

Widening Participation in Learning through Adult Residential Provision: An Evaluation

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Research Report

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through Adult Residential Provision:
An Evaluation*

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Executive Summary

The Department for Education and Skills contracted Eldwick Research Associates to undertake an evaluation of an initiative to develop adult residential provision aimed at widening the participation of hard-to-reach learners. The initiative, coordinated by a team from the Adult Residential Colleges Association (ARCA), was designed to contribute to Government objectives of *widening participation in learning as a route to promoting social inclusion*.

The ARCA project was based on the premise that not only is it necessary to *increase* participation in learning but also, crucially, to *widen* such participation through:

- ◆ widening participation of *individual* hard-to-reach learners in *existing ARCA provision*;
- ◆ attracting *groups* of hard-to-reach learners through *specifically designed provision* including outreach and residential learning.

Projects were to be restricted to individuals without prior experience of adult *residential learning* especially targeting individuals who had undertaken little or no post-16 learning *via any route*, since a low level of educational attainment is one of the key indicators of exclusion.

Methodology

The evaluation involved collecting survey data from all participants in two stages. The first stage involved evaluation forms completed by all students participating in the project and the second stage involved case studies of selected programmes to provide an in-depth evaluation and analysis of specific courses. Five case studies were undertaken to explore views of participants in greater depth and to examine the processes in the real-life context of selected ARCA projects.

The case study fieldwork involved in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews allowing tutors, project leaders and students the opportunity to extend their evaluation beyond the constraints of the evaluation forms. Evaluators also attended taught sessions and chatted informally to students and tutors outside classes in order to establish a rapport with respondents, which is required to elicit candid answers.

The ARCA Project

In total 340 students were to be recruited to existing provision and 195 to specially designed provision. Recruits to existing provision were to be drawn initially from two specific groups: men over 25 years old and older women learners. Further

recruitment was extended to encourage participation from learners who could be identified as belonging to the majority of those categories included in the Kennedy Report. The recruits to specially designed provision were to be drawn from particular socially excluded groups, isolated individuals, older people, those from within designated health action zones, from inner city communities and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities. In all, 472 learners participated in the initiative, representing 88 percent of target numbers.

Of the 31 ARCA colleges, 11 participated in the project, with one responsible for 21 per cent of learners and another 3 accounting for a further 33 per cent. A large proportion of the specialised programmes provided as part of the ARCA project can be classified in terms of target groups and course content:

- ◆ 30 per cent of students were recruited to courses specifically designed for those aged 50 or more;
- ◆ 16 per cent of learners were recruited to programmes designed for those with disabilities;
- ◆ 7 per cent of participants were recruited to courses geared to family learning;
- ◆ 8 per cent of learners joined courses which focused on the development of IT skills;
- ◆ 11 per cent of participants were involved in programmes for carers.

Of those participants providing relevant details:

- ◆ 69 per cent were female;
- ◆ 57 per cent were aged 50 years old or more;
- ◆ 77 per cent classed themselves as ethnically white and 12 per cent came from minority ethnic groups;
- ◆ 28 per cent suffered from a disability and 18 per cent were registered disabled;
- ◆ 63 per cent were in receipt of benefits, including 40 per cent who were entitled to claim in at least two benefit categories;
- ◆ 27 per cent of learners were classified by occupational category as Social Classes IV and V;
- ◆ 48 per cent of learners had been involved in some form of learning during the previous 12 months, although for many this was a basic skills or access course;
- ◆ 29 per cent of participants had not been involved in any form of learning, education or training during the previous 5 years.

The programmes

When asked about the programmes of study:

- ◆ 83 per cent of respondents felt that the majority of what they had learnt had increased their knowledge and understanding;
- ◆ 57 per cent of learners believed that they had been introduced to new technologies;
- ◆ 91 per cent of learners thought teaching methods had been highly effective;

Effectiveness of the programmes

Tutors and participants from the case studies were asked which were the most useful parts of their own programmes. Tutors identified two key areas:

- ◆ ‘individual engagement’, which is of ‘vital importance in the learning process’;
- ◆ group work, which involves the development of team skills.

Before and after the programmes, learners were asked about a wide range of benefits from participating and cited the following:

- ◆ Learners reported personal development outcomes such as: increased self-confidence; increased knowledge and understanding; motivation to learn; improved social and communication skills; learning to learn.
- ◆ Among learning benefits reported were: greater understanding of a variety of subjects; increased IT knowledge; development of new skills; knowledge of different groups from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.
- ◆ Benefits in terms of group dynamics included: getting to know other members of the group; learning from each other; improving confidence to become active in the group; team building.
- ◆ Benefits of meeting new people included: comparing experience; increasing understanding of the learning disabled; developing close working relationships; broadening their outlook; exchanging ideas and learning to be more relaxed with other people and able to socialise.

Added value of residential provision

When participants were asked to identify the benefits from studying in a residential setting, the following were cited:

- ◆ the opportunity to study, away from distraction, domestic commitments or childcare responsibilities and with no worries about transport;
- ◆ a more focussed and intensive learning experience and greater continuity of learning in a relaxed learning environment;

- ◆ the opportunity to go over the day's work with the rest of the group particularly the difficult areas.

Group project leaders for three of the case study programmes had deliberately selected residential programmes for their members to allow them to broaden concerns from the rather operational day to day focus, enable students to have the opportunity to study away from family pressures and domestic commitments and 'cement positive relationships'. For the students with learning disabilities, residentiality was a key reason for joining the course. The majority of learners on the remaining programmes, however, did not specifically select a course because it was residential, but had taken up a residential place because 'this was what was on offer'

An exploration of views towards residential provision elicited the following:

- ◆ 55 per cent of respondents did not know whether similar courses were available in local non-residential colleges, but 52 per cent would have been prepared to follow the course at a local non-residential college;
- ◆ Nevertheless, 94 per cent of learners highly rated the importance of the residential aspect of their course. For many participants the residential experience was one of 'total focused uninhibited learning'.

As a result of attending a programme under the ARCA initiative:

- ◆ 15 per cent would be seeking paid employment (80 per cent were not);
- ◆ 38 per cent would become involved in community work;
- ◆ 90 per cent were keen to attend other courses, and 42 per cent intended to pursue a qualification.

Financial details of course provision

It was difficult to assess the costs associated with the ARCA initiative and especially in relation to the individual learner projects. On the basis of the information available:

- ◆ tuition and other costs (i.e. costs not associated with residential provision) are between £8.41 and £2.58 per learner hour, but there is no a priori reason why these should differ from non-residential provision for the same target group;
- ◆ residential costs are between £7.46 and 6.97 per learner hour, or in round terms £50 per learner day, and this is the *additional cost* that must be weighed against the added value of residential provision.

Conclusions and recommendations

The overall conclusions offer a summary and recommendations for any future such initiative in relation to generic themes identified in the evaluation as follows: programme design; target groups; recruitment, advice and guidance; learning benefits; the added value of residential provision; and progression. Recommendations are structured under the same themes and are summarised below.

Programme design

- ◆ Criteria for distinguishing the two projects should have been clarified, and in any future initiative, the distinction should be dispensed with.
- ◆ More ARCA colleges should be involved in any future initiative to demonstrate commitment to widening access and meeting target numbers.
- ◆ Courses that could be funded from other sources should not have been included in the project since such programmes could have represented substitute rather than additional provision.

Target groups

- ◆ In any future initiative, course places should be prioritised for individuals with greatest need, as indicated by postcode using the DLTR multiple deprivation index. Where participants can afford to pay course fees, they should do so.
- ◆ More effort should have been made to attract individuals from minority ethnic groups, through designing programmes to meet their specific needs.
- ◆ Childcare should have been provided where young parents were included in the target group.
- ◆ In any future initiative, courses should be developed for learners over 50 wishing to re-enter the labour market, alongside those for individuals preparing for retirement.

Recruitment, advice and guidance

- ◆ ARCA should only have recruited adult learners, who have not previously attended residential programmes, since this was a condition for DfES funding the initiative.
- ◆ Priority should be given in any future initiative to those with mobility, travel or security difficulties and recruitment geared to target groups through outreach.
- ◆ Recruits, particularly those with learning difficulties, should be properly screened in future and given appropriate advice and guidance.

Learning benefits

- ◆ All parts of the programmes should have been evaluated using agreed, specific, criteria appropriate for, and sensitive to, the target groups.
- ◆ In any future initiative, ARCA should endeavour to measure the learning gain of individuals in educational terms, as well as the wider benefits of learning.

Added value of residential provision

- ◆ Non-residential colleges should replicate some of the courses provided under the ARCA initiative to identify the added value of residence.
- ◆ In any future project, the ARCA colleges should work in partnership with other agencies in adult and community learning to achieve the objectives outlined in the widening participation agenda.
- ◆ All colleges should in future complete the forms giving full financial details to facilitate an assessment of the costs as well as the benefits, as well as making comparisons between courses and colleges.

Progression

- ◆ In any repeat of the ARCA initiative, progression routes should be identified and criteria defined to measure progression within the context of each programme's outputs, in line with the ARCA proposal.
- ◆ A longitudinal tracking study is recommended to follow individuals in the ARCA initiative, explore how far expressed intentions are translated into take-up of further learning; individuals' expressed motives; the extent to which new learners become active in further education, the community or the labour market (or combinations of these); and the role of learning in activation.

1. Introduction

The initiative addressed in this Report is located in the context of Government policy on Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion. This introduction briefly outlines the policy context, the background to the initiative and the focus of the Report.

1.1 The policy context

In relation to lifelong learning, the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning (NAGCELL), chaired by Professor Bob Fryer, was established to advise on ‘extending lifelong learning to those groups and individuals *whose increased participation will contribute to improvements in employability, regeneration, capacity building, economic efficiency, social cohesion, independent living and citizenship.*’ The NAGCELL argued that the most urgent priority for the Government was to establish a strategic framework for the promotion of lifelong learning, which would permit a *widening* and *deepening* of participation and achievement in learning (Fryer, 1997b: 4-5).

The first NAGCELL report identified a number of changes that make lifelong learning an urgent priority:

- ◆ economic globalisation, bringing about a shift in skill needs in the workplace;
- ◆ demographic change, particularly in the age and sex profile of the workforce;
- ◆ new working practices such as team working and flatter management structures;
- ◆ a decline in unskilled employment;
- ◆ greater need for key skills, at all levels;
- ◆ a need to recognise diversity and a range of cultures, with their associated needs for learning;
- ◆ and shifts in traditional employment structures, which have often weakened communities and created a need for regeneration.

The Government clearly addressed many of the NAGCELL recommendations in formulating the lifelong learning Green Paper *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998), which offered a vision of how lifelong learning could enable everyone to fulfil their potential and cope with rapid economic and social change. In addition to this largely economic and work-related agenda, the Government has recognised the importance of social inclusion, civic and public life and personal development and fulfilment as legitimate goals for education worthy of public support (Hillage *et al.*, 2000).

David Blunkett's Foreword to *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998) recognised the value of learning for its own sake, and stated that learning:

- ◆ promotes citizenship, equality of opportunity and democracy;
- ◆ strengthens the family;
- ◆ enables people to provide leadership to, and play a full part in, their community;
- ◆ enables a love of the arts and a civilised society, and develops the spiritual side of our lives.

This mix of economic aims and wider, more intrinsic goals seems in principle supportive to the residential colleges, many of which provide work-related learning during the week and liberal adult education at the weekends.

Critical of inconsistencies and contradictions in the funding arrangements and delivery mechanisms for post-16 learning, in March 1999 the Government announced a wide-ranging consultation exercise on the structures for education and training for people over 16 years of age, excluding higher education. Following that exercise, the Government published a White Paper, *Learning to Succeed: a new framework for post-16 learning* (DfEE, 1999).

The key argument of *Learning to Succeed* is that too many people are excluded from the benefits that learning can bring and that the post-16 education and training system must be reformed to increase the participation in learning needed to raise the skills of the working population. To achieve the necessary changes, the Government established from April 2001 a *Learning and Skills Council* (LSC) for England to deliver all post-16 education and training (excluding higher education). In addition to other responsibilities (including further education colleges and Modern Apprenticeships), the LSC is now responsible for developing, in partnership with local authorities, arrangements for adult and community learning, and for providing information, advice and guidance on lifelong learning to adults.

Lifelong learning and social inclusion are intimately related as the EC White Paper (1996), *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, acknowledged in linking lifelong learning to social progress and cohesion. Following the Lisbon summit in March 2000, the role of learning in promoting social inclusion was highlighted further, firstly in the EC *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (November 2000) and subsequently in the EC *Communication on Lifelong Learning* (November 2001).

1.2 Background to the ARCA Initiative

The issue of social inclusion is central to the initiative examined in this Report and forms part of the wider agenda of adult and community learning (Callaghan *et al*, 2001). The Government is concerned with promoting social cohesion through combating social exclusion, what the Prime Minister has described as ‘a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown’ (Scottish Office, 1999). Social exclusion is therefore manifest in a variety of ways, many of them connected and mutually reinforcing. Ill health, for example, can be both a cause of unemployment and reflect the poverty that unemployment causes.

Room (1995; 1999) defines social exclusion in terms of ‘multi-dimensional disadvantage’, exclusion from the ‘principal social and occupational milieux’ and the persistence of vulnerability over time. Room argues that poverty can only be understood with reference to a broader definition of exclusion, which links incomes, housing, educational attainment, lack of skills development, health, and a range of other factors. Room also suggests that social exclusion as experienced by the individual or household must be analysed with reference to the infrastructure of the local community, which ‘modifies the personal experience of want’. Social exclusion can also be viewed as incorporating exclusion from social relations: from the variety of organisations and communities that bind together the individual and society: the workplace; extended family; local neighbourhood and its informal organisations; the welfare services (Friedman, 1992).

Those who are socially excluded may be characterised in terms of social class, age and ethnic origin, but the three universally reliable indicators of exclusion are: previous educational attainment; income level; and where people live (Kennedy, 1996).

DfEE agreed to fund an initiative, to run from April 2000 to April 2001, which was intended to develop adult residential provision with the objective of widening the participation of hard-to-reach learners. The initiative, coordinated by a team from the Adult Residential Colleges Association (ARCR), was designed to contribute to Government objectives of *widening participation in learning as a route to promoting social inclusion*.

The ARCA initiative started from the premise that not only is it necessary to *increase* participation in learning but also, crucially, to *widen* such participation. Two related sets of projects were contained in the ARCA initiative, each with two phases:

- ◆ widening participation of *individual* hard-to-reach learners in *existing ARCA provision*;
- ◆ attracting *groups* of hard-to-reach learners through *specifically designed provision* including outreach and residential learning.

