job-related skills were seen as being less important (Millar 2000).

The evaluations do, however, suggest that *subsidised* employment is an effective way to achieve sustained employment. High levels of retention were found at the end of the subsidised period, and participants in subsidised jobs were the most likely to be in employment after participating in New Deal.

### 3.5.2 Work-Based Learning for Adults

In addition to the New Deal, the Labour government continued and adapted other support programmes for jobseekers. Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) is a voluntary training programme in England aimed at people aged 25 and over who have been claiming JSA or another benefit for more than six months. Initially run by the TECs, with their abolition in 2001, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) took over the scheme. It offers four options: short job-focused training of up to six weeks, for clients perceived as the most job-ready; longer occupational training, for those with claims of a year or more, aimed at clients with more fundamental needs; basic employability training, expected to last 26 weeks, which targets those with basic skills needs; and self-employment provision.

WBLA was evaluated in 2004 by the National Centre for Social Research and the Policy Studies Institute (Anderson et al. 2004), to assess whether participation affected subsequent labour-market outcomes. The evaluation found that many participants came onto the programme with low-level skills and/or no qualifications, the most disadvantaged being those on basic employability training. Of those, 77 per cent had never used a computer, 68 per cent had no qualifications, and 75 per cent reported literacy and numeracy difficulties. Many had no recent work experience.

After the programme, 58 per cent of participants in short job-focused training, 53 per cent of longer occupational training participants and 33 per cent of basic employability training participants were in paid employment. However, rather disturbingly, only half of short job-focused training and basic employability training participants and just under two-thirds of longer occupational training participants could actually recall starting training. Only relatively

small percentages thought that WBLA had helped them to get a job, either through better qualifications or increased self-confidence.

Labour market effects were identified by comparing participants in WBLA with matched non-participants. Short job-focused training seemed to accelerate entry to employment at the five-month stage, but had no impact by the 10-month mark. It did have other effects: qualification levels, IT skills and writing skills all improved. Longer occupational training increased the probability of working full-time by about 7 per cent and the effect was sustained after a year. It also had a positive effect on qualification levels, IT skills and writing skills. Basic employability training had no effect on employment, but it did have a large impact on basic skills and IT skills, and increased labour market attachment for participants. The report concludes that to be effective, basic skills training must be tailored to the needs of the client group.

A separate analysis which looked specifically at lone parents' experience of WBLA (Anderson and Pires 2003) found that almost half had 'improved their human capital', either by attending courses which had improved their English, reading, writing, numeracy or IT, or by gaining a qualification. Basic employability training clients were the most likely to report human capital gains. The report's authors advise caution in the interpretation of this, though, since small improvements may not have an effect on employability, and not all qualifications gained are desired by employers. Many participants thought the programme had helped them into work, either through raised confidence or improved qualifications; however, only 65 per cent of participants could recall starting government training in the period under study.

### 3.5.3 Modern Apprenticeships

The Modern Apprenticeship (MA – now just Apprenticeship) programme was originally introduced by the Conservative government in 1994, and continued by Labour following the 1997 election. Though this was an initiative not specifically aimed at jobseekers and the unemployed, it is another programme which attracts young people in search of employment and includes some degree of LLN education. While higher-level apprenticeships represent a fairly standard progression route for young people with several GCSEs, the lower-level Foundation Apprenticeships attract a similar constituency to the youth unemployment programmes described above.

Aimed at 16 to 24-year-olds, the MA was an attempt to increase the national stock of young people trained to intermediate level. This was in a context where apprenticeship numbers had been declining since the mid-1960s, from 240,400 in 1964 to 53,500 in 1990 (Dolton 1993). The introduction of NVQs, described above, had been seen by the Government as a positive replacement for the apprenticeship system, which was thought to encourage 'time-serving' and to erect artificial barriers to job entry. NVQs and GNVQs were intended to free up the labour market and make apprenticeships irrelevant, with the aim of producing a high-status vocational route offering 'parity of esteem' with A-levels (Sharp 1998). However, very few NVQs achieved this goal, and most were perceived to be a lower-status qualification (Wolf 2002). The notion of 'apprenticeship' retained positive associations in public perceptions, and Modern Apprenticeships were another attempt to introduce a high-status vocational route. These too proved problematic.

Under the MA programme, apprenticeships were introduced in a range of sectors where they had not been offered before (often for good reason – see Wolf 2002). They were designed to lead to an NVQ level 3 qualification, breaking the association of apprenticeship with simple

time-serving and ensuring recruits were selected from those capable of studying to level 3 (Youth Training led only to level 2). Apprentices also had to attain key skills units. To further separate MAs from Youth Training, National Training Organisations were made responsible for the MA framework for their sector. In 1996, the DfEE's White Paper, *Learning to Compete: Education and Training for 14 to 19-year-olds*, proposed the introduction of employer designed and led national traineeships, building on the Modern Apprenticeship concept, to replace Youth Training. These were introduced in 1997, and expanded in 1999. In 2001, the Government proposed the establishment of a 'vocational ladder' of training programmes for young people, beginning with a 'learning gateway', continuing through a foundation MA leading to NVQ level 2, an advanced MA leading to NVQ level 3, and finally a foundation degree (Blunkett 2001). Government agencies (primarily Local Learning and Skills Councils) and local training providers, driven by tough quantitative recruitment targets, persuade employers to take on apprentices, with particular targets associated with young people at risk of social exclusion.

