Evaluation

of the

Pathfinder

Individual

Learning

Accounts

Initiative

D*f*EE

**Department for
Education and Employment**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council

The purpose of the FEFC is to secure further education provision which meets the needs and demands of individuals, employers and the requirements of government in respect of the location, nature and quality of provision.

Summary

The Pathfinder Project was a pilot Individual Learning Account scheme in the further education sector. Key aims of the resulting 30 individual Pathfinder Projects were:

- widening participation in further education
- widening participation through workplace learning
- sustaining individual demand for learning
- co-financing of learning by people and their employers.

In terms of meeting overall recruitment targets, the Pathfinder scheme was not successful, with fewer than 1,900 people opening Pathfinder ILAs. However, the successful projects clearly involved many new learners, and to that extent were successful in addressing the widening participation agenda.

This report draws out important findings relating to good practice, which are of value in the implementation of ILAs more generally.

Six case studies of successful projects are included as an annex.

Introduction

1   In response to a request from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the Further Education Funding Council (the Council) set aside some of its funding for 1999-2000 to develop a pilot Individual Learning Account (ILA) scheme in the further education sector. The scheme was named the Pathfinder Project and expressions of interest from colleges were invited in Council Circular 99/38. Since the government had announced its intention to introduce a national ILA scheme, it was felt that it would be appropriate to carry out a formal evaluation of the Pathfinder Project to inform future ILA developments. There had been many local ILA schemes, funded and administered by training and enterprise councils (TECs) and chambers of commerce and training enterprises (CCTEs), and some of these were still active during the period the Pathfinder Project was running. In spring 2000, the Council announced a second pilot ILA scheme (Circular 00/08), based on fee discounts for information technology courses.

2   The Further Education Development Agency (FEDA – now known as the Learning and Skills Agency) was selected to carry out the review of the Pathfinder Project; this is the resulting report. The Council's working papers relating to the project and the returns made by participating partnerships were made available to FEDA. Twenty-nine of the 30 Pathfinder Project managers were interviewed by telephone. All projects were surveyed by means of a questionnaire and visits to six projects were undertaken, during which college staff, employers and learners – some of the 1,800-plus people who opened Pathfinder ILAs – were interviewed. The findings from these six visits are set out as case studies in the annex to this report.

3   Circular 99/38 was issued in August 1999 and invited expressions of interest (to be received by 10 September 1999) in developing and running a Pathfinder Project. The overall target group was people who were on low incomes, were not eligible for fee remission, and who might have been deterred from taking part in learning by the cost of participating. In order to build on work already taking place in the sector, colleges were asked to consider how learning accounts might add value to work being undertaken in the following areas:

- widening participation in further education – Pathfinder Projects could target individuals who are in low-paid work or part-time jobs but who are not eligible for fee remission because they are above the income threshold
- widening participation through workplace learning – ILAs may help employers to develop employee-development schemes, and the Council also wished to consider how learning accounts may help small businesses
- sustaining individual demand for learning – ILAs may be used to encourage people to make the transition from basic skills provision into mainstream further education
- co-financing of learning by people and their employers – projects could explore how ILAs may help employers and employees on lower incomes to co-finance the cost of non-job-specific learning.

4   The pilot projects aimed to:

- explore ways in which ILAs might be used to encourage those on low incomes to participate in learning

- explore how people and their employers might be encouraged to contribute more to the cost of learning
- identify what other forms of financial and non-financial assistance may be required, in conjunction with learning accounts, to help people participate in learning
- identify any practical issues for colleges arising from working with learning accounts.

5   Circular 99/38 made it clear that the Council would prefer to receive applications from lifelong learning partnerships, although one college was expected to act as lead institution, managing any project funding allocated.

6   After receiving and considering applications, the Council approved 30 Pathfinder Projects, all from college consortia or from learning partnerships. Projects were approved in all Council regions, and involved about 150 colleges and adult education providers. Each project had an agreed target number of Pathfinder ILAs. Partnerships were informed that they had been successful, and had their targets and funding confirmed, on 17 December 1999.