Projects were to be restricted to individuals without prior experience of adult *residential learning* and the evaluation was to pay special attention to the experiences of those individuals who had undertaken little or no post-16 learning *via any route*, since a low level of educational attainment is one of the key indicators of exclusion.

1.3. Structure of the report

This Report has several objectives. Firstly, a review of the relevant literature has been undertaken in relation to widening participation in learning (section 2) and the role of residential education (section 3). In section 4, the methodology developed to evaluate the ARCA Initiative is elaborated and the research instruments described. The findings are presented in the next four sections.

Section 5 describes the achieved participation in the project and the demographic characteristics of those involved. Section 6 outlines the actual programme, identifying the scope of knowledge and information gathered from the courses, exploring the most effective methods of learning and the level of learner involvement in this process. The most useful aspects of the programmes to learners and any amendments and improvements they suggested are considered in Section 7, which analyses the extent to which courses met learner expectations. Section 8 assesses the added value of residential education and section 9 outlines the financial details of the projects. In conclusion, Section 10 presents a summary and recommendations drawn from the evidence collected in the evaluation. Individual reports on the five case studies are included in Appendix 1, while the research instruments are included in Appendix 2.

2. Widening participation in learning

It is contended that the making of finer men and women is the urgent need of the moment, and that this can be achieved by establishing a settlement in each unit of population, and making it the centre of a great local effort for the education of adults...In the guest-rooms may be accommodated people of the town whom you desire to educate intensively over a week-end.

(Arnold Freeman, *Education through Settlements*, 1919).

The Government is committed not only to increasing the amount of adult learning, but also to ensuring that a wider and more diverse population takes part. Policies, programmes and provision need to tackle both the attitudes and the practical obstacles that discourage participation. Work is in place:

- ◆ to simplify the funding system and give targeted help to individuals;
- ◆ to provide information, advice and guidance to help people make the right choices;
- ◆ to make learning more convenient and accessible in time and place;
- ◆ to offer learning online;
- ◆ to take learning out to communities; and
- ◆ to extend workplace learning to all employees.

Education of the type provided by the 26 short-term residential colleges (NIACE, 1999) could, in principle, contribute to this co-ordinated effort to widen participation. This review examines whether the literature contains relevant lessons that could inform the shape of such a contribution. The review summarises what is known about adult participation in learning, and about adults' attitudes to learning, focusing on obstacles to participation and on the attitudes of non-learners.

There is one further important point concerning the review's scope. The ARCA projects all offer short residential courses. In the past it has been true that, in the words of the Russell Report on Adult Education (DES, 1973), 'the differences between [long term and short term residential colleges] amount to much more than the duration of the courses: they have different objectives, attract different types of learners, and are staffed and equipped in different ways.' However, the increasing flexibility of provision in recent decades has eroded the distinction: for example, many of the eight long-term colleges now offer short residential courses, often tailored to the needs of the college's local community. Further, much of the literature does not distinguish between long-term and short-term provision. Therefore this review covers material on both long-term and short-term provision, on the assumption that many of the points covered are relevant to both.

At the local level, there are 54 FEFC-funded strategic partnerships focusing on widening participation, which collect and share information with local agencies; and FE Colleges generally exhibit good practice by comparing their recruitment profile with local demographic data (FEFC, 2000). However, the FEFC notes ‘most colleges fail to set targets and develop strategies to improve achievement rates among under-represented groups.’ The notion of widening participation therefore inevitably leads to the question of target groups.

2.1 Target groups for widening participation

There is no general consensus among policymakers on an exact listing of ‘hard-to-reach’ groups. The 1990s saw a number of attempts at a definition. The report of the FEFC Widening Participation Committee (Kennedy, 1996) identifies these target groups for widening participation:

- ◆ older workers;
- ◆ unskilled/semi-skilled socio-economic groups;
- ◆ those with poor basic skills; and
- ◆ those with low or no qualifications.

Kennedy also reports lower qualification levels among women and some ethnic minorities, while noting that current *participation* does not show major differences, and comments that FEFC statistics show that low income is associated with poor retention and low achievement on courses.

The groups identified in the first NAGCELL report (Fryer, 1997b) are:

- ◆ younger people;
- ◆ older people;
- ◆ ex-offenders;
- ◆ minority ethnic and linguistic communities; and
- ◆ those with learning difficulties.

Widening participation concerns not only an individual’s initial decision to take part in learning, but also retention, progression and achievement. According to the FEFC (1997), in a report that addresses uneven completion and achievement rates as well as participation as such, key target groups in this respect are:

- ◆ those in receipt of benefits, who have higher withdrawal and lower achievement rates;

- ◆ those on literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses, who have higher withdrawal rates; and
- ◆ some ethnic minority groups having higher withdrawal rates and others having lower achievement rates.

A further report by the FEFC (2000) identifies the following adult groups as having low levels of participation:

- ◆ ex-offenders and probation clients
- ◆ lone parents
- ◆ those unemployed long-term
- ◆ those working in SMEs
- ◆ those with low levels of literacy and numeracy
- ◆ some ethnic minority groups
- ◆ refugees and asylum seekers
- ◆ travellers
- ◆ those recovering from mental illness
- ◆ people with disabilities
- ◆ those with severe learning difficulties
- ◆ those with drug or alcohol dependency, or recovering
- ◆ those with emotional or behavioural difficulties

Individuals participating in the courses may belong to more than one group under-represented in adult learning. For example, someone taking a course for older people might also belong to the semi-skilled/unskilled socio-economic group. The same applies to non-learners: indeed, for many, their non-participation is an outcome of multiple deprivation – in effect, social exclusion. Further, a group that could on casual inspection appear homogeneous may in fact be diverse. McGivney (2000) warns ‘target groups should not be too broad ... ‘unemployed men’ as a category can include people who differ widely in age, experience, educational and occupational background.’

For some target groups, specific aspects of residentiality are particularly helpful and provide opportunities for tailored, purpose-designed provision. For example, Sutcliffe and Jacobsen (1998) identify physical access and transport as key barriers for those with learning difficulties, so residential provision seems very suitable. There have been successful instances of such provision; for example, a residential summer programme where people with and without learning difficulties took part in

debates, lectures, readings, and social activities such as guided walks and dances (Percy and Sutcliffe, 1992).

2.2 Participation in adult learning

There is considerable variation between the lists of target groups developed by a number of policy and advisory bodies and cited above. Statistical evidence from survey and administrative data gives a more objective picture of groups under-represented in adult learning.

Sources of information on adult participation in learning differ by reference period and by the defined scope of 'learning'. For example, a snapshot of current participation can be taken, or alternatively surveys can ask about all learning over an extended period such as three years. 'Learning' can be defined as formal taught provision only, but can also include self-directed and informal learning. However, a broadly consistent story of polarisation emerges. As the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee (1999) points out, 'a side-effect of the substantial improvement in participation during the last two decades has been to widen the gap between the educational "haves" and the "have-nots".'

The National Adult Learning Survey (Beinart and Smith, 1998) found that individuals particularly unlikely to have undertaken learning over a three-year period are:

- ◆ those aged fifty or over;
- ◆ those looking after the home or family, the retired, and those unable to work because of long-term sickness; and
- ◆ those leaving school aged 16 or younger and those leaving school without qualifications.

Learners tend to be younger people; those in non-manual occupations; those who stayed in full-time continuous education longer; and those who left with higher qualifications. Key points from NALS include the following:

- ◆ Nearly three quarters of adults have participated in some learning during the last three years (78 per cent of men and 70 per cent of women).
- ◆ Learners tend to be significantly younger than non-learners. Eight in ten under 40 years of age have participated in learning compared to six in ten of those aged over 50.
- ◆ Learners are more likely to be in paid work than non-learners (77 per cent compared with 39 per cent). Over nine in ten who work in

managerial/professional occupations have participated in learning, compared to two thirds of those working as plant/machine operatives and nearly three quarters of those in craft and related occupations.

- ◆ 86 per cent of those who left full-time continuous education with academic qualifications were learners, compared to 55 per cent of those without such qualifications.

Enrolments in LEA adult education – a form of provision fairly close in character to that which the short-term residential colleges offer – exhibit the following participation characteristics (DfEE, 2000):

- ◆ 68 per cent of enrolments in England are on courses not leading to a formal qualification: e.g. painting, writers' workshops etc.;
- ◆ a quarter of those enrolled are aged 60 or over;
- ◆ more than 70 per cent of enrolments are female;
- ◆ the enrolment rate for individual LEAs varies from under 1 per cent to over 6 per cent of the adult population;
- ◆ enrolments are split equally between daytime (50 per cent) and evening/distance learning (50 per cent);
- ◆ on a whole year basis, about 1.6 million students take part.

People aged 60 or over account for a quarter of LEA adult education enrolments, but form a much smaller proportion (around 6 per cent) of overall participation as measured by collating the administrative data on the full range of learning routes such as FE, HE and Government Supported Training.

McGivney (1997) makes a general point that 'adults who have engaged in learning are always far more likely to continue than those who have not. Taken together the factors that influence participation suggest that participation in post-compulsory learning is a continuing rather than a remedial or catching-up activity.' She summarises the determinants of participation as:

- ◆ length of schooling;
- ◆ educational attainment;
- ◆ current socio-economic circumstances;
- ◆ cultural factors: work, social and family environment;
- ◆ perception of the value of education;
- ◆ awareness of educational needs;
- ◆ familiarity with educational opportunities and processes;
- ◆ possession of time and autonomy;

- ◆ possession of basic, social and communication skills;
- ◆ absence of constraints such as lack of money, transport and childcare.

Patterns of individual participation are complex, and longitudinal evidence suggests that both retention and outreach are important (La Valle and Finch, 1999). On *retention*: even a relatively short 'learning break' might have a negative influence on future learning behaviour: only 31 per cent of former (1997) learners who had not done any learning in the past 18 months (i.e. at the *Pathways in Adult Learning* interview in late 98/early 99) thought they might be doing some learning in the next two to three years. On *outreach* to new learners: over the 18 months period between NALS 97 and the PAL follow-up interview, 28 per cent of those classed as non-learners had become learners, suggesting that even those out of learning for a long time are not an homogeneous hard-to-reach group.

2.3 Attitudes of learners and non-learners

Participation in adult learning is determined not only by supply (potentially including an expanded residential sector), but also by demand or the lack of it. Non-learners are more likely than learners to cite, as obstacles to learning, a general lack of interest; being too old; preferring to do other things in their free time; not having time because of their family; and health problems.

- ◆ 'I couldn't wait to leave full-time education': a third of learners but nearly half of non-learners agreed with this statement (Park, 1994).
- ◆ Non-learners (47 per cent) were more likely to say they preferred to spend their free time doing things other than learning (36 per cent of learners) and that they lacked time to participate in learning due to family commitments (32 per cent of non-learners and 25 per cent of learners) (Beinart and Smith, 1998).
- ◆ 28 per cent of long term non-learners felt too old to learn (8 per cent of learners) and 18 per cent said health problems prevented them participating (8 per cent of learners) (La Valle and Finch, 1999).
- ◆ 22 per cent of long-term non-learners felt they might not keep up with others compared to 10 per cent of learners (La Valle and Finch, 1999).
- ◆ McGivney (cited by FEDA, 1999) points out that surveys may under-estimate the extent of sheer lack of interest in learning, because education is seen as a worthy pursuit and interviewees prefer to suggest that they are too busy or the college is too far away, rather than admit that they are not interested.
- ◆ Older respondents (50 years and above) tend to lack confidence and to be restricted by health problems. A quarter of those aged over 50 years said that

age was an obstacle to participating in learning and a tenth similarly cited health problems (Beinart and Smith, 1998).

- ◆ Half of people aged over 45 years old wished they had stayed in full-time education longer than they did (49 per cent compared with 40 per cent of others) (Tremlett, Park and Dundon-Smith, 1995).
- ◆ Older people lose confidence, find it harder to remember and retain information, and feel out of place amongst younger people (Taylor and Spencer, 1994).
- ◆ Those in paid work (41 per cent) are too busy with work to spend time learning (less than a tenth for other groups); those unemployed (31 per cent) are more likely to say they don't have the qualifications needed to get on most courses (a fifth of the other groups); a quarter of those who are retired feel too old to learn (a tenth of those in paid work); and half of those who are looking after a family feel 'there is not enough information about learning' (Beinart and Smith, 1998).
- ◆ Members of ethnic minorities are much more likely than others to be keen on learning. A quarter (compared to 40 per cent of those of white ethnic origin) said 'I prefer to spend my free time doing things other than learning'. Only 11 per cent (compared to 18 per cent of whites) say they did not enjoy learning at school. However, ethnic minorities face more severe obstacles: 30 per cent have problems with fees compared with 21 per cent of those of white origin. They are more likely to feel they know very little about local learning opportunities (27 per cent ethnic minority, 20 per cent white); and are more likely (23 per cent) to cite not having the qualifications needed to get on most courses, than whites (15 per cent) (Beinart and Smith, 1998).
- ◆ Nearly half of respondents with basic skills problems compared to just over a quarter of people without problems believe they do not have the necessary motivation to learn on their own at home (Tremlett, Park and Dundon-Smith, 1995).

The second report of the NAGCELL (Fryer, 1999) usefully summarised the barriers to adult learning as: a preference to make other use of free time; pressures on time at home and at work; location; finance; domestic and caring responsibilities; lack of information; absence of opportunity; a belief that learning has little to offer; and unhappy memories of school.

In one local area, adults were classified according to survey results as below in Table 1 (IFF, 1996).

Table 1 Classification of adult learners

	per cent
Self-motivated learners	17
Learning enthusiasts, unaware of local opportunities	19
Unskilled and under-confident	10
'No problem with learning, but why bother'	25
Switched off	27

The above evidence provides a detailed picture of the context in which any expansion of short-term adult residential education would operate; suggests groups that might be targeted on the basis of their current under-representation in adult learning; and outlines the practical and attitudinal barriers that need to be overcome. We now turn to the evidence on what, in theory and practice, residential learning has to offer to these excluded groups.

3. The role of residential education

The White Paper *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE, 1999) commits the Government to a National Learning Target for 2002 of a 7 per cent reduction in non-learners. To attract and retain those not currently participating, learning opportunities will need to be of high quality, relevant, accessible and convenient. The White Paper notes that many adults wish to learn in informal, self-directed and flexible ways, and the first NAGCELL report (Fryer, 1997b) emphasised the home, the community and the workplace as places of learning. For short-term residential education to contribute effectively in this context, flexibility and partnership would need to be the watchwords; we amplify this point in the later section on good practice.