MAs have been widely criticised. Some studies see them as being in much the same lineage as the earlier, unpopular youth training schemes like YTS, and falling well short of best practice elsewhere in Europe (Ryan and Unwin 2001; Steedman 2001). There are enormous variations between apprenticeships in terms of pay, length of training, provision of training, and range of qualifications (Unwin and Wellington 2001). And, unlike in most European countries, there is no social partnership between government, employers and trade unions on apprenticeships. Employer involvement in the schemes remains patchy. The DfES can alter the programme without consulting employers or trade unions.

Fuller and Unwin (2003:9) suggest that MAs look like 'the latest in a long line of government schemes designed to manage youth unemployment and entry into the labour market'. They claim that 'the Government's aim seems to have been to attract young people into the programme irrespective of employers' demand for intermediate skills' (p. 22). They point out that while raising level 3 attainment and encouraging as many young people as possible to continue learning are both praiseworthy aims, both cannot be achieved at the same time in one undifferentiated programme. They call for more thought as to how a range of vocational education and training programmes can be constructed to meet the needs of young people and employers. Questions are also raised as to the extent to which the goals of the programme are being achieved. In 2003, only around one-fifth of programme leavers gained an NVQ level 3 award. Even of these, it is unclear whether this represents an improvement in the employee's competence or whether many of these participants were already qualified to this level (Fuller and Unwin 2003; Unwin et al. 2000).

A review of 14–19 education and training published in 2004 (Hayward et al. 2004) has similar findings: that at a system level, MAs do not appear to be working well. The MA programme has suffered from overall weak performance, continual rebranding, pleas for employers to participate, and successive inquiries into its performance.

It seems to be difficult to maintain a viable work-based apprenticeship route in England and Wales. There may be several reasons for this. If apprenticeships are to be of high quality, they are expensive for employers to deliver. This is only really worthwhile for employers when they have a real need for highly-trained, highly-skilled staff. In traditional apprenticeship areas where this investment was already being made, the MA scheme has been successful. But Hayward et al. argue that government policy deliberately extended apprenticeships to sectors which lacked the capability to deliver the necessary learning environment, and which had no

real need for level 2 and 3 qualifications for the relevant jobs. It is in these non-traditional areas that people have tended not to progress from foundation to advanced level. A lack of commitment from employers is coupled with a range of providers competing for young people to meet targets in the post-compulsory education setting. This means that the current system suffers from high attrition, low success rates in vocational programmes, and poor recruitment and retention.

In relation to literacy, numeracy and key skills in particular, widespread concern has been expressed by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and others about unsatisfactory achievement in apprenticeships. An NRDC evaluation project (Cranmer et al. 2004) worked with eight case-study sites to develop and evaluate the impact of 'front-end delivery models', identifying learners' needs at the start of apprenticeship programmes and enabling trainees to improve their skills through the apprenticeship frameworks, concentrating support at the beginning. The project found that many centres had regarded key-skills provision as 'a chore', an add-on to the main substance of the programme. Before the project, they had been leaving attention to key skills until very late on. This gave learners little time to develop their skills. Findings from an additional evaluation (Cranmer et al. forthcoming) found continuing ad hoc variety in models of provision, and training and development needs on the part of staff developing programmes.

Across the learning and skills sector, key skills tests were not serving the purposes for which they were intended, being 'universally loathed – by learners and tutors alike' (Torrance et al. 2005 p. 68). In relation to apprenticeships, younger trainees with poor prior academic qualifications disliked them, being reminded of school failure. Better-qualified apprenticeships starting with good grades at GCSE who were then forced to take key skills tests (because after three years, GCSEs were considered to be 'out of date') found this ridiculous. Non-completion of these key skills tests, both at foundation and at advanced Apprenticeship levels, seemed to be a major factor in non-completion of apprenticeships, despite the trainees in question becoming competent workers, attaining NVQs and remaining in employment. Questions are also raised in this report about the generic nature of the key skills test, which goes against the embedded way such skills are taught as part of the NVQ and apprenticeship process.