7   This report categorises the people who became Pathfinder ILA learners, and summarises the kinds of courses on which they enrolled. It assesses the extent to which such a form of ILA is likely to be successful, given the aims of the project as a whole, and draws attention to common issues that arose, especially in relation to employer involvement. The report also sets out the factors that contributed to the disappointing overall level of recruitment on the project, and makes recommendations about project design and management as well as considering issues

directly related to ILAs. Despite the poor levels of recruitment in many projects, areas of good practice were identified, and these are described.

Statistics

Overview

8   Had all 30 projects recruited to target, 9,167 people would have opened Pathfinder ILAs, and their learning programmes would have generated about 156,000 funding units, worth £2.65 million. A further £1.2 million was allocated for the costs of fee support and for project development and running costs.

9   In terms of meeting overall recruitment targets, the Pathfinder scheme was not successful. Fewer than 1,900 people opened Pathfinder ILAs (20% of target). Only three of the 30 projects achieved more than 50% of their target numbers, with 12 recruiting less than 10%. Approximately two-thirds of the institutions involved did not recruit any Pathfinder ILA learners. In terms of funding units, about 22,000 were generated (14% of target), and the majority of the funding available for the project was therefore unused.

The Learners

10   This section includes an analysis of the 1,800-plus Pathfinder ILA holders. In order to try to compare their characteristics with those of other students, some national figures for all Council-funded part-time students are also shown in some cases (these figures relate to 1997-98, the last complete year for which figures are available). It would not be wise to derive firm conclusions from these 'comparative' figures, given the pilot nature of this project, but they do perhaps indicate in a general way the project's

performance in terms of reaching particular groups.

Gender

78% female 22% male

(Nationally, 60% of part-time Council-funded students are female.)

Age

16–19	3%
20–24	10%
25–34	34%
35–49	39%
50+	14%

32% of the learners were women aged 35–49.

Ethnic origin

Black African	1%
Black Caribbean	<1%
Black other	<1%
Bangladeshi	<1%
Indian	3%
Pakistani	4%
Chinese	<1%
White	85%
Other or mixed	5%

(Nationally, 90% of part-time Council-funded students are white.)

Previous qualifications

None	31%
Entry level	22%
Level 1	16%
Level 2	16%
Level 3	9%
Level 4+	6%

New learners

11   Providers used a range of definitions of a new learner, ranging from a person who had not participated in formal learning since leaving school, to someone who was not currently enrolled on a learning programme at a college. Setting aside these differences of definition, those projects that were able to provide such information reported that about 90% of the learners enrolled were new learners.

Programmes of study

12   Learners used their Pathfinder ILAs on a wide range of qualifications. In terms of level, the spread was as follows:

Below level 1:	22%
Level 1	32% (that is, 54% at level 1 or below)
Level 2	28%
Level 3	15%
Above level 3	3%

(Nationally, only 33% of part-time Council-funded learners follow courses at level 1 or below.)

13   In terms of subjects or vocational programme areas, two predominate, with 36% of learners enrolling on IT courses and 27% enrolling on courses in the health and community care area. Humanities accounted for 12% of learners, with business and basic education contributing 8% each. The remaining 9% of learners were distributed among other areas such as engineering, sciences, and catering.

14   Enrolments were concentrated in two areas – 30% of all learners enrolled on IT courses at entry level or level 1, and 20% on level 2 or 3 health and community care courses (many of which were national vocational qualifications).

The learners' employment status

15   Some 86% of learners were employed (68% full-time, 14% part-time and 4% self-employed). Over half worked in the public administration, education and health sector, and a further quarter in other

services. This suggests that the general aim of targeting low-paid workers was successful. Thirteen per cent worked in manufacturing, with the remainder spread across other industrial sectors.

16 Some 14% worked in very small companies with up to five employees, 26% in companies with between six and 25 employees, 44% in companies with 26–250 employees, and the remaining 16% in larger companies. Hence 84% of learners worked in small and medium-sized enterprises, suggesting that another of the overall aims of the initiative was achieved.

17 Learners were drawn from a wide range of occupations. When asked to describe their own jobs, a quarter of learners said they worked in personal and protective services, probably reflecting the large group enrolled on care qualifications. Technical occupations, administration, clerical/secretarial, and unskilled occupations each accounted for between 12–16% of the total, with the remainder distributed across other occupational areas such as skilled trades and sales/customer service.