This second part of the literature review addresses the potential of adult residential education to widen participation; summarises the elements of good practice; gives an account of the available evaluation evidence; and outlines some possible strands of further evaluation work.

3.1 The residential experience

The Educational Settlements Association (1943) gives as good a justification as any source, of residential as distinct from evening study: ‘The student comes often to his class tired in body and mind after a strenuous day’s work; and unless the teacher is engaged full time in adult education work...he too suffers from the same handicap. Any of a number of accidents – illness, pressure of domestic duties, overtime, public engagements, bad weather, or even a breakdown in a transport service – may prevent attendance, and thus break the continuity of the course, and deprive the student of a part of the benefit.’ The ESA summarises the benefits as follows:

- ◆ Absence of distraction e.g. work and domestic pressures;
- ◆ Intensiveness and rapid progress, compared to ‘education by teaspoonfuls’ at evening classes;
- ◆ Benefits of studying in community, including meeting people from contrasting backgrounds;
- ◆ Recuperative effects on participants.

Lieven and Jackson (1992) expand upon the theme of ‘intensiveness’. Because of the combination of academic learning and living together, ‘debate, dialogue and exchange lead to thorough and engaged learning. They challenge assumptions forcibly. Because the challenge continues outside the classroom new ideas are not easily thrust aside by previous patterns of thought or the habits of familiar surroundings.’

A Principal of a short-term residential college (Wilkinson, 1997) cites adult education's compensatory role in providing a second chance, and in rebuilding confidence and self-worth; the help it gives to older learners to preserve active citizenship, independence and well-being; and its therapeutic role, providing a psychological lifeline and lightening GPs' workloads.

Faithfull (1992) cites Arnold Toynbee in *A Study of History*: 'human creativity seems to depend on...a going apart and, for the time being, a release from, social toils and trammels; then, in a second phase, a return to the original social context but with a new vision of its problems and their solution.'

Fryer (1997a) sums up the benefits of residential provision as:

- ◆ opportunity for focused and undistracted study;
- ◆ likelihood of accelerated learning;
- ◆ access to specialist facilities and expert learning support;
- ◆ the chance to engage in team-building and develop other essential social skills;
- ◆ a combination of formal and informal learning.

Bron (1992) traces the origins of adult residential education in modern Europe to the *folkehojskole* (folk high school) established first in Denmark and thereafter in Sweden, Norway and Finland during the mid-nineteenth century. 'Enlightenment for citizenship' was a very important theme in the folk high schools from the beginning. Emotional as well as intellectual goals were important, and the idea of community or residentiality was central: 'one should not only live under the same roof and learn together, but run a household together – cook meals, work in the garden or at the farm which the school owned.'

Bron suggests a theoretical division into four dimensions of environment in residential provision, whilst acknowledging that they are often impossible to distinguish:

- ◆ A physical environment, i.e. a boarding house in which all students and some or all staff live together and share sport and leisure facilities;
- ◆ A social environment – socialising students into norms – the staff and students are a community with responsibilities and rights;
- ◆ A socio-psychological environment where group dynamics occur; co-operation; conflict handling; learning democracy on the spot and thus partaking in civic learning;

- ◆ An educational environment including discussion, study circles etc.; participants are responsible for their own learning (which equates to ‘learning how to learn’ as a key skill).

Faithfull (1992) offers a similar framework:

- ◆ food-sharing;
- ◆ habitat-sharing;
- ◆ task-sharing;
- ◆ ideas-sharing;
- ◆ ‘Minds in Community’.

3.2 Purposes, motivations and goals

The purposes of adult residential education, as articulated by providers, may differ from the motivations and goals of those participating in such provision. Each is therefore explored in turn below.

Purposes of residential education

Education for democracy, citizenship and national or social renewal is a recurring theme in the literature, especially during the earlier decades of the colleges’ existence. The Educational Settlements Association (1943) cites Sir Richard Livingstone on the Danish People’s High Schools: ‘Before they were established, Denmark was a poverty-stricken country lacking in energy or enterprise...its transformation into one of the most progressive and prosperous democracies of Europe was largely the work of the education given in these schools.’ Lieven (1991) traces the foundation of the British residential colleges to the extension of the electoral franchise and the development of an educated working class leadership. Northern College (HMI, 1982) and Ruskin (Pollins, 1984) remain explicitly connected with the labour movement.

A European Parliament Committee report (1978) re-invents this idea of political participation in European terms: ‘residential adult education, whilst forming only one element of the EC’s education policy, can nevertheless play its part in strengthening confidence in the Community.’ The Committee proposed a small-scale programme of pilots ‘with a European accent’ that would involve trans-national residence building on the experience of ‘Europe High Schools’ in Denmark and ‘Europe Houses’ in a number of EU member states, where the curricula have included topics such as European institutions and integration. Newbattle Abbey College offers two courses to long-term students: European Studies, and Scottish

Studies. There is a long tradition of internationalism in adult residential education. Hake (1996, 1998) traces the cross-cultural fertilisation between the Scandinavian *folkebojskole* movement and residential education in other Western European countries including England; and gives an account of the influence of the Quaker study centre at Woodbrooke, Birmingham on residential education in the Netherlands between the wars, and on the foundation of an International Peoples' College in Denmark in the 1920s.

Religious enthusiasm was also present as a driving force in the foundation of some residential colleges. According to Hake (1998), the founders of the two earliest educational settlements, Fircroft College and Woodbrooke, believed that adult education was fundamentally a spiritual endeavour and that it could only be conducted in an atmosphere of fellowship in a residential setting. Religious purpose remains today at, for example, Plater College (Catholic) and Woodbrooke (Quaker), although admission to these institutions is not limited to the adherents of the faiths or denominations concerned.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the purposes of residential colleges shifted towards enabling working class students lacking traditional entry qualifications to enter higher education. In the 1980s, part-time access courses in FE colleges largely took over this HE entry function (Lieven, 1987). This gave rise to arguments that the residential colleges were becoming redundant or expensive (Wojtas, 1988) and stimulated them to seek new purposes and roles. Lieven says that the former DES took an active and largely helpful role at this stage, encouraging the provision of short courses and recommending a focus on those at greatest risk of exclusion, 'rather than settling for assisting individuals who can enter the education system by other routes.'

College purposes now often have synergy with the purposes of local groups. Lieven and Jackson (1992) note that the long-term residential colleges have in recent decades offered short courses: tailored to purpose, not merely cut-down versions of the long-term offer. Mostly these short courses connect with locally organised networks: neighbourhood associations based in community centres, mother and toddler groups, and pensioners. They also claim that 'the colleges have succeeded in connecting with Black and Asian community groups and recognising their particular needs for particular approaches.'

Leighton (1992) traces a long-term trend towards a vocational and utilitarian emphasis in Government policy, which he interprets as leading to an increasing threat to liberal adult education. He notes that the solutions adopted by colleges (to respond to the funding reductions brought about by this allegedly hostile climate) have led to diversification. Management and foreign language courses are offered to industry and commerce, and the colleges increasingly operate on a full cost-recovery or nil-net-budget basis.

Lieven (1988a) points out that much of the questioning of residential provision is made in bad faith. For example, its value is simply assumed for management training, but challenged where liberal adult education is concerned. Further, the colleges are obliged to take on paying customers in order to operate on a full-cost-recovery basis, but are then criticised for failure to widen participation; by contrast, widening participation is recognised as a core purpose in the non-residential FE funding system.

Great variation of purpose is possible, depending on current social and economic circumstances and reactions to them. For example, Hake (1997) suggests that the development of residential education in the Netherlands between the wars was dominated by the concern of government with the problems of mass unemployment, rather than any sense of pedagogical idealism.

Motivations, attitudes and goals of residential students

Students' motivation to take part in adult residential education shows a long-term shift of emphasis away from collective or societal goals, towards individual advancement. Speak (1949) identifies: '...[before 1919] a belief that such education would be valuable to themselves, their friends, their class and the movements of which they were members'. As in *folkehojskole* education, students returned to their original communities, often to work in Trade Unions, Co-operative societies, or adult education itself. But by 1939 most were looking for career progression, with about 50 per cent going on to university. The tension between collective and individual aspirations surfaced during the 1970s in the form of controversies within the residential education movement on what collectivists described as 'class seduction'. Conversely there was conflict over freedom of speech, perceived by some to be under threat from dogmatic collectivism. A strong communal strand remains, often in the form of links with local organisations. Attending as a group can help to break down individuals' fears and inhibitions about taking part in learning (Northern College, 2000).

Iphofen (1996) concludes that most commentators see ‘knowledge pursued for its own sake’ as the most common motive for residential students, with vocational reasons always a close second. He cites a survey undertaken in the early 1960s. Of 207 Ruskin College students questioned, 90 per cent were taking part to satisfy intellectual/cultural ambitions, while 38 per cent saw vocational motives as equally important. According to a residential college principal interviewed by Utley (1990) most students feel the need to make up for lost opportunities, while ‘others simply want to be able to help children with school work or understand the economy’.

3.3 Good practice and added value in residential provision

The question of whether adult residential provision is effective in widening participation can be broken down into elements of good practice in widening participation and the value added by residential provision. Each is explored in turn below.

Elements of good practice

Where residential provision has a goal of widening participation, it is important to look at the characteristics of the students who have enrolled. This may seem an obvious point, but it is a familiar process in adult education that people who apply are those who have discovered the value and attractiveness of such learning through having *already* had the opportunity of further and higher education (Jackson, 1989). Therefore, the participation *per se* of members of under-represented groups is a measure of success. The *Times Higher Education Supplement* (29th January 1988) reported on the demographic composition of students on an innovative course, established on the suggestion of the DES to harness adult residential education as an integral part of a wider pattern of provision. The scheme worked as a three-way partnership with Ruskin College providing residential weekends, the Workers’ Education Association offering tutorial support, and the Open University contributing its expertise in distance learning. In this initiative, 60 per cent of students came from unskilled or semi-skilled occupational backgrounds, and 56 per cent entered the programme with no prior qualifications at all.

Chronnell (1990) reports a relatively high proportion of black students (17 per cent) at Hillcroft College, a long-term residential college for women. A further indicator of success in widening participation is noted: some 83 per cent of Hillcroft students were proceeding to university courses or to professional training courses in social work. Progression generally is an important performance indicator. However,

wherever it is mentioned in the literature, commentators are careful to emphasise that the concern with progression should not lessen the value placed on the intrinsic benefits of residential education.

Iphofen (1996) notes the pressures to reduce unit costs, increase student throughput and widen participation. He is less negative than Leighton (1992) about the pressures, and recognises the need to justify residential provision: 'Developments made in Return to Learn, Access to Higher Education courses...and in the establishment of Credit Accumulation and Transfer and National Vocational Qualifications are all stimulating a re-assessment of the costs and benefits of the residential experience.'

Jackson (1989) mentions one way of ensuring value for money: 'as far as possible, residential adult education at Northern College should be part of a learning programme before and after the residential period. This was...the way to ensure that most value could be obtained from an expensive resource.' Northern College has used a number of approaches to achieve integrated learning programmes of this type, collaborating with a range of partners:

- ◆ organising courses for voluntary organisations and community groups, some with national structures and others entirely local;
- ◆ arranging courses as an integral part of the curriculum in other adult education institutions;
- ◆ joint work with outreach staff on community adult education programmes, based in local authority services or voluntary organisations; and
- ◆ college staff themselves playing a primary role in building community groups, for example the Dearne Valley Project working with long-term unemployed people in a declining mining area.

The FEFC Inspectorate (2000) cites elements of good practice in widening participation, covering a range of FE provision including residential colleges. Innovative approaches reported by FEFC at the level of specific courses include:

- ◆ 'mezzanine' courses at points between the four main levels, to enhance confidence;
- ◆ partnership between colleges and other agencies such as LEAs and the Workers' Educational Association, for non-Schedule 2 provision;
- ◆ customised provision for those with few or no qualifications: examples include courses for residential care workers and for employees in SMEs, and family literacy courses;

- ◆ entry level courses for those with poor basic skills;
- ◆ and use of non-standard locations, such as a learning centre in a supermarket; provision aimed at groups on low incomes, e.g. homeless people, and those in deprived neighbourhoods pursuing community development.

Elements of successful practice in widening participation at the level of overall organisation and curriculum design, which could be used as benchmarks for evaluating residential provision, include, according to the FEFC (2000):

- ◆ a systematic college-wide approach with a designated senior manager, bringing the participation agenda in from the margin to the mainstream, and avoiding dependence on individual staff enthusiasm;
- ◆ the use of role models: ‘in an adult residential college, former students came to talk about their own fears and lack of confidence when they started the course, how they overcame these and how the course helped them to get their current job or get accepted on a higher-level course’;
- ◆ an intensive focus on key skills: FEFC cites the example of an adult residential college, where personal tutors are closely involved in the successful five-week foundation period on the Access to HE programme. They help students to assess their own key skills and to strengthen study skills such as learning effectively with others, note taking, essay writing, interpreting graphs and tables etc. The balance is early and at critical times e.g. first assignment and applying for progression opportunities;
- ◆ agreeing ground rules for residential life and learning: e.g. in one residential college these are: confidentiality, not judging, listening, respecting difference, respecting equal opportunities, and punctual attendance.

An interesting aspect of practice in the Danish folk high schools, uncontentious in Denmark but unfamiliar in the UK, is that teaching should emphasise the spoken word at the expense of book learning. Lieven (1988b) comments that ‘the feeling that books tend to emphasise individualised learning and make learning into an isolating experience, goes very deep.’ The folk high school libraries often consist of only a few shelves.

Evaluation of residential education and measures of added value

Statements of the value of residential adult education are on the whole broad and philosophical. Even where based on experience, they tend to be general assertions rather than evidence-based arguments. The majority of writers on the subject are directly involved in provision, and there has been little independent evaluation.

Some advocates are defensive in tone and hostile to external measurement of learning achievement. For example, Hutchinson and Hutchinson (1990) regard exit qualifications as ‘arbitrary outside monitoring’ that compromises the ‘rights of mature students to be served in terms of their own needs.’ However, many practitioners who have contributed to the literature have acknowledged that the residential colleges need, in the words of Iphofen (1996) ‘to demonstrate precisely in what their added value inheres if they are to survive.’