#### **3.5.4 Entry to Employment**

Entry to Employment (E2E) is a programme for 16 to 18-year-olds that mixes basic skills and vocational work with personal and social development. It began in 2003, with pathfinders running in the year to August 2003 and national establishment of the programme from 1 August 2003 onwards. Its roots lie in the Modern Apprenticeship advisory committee, chaired by Sir John Cassels, which suggested the phasing out of 'other training' from the MA programme. From August 2003, all learners on 'other training' (made up of a range of programmes called life skills, other training at level 1 and preparatory training provision) were transferred on to E2E. E2E was designed to be a 'step change' in delivering work-based learning from entry level to level 1. It aimed to provide flexible, consistent, high-quality provision, with an increased focus on the learner and an increased emphasis on progression. It relies on co-operation and co-ordination between partner organisations.

An evaluation of the initial stages of E2E (GHK Consulting 2004) found that E2E was seen to be a flexible and innovative programme, addressing the needs of a difficult group of learners. Learner support was seen as a strength, with providers well experienced in this aspect, and positive views expressed on the emphasis on individual learner support in the programme

and the staff resources devoted to this. The overall framework made it easy for key partners to buy into. It was felt to be better resourced than previous programmes of its type.

The referral mechanism in general appears to be working well; more learners are being referred to E2E than was first envisaged. However, one important issue for the programme is the level of inappropriate referrals, especially of clients with severe learning difficulties. Some providers were taking 'all-comers', contrary to the national view where the appropriateness of E2E for the young person is emphasised alongside eligibility criteria. One important reason for this is the lack of alternative provision for some groups of young people, particularly those with multiple needs.

Respondents tended to be positive about the vocational skills element of the curriculum, particularly since this was drawing on providers' existing strengths and experiences. There were some concerns about the number of employer work placements available; lack of employer involvement in the programme remained an issue. The personal and social development area of the curriculum was seen to be strong for similar reasons, and better structured and integrated than previous programmes (such as the LifeSkills programme it had replaced).

Views on accreditation were mixed, with about half of evaluation respondents believing accreditation was used appropriately, but others mentioning a lack of awareness among tutors of the range of accreditation options and a lack of appropriate level 1 qualifications.

A key aim of E2E is to enable young people to progress onto a positive outcome, especially a foundation MA. Progression and aftercare are therefore key issues. However, relatively few learners progressed onto a foundation MA. Only about one-third of learners at the time of the evaluation were progressing to positive destinations, more than half of these into employment. Some respondents were disappointed at levels of progression, with learners staying in the programme too long. But most respondents felt that participation, retention, achievement and progression rates were higher than on previous programmes.

The basic and key skills element of the programme raised the most concerns, with the greatest area of concern being staff expertise and development. Many people delivering basic skills at this point in the programme were not suitably qualified, leading to variable quality in provision. Staff recruitment and development were related matters for concern. It was felt by some that E2E staff were not paid enough for a challenging role. Staff development in basic skills was a key issue, with poaching being a barrier to further staff training. A range of initiatives and development projects has been put in place to focus on such issues. However, respondents also felt that basic and key skills were higher priority under E2E than they had been before, and delivery was more innovative.

### **3.5.5 Employment Zones**

Another approach to the problems of long-term unemployment was the creation in April 2000 of Employment Zones (EZs) in 15 areas of Britain. This is another 'work-first' approach that emphasises job search and early entry to mainstream employment or self-employment. Zone providers are selected by competitive tender. They were intended to give providers more flexibility in operation, by suspending the rules of some programmes and reducing constraints on how funding was to be used.

A study of prototype employment zones in 2000 (Simmonds et al. 2000) found that the key



factors for engaging successfully with unemployed people were: flexibility to meet individual and employer needs; skilled, committed personal advisers, who could challenge expectations; a focus on individual solutions, motivating and empowering participants; active outreach services; help to research and source opportunities; realistic action plans; and recognition of improved employability as an achievement. They noted a need for a cultural/practical shift to allow participants a greater say in identifying obstacles to work and possible solutions, and highlighted the importance of building on the knowledge of local partner organisations.

Research on administrative data at local authority level (Hasluck et al. 2003) showed that EZs had reduced unemployment in their areas. Research which compared the results to those in New Deal 25 plus areas (Hales et al. 2003) found that participants in EZ programmes tended to have more disadvantages than ND25+ participants. Zone managers and staff felt that some participants' problems were too deep-seated for the programme to address. Hales et al. cite research in this area which estimated that 25–40 per cent of clients were 'very hard to help', and EZs did not have the capacity to deal with problems like mental health, drug and alcohol addiction or criminal behaviour. ND25+ made greater use of skills training and basic skills training, and made more formalised referrals to other organisations, whereas only one in six EZ participants had any form of external training. Hales et al. analyse a wide range of factors that have an impact on obtaining a job through EZs. They conclude that while 'human capital' (such as an individual's qualifications and skills) is important, 'social capital', that is the social networks an individual belongs to, is also crucial.

## 4 Broader issues

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There has been a range of government measures to support and train the unemployed since the 1970s. Their primary focus has been to get unemployed people into work, and this has been the main measure of their effectiveness. Prior to Skills for Life, although basic skills were recognised as an issue in this area, their importance varied from programme to programme. The introduction of Skills for Life has made LLN issues much more salient in relation to this provision, and indications are that this is likely to continue.