Success Factors

18 Many Pathfinder Projects experienced considerable difficulties in making progress, for a number of reasons which are dealt with below in paragraph 26 ('Obstacles to success'). Leaving these aside for the time being, it is possible to identify a number of factors which most of the reasonably successful projects had in common. These are dealt with below.

19 Nearly all the successful projects identified their Pathfinder ILA holders in the workplace. Colleges that expected potential ILA learners to respond to promotional material and present themselves at the college were generally disappointed. People who did make

enquiries at a college were generally not eligible for the Pathfinder ILA, or knew they were eligible for fee remission from previous experience. The successful projects used the ILA as a means of promoting specific learning opportunities to people who would not normally have thought of enquiring at a college. This usually meant using existing contacts with employers to promote the ILA to new groups in the workforce, although in some cases new employers were recruited through 'cold calling'. Clearly the employer's attitude was critical, and successful projects made sure that employers or training managers were well briefed about the scheme and understood its potential benefits.

20 A smaller number of projects successfully recruited learners through their community and outreach activities. Again, the approach that worked was to use the ILA as a means of reaching specific groups of people, such as the helpers in a school or people attending a community venue.

21 In nearly all cases, successful projects were managed through the section in the college responsible for employer links – often the college's business development unit, sometimes the marketing department. Projects that chose to manage the scheme through their admissions or student services units were much less successful in enrolling potential learners onto the scheme. Many staff working in the more entrepreneurial environment of a business development unit appear to have had the skills to 'sell' the benefits of an initiative such as learner accounts, and may also have had a more flexible working week to enable them actively to explore new markets and to work with employers and others to exploit new initiatives. Admissions staff and those dealing with

student support are generally very skilled in finding the best financial package for students who apply for courses, but it is not normally part of their responsibilities to attract new learners, especially adults.

22　Many of the projects that recruited reasonably well chose to rebrand the Pathfinder ILA. Some renamed the ILA, and promoted it as a product in its own right, while others used the ILAs to offer 'two for the price of one' or similar offers. Promotional material was brief and easy to read, and concentrated on the benefits to the learner and the employer, rather than giving lengthy details about qualifications or assessment methods.

23　Some of the more successful projects reported that they had good working relationships with their local TEC/CCTE. Many TECs/CCTEs operate a particular type of learning account, and a close working relationship enabled potential ILA holders to be referred between schemes where necessary.

24　The final, critical, common theme visible in all successful schemes was that colleges were offering courses in a flexible way which suited the needs of the learners. Many people used their Pathfinder ILAs to study in groups at their employer's premises, with college staff visiting to deliver courses at times that fitted with the learners' work times. In other cases colleges mounted courses in the summer term 2000 in response to interest generated by the ILA. Much of this provision involved short courses in information technology. Other Pathfinder learners enrolled for NVQ qualifications, for example in the health and community care area, where colleges were able to start learners flexibly in the spring or summer terms. Given the timing of the launch of the scheme, which is discussed in more detail in paragraph 28, only those

partnerships that were able to respond quickly and flexibly were successful in recruiting more than a handful of learners.

Employer Attitudes

25　It is unrealistic to expect a pilot initiative such as the Pathfinder ILA to bring about a huge change in attitudes to training or to result in a step-change in employer investment in learning – one of the overall aims of learning accounts. Nevertheless, experience gained in this project does have implications for a national ILA scheme.

26　Many projects reported considerable difficulties in engaging with employers. They said that many of the people they contacted were not interested in qualifications, preferring to carry out any necessary job-specific training in-house or using private training companies. Others perceived the Pathfinder ILA as yet another government scheme that would involve them in a lot of paperwork. One project manager said it was 'virtually impossible to give away free training'.

27　Other projects, especially those managed by sections in colleges already working closely with employers, reported a very positive attitude to the Pathfinder initiative. Employers already dealing with colleges could see the potential advantages of the scheme, and colleges and employers working together were able to maximise the benefits to their employees and the companies. Training managers typically used the Pathfinder ILAs to provide training for more employees than would otherwise have been the case – the discounts arising from the ILA enabled their training budgets to go further. One employer in one of the case studies described how the existence of the scheme had encouraged the company to increase its training budget, but this was unusual.