Bron (1992) reports a study of Finnish folk high schools in which 640 residential students were asked at the beginning and end of their studies about the effects of the residential environment on the educational process. The 64 teachers also questioned were more positive about the residential aspect than were the students; 60 per cent of teachers said residentiality was ‘of great importance as a help in learning’, while fewer than 20 per cent of students said so. Among teachers, positive views were stronger in relation to creating a good climate for study and enabling better interaction between students and teachers than concerning cognitive learning (only one third thought this helped in the assimilation of knowledge and skills).

The *Choosing to Learn* survey, published in 1987 and cited by Lieven (1989) provides evidence on student satisfaction with residential education, by type of provision. Of those on courses leading to qualifications, 44 per cent at residential colleges were very satisfied with course content, compared with 46 per cent in distance learning, 36 per cent at university and 24 per cent in Advanced Further Education (AFE). In terms of teaching methods and standards, amount of contact and teacher commitment, the residential colleges came out significantly ahead of other routes: for example, 43 per cent at residential colleges considered the teaching methods to be very satisfactory, compared with 23 per cent at university and 15 per cent in AFE. Lieven ascribes these findings largely to the ‘small is beautiful’ factor – the largest of the eight long-term residential colleges has fewer than 200 places – and uses this argument to counter the criticism that small college size limits student opportunities and leads to high unit costs. Other than *Choosing to Learn* there is little in the literature by way of evidence-based comparison between residential education and other routes; there are no evaluation studies using comparator groups.

Iphofen (1996) cites a very small follow-up study, tracking Newbattle Abbey College students from their attendance at the college in 1975, to 1983. 10 out of 22 responded at the second stage, 8/10 reporting the same motives as they had cited earlier, and 6/10 reporting that the original goals had been achieved. The absence

of significant longitudinal work limits what can be said about impact; however, this is a problem common to evaluation of most adult learning outside higher education.

Lieven (1988a) acknowledges that whether or not the world's view of residential learning is fair, its supporters need to assemble a solid set of arguments. He does not assemble evidence as such, but does elaborate a useful framework of elements that could be tested in evaluation:

- ◆ the intensity of the learning experience;
- ◆ the facility to stick with a discussion until the point is resolved;
- ◆ the building of 'affective skills', mainly self-confidence;
- ◆ reduction of dropout through group cohesion and mutual support;
- ◆ the facility to enable practitioners to set up effective networks and collaboration (see also Hughes, 1988);
- ◆ strong potential for staff training and reflection on practice;
- ◆ potential for intensive short bursts within mainly non-residential courses.

Possible starting points for evaluation of residential adult education can be found in general statements and findings on adult learning. For example, evaluation could focus on the work of residential colleges with older learners (the target group for a high proportion of the courses in the current ARCA project) and the assertion of associated health benefits. Dench and Regan (2000) researched the benefits of learning for people aged over 50. Eighty per cent of learners reported a positive impact of learning on at least one of the following areas:

- ◆ their enjoyment of life;
- ◆ their self-confidence;
- ◆ how they felt about themselves;
- ◆ satisfaction with other areas of their life;
- ◆ their ability to cope with everyday life.

An improvement in their ability to stand up and be heard and/or their willingness to take responsibility was reported by 42 per cent of learners, while 28 per cent reported an increase in their involvement in social, voluntary or community activities. Findings such as these (or analogous findings for other groups), derived from analysis of adult learning in general, could point to a framework for evaluation of the particular contribution of residential education. One way forward is to develop evaluation frameworks on the basis of more general analysis of the adult learning scene, to enable more rigorous comparability.

4. Methodology

The residential colleges offer learning opportunities of a character consistent in principle with current policy goals. The literature contains some useful pointers to good practice. Commentators assert that residential provision has successfully attracted members of groups under-represented in lifelong learning; can overcome at least some of the barriers to adult learning, such as domestic pressures; and is effective in securing student retention and progression, especially where the residential college forms networks with local agencies and exploits fully the potential of group learning. The rather sparse literature on evaluation does not contradict these assertions, but neither does it offer rigorous supporting evidence.

In order to evaluate the ARCA initiative and to report on the part that ARCA residential provision might play in the Department's widening participation agenda to inform Learning and Skills Council planning, the focus of the evaluation was agreed with the DfEE Steering Group, tools were developed for individual evaluation and a protocol was devised for case studies. Each of these aspects is elaborated below.

4.1 Focus of the evaluation

The evaluation strategy proposed in response to the invitation to tender was operationalised and the project 'scoped' through interaction between representatives of DfEE, the ARCA team and the ERA evaluators. It was agreed with the project Steering Group that the evaluation would address the following areas:

- ◆ *Target numbers* - have the targets defined for each phase of each project (a total of 535 hard-to-reach learners participating) been achieved? What explains any departure from the target numbers in each project?
- ◆ *Access* - what were the strategic objectives in targeting particular individuals and groups in terms of increasing social inclusion? How have individuals/groups been accessed? Details of outreach work - how contacts developed - why approached as potential provider of groups/ individuals. To what extent are the approaches in the ARCA initiative innovative, representing methods not used before by the colleges?
- ◆ *Course provision* - which existing courses were successful in attracting new non-learners in the individuals project? How were the courses in the group projects designed and how were the objectives established? Were innovative teaching methods developed for delivering the courses in order to respond to the needs of the target audience? Could the tailored course be offered to a wider, fee-paying, client group?

- ◆ *Costs* - in both the individual and group projects, what is the breakdown of expenditure between living costs and tuition costs? What other costs are involved, such as support and outreach work? How are the specially designed group courses financed (partner contributions, DfEE funding for the initiative, etc)? Could the group course be self-financing?
- ◆ *Individuals* - what are the characteristics of participants involved in both the individual and group projects in terms of social class (most recent occupation or income bracket), gender, ethnic origin, age, previous educational attainment and prior involvement in community activities? What are the learning objectives and motives for participation?
- ◆ *Residential element* - what is the value added of residential provision? Could the individuals and groups have accessed similar provision in a non-residential situation? Are the costs of residential provision justified in relation to the benefits for the particular individuals and groups concerned?
- ◆ *Strategic impact* - have the strategic objectives been achieved? How far did the courses, in both projects, meet participants' stated learning objectives? Has the strategy of targeting particular individuals and groups demonstrably contributed to increased social inclusion? How has this been assessed? Were individual or group projects most successful in these terms?
- ◆ *Individual outcomes* - what effect has accessing the learning opportunity had upon the individuals and groups concerned? In addition to learning outcomes in terms of *educational* achievement, broader issues will be considered such as anticipated improvement in *health*, and *social* outcomes like increased confidence or involvement in community activities.
- ◆ *Progression* - what, if any, further learning opportunities have individuals undertaken, or plan to undertake following participation in the ARCA initiative? What advice and guidance did they receive? Has the learning experience affected participants' behaviour, such as use of new technologies or adoption of life style changes?
- ◆ *Additionality* - would the individuals or groups have participated in learning in the absence of the ARCA initiative? Does the initiative represent value for money in terms of the outcomes? Some attempt will be made to assess additionality, deadweight and substitution effects in relation to strategic and individual outcomes, including progression. (Would the individual have made behavioural changes in the absence of participating in the course?)
- ◆ *Process issues* - what role has ARCA played in implementing the two projects and supporting the work of the colleges? Could the projects have been initiated without ARCA coordination?

Eldwick Research Associates worked closely with the ARCA team to evaluate the effectiveness of the project and its potential role in widening participation. The evaluation contained three distinct phases:

- ◆ development of evaluation instruments;
- ◆ data collection;
- ◆ analysis and reporting.

Data for the project were to be collected in two stages, the first stage involving the utilisation of evaluation forms, which were to be completed by all students participating in the project and the second stage involving case studies of selected programmes to provide an in-depth evaluation and analysis of specific courses.

4.2 Individual evaluation

During the first part of the development phase the ARCA team proposed draft research evaluation instruments. The evaluation team considerably modified these research instruments in order to elicit more detailed and specific responses in a number of key areas, some of which were identified in scoping the project (see focus above), whilst others arose from a preliminary literature review. The objective of the redesigned research instruments was to achieve the most robust evaluation possible. The new evaluation forms were then sent to ARCA for comment and modification. The final revised evaluation forms are included in Appendix 2 to this report. All students participating in projects under the ARCA initiative were expected to complete the evaluation forms on an individual basis.

Design of evaluation instruments

The ERA team designed two evaluation forms for completion by all learners involved in the ARCA projects. The first evaluation form EF1 was to be completed by course participants prior to their arrival on the programme. The form begins with basic factual questions (1 – 8) concerning the individual respondents' personal and employment circumstances, since these are the defining characteristics of the sample. The questions explore the age, ethnicity and social class of respondents, as well as identifying whether learners are claiming benefit, which benefits they are claiming and whether they suffer from any disability.

One of the key areas to explore in the evaluation is the effect that re-entering education has had on an individual's life and whether it will encourage them to become more active in the community; it is important, therefore, to establish

whether course participants have been previously active in this role (question 9). Learners in the project should not have been recently involved in education, which was established from question 10 and explored further (questions 11-12) to determine what was the last form of training or education undertaken and whether this was a positive or negative experience for the individual.

The remainder of the questions (13 – 16) in Form EF1 are mainly open-ended in nature, designed to explore what learners were expecting to gain from the course in terms of personal benefits, learning benefits and social benefits. Participants were also asked what they anticipated they would be doing after they completed the programme.

The second evaluation form (EF2) was to be completed at the end of the course and explores issues raised in the pre-course evaluation form as well as new areas directly related to the programme. Participants were questioned about the course in some detail, exploring whether they had understood what the course is about (question 1), and whether they had acquired new knowledge and understanding (questions 2 and 20). Learners were also asked whether they thought teaching methods were effective (questions 3 – 6) and to provide an evaluation of the adequacy of the programme (questions 7 – 11).

The effectiveness of residential provision is another important aspect of the evaluation and learners were encouraged to give their views on this in questions 12, 13, and 15 – 17. Form EF2 was also designed to explore whether expectations of benefits from the course outlined in EF1 (questions 13 –15) had been fulfilled (EF2, question 14). Question 18 on Form EF2 explores in greater detail students' future plans after finishing the programme. This can also be mapped against question 16 on Form EF1 to see whether the programme had altered learners' intentions. The role of advice and guidance is assessed in question 19.

Analysis and reporting

Originally it was intended to analyse and evaluate each phase of the project individually, but this proved impossible for three reasons: the project did not start as early as anticipated; the colleges initially experienced difficulty in recruiting students on an individual basis; and subsequently the two phases of the project were merged into one. The phasing of the projects appears to have been for financial convenience, rather than for conceptual or analytical reasons and in our view this change had no effect on the evaluation.

Also, it is not clear what were the assumed differences between those students recruited as group learners and those recruited as individual learners. Recruits to group projects had a common defining characteristic, for example those learners on the *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* all suffered from learning difficulties in varying degrees, but had not necessarily had any contact with one another prior to attending the programme. This was also the case with one of the *Better Government for Older People* programmes, which had recruited from two specific community groups (the London Irish Elders Forum and Hackney Pensioners Convention) and had also included individual learners local to the college. It could be said that the *Life Begins at 50* programme, which was categorised as a course for individual learners, had also recruited students who were a specific group because they were all aged over 50. Although this programme could be classified as existing college provision, it had only run once before and was not, therefore, a particularly well established programme, whereas at least three of the College E ICT group programmes were largely replications.

Understanding Watercolour provided a comprehensive understanding of watercolours for a group of older learners, but as the Watercolour week is central to the College F range of courses this should surely have been listed under existing provision. Also, three *Family Learning* programmes were run at two different colleges: one was designated a course for individuals and the other two were group programmes. There seemed to be no logical reason for this distinction. Recruitment details for the individuals' course did explain that it drew parents from several family learning schemes, but apparently so did the other family learning programmes. These students may have been working on different learning schemes but were all part of a wider group. *People, Wildlife and Tourism in Africa* was a programme provided for Hackney African Pensioners, and was specifically designed for this group, yet was programmed as an individual learner course.

4.3 Case studies

A case study approach was adopted to explore views of participants in greater depth and, most importantly, to examine the processes and interactions involved in the real-life context of selected ARCA projects. The reformulated evaluation forms were used as a basis for designing the research instruments for the case studies. These replicated the questions raised in the evaluation forms as well as enabling a more in depth analysis of certain issues. The interview schedules used for course

tutors and group project leaders and the focus group agenda are also included in Appendix 2 of this report.

The case study fieldwork involved in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews allowing tutors, project leaders and students the opportunity to extend their evaluation beyond the constraints of the evaluation forms. Evaluators attended taught sessions and chatted informally to students and tutors outside classes in order to establish rapport with respondents, which was necessary to elicit candid answers. Focus groups were also organised. Each case is a self-contained study, and it was intended that each case report would reach conclusions concerning the key issues to be evaluated within the specific programme context. Case reports were validated with the different colleges and corrected before being fully incorporated in the final evaluation analysis.

A list of 25 possible courses for case study was provided initially by ARCA. Sixteen of these courses were group projects involving 12-27 student participants. Six courses involved 1-3 individual learners and three courses involved 15 individual learners. Originally it was proposed to undertake six case studies, which were to be three each of phase 1 (individual) and phase 2 (group) projects. However, difficulties in recruiting individual learners and a delay in starting the project were instrumental in ARCA requesting the merging of the two phases of the project, so the distinction was not maintained. Three case studies were eventually selected from this list and a further two from the eight group projects, which came on stream later in the project. A full list of programmes in the project is outlined below.

Cases for study were selected with the objective of capturing the diversity of the ARCA initiative in terms of:

- ◆ different groups of socially excluded students;
- ◆ following different programmes;
- ◆ in a variety of geographical locations;
- ◆ spread over the life of the project.

The case studies utilise the information from the individual evaluations and supplement this with observation during attendance on the course by the evaluator and informal discussion with students. Interviews with the project leader and course tutor as well as a focus group discussion with student participants provide more structured and comparable information. The evaluation forms, interview schedules and focus group agenda were designed to facilitate triangulation or corroboration of

evidence. Thus the various evaluation instruments all had interlocking questions so the views of course tutors, project leaders and focus group members could be compared and contrasted.

The following key issues are explored in detail through the case studies:

- ◆ why do you offer this programme?
- ◆ where did you find out about the programme?
- ◆ why did you select this course for your group?
- ◆ how did individuals access the programme?
- ◆ what type of person attends the course?
- ◆ why do they attend?
- ◆ do they deliberately select a residential course?
- ◆ what is the difference between residential and non-residential provision?
- ◆ what is your opinion on the effectiveness of the course?
- ◆ what will learners do after the programme?