Having surveyed the field and its history, we now turn to draw out key issues and conclusions particularly around the question of the effectiveness of such programmes. This should not be perceived only in terms of the programmes themselves. Programmes for the unemployed and jobseekers always operate in a wider policy context. The New Deal suite of programmes, for instance, is operating within a range of other welfare-to-work initiatives, including tax credit schemes designed to 'make work pay', the introduction of a minimum wage, extensions of maternity rights and parental leave, and area-based measures such as the EZs. Their impact will be in part shaped by their interaction with these other policies, and by a range of broader issues relevant to the question of whether programmes prove successful or not. We will first discuss these issues before offering recommendations in the final section in relation to LLN education in programmes for jobseekers and the unemployed.

### 4.1 Basic skills and wage effects

The effectiveness of programmes for the unemployed in broad terms is normally measured in relation to whether participants enter employment or not, and whether they retain it. However, it is problematic to measure the effectiveness of basic skills interventions in these terms. International comparisons give little clear-cut evidence of economic benefits accruing to countries that are high-spending in educational terms. The relationship between education and growth is a complex one. While education and growth often correlate in national terms, proving a clear-cut causal effect of education on growth is more difficult, and it is hard to be sure of the scale of impact that education has (Wolf 2004, Stevens and Weale 2004). The direct effects of basic skills improvements on employability in the short term remain debatable.

Large empirical studies such as the birth cohort studies (Bynner 2004) have demonstrated clear correlations between literacy levels and employability. Bynner suggests that qualifications have become increasingly important in gaining access to and retaining employment. People with low basic skills tend to get fewer qualifications and leave school earlier, and there are now fewer jobs available in the unskilled and semi-skilled sectors than there used to be. The paper reports on the experiences of two cohorts, one born in 1958 and

one in 1970. People with poor basic skills born in 1958 were absorbed into unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Some of these gained on-the-job training that enabled them to move into skilled jobs. People from the 1970-born cohort with poor basic skills tended to enter training schemes, to become unemployed or to move in and out of insecure employment.

The dominant policy discourse has drawn on this and similar research to reinforce the notion that the labour market will reward qualifications, and that increasing a given individual's skill levels will inevitably increase their employability. However, this may misrepresent both what the labour market needs and what it offers in return for qualifications. Raising an individual's literacy and numeracy skills in adulthood is not necessarily directly correlated with improving their chances of gaining secure employment.

A review of basic skills and workplace learning (Ananiadou et al. 2004) suggests that people who *possess* better literacy and, particularly, numeracy skills earn more and are more likely to be employed. Qualifications obtained in youth are good predictors of later life chances. However, the review also finds that the literature suggests that *improvement* of basic skills in adulthood has very small, or even no, positive effects on wages and employment probability. They also find that there is evidence to suggest that general training provided at the workplace has a positive impact on individuals' wages, particularly when this is employer-provided rather than off-the-job. However, they point out that it is hard to extrapolate this effect to government-funded basic skills training delivered in the workplace. This is very different from training initiated by employers and has recipients selected by them, where it is likely that training will be targeted towards those people already valued by the employer. Policy-makers extrapolate from the current advantages of particular skill levels in the labour market. But the labour market is positional; there is no guarantee that if more people reach a given level, they will gain the same benefits as those already there. Increased numbers may simply increase competition for the same number of jobs, and may thereby even lower the probability of any given individual at that level gaining work.

Analysis of a longitudinal panel data set (Jenkins et al. 2003) has found little evidence of positive wage effects from lifelong learning, with benefits only accruing to men who left school with low-level qualifications and go on to undertake a degree. People gaining level 2 qualifications – the main target of the Skills for Life policy – do not in general appear to derive wage benefits from this. Another analysis of the cohort data (Vignoles et al. 2004) found that one form of lifelong learning – work-related training – did appear to have a positive effect. As in the analysis above, they suggest that this may result from the fact that only particular individuals are selected for training in the workplace to start off with. These may well be the individuals who were 'cherry-picked' for progression, were most motivated and would gain the most from training anyway.