However, the additional training activity in those companies that used Pathfinder ILAs certainly represents a considerable investment in terms of time and support for staff. Pathfinder ILAs may not have resulted in a sharp increase in employer investment in learning, but the successful projects clearly involved many new learners, and to that extent were successful in addressing the widening participation agenda.

Obstacles to Success

28   Colleges described a number of factors that prevented them from making satisfactory progress with this project.

29   The timing of the project made it difficult for some consortia to recruit enough learners. The circular announcing the project (Circular 99/38) was published in August 1999, with projects expected to start in January 2000. The fact that consortia were not notified until mid-December that project proposals had been approved meant that it was virtually impossible for learners to be identified and to start their programmes in January. Almost all projects – including those that recruited well – reported that this created considerable problems, and it was the issue raised most often when lead colleges were asked to evaluate the project. Colleges spoke of the need for considerable lead time, especially in partnership projects, before learners could be recruited. The perceived late notification effectively rendered the targets unachievable in many projects. Areas where successful consortia were already in place were more likely to be in a position to respond quickly or to make provisional arrangements before formal notification.

30   There was some confusion about some of the timescales within the project (for example, whether learners had to have completed their programmes of study before 31 July 2000, or merely had to have started by that date). Projects appear to have received different advice at different times on this particular issue, which has caused considerable discontent among project staff. At the time of this evaluation, some project managers were still of the view that all learning programmes should have been completed by 31 July 2000, whereas the FEDA researcher spoke to learners in other projects who had started their programme before that date but were continuing well into 2001.

31   In many areas it took a long time to agree and organise consortium arrangements. In some cases this project was the first attempt at joint working for consortia (such as learning partnerships), and the time taken to agree common criteria, marketing strategies and administrative arrangements prevented the project getting off to a quick start. Some partnerships did not start to plan until after project notification in December, and given the constraints imposed by other priorities, in some cases it was February before partners met. Some consortia experienced particular difficulty with the Council's requirement that all learners in a consortium had to be recorded through a single college's management information system – this proved to be unacceptable to some other colleges. It is interesting to note that the project which was most successful in terms of recruiting learners was one of the few with a single college in the partnership.

32   The ILA fee discount scheme for IT courses, which was announced in April 2000 in Circular 00/08, undermined some of the initiatives proposed under the Pathfinder scheme, since it had the potential in some circumstances to offer a discount to learners of 80% or 100%. This

was a major issue in some projects – those that had decided to target IT in the Pathfinder scheme – and was cited as a direct cause of project failure by several project managers. Many found it difficult to understand why two such schemes offering different benefits should be operating at the same time. Several Pathfinder ILA projects were effectively abandoned when the fee discount scheme was launched.

33   Some colleges that were not confident of meeting their unit targets chose not to go ahead with the Pathfinder scheme. They decided that it would be more advantageous, for example, to offer free courses but to count the units generated towards their normal funding target than to participate in the scheme. This did not necessarily disadvantage learners, but certainly impacted on the achievement of the project's targets and caused strains in some consortia. It may also have resulted in less direct targeting of learners than would otherwise have been the case.

34   A number of colleges reported that they found it difficult to recruit learners because so many of their students paid no fees anyway (one college reported that 80% of its students paid no fees).

35   In one or two Pathfinder Project areas, TEC/CCTE ILA schemes were relaunched during the project. Since the learning accounts on offer were generally seen as more generous than those available under the Pathfinder scheme, the partnerships involved felt that this undermined the Pathfinder projects.

36   Some colleges reported that they were suffering from 'initiative overload', especially in relation to Individual Learning Accounts. In all areas TECs/CCTEs had run ILA schemes, with varying degrees of college involvement. This meant that in some areas potential learners already had

a perception of what an ILA might be, and whether it might be suitable for them. These perceptions were not always positive (for example, because TEC/CCTA ILAs had run out in some areas, some people may have had the experience of applying for one scheme and being told that it no longer existed). The Council's fee discount ILA was then introduced, and of course the announcements about the National Framework ILA were also beginning to emerge during the project. This resulted in some cases in confusion among learners and frustration among college staff.