The case reports provide background details of each course studied, details of the students, an evaluation of the programme, detailed comments and opinions from the actors involved in constructing the programme, bringing the students into the college and from the groups formed during the programme through learning in the classroom and social interaction outside of this.

Five cases studies of project programmes were conducted. The following five courses were selected for detailed evaluation:

- ◆ *Life Begins at 50*, College K;
- ◆ *Reaching Out to Parents*, College C (renamed *Family Learning 2000*);
- ◆ *Better Government for older People*, College B;
- ◆ *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, College D;
- ◆ *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*, College E.

The case studies were drawn from programmes involving both group and individual learners. They accessed a variety of socially excluded groups with varied social and economic backgrounds, had a good geographical spread and focused on different areas of study.

5. The ARCA Initiative

This section outlines the nature of the ARCA initiative, describing the number of participants, their backgrounds and how they joined the courses provided by the ARCA initiative. The following sections therefore deal with the achieved participation, characteristics of participants and the background and access to the programmes.

5.1 Achieved participation

In the original ARCA proposal, the project was planned to run for one year, from April 2000 to April 2001 and to consist of two phases. In the event, there was a small overrun in the timing of programmes in both phases and a significant gap between the end of programmes and ARCA providing all the requisite financial information, so the evaluation was also delayed. The target numbers for the programme were outlined in terms of two distinct routes. To existing provision, 340 students were to be recruited in total over the duration of the project. In Phase 1, which was to run until June 2000, 136 students were anticipated, drawn from two specific groups: men over 25 years old and older women learners. In Phase 2, which was to run until April 2001, recruitment of the remaining 204 students was to be extended to encourage participation from learners who could be identified as belonging to ‘the majority of those categories included in the Kennedy Report.’ A further 195 participants were to be recruited over the length of the project to specifically designed provision. The learners were to be drawn from ‘particular socially excluded groups, isolated individuals, older people, those from within designated health action zones, from inner city communities and adults with learning difficulties and disabilities.’ It was intended that 75 learners would have been involved through this route by the end of Phase 1 and a further 120 participants by the end of the project. Therefore, overall the target number of enrolments for the project was 535, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Target learner numbers for the ARCA initiative

	Learners Phase 1	Learners Phase 2	Total
Phase 1 Existing provision	136	204	340
Phase 2 Specially designed	75	120	195
Total	211	324	535

During the course of the project considerable difficulty was encountered in achieving the desired sample through recruiting individuals onto existing provision and it was agreed with the DfEE project manager that the two phases of the project should merge in order to achieve the target numbers within the time limit. Tables 3 and 4 below outline the numbers of learners by programme based on the returns made by ARCA to the DFEE.

Table 3 Widening Participation in Residential Adult Education Projects: Group Projects

Course	College	Learners	Programme
C	A	15	Communications for Independence
A	B	18	Better Government for Older People
B	B	9	Retirement Preparation for Early Retirees
E	C	15	Reaching Out to Parents
F	C	16	Growing Older – Staying Younger
D	D	12	Highbridge Oral History
H	E	9	Developing Confidence & Skills through IT
J	E	9	Building Independence Through IT Skills
G	B	27	Better Government for Older People
K	F	12	Understanding Watercolour
L	G	26	Carers in Wiltshire
M	D	8	Elderly Learners & Reminiscences
N	H	16	Opening Access to Careers in Health through Residential Learning
P	B	15	WEA National Foundation Programme
U	D	12	Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties
T	B	12	Stoke on Trent Neighbourhood Project
Z	E	11	Developing Personal Confidence Through IT
R	A	16	Communications for Independence
V	C	16	CARE – Preparation for Retirement
S	F	12	Creative Writing
Y	C	16	Family Learning
W	G	30	Carers in South Wiltshire
X	B	10	Introduction to Residential Learning – Islington Community Group
Q	E	11	ICT Skills for Volunteers Network (Refugees)
Total		353	Learners

Table 4 Widening Participation in Residential Adult Education Projects: Individual Learners

Course	College	Learners	Programme
1	B	2	From the Cradle to the Grave
4	J	18	Learning about Residential Learning
6	H	1	Follow on Watercolours
3	H	1	Glass Painting
2	K	19	Life Begins at 50
5	B	4	Meditation Weekend
7	K	1	Unbridled Painting Pleasure
12	E	1	Demystify the Web
8	B	13	People, Wildlife & Tourism in Africa
9	B	2	Singing Together
13	E	1	Demystify the Web
10	L	1	Flower & Plant Illustration
11	L	13	Family Learning
15	E	1	Reiki
16	E	1	Chinese Brush Painting
14	K	22	Life Begins at 50
17	J	18	It's Never too Late to Learn
Total		119	Learners

Tables 3 and 4 shows that 472 learners participated in the programmes, so ARCA achieved 88 per cent of their target numbers by the end of the initiative. However, the breakdown of participation was considerably different from that anticipated in the original proposal. Instead of 64 per cent of participants being recruited on to existing provision and 36 per cent onto specifically designed provision, the emphasis of project recruitment was completely reversed with 75 per cent of all participants recruited to specially designed provision and only 25 per cent recruited to existing provision. The number of individual student cases compiled from the evaluation forms returned was slightly lower than this, but more than adequate for the analysis required (see Tables 5 and 6 below).

Table 5 Data Returns by course and type of evaluation form: Group Projects

Course	College	Learners	EF1	EF2	Project Title
C	A	15	0	0	Communications for Independence
A	B	18	17	17	Better Government for Older People
B	B	9	8	7	Retirement Preparation for Early Retirees
E	C	15	15	13	Reaching Out to Parents
F	C	16	16	16	Growing Older – Staying Younger
D	D	12	10	9	Highbridge Oral History
H	E	9	12	9	Developing Confidence & Skills thro' IT
J	E	9	9	9	Building Independence through IT Skills
G	B	27	26	26	Better Government for Older People
K	F	12	12	12	Understanding Watercolour
L	G	26	24	15	Carers in Wiltshire
M	D	8	8	8	Elderly Learners & Reminiscences
N	H	16	16	16	Opening Access to Careers in Health through Residential Learning
P	B	15	15	15	WEA National Foundation Programme
U	D	12	11	6	Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties
T	B	12	12	12	Stoke on Trent Neighbourhood Project
Z	E	12	12	9	Developing Personal Confidence thro' IT
R	A	16	16	15	Communications for Independence
V	C	16	16	16	CARE – Preparation for Retirement
S	F	12	12	11	Creative Writing
Y	C	16	16	16	Family Learning
W	G	30	30	28	Carers in South Wiltshire
X	B	10	10	9	Introduction to Residential Learning – Islington Community Group
Q	E	10	9	7	Develop ICT Skills for Volunteers Network (Refugees)
Total		353	321	290	Learners

Overall, 90 per cent of learners completed the initial evaluation form and 82 per cent the final evaluation form. This excellent response rate was only achieved with the support of all the colleges involved and the efforts of the ARCA project co-ordinator. The evaluation demonstrated that the actual number of learners attending the programmes did not always accord with the expected number. For example on the *Life begins at 50* programme, it was anticipated that 15 learners would attend and in the event that number increased to 19, whereas on the *Reaching out to*

parents programme, only 13 of the 15 recruits remained to the end of the course. This fine-tuning is not unusual in adult residential short course provision and with hard-to-reach learners, one might have anticipated a greater degree of uncertainty and, in particular, a higher rate of attrition from courses. Retention therefore appears to have benefited from the residential aspect.

Table 6 Data Returns by course and type of evaluation form: Individual Learners

Course	College	Learners	EF1	EF2	Course Title
1	B	2	2	2	From the Cradle to the Grave
4	J	18	18	17	Learning about Residential Learning
6	H	1	1	1	Follow on Watercolours
3	H	1	1	1	Glass Painting
2	K	19	19	19	Life Begins at 50
5	B	4	4	2	Meditation Weekend
7	K	1	1	1	Unbridled Painting Pleasure
12	E	1	1	1	Demystify the Web
8	B	13	12	13	People, Wildlife & Tourism in Africa
9	B	2	2	2	Singing Together
13	E	1	1	1	Demystify the Web
10	L	1	1	1	Flower & Plant Illustration
11	L	13	15	13	Family Learning
15	E	1	1	1	Reiki
16	E	1	1	1	Chinese Brush Painting
14	K	22	22	22	Life Begins at 50
17	J	18	0	0	It's Never too Late to Learn
Total		119	102	98	Learners

Three courses produced no respondents; participants on the *Communication for Independence Training* completed 10 of each type of form but unfortunately these were in the original format developed by the ARCA team, as the modified evaluation forms were not available at this time, so could not be used. Learners on the *It's Never too Late to Learn* course (19 students) did not return evaluation forms at all. Also, not all EF1 and EF2 forms are matched pairs. For example on the *People, Wildlife and Tourism in Africa* programme, although there were nine matched pairs of forms, there were 3 EF1 and 4 EF2 evaluation forms that were completed by different people. Presumably, this indicates that three people intended to come on the programme, but were unable to attend and their places were taken by four

substitutes. Some forms were not fully completed by respondents or the forms were printed incorrectly, for example on the *Introduction to Residential Learning* programme all the EF2s were incomplete as page 2 of the form was missing.

Some learners had difficulty in completing the evaluation forms for a variety of reasons. Several participants had learning difficulties and needed assistance in interpreting and responding to questions, while others were physically disabled. Some of the qualitative questions were not easy to answer and learners had to think about various issues that they had not considered before. Some learners commented that questions were repetitive and this raises concerns about the timing of the completion of forms. Qualitative questions explore in some detail what benefits were anticipated by learners from the programme (Form EF1) and whether these had been achieved at the outcome of the course (Form EF2). If the timing of completion of the two forms was too close, this reaction is understandable. However, despite these difficulties we are confident that this project collected a rich source of qualitative and quantitative data on socially excluded adults in residential education, which can be systematically compared by learner, programme and college, something that was not previously available.

Only 11 of the 31 ARCA colleges participated in the initiative and of these, 3 were responsible for almost half of the enrolments (see Table 7).

Table 7 Learner numbers by ARCA College

College	Group Learners	Individual Learners	Total Learners (%)
A	31	0	7
B	91	21	24
C	63	0	13
D	32	0	7
E	40	4	9
F	24	0	5
G	56	0	12
H	16	2	4
J	0	36	8
K	0	42	9
L	0	14	3
Total	353	119	100

5.2 Characteristics of participants

It is important to assess the social and economic characteristics of the participants in the ARCA programme since the background of participants is an indication of the extent to which the project achieved its aim of widening participation. This section considers such characteristics as gender, age, ethnic origin, receipt of benefits, socio-economic class and learning history.

Gender, age and ethnic origin

Of the 427 respondents who attended the programme, 69 per cent were female and 31 per cent male. The majority of learners provided information on their age details of which is outlined in Table 8 below.

Table 8 Learners by Age

Age band	Number of learners	Percentage of total respondents
Less than 18 years old	13	3
18 but less than 19 years old	6	1
19 but less than 20 years old	11	3
20-29 years old	35	8
30-39 years old	52	12
40-49 years old	51	12
50-59 years old	90	21
60-69 years old	86	20
70- 79 years old	52	12
80-89 years old	16	4
Non-responses	15	4
Total	427	100

The majority of learners (57 per cent) were at least 50 years old. A small proportion (4 per cent) were less than 19 years old and should not therefore have been included in the project, since an adult learner is defined as being at least 19 years old.

The majority of learners (77 per cent) involved in the project were classed as ethnically white. When questioned about their ethnicity, several participants (11 per cent) declined to respond. The remainder (12 per cent) came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds: 10 were black African, 12 black Caribbean, 5 black (other), 7 Indian, 4 Pakistani, 1 Bangladeshi, and 12 participants classed themselves as belonging to another (unspecified) ethnic group.

Receipt of benefits

Almost 28 per cent of respondents suffered from a disability and 18 per cent were registered disabled. Benefit was being claimed by 63 per cent of participants, as detailed in Table 9 below. Moreover, 25 per cent of learners were entitled to claim in two benefit categories, 10 per cent in three benefit categories, 4 per cent in four benefit categories and 1 per cent in five benefit categories. State pension was being claimed by almost one quarter of learners, income support by 17 per cent, council tax benefit by 11 per cent and housing benefit by 10 per cent of participants. Also, 21 per cent of learners were entitled to other benefits and allowances.

Table 9 Learners entitled to claim benefit by benefit category

Benefit category	Number of learners	Percentage of total learners
Jobseekers' Allowance	11	3
Incapacity Benefit	34	8
Housing Benefit	41	10
Severe Disablement Allowance	17	4
Council Tax Benefit	49	11
Income Support	71	17
Widows Pension	8	2
Disability Working Allowance	8	2
State Pension (sole or main source of income)	97	23
Government Training scheme for the unemployed	4	1
Family Credit/Working Families Tax Credit	13	3
Other Allowance or Benefit	88	21
Total in receipt of benefit*		63

Note: * Learners may appear in more than one category, depending on the number of benefits to which they are entitled.

Social and economic background

Learners came from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, the analysis of which is based on the 61 per cent of respondents who gave details of their most recent paid employment. Some learners had never held paid employment and others simply failed to respond to this question. Of those that responded, 5 per cent of learners were classified by occupational category as coming from Social Class I, 28 per cent from Social Class II, 40 per cent from Social Class III, 23 per cent from Class IV and 4 per cent from Social Class V. Where there was doubt about the social category of a respondent, for example ‘engineer’, which could be classified anywhere between Social Class I and III (that is chartered engineer to engineering skilled worker), we coded at the lowest level available. In this way, the evaluation gives the benefit of doubt in favour of showing widening participation. Since such doubt only existed in a few cases, it is unlikely to affect the overall analysis.

Over half of the learners (57 per cent) were currently involved in voluntary activities and cited involvement in, for example, charity shops, community centres, hospices, schools, churches, WRVS, and tenants’ associations. They were also involved in various capacities in, for example, community relations, meals on wheels, crime prevention associations, carers associations, victim support, stroke clubs, the Samaritans, Christian Aid, youth clubs, the RSPCA, the elderly, ethnic minority groups, the disabled, the blind, children with special needs, mothers and pre-school children, the unemployed, the bereaved and so on.