In a paper examining the UK's poor performance in post-compulsory participation across the 16–19 age group, Keep (2005) argues that the labour market actually provides very weak incentives for study of any kind leading to lower level vocational awards. He claims that 14–19 policy images of the labour market have been constructed around two misconceptions. First, that there will be a demand for massive and uniform upskilling, related to the impending arrival of a knowledge-driven economy. He cites a range of research which claims that this has been vastly overestimated, and that there will continue to be a significant number of low-skilled, low-pay jobs in our economy, with many employers being locked into production and quality strategies requiring relatively low levels of skills from their workforce. Second, that qualifications and certification play a key role in determining the distribution of employment

opportunities – ie, that the best-qualified candidate for a given job will normally be the one to get it. He claims that this is not empirically grounded. The importance of and weighting placed on qualifications varies enormously across the educational spectrum and many jobs appear to carry no specific qualification requirement. At the same time, employers are engaged in a growing prioritisation of softer social skills and personal attributes, linked to the shift from a manufacturing to a service economy. This is backed up by the National Skills Task Force report (2000). Their survey of employers found that they required a high level of what this report calls 'generic skills', including communicating, working in teams, problem solving, negotiating and persuading. These softer skills and personality traits are not generally certified, or even certifiable. The wage premium employers are prepared to pay for many lower-level post-16 qualifications is low to nil, but the lack of salience of these qualifications has been largely ignored by policy-makers. However, young people are aware of this, and Keep argues that this is one of the key reasons for low levels of participation in 16–19 vocational education in the UK.

A survey of econometric assessments of the effects of training programmes (Dolton 2004) concludes that state training programmes do not significantly raise earnings or affect employment probabilities in the short to medium term, but more research is needed on longer-term effects. The greatest impacts and largest social returns come for participants who have the least labour market experience, including women and those facing multiple disadvantages.

There is also international research which argues that there is a lack of evidence of any relationship between literacy programmes and employment. A Canadian study of participants in an urban literacy centre over a three-year period (Malicky and Norman 1994) found that while their informants had a range of goals in participating in literacy programmes, improving their job opportunities was a common theme. However, most of their students simply returned to their old jobs on completing the programme. They warn against producing unrealistic expectations on the part of students.

Hamilton and Davies (1993), in their interview study of long-term unemployed adults with literacy and numeracy needs, point out that training alone cannot bring about economic recovery, although it is a crucial condition for equipping a workforce. And people with basic skills difficulties often have multiple barriers to participating in training, including past experience of marginalisation in the education system. They underline the importance of listening to the experiences and concerns of unemployed people with literacy and numeracy needs to work out effective systems of support and training which are appropriate for them as individuals.

Such research is not an argument against providing LLN training for unemployed adults per se. LLN skills provide the foundations of competence and capability in many spheres, including (but not reduced to) employability. The differential distribution of human capital in this regard is an unacceptable inequality in our society, which needs to be addressed as a basic human right. Offering people the chance to improve their confidence and capabilities in this area is a fundamental societal obligation. Improving LLN skills brings a range of personal and social benefits, and protecting against deterioration of skills is also important for people's life chances (Schuller et al. 2004; Bynner and Parsons 2006). Improving someone's LLN skills may also have a protective value against unemployment in the longer term – an effect which is difficult to assess.

However, the research outlined here does underline the fact that this provision is not a 'magic bullet' and will be unlikely *in itself* to resolve someone's history of unemployment. Improvement in basic skills should not be seen as automatically increasing employability in the short term, nor as only being worthwhile in this light. Rather, it should be seen as part of a broader package of support which aims to meet people's needs and aspirations and support them in their employment goals. Detailed studies of adult learners' lives (Barton et al. 2006; Ivanic et al. 2006) similarly argue the importance of understanding the role of basic skills education within a broader framework.

#### 4.2 Labour market conditions

Local labour market conditions play a central role in the success or otherwise of programmes for jobseekers and the unemployed. One good example of this is a study of young adults' transitions and social exclusion in one of the most deprived areas in the North East (Webster et al. 2004). This research found that despite numerous welfare and training initiatives in the study area over many years, the impoverished situations of most of their interviewees remained unchanged. NDYP and other initiatives like tax credits and Sure Start improved some people's situations, but did not change their essentially economically marginalised position. In fact, the report's authors argue that work-first initiatives could actually be detrimental in this area. Poor, casualised local labour market opportunities meant that young people were placed in New Deal options they did not want, and channelled into poor quality, precarious work which provided little long-term benefit and did not enhance educational opportunities. The authors argue that this encouraged the continuation of low-waged, unrewarding, insecure employment patterns in the area.

The report argues that the key to understanding these young people's transitions is the rapid de-industrialisation of a region that was until recently a 'working' area. They question the appropriateness of the welfare-to-work agenda, in conditions where poor work predominates in a precarious labour market. Those few people in their study who acquired higher-level skills and qualifications could not find work locally, as the new 'information economy' had not made inroads into the area. Their main policy conclusions are that policies like NDYP propose remedies that imply the problem lies in the deficits of the target population (including basic skills deficits). This ignores the availability and quality of existing employment opportunities. Supply-side labour market initiatives such as New Deal may collude with or reward the prevalence of poor work, rather than challenging it.