Good Practice

37   One of the purposes of any pilot scheme is to provide examples of good practice to inform future initiatives. The investigations undertaken to produce this evaluation have highlighted a number of areas of good practice. All the projects that were most successful in attracting learners through this scheme had most of the following characteristics:

- the partnership operating the project was already developed, or the project was operated by one institution only
- the project received strong and active support from senior managers
- the project had a single individual nominated as project manager, with adequate time allocated to fulfil the role
- the local TEC was involved in the initiative to some extent, so that individuals could be referred from one ILA scheme to another if appropriate
- the project used existing links with employers to target learners in the workplace, usually through the college's business development unit

- training managers in companies were involved in the promotion of the scheme in their company

- promotional material was simple and clear, and free from educational jargon

- many of the courses available were delivered at employers' premises and/or at convenient times for the employees

- there was an emphasis on encouraging groups of learners to participate rather than individuals

- strong community and outreach networks enabled the initiative to be promoted through a number of different channels.

Conclusions

38   It is possible to draw a range of conclusions as a result of this evaluation exercise. Some are general conclusions about project design and management, others relate more specifically to learning accounts and the future development of the ILA initiative. This section sets out our conclusions, which we group into three main headings.

Project design

39   Even given very efficient administrative arrangements, Pathfinder ILA projects inevitably had a tight timescale. Local learning partnerships were encouraged to bid for funding for projects. Many of these were relatively young organisations with underdeveloped infrastructures. Partnership working, however desirable and effective in the long term, takes time to develop. The two aims of creating a bank of ILAs within a learning partnership, and building on work already being undertaken by individual colleges to encourage people on low incomes to participate in learning, as

envisaged in Circular 99/38, seem (albeit with the benefit of hindsight) to be very ambitious for a project which was initially designed to run for just two college terms. It is likely that projects could have made a quicker start and more learners would have been recruited if individual colleges had been invited to submit expressions of interest.

40   A significant number of colleges decided not to participate in the project because they were not confident of recruiting enough students in 1999-2000 to enable them to reach their normal funding target for that year. The project rewarded colleges in cash rather than funding units, and the colleges that withdrew took the view that it was better for them to achieve the units (by offering free courses, in some cases) than to receive the cash via the Pathfinder Project. This was obviously not the intention when Circular 99/38 was written, but it is certainly how the administrative and payment arrangements were subsequently perceived. It would clearly be desirable to design projects so that participation in them is not dependent on such a strong external factor.

41   The announcement of the fee discount ILA in Circular 00/08, although an admirable initiative when viewed in isolation, sounded the death-knell for many Pathfinder Projects. It certainly appears that in the spring of 2000 the Council, and in turn the further education colleges, were having to deal with a number of government initiatives that were not complementary. In terms of testing models for the National Framework ILAs, it may have been better to have run the fee discount ILAs on a pilot basis in areas where Pathfinders were not running. This might have allowed for some comparison to be made between the two schemes.

42   It is ironic that one of the reasons given in some areas for a failure to recruit to target was that very few learners paid fees. Some partnerships reported that differences between the fee policies of colleges in the partnership made it difficult to arrive at a common framework for administering the Pathfinder ILAs. One can argue that any national scheme based on discounts presupposes that there is a rational system of fees nationally, which is currently not the case. As a minimum, it would be helpful if much more information were available about colleges' fee policies before any future initiatives of this sort are planned.

Project management

43   The features of the projects that were more successful in recruiting learners are set out in paragraphs 18–24 above, and some examples of good practice are highlighted in the case studies in the annex. This section summarises those findings and includes other observations arising from the evaluation.

44   The first stage in participation in the initiative was for partnerships to express interest. Some partnerships do not appear to have had a clear overall strategy for the initiative, so there was confusion at the later implementation stage. Partnerships that decided to use the project to target very specific groups were more likely to be successful. Partnerships that gave thought at an early stage to the actual processes they would use to target learners were certainly at an advantage, and in particular, those partnerships that consulted at the bid-writing stage with college staff already involved in employer liaison had a much clearer idea of how the project should proceed. Most of the projects that recruited a significant number of learners had consulted their local TEC/CCTE about target groups, and

worked with the TEC/CCTE so that learners could be referred to the Pathfinder Project.

45   For some learning partnerships, this initiative was the first opportunity to put together a joint project proposal or to work together. As such, some partnerships reported that it was a valuable exercise in itself, irrespective of the eventual outcomes.