Last involvement in learning

Table 10 shows that almost half (48 per cent) of the learners participating in the ARCA project had been involved in some form of learning, education or training during the past 12 months. Technically, it is questionable whether such individuals can be considered ‘non-learners’, even though they may never have participated in courses at an adult residential college. However, a significant number had only been involved in basic skills or return to study course, which effectively acted as conduits for access to the ARCA programmes. The second largest group of learners (29 per cent) had not been involved in any form of learning, education or training during the past five years or more, confirming that the project had engaged new learners.

Table 10 Learners' last involvement in learning, training or education

Last involvement	Number of learners	Percentage of total learners
Less than 12 months ago	203	48
1-2 years ago	32	7
3-4 years ago	23	5
5+ years ago	122	29
No response	47	11
Total	427	100

Learners had participated in a wide variety of education and training programmes. For some participants, secondary education had been their last experience of education, whereas others had pursued a variety of courses from managerial and accounting to typing and bookkeeping. Other programmes studied focused on areas such as art, calligraphy, pottery, dressmaking, home furnishing, cookery and joinery. Learners often followed courses that related to their current activities, particularly those who were involved in the voluntary sector, who took such courses as counselling, sign language, parenting, handling and lifting the elderly, First Aid, learning about bereavement, befriending training, Age Concern training, and working with children. Learners had also followed subject specific courses like creative writing, IT, English, French, maths, media, music, health, politics history, geology, astronomy and psychology. Prior learning for some learners had been primarily skills based and had focused on courses like return to study, basic skills and adult literacy and numeracy. Participants had also been working towards a variety of qualifications in various subject areas, for example, City and Guilds, CLAIT, GCSE, NVQ, BTEC, A level, Diploma, BA, BSc, MA and various professional qualifications.

The overwhelming majority of participating learners (82 per cent) had enjoyed their learning experience, although 2 per cent had not and 16 per cent did not respond to this question. A similar majority (81 per cent) felt that they had benefited from this learning.

5.3 Background and access to the programmes

The background to the courses and how learners accessed them provides another measure of the extent to which the ARCA programme succeeded in widening participation among hard-to-reach learners. Each is considered below.

Background

The programmes provided as part of the ARCA project can be classified in terms of target groups achieved and course content. Several courses were aimed at elderly learners. Two *Better Government for Older People* courses encouraged socially excluded adults to explore new methods of democracy and participation leading to better government for older people. The *Highbridge Oral History Project* involved participants who were almost all over 50 and brought together a group of people in order to develop skills and knowledge to compile an oral history of Highbridge (an area local to the college providing the course). The *Elderly Learners and Reminiscences* programme, where all but one of the participants was over 60, aimed to develop creative writing skills building on individual experience. A *Creative Writing* course recruited learners who were mostly aged 50 or more with the objective of providing new writers with the confidence and skills to write independently. Two *Life Begins at 50* courses intended to encourage over 50s to use their leisure time as effectively as possible by introducing a wide range of subjects, which they might pursue in the future. *Understanding Watercolour* provided a comprehensive understanding of watercolours for the older learner and gave students greater confidence to practice and develop painting skills. The key objective of the *Retirement preparation for early retirees* programme was to provide learners, who were mostly in the age group 50-59 years old, with the skills to continue being economically active beyond early retirement. This course differed in content from the other programmes outlined above as it was geared to stimulating re-entry into the labour market whereas the other courses focused on encouraging active citizenship and developing an appreciation of, or skills in, history, art and writing. These courses for older learners accounted for approximately 30 per cent of student numbers.

A second target group for recruitment to the project were students who suffered from various disabilities. The *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* programme brought together adults with learning difficulties and volunteers prepared to buddy adults with learning difficulties on a Creative Arts weekend. Two *Preparation for Retirement – Growing Older staying Younger* courses were designed to provide service users living and/or working within CARE an opportunity to consider their future needs and aspirations as they grow older. Two

Communications for Independence in Training courses planned to develop and enhance the communication skills of adults with learning disabilities. These courses for disabled people involved 16 per cent of learners.

A third identifiable target group was parents, all mothers, who joined two *Reaching out to Parents (Family Learning)* programmes, designed to support their child's learning and extend their own through such subjects as IT, creative writing, spelling and learning, in order to produce a newsletter. Another *Family Learning* programme from a different college, whose members were designated individual rather than group learners, drew parents from several family learning schemes and included many single mothers amongst its recruits, while making provision for their 23 children. Many of the mothers had low standards of literacy and numeracy and sessions focused on numeracy, creative writing and IT. These courses for parents accounted for 7 per cent of recruits

Two courses in the project were designed specifically to attract learners from minority ethnic groups. *People, Wildlife and Tourism in Africa* was a programme provided for Hackney African Pensioners and focused on wildlife conservation, safari hunting and eco-tourism, using material related to Zambia and Zimbabwe. *Open Access to Careers in Health through Residential Learning* was intended to support black and ethnic minority staff, with objectives that were employment related. Learners, who were currently employed as nursing auxiliaries and health assistants, were to be encouraged to access health care careers through a group residential learning experience. A personal development plan was to be produced for each participant with a view to engaging in professional training focusing particularly on vocational competencies. Unfortunately, only 3 of the 15 participants in these courses were actually from minority ethnic groups.

College E offered several IT programmes. Three courses: *Develop Confidence and Skills through IT and Internet Training*, *Building Independence through IT Skills*, and *Develop ICT Skills for Volunteers Network (Refugees)* provided a residential experience for participants in receipt of help from the mental health organisation 'Imagine' and for a group of refugee men and women who are part of a local employability programme. Both courses involved introduction to the Web, training in the use of email and practical applications using the Internet. Another course entitled *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteers Network* was tailored to the needs of volunteers and workers attached to Ellesmere Port Community Action Partnership. Course content focused on use of packages and equipment relevant to producing community

newsletters. These programmes accounted for 8 per cent of learners involved in the project.

Two courses for *Carers in Wiltshire* attracted participants from a wide range of educational backgrounds from those 'who have previously held professional jobs to those who were much less articulate had little paid work experience' and whose literacy skills were underdeveloped. Carers who attended the programme were all registered with Carers Support and Alzheimer's Support in Wiltshire. Participants studied aromatherapy, textile craftwork, clay work and sketching. These two programmes were among the largest, recruiting 25 and 26 students, respectively, and accounting for 11 per cent of student numbers in the ARCA project.

Two courses at different colleges were concerned with 'residential learning' *per se*. Neither course provided details of the rationale and objectives so it is difficult to comment on either. The course entitled *Introduction to Residential Learning* provided sessions concerned with local history, art, 'Ways of seeing...trees and sculpture', a 'Mapping'-palm print game and writing. *Learning about residential Learning* involved sessions on IT, silk painting, pottery, watercolours, glass painting and pottery. The average age of students attending these two programmes was 69 years.

The *Stoke on Trent Neighbourhood Project* was planned through *Teenwise*, an organisation that works with young people in order to reduce teenage pregnancy. Participants were aged 13-20 and had all shown an interest in the project; unfortunately, the majority of participants attending the programme were aged 13-17 and did not therefore qualify as adult learners, despite the obvious importance of such a target group.

A *WEA National Foundation Programme* was also included in the ARCA project. This programme is part of a nationally recognised, two-term, OCN-accredited course, designed to introduce students to the study of society. The objective of the course was to facilitate intensive study of issues covered in the foundation programme by offering a residential experience to students who would otherwise be unable to afford this.

A whole raft of courses were also accessed by individual learners focusing mainly on painting but specialising in different areas, such as flower and plant illustration, watercolours, glass painting and Chinese brush painting. There were also courses on

meditation, singing, Reiki, creative writing and demystifying the Web. These eleven courses involved only 15 learners, 3 per cent of the achieved numbers.

Access

The group project leader or members of their organisations commonly facilitated access to group projects. Participants knew and trusted this key individual and although many students had reservations about attending a college, particularly a residential college, because of the considerable upheaval in their personal lives, they were reassured and supported by this contact person. Some group project leaders also played a central role in organising the course curriculum, liaising with both the college and the group and negotiating a course that was satisfactory to all involved.

Learners joined the course for a variety of reasons, some specifically related to individual client groups and others of a more general nature. Participants who had been made redundant or were preparing for retirement were looking for new ideas or opportunities to widen their scope of future leisure activities. Students with learning disabilities were anticipating the independence of residential study. Women with family commitments were looking forward to a break from their families and children and to participate in a programme that would be inaccessible to them at home. Generally, learners were seeking increased knowledge and understanding, hoping to learn from each other, exchange views, meet new people, gain confidence, prepare for paid employment and, significantly, to share their knowledge with others, transferring skills to their children, grandchildren and community groups.

6. The programmes

This section addresses the content and delivery of the ARCA Initiative in terms of what the learning achieved, what was perceived to be effective learning, how learners were involved and how their progress and performance was assessed. These issues are considered below in turn.

6.1 Knowledge and understanding

The majority of respondent learners (86 per cent) believed that the course objectives had been made clear to them, giving ratings of 1 and 2 on a scale of 1-5, 9 per cent of learners rated clarity of course objectives at 3 on the same scale, 1 per cent at 4 and 4 per cent at 5. When asked to indicate the extent to which they had acquired new knowledge and understanding, 83 per cent of respondents felt that the majority of what they had learnt had increased their knowledge a good deal. Some 14 per cent rated this lower, 3 on a scale of 1 to 5, 3 per cent at 4 on the same scale and only one respondent felt that they had acquired very little new knowledge and understanding. Detail of the new knowledge and understanding acquired tended to relate specifically to course content, so students following the *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* focused on describing the different packages to which they had been introduced, whereas the learners following the *Better Government for Older People* programme identified areas such as political philosophy, economic policies and pensioners rights. Almost a quarter of the respondents did not answer the question asking whether they had been introduced to new technologies; of those that responded, 57 per cent believed that they had.

6.2 Most effective methods of learning

Course tutors interviewed for the case studies had different opinions regarding the effectiveness of various teaching methods. For example, the course tutor for the *Life Begins at 50* programme explained that a mixture of learning approaches was thought to be most effective; although tutors seek a maximum level of participation from learners. There is a strong practical emphasis to teaching sessions and activities and a key objective of the course is to motivate learners to 'join in'. A tutor teaching on the *Better Government for Older People* course felt that 'an interactive seminar with delivery interspersed with discussion is the best teaching method', whereas a tutor on the *Developing Creative skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* programme thought that 'the group project was the most successful activity' in their sessions. The course tutor for the *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* emphasised the 'practical focus of the programme' which 'was key to the

success of the course. Also students were encouraged to work together and this gave individuals confidence to learn.’

Learners were asked to rate the extent to which teaching methods had been effective on their individual programmes on a scale of 1-5. Of the 85 percent of learners that responded to this question, 91 per cent believed that teaching methods had been highly effective, 9 per cent gave a lower rating of 3 and only 2 per cent indicated that teaching methods had been ineffective. The results are shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11 Effectiveness of teaching methods as a percentage of respondents

Teaching method	Percent of total		Percentage of respondents	
	No response	Highly effective	Middle rating	Ineffective
Discussion	20	92	7	1
Written work	50	73	15	12
Practical work	26	90	6	3
Listening	15	90	7	3
Group work	23	88	8	4
Preparing a project	50	81	15	4
Discussion outside the classroom	23	86	11	3
Helping others	24	88	9	3

Detailed comments on tutor effectiveness referred to the ability of tutors to respond to the group’s need on both an individual and group basis. They were always helpful and supportive and could deal with a wide range of abilities. Tutors varied the pace of teaching in response to student need and were always patient and adaptable. They made sure that students understood the sessions and tutor delivery was described as ‘clear, interactive, informative and amusing.’ Also, tutors ‘knew their subjects’ and were ‘very approachable’, ‘clearly interested’ in what they were teaching and were prepared to acknowledge and integrate student experience into the sessions. Few adverse comments emerged from the questionnaires. A couple of students from the *Life Begins at 50* programme indicated that there was a lack of differentiation and some sessions were hard to grasp. On the *Better Government for Older People* course one student would have liked written practical work to be included in the programme and another, who was hard of hearing, would have liked tutors to speak more loudly.

General satisfaction with the effectiveness of teaching methods was confirmed when learners were asked to rate the effectiveness of a variety of teaching methods. The students that did not respond to a question on a specific teaching method included in their number those participants that tended not to respond when they felt a specific learning method was not present in the programme.

From the evidence in Table 11, it is apparent that ‘written work’ and ‘preparing a project’ were not commonly used as teaching methods in a large proportion of the programmes. Moreover, a slightly higher proportion of learners that responded to questions on the effectiveness of these teaching methods indicated that they did not find them highly effective. However, ratings of highly effective from 73 per cent and 81 per cent of respondents respectively should not be considered a weakness.

The key method of learning, eliciting an 85 per cent response rate, was ‘listening’, from which one might infer a passive didactic approach inappropriate to hard-to-reach learners. However, this was followed closely by ‘discussion’ (80 per cent), suggesting a balance of active and passive learning. Moreover, both teaching methods were rated highly effective by the highest proportion of respondent learners. Generally there was not a great deal of differentiation in respondent results, except for ‘written work’, which was judged an ineffective means of learning by the highest proportion of respondents to a specific question.

6.3 Learner involvement

Most learners felt able to contribute to class discussion (81 per cent of those that responded to this question). A further 15 per cent of the participants responding rated their ability to do this at 3 in a range of 1 to 5 and 5 per cent of respondents felt that their ability to contribute to class discussion was minimal. About 15 per cent did not respond to this question.

The course tutor on the *Life Begins at 50* programme explained that confidence levels vary significantly amongst learners and are often a function of social background. Once participation in class has been achieved, it becomes easier to repeat, but initial participation is a challenge to new learners. In order to build confidence and encourage participation, the course was delivered in a mixture of plenary and small group sessions allowing learners to become part of a cohesive group and at the same time encouraging individual contribution by tutors giving learners individual attention.

When asked to provide further details, participants in the cases studied explained how the class ‘atmosphere was generally conducive to discussion.’ Learners ‘were encouraged to ask questions’, ‘everyone was given a chance to speak and the lecturer valued their opinions’ and participants received ‘feedback from the group.’ Students ‘felt relaxed’ and had ‘no hesitation expressing their views’ and felt the tutor listened and responded to their arguments. For some, the small group work was perceived as a key means of facilitating class participation and allowing ‘everyone to contribute’. These groups were viewed as ‘friendly and supportive’ and ‘students felt relaxed and able to talk.’ Tutors encouraged learner involvement and tried to elicit the opinions of all students, even the quieter members of the class. The ability to contribute increased as the course progressed. The confidence to contribute was thought to be a function of ‘individual personalities’ by the course tutor on the *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* programme.