Similarly, Black (2004) in Australia challenges the dominant policy discourse on the relationship between literacy and numeracy skills and unemployment. He suggests that dominant definitions of literacy 'problems' play an ideological role in supporting hegemonic interests. The responsibility for particular economic conditions is shifted onto those who lack literacy skills, and large amounts of money are spent on programmes, including programmes for the unemployed, designed to 'equip' individuals with literacy skills. Studies of people's literacy lives on the ground, in the tradition of the New Literacy Studies, have found that people's practices are far less individualised than the dominant policy discourses would suggest. Individuals may balance lack of skills in one area with mastery in another, so goals can be achieved by working together in teams and drawing on social networks. Black suggests that a lack of 'schooled' literacy is not what stops people from getting jobs; the economic climate has a much greater impact. While Black allows that there are correlations between low levels of literacy and numeracy and people's employment status, causal factors

of unemployment are more complex, and include structural issues such as manufacturing moving overseas. He claims that the principal causal issue is not so much a 'skills gap' as a 'jobs gap'.

Work such as the above raises important questions about the underlying policy rationale of welfare-to-work programmes, and suggests a degree of caution for the future. The success of New Deal may depend on there being an employers' demand for labour. Since 1997, the employment rate has increased overall, and unemployment has declined (Brewer and Shephard 2005). If the economy goes into recession, this might cause the New Deal programme real problems (Hodgson and Spours 1999). Overall economic conditions are one of the most important factors in the success or otherwise of programmes for the unemployed.

### 4.3 Compulsion

One key issue in relation to programmes for the unemployed and jobseekers in relation to education and training is that of compulsion, particularly with the recent introduction of mandatory basic skills provision. Much learning theory would suggest that people learn better when they follow their own motivations for learning, fitting learning into their own purposes, and where their learning is self-directed (Tusting and Barton 2003). People need to be engaged in their own learning if it is to be successful, and attending is not the same as engaging. Learning theory therefore suggests that compulsory basic skills programmes for unemployed people and jobseekers might not be successful.

A study that compared voluntary and non-voluntary adult basic skills learners (reported in O'Grady and Atkin 2005, 2006) bears out this concern. Voluntary learners reported gaining wider benefits from learning, such as personal confidence and self-esteem, and had a good understanding of their basic skills competencies and limitations. Non-voluntary learners, including participants in a range of welfare-to-work programmes, did not tend to show a great deal of motivation to develop their basic skills. These learners did not appear to value the programme or to recognise any benefits to them of participation. They had had little or no choice in the training opportunities they attended. For many, a lack of desire to engage in learning was associated with barriers such as problems with alcohol, drugs, or housing, domestic requirements or their social environment. They did have a sizeable knowledge of the benefits system, and the research suggests some were exploiting this training period to extend their entitlement, while taking full advantage of any holiday, sickness or other allowances. This caused difficulties for providers, who found some learners manipulating the training programme, being disruptive and exhibiting negative attitudes. Teachers' levels of frustration and demotivation were particularly high where learners who did not wish to engage were taught alongside others who did. Nevertheless, all learners interviewed valued the ability to socialise with others, recognised that others were developing basic skills and felt less isolated. More on how barriers such as problems with alcohol, drugs, or housing interact with participation in learning programmes can be found in detailed studies of learners' lives (Barton et al. 2006).

O'Grady and Atkin's research concludes that welfare-to-work programmes can end up being like a 'hamster wheel', with people going round and round the same cycle, when it is unclear whether an adult compelled to engage in training can realistically be expected to acquire the skills required for the 'knowledge society' that the strategy is seeking to promote. These problems are compounded by the existence of targets expecting people's basic skills to be

raised to level 1 or 2 in a short period of time, which the researchers point out is unlikely to be successful when this goal was not achieved by 11 years of full-time education.

More broadly, evaluations of New Deal programmes (Millar 2000) suggest that compulsion is neither intrinsically productive nor intrinsically unproductive. Rather, it is looked upon differently depending on which group was involved, particularly if people also had other responsibilities such as caring roles, and on which element of the programme was compulsory – for instance, compulsion to attend initial interviews is looked on more favourably than compulsion to take up particular options. These studies and evaluations would suggest that while compulsion is not in itself detrimental, but if it is to be productive it needs to be used judiciously and in a context in which clients broadly feel they have choices about their participation. People accept it if they see it as fair.

## 5 Conclusions about broader issues

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The above issues have been raised to underline the need for careful consideration of the broader context when planning policy interventions in relation to LLN and programmes for the unemployed. Issues around the local labour market, the broader policy context and the state of the economy as a whole may have a more significant effect on the success or otherwise of a given programme than any programme-specific characteristics. Having said that, however, this review has considered programmes running in very different economic and policy contexts, and there are points relating to programmes' effectiveness that have recurred throughout. The following conclusions should therefore be taken into account in programme development.