46   For those projects that did go on to deliver Pathfinder ILAs, the following key features are noted in paragraphs 18–24 and in the cases studies in the annex:

- targeting people in the workplace by using existing employer links
- encouraging employers to use the scheme for employees who do not generally engage in learning, other than very specific job-related training
- strong support from senior managers
- simple, jargon-free promotional literature
- flexible delivery of learning, often at employers' premises
- strong outreach networks.

Issues for the development of the National ILA Framework

47   This was an ambitious project, which sought to gain insight into long-standing difficult issues in further education: how to encourage more people with low incomes to engage in learning, and how to engage employers more in learning and encourage them to contribute more to the costs of learning. This evaluation shows that, viewed as a research project, it has been successful, producing some valuable insights. The National ILA Framework has now been launched and it is hoped that the scheme may be able to take account of this report.

48   One of the key findings from this evaluation – perhaps the most important one – is that those projects which were most successful in engaging learners from the target groups were those that were most proactive in working with employers to use the ILA to meet their needs and the needs of their employees. Colleges that expected to issue Pathfinder ILAs to people who enquired about courses did not generally recruit many learners.

49   This raises concerns about the potential for success of the National Framework ILA, which focuses on encouraging the individual to apply for an ILA. Our findings show that intermediaries – friends, colleagues, employers, trade union representatives, and managers – are important in encouraging people to undertake learning. There is a danger that unless this fact is recognised, many of those who will take out an ILA are those who would have engaged in learning anyway.

50   Hence, we would make the following recommendations:

- consideration should be given to packaging ILAs so that employers can apply for ILAs on behalf of their employees, and employees can apply for ILAs as a group, for use at work
- the national promotional campaign should promote the benefits of learning in the workplace to employees and employers alike
- colleges should consider promoting ILAs to employers using their employer liaison teams.

Case Studies

1   Six projects were visited during the course of this evaluation. In order to gain particular insight into projects where there was good practice, the researcher did not visit projects that had recruited less than 15% of their target numbers. However, the selection of the following projects in no way implies that they were the only partnerships that were successful, or where good practice was found. They were chosen to be a representative sample in a range of settings and with a variety of different approaches.

Case study 1 – an area in the South East with a largely strong economy and low unemployment

2   This project, like most others, fell well short of its overall targets, and had a fairly typical experience in that one of the three partners failed to recruit any learners. The project co-ordinator reported that the single biggest barrier to achieving enrolment targets was the December notification date. This meant that the scheme was not in place until Easter 2000. The introduction of the fee discount scheme then created further difficulties, since the Pathfinder Project had been expecting to recruit some learners onto IT courses.

3   The consortium had clear objectives and these were not diluted in an attempt to enrol more learners. For example, existing students were not eligible for the Pathfinder ILA, and the project targeted a geographical area where participation rates are low. The scheme was promoted to employers by a college's business development unit and to the wider community by outreach workers from an education service.

4   One area of success was through existing contacts with a local employer, the Prison Service. Employees on certain grades at a local prison must achieve NVQ level 2 to be eligible to apply to become prison officers. The service is finding recruitment difficult in this area, and therefore saw the Pathfinder ILA as a means of encouraging staff to achieve NVQ 2. The college and the employer worked together to promote the scheme to appropriate staff and the employer supported all those who expressed a wish to start an NVQ programme, by paying all or the majority of their fees. College staff delivered the programme at the prison. Learners interviewed said that they would certainly not have been able to afford the qualification themselves, and valued the support from their employer. Most of the learners said that they intended to apply for promotion when they achieved the qualification. Managers at the prison said that the scheme had not necessarily increased the amount they were able to spend on training, since they had a fixed budget, but that it had enabled them to train more employees and to offer training opportunities to members of the workforce who might not otherwise have benefited.

Case study 2 – a largely rural area in the West Midlands

5   This consortium recruited about one-third of its target number ILAs, with the lead college recruiting 60% of the total – about 100 learners in total. Some colleges withdrew from the consortium when they thought that they might not achieve their funding targets.

6   The lead college operated the Pathfinder Project through its training division, which also deals with work-based training programmes such as youth credits and modern apprenticeships. The unit

therefore has an ongoing dialogue with employers, and is well placed to bring new initiatives to employers' attention. In many cases the Pathfinder ILA was promoted to employers as part of a broader package of support, rather than as a specific new scheme, and known employers whom the college thought could benefit were contacted. As the scheme's main selling point, the college told employers that it could help their training budgets to go further, so that more employees could benefit. There was a very positive response to the scheme, no doubt helped by the college's active involvement in dealing with much of the administration for employers.