A small proportion of the sample responding to this question did not feel able to contribute to class discussion. They explained that there was more listening and learning and not a great deal of time for in-depth discussion, that they left others to ask the questions, that some members of the group were too dominant in discussion and that the tone of debate was sometimes overly aggressive, which was off-putting

6.4 Assessment

Course tutors involved in teaching case study participants had various comments regarding assessment. The course tutor on the *Life Begins at 50* course explained it was not always possible to assess all areas of the programme. An integral part of practical subjects, like computing, necessarily involved constant feedback and interaction with learners directly related to their progress in the session. The tutor from *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* explained how they tried to be positive when commenting on student’s work ‘emphasising what was “good” and focusing on the students’ improved level of performance.’ This tutor also mentioned the role of peer group assessment in developing students’ skills and confidence: ‘Students always think that their own work is no good and everyone else’s is better, so praise from the other members of the group is a key aspect of developing individual confidence.’ The tutor from the *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* believed that that the ‘degree to which comments on students’ work were helpful was very much a function of the degree of student learning difficulties.’ ‘They do take notice. They try to learn from what I say and act on my advice, but it’s hard for me to know if they can’t do what I advise, don’t understand or just don’t want to do it.’

When asked whether tutor assessment and comments were helpful to learners, 27 per cent of the sample did not respond. Of those that did respond, the vast majority (89 per cent) felt that tutor assessment was extremely helpful, while 8 per cent rated this lower at 3 on a scale of 1-5 and only 2 per cent of learners expressing the view that they did not find tutor assessment helpful at all. Case study participants felt that tutor assessments and comments were helpful, gave 'encouragement and positive feedback' and made them feel more confident in themselves. 'Anything and everything was discussed.' Adverse comments were minimal; only one learner commented that 'the tutors had only a limited amount of time' available and another stated that they had 'previous knowledge of most of the course work.'

7. Effectiveness of the programmes

This section explores the effectiveness of the ARCA Initiative, as reported by tutors and participants. The following sub-sections deal with the parts of the programmes perceived to be most useful, suggested amendments and improvements and, especially, the extent to which the courses met learners' expectations in terms of a range of benefits and outcomes.

7.1 Most useful aspects of the programme

Tutors from the case studies were asked which they thought were the most useful parts of their own programmes. The tutor from the *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* course emphasised the importance of 'individual engagement', which is of 'vital importance in the learning process.' The most useful part of the course was when students had to 'work out how things are done in their own minds.' The tutor from *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* believed group work was most useful as this developed team skills, a new experience for members of the group, while a tutor from *Life Begins at 50* felt the learners were best placed to assess what was most useful.

When asked which parts of their course had been most useful, a number of learners stated all sessions, while others mentioned course specific sessions, such as PowerPoint, the digital camera, a publishing package and the scanner, which would enable them to utilise more effectively the equipment to which they have access through their voluntary groups (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Learners on *Family Learning* cited the creative writing and IT sessions, anticipating that these would enable them to 'write more easily with more confidence' and undertake a whole range of IT related activities from which they had previously been excluded. Learners on *Better Government for Older People* identified sessions on the NHS and pensions as most useful and emphasised the importance of group. Learners on *Life Begins at 50* cited the painting and computing sessions as being most useful explaining that these sessions had been a good introduction to specific areas and awakened them 'to new ideas.' Participants enjoyed the experience and believed the excellent teaching would make them want to continue studying certain subjects.

7.2 Course amendments

The majority of case study participants felt that all parts of their programmes were necessary. The tutor for *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* explained that the 'course content was about right for the majority of the group.' Generally, learners

were less critical of the programmes than tutors, who demonstrated commitment to developing and improving what was being delivered. The course tutor from *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* felt that the video sessions at the end of the day could have been dispensed with because students were too tired to benefit from them. They would have liked to ‘have done more demonstrating but students were keen to get on with their own work and their attention wandered.’ The course tutor from *Life Begins at 50* felt there was some overlap between the two history based sessions, which would have to be addressed before the course was offered to another group. The tutor from *Better Government for Older People* felt they had ‘not covered as much material as they would have liked in their own session on the NHS,’ explaining that the pace of lecturing was a function of the abilities of the group and this had ‘limited their delivery.’ A small but significant number of students on this course also mentioned that a trip to the nearby Wedgwood factory could have been dispensed with. Other specific areas that could have been omitted from the programmes were mentioned, but these views were very much related to individual preference or experience and did not represent a general view from a specific group.

A large proportion of learners in the case studies did not identify other areas should be included in their courses and where people did, responses were generally course specific. On the *Life begins at 50* programme, 8 learners had various suggestions regarding what should have been included in the programme. Two learners suggested there should have been an outside activity and another the opportunity to explore the local environment. Other suggestions related to learners’ personal interests like music appreciation, collectables and antiques, astronomy and calligraphy. On the *Family Learning programme* 6 learners suggested that a session on using email should have been included and 4 would have liked to have learnt more about scanning documents, while 3 learners from the *Better Government for Older People* course would have liked more time for discussion both in and out of class

7.3 Course improvements

The course tutor from *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* felt the course did not need altering but that the ‘buddies’ supporting the students with learning difficulties ‘could have been better prepared for the programme.’ The buddies similarly thought that they ‘were not well prepared for the course’, and were ‘unsure of their own roles.’ The course leader from *Family Learning* also focused on the students rather than course content, suggesting that ‘more careful recruitment would have improved the programme... Our expectation

was that mothers' IT skills would not be good but this was not universally the case.' The level proved too basic for two recruits who left the programme. The tutor from *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* suggested that better computer packages would have enabled more pictures to be imported into newsletters.

The majority of learners from *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* and *Life begins at 50* felt no improvements to the courses were necessary. On other case study programmes, for example *Better Government for Older People* and *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, the response rate to this question was low, which may indicate learners felt that no improvements were necessary. On *Life begins at 50*, individual learners had not enjoyed all sessions, but generally opinions were extremely positive and they accepted that not all sessions would necessarily suit them. One member of the group thought learners recruited to the course covered too wide an age range. At 50, this participant intended to return to work and regarded the course as a stepping stone to get back into employment, whereas those 58 and over were operating to a different agenda.

Buddies on *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* felt the course needed more focus to make people work as a team, and a follow up so participants could see what had been accomplished. Learners on *Family Learning* felt 'aims and objectives should be set out before each session' to identify achievements, and that 'the ability of learners should be identified... so that each member of the group could work to their own level.' One participant in *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* suggested more computers should be fitted with the Adobe deluxe programme, while learners on the *Better Government for Older People* course thought the course should have been broader, 'include written and practical work', and have had more scope to 'report on our own areas of work.'

Learners on all five case study programmes mentioned the length of the working day, believing this was excessive (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*) or commenting that the course should have been run over a longer period (*Family Learning*, *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, *Better Government for Older People*). In several cases, learners would have liked more leisure time: 'there was no time to relax', or 'free time to socialise with each other.'

7.4 Meeting learners' expectations

Before joining the programme, learners were asked how they thought they would benefit from attending the course on a personal level, in terms of what they

expected they would learn and from meeting new people. At the end of the programme learners were asked the same questions in the light of their experience of the programme, in order to measure whether their expectations had been fulfilled.

Personal benefits

On *Life begins at 50*, the majority of learners responded in the broadest sense, anticipating personal benefits through learning about new areas of which they had previously little or no knowledge: 'It was an introductory course that would lead on to other things.' On *Better Government for Older People* learners also thought they would benefit from new knowledge and understanding about issues such as aging and supporting the elderly. On the *Family Learning* programme, learners were expecting to improve their general IT skills, while those on the *Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties* programme looked forward to developing detailed artistic skills and improving their technique, as well as being able to gather evidence for NVQs.

Participants also anticipated benefits like 'learning with like-minded people' (*Life begins at 50*) and sharing views and opinions with others (*Better Government for Older People*), gaining personal confidence (*Better Government for Older People, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Family Learning*), increasing employment opportunities (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Family Learning*), and exploring the experience of people from different cultures (*Better Government for Older People*).

Students from the case study programmes believed their courses would make them more effective as members of their communities. Learners from *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* thought that skills they would acquire would make them more effective in their role in the community, improving their ability to interact with diverse age groups. On *Better Government for Older People*, learners anticipated improved ability to help vulnerable members of society. Similarly, buddies on *Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties* felt they would gain from 'experiencing how to work on a one to one basis with the learning disabled.'

Life begins at 50 learners felt that they would benefit personally by being given the opportunity to develop 'ideas for the future' through attending the programme. Other personal benefits expected were a motivation to learn, 'improving my mind', 'improving my concentration', and for those on the *Family Learning* programme, being away from the home environment and their domestic commitments was an

enormous personal benefit, which would allow learners time to concentrate on themselves and improve self-esteem.

At the completion of the programme, learners from four of the five case study programmes said they had gained increased self-confidence. Other personal benefits included increased knowledge and understanding, (*Life begins at 50, Family Learning*), improved IT skills (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*), the motivation to learn, learning with a similar age group, increased enthusiasm and becoming generally more aware (*Better Government for Older People*). In addition, learners cited improved social and communicative skills (*Family Learning, Better Government for Older People*), recognition of self and own personal goals and objectives (*Family Learning*), generally being more positive (*Better Government for Older People*), improved ability to help others, personal satisfaction (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*) and proven ability to learn (*Life Begins at 50*).

Learners had broadly anticipated the personal benefits outlined above, although the scale of increased self-confidence had not been anticipated. Benefits of increased independence for the students on the *Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties* programme were largely unexpected.

Learning benefits

Anticipated benefits of what learners would learn were often described in terms of new knowledge and information, which related directly to the course of study. So learners on the *Life Begins at 50* programme cited the opportunity to take up a variety of new subjects, while those on the *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* course anticipated gaining IT skills. Participants on the *Family Learning* programme cited the ability to operate and use computers and familiarity with the net; those on the *Better Government for Older People* course, greater awareness of aging and learners on the *Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties* programme, the opportunity to gain experience with watercolours and other techniques.

The ability to share knowledge with others was another anticipated learning benefit. Participants on case study programmes described this in terms of ‘increased confidence to pass on to others what I have learnt’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*), ‘the ability to share knowledge gained with others’ (*Better Government for Older People*) and ‘the ability to support and share knowledge with their children’ (*Family learning*).

Other possible learning benefits described in the cases included ‘being stimulated to learn more and broaden interests’, experiencing learning together as a group and learning through helping others to learn (*Life Begins at 50, Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties*). In addition, participants cited increased employability (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Family Learning*), increased satisfaction from work with the elderly, direct financial gain leading to a higher standard of living (*Better Government for Older People*) and facilitating the achievement of an NVQ (*Family Learning*).

At the end of the programme, learners identified the benefits of what they had learnt in similar terms. They cited such benefits as greater understanding of a variety of new subjects (*Life Begins at 50*), increased IT knowledge (*Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*) and development of new skills (*Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties, Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Similarly, participants mentioned improved drawing and painting techniques (*Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties*) and greater understanding of the aging process (*Better Government for Older People*). Some mentioned widening knowledge of different groups from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (*Better Government for Older People*), broadening the mind and creating the confidence to keep learning, with the message ‘education can be enjoyable’ (*Life Begins at 50*). Significantly, one participant commented, ‘I proved to myself that I am able to learn’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*).

Benefits in terms of group dynamics

Before entering their programmes, learners believed they would benefit as a group from being given the opportunity to ‘get to know other members of the group better’ (*Family Learning, Better Government for Older People, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Other benefits would come from having the chance to compare experiences and life details about ‘how other children are doing in other schools’ (*Family Learning*). Participants expect to learn from one other (*Better Government for Older People*) and to gain confidence to become active members of the group (*Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*) and talk in front of each other (*Better Government for Older People*). The opportunity for team building through shared knowledge and support (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*) and improvements in volunteer training, recruitment, networking and fundraising were expected as a direct result of group interaction (*Better Government for Older People*).

Feedback forms completed at the end of the course emphasised the benefits of team building, mixing and being at ease with each other and the opportunity to discuss issues ‘more comfortably’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Learners also stressed the importance of having the opportunity to share ideas as a group and particularly the fact that this had been a multicultural experience (*Better Government for Older People*). Group support had also facilitated the learning process (*Family Learning*).

Benefits of meeting new people

Before coming on the course, participants were looking forward to meeting and making friends with people in a similar situation to themselves (*Life Begins at 50*, *Developing Creative skills in Adults with moderate Learning Difficulties*, *Family Learning*), as well as meeting new people (*Better Government for Older People*, *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Buddies on the *Developing Creative skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* programme were hoping to improve their social skills and increase their knowledge and understanding of the learning disabled. Learners hoped that their self-confidence would increase, (*Life Begins at 50*, *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*, *Family Learning*) as well as team spirit. Close working relationships were expected to develop, which would serve to ‘widen horizons and establish contacts, which will be of mutual benefit in the future’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Meeting new people would enable learners to learn from others, broaden their outlook, exchange ideas and learn to be more relaxed with other people and to socialise (*Life Begins at 50*, *Family Learning*, *Better Government for Older People*). Students from the *Family Learning* programme explained they would value the opportunity to ‘mix with adults rather than just children.’

At the end of the courses, benefits cited included making new friendships (*Life Begins at 50*, *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*, *Developing Creative skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*), which some imagined would outlast the course (*Better Government for Older People*, *Family Learning*). Sharing views had broadened learners’ perspectives (*Better Government for Older People*), as had meeting people with different skills (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*) and having the opportunity to socialise as a group (*Life begins at 50*). Other benefits identified were developing communication skills, sharing views with people in a similar domestic position (*Family Learning*) and developing new sources of information and networking (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). For the buddies on *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, ‘understanding the way learning disabled students live and work’ was a key benefit.

8. Added value of residential provision

Many of the benefits cited and expected in the previous section in relation to the programmes under the ARCA Initiative could equally have been anticipated or reported in non-residential provision. Given the higher costs involved in residential provision, it is important to assess the particular value added of this approach to widening participation among hard-to-reach learners. Participants were therefore asked to identify the specific benefits from studying in residence. We also explored the extent to which learners deliberately select residential programmes, whether this makes a difference and learners' intended progression following the course. Each is considered below.

8.1 Benefits from studying in residence

Learners generally expected the major benefits from studying at a residential college would be getting away from home and the 'everyday routine' (*Life Begins at 50*), allowing them to concentrate without outside diversions (*Life Begins at 50, Family Learning, Better Government for Older People*), domestic commitments or childcare responsibilities (*Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Participants would have no worries about transport (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Better Government for Older People*). One new learner commented: 'I need to push myself and do new things. I have never been parted from my children, so I have something to prove to myself' (*Family Learning*).