### 5.1 Tailored individual solutions

Flexibility and the ability to meet clients' needs and aspirations were crucial to the success of many programmes. Clients need to perceive they have a choice and are in control of their decisions if they are to be engaged in their learning. This implies that it is good to have a basic skills element available to offer to clients, where this is necessary and appropriate. The increased resources available to adult literacy, numeracy and language through Skills for Life are to be welcomed. Nevertheless, it is important to avoid conflating unemployment with literacy and numeracy difficulties. LLN support should not be compulsory. Rather, it should be available to clients who need *and desire* it, as part of a broader programme tailored as much as possible to the individual. For some clients, this may involve full-time education and training. But for many, this might be more appropriately delivered as part of a coherent programme involving subsidised work or embedded in other activities. This conclusion supports the policy goals of personalisation.

### 5.2 Positive, supportive relationships with personal advisers

These were also pivotal to the success of programmes. All the New Deal programmes include this element of individualised support, and it is important that this should be continued. Ongoing positive relationships with advisers are what enable programmes to be tailored to individuals. Even with sophisticated initial needs assessment, people's needs and aspirations develop and become more visible over time, as clients build up trust and as advisers come to understand people's circumstances and histories. Investment in staff time to support the development of such relationships makes an important contribution to the success of these programmes.



### **5.3 Subsidised jobs**

It is clear from much of this research that, in terms of getting people into work in the short term, subsidised jobs have proved to be the most successful approach, more successful than education and training – although in the longer term, education might be in individuals' better interests. However, employers want clients' basic skills needs to be addressed where necessary, and clients appreciate having the option of basic skills training available to them if it responds to their needs and is delivered well, supportively and respectfully. On balance, it seems that the most appropriate approach to helping the unemployed and jobseekers get into work might therefore be to focus on subsidised jobs as a principal approach, while offering support and training in literacy and numeracy to those clients who have a need and desire to engage in this, enabling them to develop the skills they need to stay and develop in those jobs. Making LLN training appropriate to clients' work situations and aspirations seems to be the key message.

## 6 Glossary

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*This glossary explains the acronyms used and provides definitions of the key programmes.*

**Connexions:** single advice and support system for 13 to 19-year-olds, introduced as Investors in Young People in 1997 and re-developed as Connexions in 1999.

**Employment Training (ET):** single, unified training programme for the adult unemployed, ran from September 1988. Prioritised helping longer-term unemployed, and shifting emphasis from providing temporary employment to motivating and upskilling people through a range of types of training.

**Employment Zones (EZ):** created in April 2000 in 15 areas of Britain, aiming to enable providers to operate more flexibly. A 'work-first' approach emphasising job search and early entry to employment, with zone providers supporting clients.

**Entry to Employment (E2E):** a programme that began in 2003 delivering work-based learning from entry level to level 1, including basic and key skills, which replaced LifeSkills, other training at level 1 and preparatory training provision linked to the Modern Apprenticeship programme. It aims to progress young people to a positive outcome, such as employment or a foundation MA.

**Industrial Language Training Service (ILTS):** service offering training for communication in the workplace for second-language speakers. Set up in 1970, funded by the MSC from 1974 onwards. Ended in 1989.

**Industrial Training Boards (ITBs):** tripartite training boards incorporating unions, employers and government, funded partly by a statutory training levy on employers. Established in 1964, all but seven had statutory status removed in 1982.

**Jobcentre Plus:** brought together the Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency dealing with people of working age, as part of Labour's programme of welfare reform. Work-focused approach. Launched with 56 pathfinders in October 2001.

**Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA):** introduced in October 1996 to replace both Unemployment Benefit and Income Support. Required people to be actively seeking work in order to be eligible for benefits.

**Job Training Scheme (JTS):** scheme for adults similar to YTS. Introduced in 1985, replacing TOPS schemes.

**Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs):** superseded TECS in April 2001 as part of a reform of the structure of post-16 education and training.

**Manpower Services Commission (MSC):**

national agency established in 1974 to shape the Labour government's manpower policy. Led a wide range of programmes for the unemployed and jobseekers, in a context of rising unemployment. Replaced by the Training Agency in 1987.

**Modern Apprenticeships (MAs):** introduced by the Conservative government in 1994 for 16 to 24-year-olds, aimed to increase the stock of young people trained to intermediate level. Developed and expanded by Labour. Now replaced by Apprenticeships.

**New Deal:** broad banner for a range of welfare-to-work programmes introduced by Labour since 1997. Combined stricter benefits programme with emphasis on one-to-one help, high-quality education and training and follow-through. 'Work-first' approach.

**New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP):** voluntary programme which aims to help people on incapacity benefits move into sustained employment, delivered by national network of job brokers.

**New Deal 25 plus/New Deal for the Long Term Unemployed (NDLTU):** variant of New Deal for people aged 25 and over, introduced June 1998. Similar to New Deal for Young People but with slimmer gateway and fewer options.

**New Deal 50 plus (ND50+):** voluntary programme for people aged 50 and over. Offers support from personal adviser, increased Working Tax Credit, and in-work training grant. Launched April 2000.