7   The college works closely with its local TEC/CCTE and this also was a factor in the success of the initiative. The college uses TEC/CCTE ILAs and the college was able to advise individuals and their employers as to the best scheme for them. At the time of the project, TEC/CCTE ILAs were in short supply, and the TEC/CCTE referred people to the college so that the two schemes could be run in a complementary way.

8   The main sectors targeted by the college were care and catering, both characterised by low pay and high staff turnover in the area. Many of the learners recruited were studying NVQs, which enabled the learners and/or their employers to benefit from significant fee discounts under the Pathfinder scheme.

9   All learners and employers interviewed exhibited a very positive attitude to the scheme and to the college's approach. They included the examples described in paragraphs 10 to 12.

10   The manager of a residential care home was using Pathfinder ILAs to support a training programme for 21 care workers, who were enrolled on NVQ level 2 qualifications under the scheme. The

programme is delivered by the college at the care home. Many of the candidates, who have a range of ages and many of whom are mature women, have not undertaken training since leaving school. Several candidates were interviewed and all spoke of the benefits of the training and the supportive atmosphere generated when training was undertaken in the workplace. The care home is located in an area without local FE provision, and many of the employees live nearby. All said they would have been unable to attend the nearest college, mainly because of the lack of transport.

11   A crèche worker was following an NVQ qualification under the scheme. She was eligible because her salary level was lower than that of some of her colleagues. Her employer has undertaken to promote her if she achieves the qualification. She had not undertaken any training since leaving the armed forces some years ago, and was very positive about the benefits the scheme was providing. She would not have been able to afford the normal course fees for an NVQ.

12   The manager of a day nursery was using Pathfinder ILAs to support NVQ training at level 3 for six staff – a major commitment in a fairly small business. The company was supporting the employees in various ways. For example, the manager herself was training to be an assessor, and staff were given time to work together on their portfolios. The company would have been unable to pay the full fee for an NVQ qualification. Although the training was still at a fairly early stage, the manager could already see benefits in terms of staff performance and attitude. The employees, most of whom were fairly young, were appreciative of the company's support and well aware of the benefit of a qualification to them as individuals.

Case study 3 – an urban industrial area of the West Midlands

13   When project proposals were being developed, this partnership involved two colleges, but one withdrew before it had recruited any learners. The remaining college operated the scheme through its marketing department, which is responsible for employer liaison. The unit devoted a significant amount of energy to promoting the scheme to employers. The scheme was rebranded as 'Step forward to learn', and promotional materials produced. These were eye-catching and easy to read, being written in a direct and appealing style without educational jargon or the use of complex accreditation titles. Posters were produced so that employers could promote the scheme to employees (for example on staff notice boards), and information packs were provided to interested employees. A range of short courses was promoted (this college, like many others, was under the impression that all learners had to finish their courses by 31 July 2000), but all the interest was in the IT area, and about 40 students from five different companies were recruited to courses leading to the CLAIT qualification. Courses were run at college sites, at a range of times to fit in with shift work – on a Saturday morning and at 16.00–17.00 on one evening.

14   The scheme was financed so that the employer and the employee each paid £20 towards the cost of training. The college conducted a survey of all Pathfinder learners at the end of the project, and found that almost three-quarters had not undertaken any training since leaving school. Feedback from learners was very positive, and the project enabled the college to explore further training needs with some of the companies involved. As a result, further provision is planned – one

example being dedicated ESOL provision in one workplace.

15   The training manager of the company providing the largest cohort of learners was enthusiastic about the scheme; she felt that the publicity pack had encouraged employees to 'have a go', and the company had increased its training budget to support them. Most of the employees involved were new learners, with a significant number of ethnic minority origin.