**New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP):** voluntary programme aimed at helping lone parents into work, through a network of personal advisers, launched in prototype areas in July and August 1997 and rolled out nationally in October 1998.

**New Deal for Young People (NDYP):**

programme for 18 to 24-year-olds which replaced Youth Training in 1998. Aimed to reduce youth unemployment. Designed initially as a time-limited initiative, seen as addressing the issue of the 'lost generation' who drifted into long-term unemployment under the Conservatives. Consists of a gateway period of supported job-search, followed by a choice of four options: subsidised employment, full-time education and training, voluntary work or working for an environmental task force.

**Pre-TOPS:** full-time courses in adult basic education, fully funded with expenses included, to prepare people for a TOPS programme (see below).

**REPLAN:** Initiative funded by Department for Education and Science to improve educational opportunities for unemployed adults through a range of local development projects and innovative schemes. Ran 1984–1991.

**Restart courses:** part of Employment Training, see above. Offered to people in need of extra confidence and motivational training before entering a training course.

**Restart interviews:** part of Jobseeker's Allowance scheme, see above. After 26 weeks on benefits, jobseekers were required to attend a 'Restart' interview to review their jobseekers' agreement. At this point, they might be referred on to a variety of work experience or job-search schemes.

**Training Agency (TA):** replaced MSC in 1987, removing employer and union representation and putting training back under direct control of Department of Employment.

**Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs):** Employer-based training bodies, designed to make training more sensitive to local employers' needs. Began in 1989, fully operational from 1991. Replaced by Local Learning and Skills Councils in 2001.

**Training Opportunities Scheme (TOPS):**

began 1972, later taken over by MSC. Funding ended 1986, after TOPS were replaced by the Job Training Scheme.

**Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA):**

voluntary training programme introduced by TECs and taken over by the DWP in 2001, for people aged 25 and over who have been claiming benefits for more than six months. Offers four options: short job-focused training of up to six weeks, longer occupational training for clients with more fundamental needs, basic employability training for those with basic skills needs, and self-employment provision.

**Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP):** six-month 'employment programme' offering work experience, training and work preparation for unemployed school-leavers. Begun 1978, replaced by YTS 1981.

**Youth Training Scheme (YTS):** replaced YOP programme in September 1981. Aim was for all young people under 18 to either continue in education or have a period of work experience combining work-related training and education. Rebranded as Youth Training (YT) in 1990.

## 7 List of abbreviations

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<b>ABC:</b> A Basis for Choice	<b>ND50+:</b> New Deal 50 plus
<b>ALBSU:</b> Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit	<b>NDLP:</b> New Deal for Lone Parents
<b>ALI:</b> Adult Learning Inspectorate	<b>NDP:</b> New Deal for Partners
<b>BSA:</b> Basic Skills Agency	<b>NDYP:</b> New Deal for Young People
<b>CBI:</b> Confederation of British Industry	<b>NIACE:</b> National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
<b>DfEE:</b> Department for Education and Employment	<b>NRDC:</b> National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy
<b>DfES:</b> Department for Education and Skills	<b>NVQ:</b> National Vocational Qualifications
<b>DWP:</b> Department for Work and Pensions	<b>PSI:</b> Policy Studies Institute
<b>EC:</b> European Commission	<b>PVPs:</b> Pre-vocational Pilot programmes
<b>E2E:</b> Entry to Employment	<b>PVT:</b> Pre-vocational Training
<b>ESOL:</b> English for Speakers of Other Languages	<b>REPLAN:</b> not an abbreviation, see Glossary
<b>ET:</b> Employment Training	<b>TECs:</b> Training and Enterprise Councils
<b>EU:</b> European Union	<b>TOPS:</b> Training Opportunities Scheme
<b>EZ:</b> Employment Zone	<b>TSA:</b> Training Services Agency
<b>FECRDU:</b> Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit	<b>TUC:</b> Trades Union Congress
<b>FEU:</b> Further Education Unit	<b>TFW:</b> Training for Work
<b>GNVQ:</b> General National Vocational Qualifications	<b>WBLA:</b> Work-Based Learning for Adults
<b>ILT:</b> Industrial Language Training	<b>YOP:</b> Youth Opportunities Programme
<b>ILTS:</b> Industrial Language Training Service	<b>YT:</b> Youth Training
<b>ITB:</b> Industrial Training Board	<b>YTS:</b> Youth Training Scheme
<b>IRDAC:</b> Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee	
<b>JSA:</b> Jobseeker's Allowance	
<b>JTS:</b> Job Training Scheme	
<b>LLN:</b> literacy, language and numeracy	
<b>LLSC:</b> Local Learning and Skills Councils	
<b>MA:</b> Modern Apprenticeship	
<b>MSC:</b> Manpower Services Commission	
<b>NCVQ:</b> National Council for Vocational Qualifications	
<b>ND25+/NDLTU:</b> New Deal 25 plus/New Deal for Long-term Unemployed	

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