Case study 4 – an urban area in the North West with high levels of deprivation and unemployment

16   In terms of meeting enrolment targets, this project was the most successful, having over-achieved its target of 250 learners by about 16%. There was only one college in the partnership, which enabled a prompt start to be made once the project was approved. The project was delivered through the college's basic skills unit, which has a well-established network of links with employers and also with community outreach centres. The target group (low-paid manual workers, especially women) was decided in consultation with the TEC/CCTE and others before the bid was submitted, and the senior management team provided active support for the project. For example, the project was adequately staffed, and laptop computers were purchased from a college budget to enable courses to be delivered in outcentres and at employers' premises.

17   The project was publicised by the basic skills unit using simple leaflets and posters, which were used by outreach workers and those working with employers. The focus was on employability skills and transferable skills, but such jargon was avoided – the leaflet aimed at employers spell out in clear terms

the benefits (including increased profits) of a motivated and confident workforce, and set out the range of qualifications available under the scheme. Simple language was used – the words 'maths' and 'English' throughout, as the college does not refer to 'numeracy' or 'literacy'. Similar material was produced for use in community venues.

18　In terms of promoting the programme to employers, college staff tried to involve both HR/training managers and trade union representatives, in order to gain the support of both management and the workforce. The college was successful in recruiting three large local employers to the scheme – a large supermarket, a national company specialising in pest control and other environmental services, and the local council's contract services department. In all cases the college delivers courses at the employer's premises to groups of staff identified by the employer.

19　The training manager of the supermarket was an enthusiastic supporter of the scheme, and the company was paying a contribution towards the fees of the learners, most of whom were checkout operators. The company clearly understood the benefit of providing training which was not linked directly to an employee's specific current job role. The staff were encouraged to consider the training in their staff teams, and this had resulted in a very supportive learning environment in which people were encouraged to participate and were not afraid to ask questions or make mistakes. Many of the learners had not undertaken any training (other than that specifically linked to their job roles in the supermarket) since leaving school, and the scheme generated a genuine thirst for more learning – workers interviewed said

they would never have gone to a college, and were amazed and delighted by the progress they had made (most were learning IT). One learner spoke in moving terms about how she had grown in confidence and self-esteem through her learning and about how she wanted to go on to learn more.

Case study 5 – a rural area in the South West with a low-wage, high-unemployment economy

20　This partnership achieved about 15% of its target number of learners and exhibited characteristics typical of many of the projects:

- although four colleges were involved in this partnership at the bidding stage, two dropped out before any learners were enrolled
- the local TEC/CCTE-funded ILA scheme was still active and offered most learners a larger contribution towards course fees
- the fee discount scheme for IT courses was successful in attracting learners and also offered bigger discounts.

21　This project did succeed in targeting some people who wished to enrol on substantial courses carrying higher fees – professional accounting qualifications and NVQs in care. For these programmes, the Pathfinder ILA offered a bigger discount than the TEC/CCTE ILA. People at work and earning less than £15,000 a year were targeted, and it is a feature of the local economy that some people wishing to study at levels 3 and above are in that category. Awareness of the ILA was raised by the colleges' 'field force', which helps employers with training needs analysis and makes them aware of training opportunities. Certainly in terms of reaching people who might otherwise have

been deterred by the cost of study, this project identified a group and the initiative has helped to fulfil a need. Learners interviewed said they would not have been able to afford to pay the full course fees, and their employers were encouraged to support them.

Case study 6 – an urban area in the Yorks/Humberside region with low participation in learning

22 This partnership had originally intended to offer informal learning opportunities without qualifications to try to attract new learners. When it became clear that such courses would not be eligible under the ILA initiative, a change of plan was needed. This effectively meant that one of the two colleges in the partnership felt that it could no longer take part. Employers were then targeted through the other college's business development arm, but with the emphasis still on the provision of 'non-threatening' learning opportunities, such as courses on the employer's premises. The partnership achieved about 37% of its enrolment target, so it was one of the more successful schemes. Trade union learning representatives and training managers were the principal points of contact in companies.

23 The majority of learners involved had not engaged in formal learning for a considerable time and had no previous qualifications. Qualifications offered were practical and of immediate benefit in the working environment – for example first aid and a playworker qualification.

24 The manager of a landscaping company used the Pathfinder initiative to provide training in first aid for a group of 15 workers, whom he described as having very low levels of confidence in terms of their ability to benefit from training. All 15

passed the qualification, enjoyed the training, and exhibited much higher levels of confidence as a result. The company contributed towards the cost of the qualification, which was therefore free to the learners.

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