Studying in a residential environment would facilitate continuity of learning (*Life Begins at 50 Better Government for Older People Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*) as well as a more focussed and intensive learning experience (*Better Government for Older People Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*). The importance of studying in a relaxed environment (*Life Begins at 50, Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*), was expected to create the right kind of atmosphere for effective learning (*Life Begins at 50, Better Government for Older People*).

Learners would have the 'chance to go over the day's work with the rest of the group', particularly difficult areas (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*), whenever they wished (*Better Government for Older People*) and benefit from 'competent structured tuition' (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). 'Group bonding' would be more likely (*Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*) and there would be companionship and greater opportunities to make

friends (*Better Government for Older People, Life Begins at 50*), and to learn from others (*Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*).

At the end of the programme learners confirmed they had felt free from ‘outside pressures and influence’ in the residential environment (*Better Government for Older People*), safe and secure, relaxed and able to concentrate, which made learning easier (*Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Better Government for Older People*). The development of teamwork was directly attributed to residential study (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Learners did not have to worry about transport (*Better Government for Older People*) could ‘follow-up their work’ and had the opportunity to ‘bond with both students and buddies’ and create greater knowledge of client groups (*Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*).

8.2 Do learners deliberately select residential programmes?

Group project leaders for three of the case study programmes had deliberately selected residential programmes for their members. On *Better Government for Older People*, the group project leader had chosen a residential programme and marketed this to possible attendees. This would give learners the opportunity to broaden their concerns from the ‘rather operational day to day local authority focus, which had characterized the learning network day conferences to date’, to focus on the structure within which their everyday concerns occur.

The *Family Learning* group project leader selected a residential course to give learners an opportunity to study away from family pressures and domestic commitments allowing them to concentrate on a learning experience including social interaction outside the classroom. Similarly, the group project leader from the *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* course had selected a residential setting so participants would be ‘more detached from work and family’ and have an opportunity to ‘cement positive relationships’. The Community Action Partnership even offered childcare and support for families left behind to facilitate student attendance.

On the fourth group programme, *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, the group project leader explained that if the residential college had not taken the initiative ‘we wouldn’t have thought of it ourselves. [The college] was searching for a partner who had experience in this area and we provided that link.’ For the students with learning disabilities the residentiality was a key reason for joining the course: ‘I wanted to come away from home as I knew I could learn more’; ‘I was looking forward to having a break away’; ‘I wanted the chance to be

more independent.’ The buddies, on the other hand, initially had no idea that the course was to be residential.

On *Life Begins at 50*, where students joined the course as individual learners, the course tutor thought some of the participants may have had friends or acquaintances that had previously attended the college and therefore knew about the pleasant venue and excellent facilities. However, the majority would not have known what to expect and might not have selected the programme because it was residential, a view confirmed in focus group discussion where participants explained that they had taken up a place on a residential programme because ‘this was what was on offer’.

8.3 Does residential education makes a difference?

When asked whether similar courses were available in local non-residential colleges 55 per cent of those that responded (90 per cent) did not know; 32 per cent believed that they were not available; and 13 per cent thought a similar course was available. When asked whether learners would have followed their programme if it had been provided in a local non-residential college, 52 per cent of those that responded (84 per cent) said they would have been prepared to follow the course at a local non-residential college.

Learners were then asked to rate the importance of the residential aspect of the course on a scale of 1-5 and of those responding (88 per cent), 94 per cent believed the residential aspect was highly important, rating it 1 or 2 on a scale of 1-5. Several reasons were given for the overwhelming importance of the residential part of the programmes, which are outlined below.

The course tutors, course leaders and group project leaders

The course tutor from *Life Begins at 50* believed that the college provides ‘an inspirational environment’ for its learners and residential experience is qualitatively different from any other form of learning. The ancient college and beautiful rural location provide an idyllic setting for learning. The quality of tutors teaching on the programme tends to be higher than on day or evening programmes, where staff have to be drawn from a limited pool in the immediate locality, whereas for the residential college, tutors are drawn from a ‘national or even international community’ of tutors. The group project leader for *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* concurred with this view; good quality tutoring was a key aspect of the success of the programme. Similarly, the group project leader for

Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks emphasised the advantage of tutors being ‘available on a continuous basis’.

The course tutor for *Life Begins at 50* argued that residential colleges are geared to adult learning and view personal development as a basic need for each individual learner. Standards of friendliness, care and support exceed those provided by conventional academic institutions. The focus of the programme is on the learning experience and this is predominant both in and out of the classroom. Learners do not have to concern themselves with domestic issues: they are in a safe, secure environment where they can concentrate on their programme; a view endorsed by the *Family Learning* course leader. The course tutor on *Better Government for Older People* similarly believed students are more relaxed in a residential environment, where learning, leisure and social activities are all more fun. Participants speak more freely as they know the group outside the classroom and may be more responsive to new ideas away from their traditional environment.

The *Life Begins at 50* course tutor explained that a key part of the social interaction of the group is concerned with the subjects addressed during the day’s teaching programme. If learners feel anxious or apprehensive they are unable to learn. This barrier to learning is more easily overcome in the residential environment, where learners who arrive as separate individuals are swiftly integrated as members of a supportive group forming relatively strong social bonds, which facilitate learning. The course leader from *Family Learning* believed that this confidence building takes place at a much faster pace in a residential environment and there is consequently a greater likelihood that students will translate their learning experience into progression, applying for another programme and continuing their education.

The course tutor from *Family Learning* associated residential education with a process of continually reinforcing what students have learnt; there is no time in between classes to forget what has been learnt and students talk about what they have experienced to others in the same programme. Learning in residence had ‘double value’, a view shared by the course tutor from *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, who felt that ‘the continuity and stability of the college environment made students more receptive learners’ and helped them to ‘gel together and work as a team.’ ‘All members of the group would be able to share the same intense learning experience’ and a greater variety of teaching methods were employed ‘in order to make the course more interesting and maintain the student’s attention (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*).

The group project leader for *Better Government for Older People* felt that learners on residential courses ‘learn in a more focused and enjoyable way’. The environment creates an atmosphere of tolerance, geared to increasing student confidence, and this is especially effective for those from black and minority ethnic communities. Often minority groups tend to stay in their own environment, fearing racism if they move out of this and the residential college is a totally new and positive experience, facilitating mixing that may not normally occur on a day-to-day basis.

Learners have the opportunity to meet new people and time to get to know them, which is unavailable in a two-hour session on a non-residential programme. They make friendships, which outlast the programme and avoid the problems of isolated learners because they are studying in a supportive environment geared to their needs (*Family Learning*). The opportunity for group members to ‘get to know each other better’ was expected to translate into more effective working relationships as ‘group members become the vehicle for forging stronger links between the different outreach centres in which they work’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*).

The learners

Learners from all case study programmes emphasised the importance of the relaxed, quiet and stress-free environment of the residential college. This allowed time to ‘be yourself; to discover what I need to do in terms of self as well as career’. On a non-residential programme, there would have been ‘no time for me’ (*Family Learning*). Time was available in residence to focus on study in a relaxed and secure environment free from domestic pressures (*Better Government for Older People*). Participants from the *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* course also emphasised the peaceful nature of the residential environment explaining it was ‘much more personal and less intimidating than [the local FE College, which] is big. There are lots of crowds – people running around – people pushing.’ Also, this particular group of learners was able to experience a level of independence denied them in their normal environment: ‘Because we are a group we can do more things and although we have to tell the teacher where we are going we have more freedom here.’

Participants believed that courses in a non-residential college would allow little time for reflection and reinforcement (*Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*), and would not be as ‘intense’ as there are too many distractions. ‘I lived and breathed computer and digital camera – that’s all we had to think about

– not work or children’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Learners were able to distance themselves from ‘family duties and the distractions and stress of home life and work and were able to concentrate on learning’, free from domestic pressures’ (*Life Begins at 50, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*), as well as working longer and more intensively increasing the knowledge and understanding gained (*Family Learning*).

Participants felt tutors were more accessible in the residential environment (*Better Government for Older People, Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Learners explained that they command a good deal of individual attention, which is not always available in college classrooms, where less time is available (*Life begins at 50*). Lectures and activities ‘went on until late’ and learners commented that their tutors ‘listen to learners and respond to them’. Participants were able to chat to tutors at mealtimes, exploring issues raised in class in greater depth. ‘Tutors aren’t rushing away at the end of the class’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Life begins at 50*) and nor are the learners who have the time to give full commitment to the course and feel generally more relaxed. This helps them learn in a more leisurely yet more effective fashion. Tutors were ‘more relaxed, more like real people and seemed to really enjoy what they were doing’. They also had the ability to respond to student needs by changing or modifying session plans in order to accommodate these. ‘They didn’t try to rush us, so we learnt more and didn’t feel intimidated’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*).

Learners believed that residential provision was synonymous with a supportive environment (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Life Begins at 50, Family Learning*), including, most importantly, group support both inside and outside formal sessions. Social interaction between group members outside classes made the courses more effective and group members were ‘encouraged to discuss things they didn’t understand’ (*Better Government for Older People*). Being in residence allowed students to ‘get to know one another’; it was a ‘bonding experience, a sharing of thoughts and ideas and feelings you wouldn’t express on day courses.’ Friendships were formed which they thought ‘would survive the transition back into the community’ (*Family Learning*).

A fundamental part of the learning process for participants on *Family Learning* was perceived as ‘gaining new ideas from other students’. Other learners similarly found being part of a group was important and believed that on a non-residential

programme ‘you don’t get to know anyone. You don’t hang around for a social life. There’s no time as you need to get home’ (*Life Begins at 50*). ‘People would have been rushing off to do work or to pick up kids’ and wouldn’t have been able to make ‘the connections on a personal level’ that was possible on the residential programme. The social interaction achieved during the course was rated as a key part of learning, extending the learning process outside the class and allowing ‘team and capacity building’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). For learners on *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, living in residence had a dual social role. Living together helped break down the barriers between buddies and participants with learning difficulties as well as providing opportunities for students to develop social skills, such as eating in a restaurant, which had never before been provided as part of a learning experience.

Non-residential learning was regarded as disjointed and learners liked the continuity of their programmes, something that is missing from a conventional college course, where gaps between each session allow learners to forget what they have learnt instead of capitalising on it and developing deeper understanding (*Life Begins at 50, Family Learning*). Learners felt that courses would have been less successful if taught at a non-residential college, believing that this would have resulted in a lack of continuity (*Life Begins at 50, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). The inevitable gap between each two-hour session in non-residence means that by next week you have to start again (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). Also, learners believed that it would have been necessary to reduce the number of subjects covered if the course had been non-residential (*Life Begins at 50*). Knowledge and skills acquired during the day are discussed and developed out of class time as learners share views and ideas. For those learners who are least confident at speaking out in class this can provide a valuable platform for discussing issues that may not have been aired or even fully understood in class with other members of the group. ‘You don’t feel uptight. We covered areas that we wouldn’t have done without a residential course. We’ve all learnt new things.’ (*Life begins at 50*).

Other areas identified where learning in a residential setting made a difference included the opportunity that learners had to meet other groups socially (*Better Government for Older People*). Transport was not a problem, which is an important issue for the elderly as transport difficulties could prevent them attending courses at a local non-residential college: ‘residential status is a big benefit for the less mobile’ (*Better Government for Older People*). Also, attendance would have been more sporadic (*Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*) and the attrition

rate would have been much higher if the courses had been non-residential (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*).

Learners from only three of the case study programmes felt that the residential aspect of the course could have been improved, and these were a small minority except in the case of the *Better Government for Older People* course, where 7 of the 26 participants on the course suggested improvements. These comments mainly focused on accommodation deficiencies relating to mobility issues. One buddy on *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* acknowledged that living with students helped to break down barriers, but thought this could have been achieved by spending ‘a full day with students with learning difficulties.’

For many participants in all the case study programmes, the residential experience was one of ‘total focused uninhibited learning’ (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*).

8.4 Learner progression

Group project leaders and course tutors expressed the hope that learners would build on their experience at college and develop the skills acquired on their programmes (*Life Begins at 50, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks*). They hoped participants would develop an awareness of the opportunities that exist (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks Group*) and take up other courses (*Family Learning, Life Begins at 50, Better Government for Older People*), perhaps moving into mainstream education (*Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks Group project leader*). Some learners consider taking up paid employment or training that will lead them back into the labour market (*Family Learning*) and experience gained from the course could be beneficial for job hunting (*Developing ICT skills for Volunteer Networks*).

The group project leader from *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* found it hard to predict exactly what course participants would do after the programme. The course tutor from the same programme believed that they would continue to attend courses at the local FE college and build on the work done at the residential college. The course may also ‘enable students to progress to a fuller, more rewarding life with greater independence in their own personal life’, but to track this type of outcome would need an ongoing longitudinal study, rather than a one-off evaluation (*Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*). The course tutor for the *Better Government for Older People* course felt that the students ‘won’t do anything different’ after the course and focus group members

confirmed that they would ‘carry on as usual.’ (*Better Government for Older People*). However, it was thought that learners might become more active in voluntary and community groups (*Better Government for Older People, Family Learning*), perhaps as school governors, in housing associations or as playgroup helpers (*Family Learning*).

Before attending, the majority of learners (79 per cent of respondents) anticipated becoming involved in other activities as a result of the course. A wide range of possibilities was mentioned, many related to the specific client group or course content. Learners from the case study programme *Life Begins at 50* anticipated becoming involved in IT training, voluntary work, reading up on family history, painting or drawing, or becoming involved in leisure activities with local groups. They expressed a general wish to build on what was learnt on the course by continuing in further education. Learners from the other case study programmes initially identified three key areas for potential future activities arising from their course of study. These included continuing in further education (*Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Better Government for Older People, Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*), taking up paid employment (*Family Learning, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Buddies from the Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*) and becoming involved or more involved in community work (*Family Learning, Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties, Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks, Better Government for Older People*).

Proposed further education activities ranged from short courses around a specific area of interest like painting and creative writing, to basic skills programmes in IT, English and Maths and higher level courses leading to professional qualifications such as teacher training. Proposed community activities related closely to learners’ current activities and areas of social interest, so learners from *Better Government for Older People* looked to expand voluntary activities related to supporting the elderly.

At the end of each programme, students were asked what they planned to do next. Of the learners that responded (76 per cent) only 15 per cent said they would be seeking paid employment: 80 per cent were not seeking paid work; 2 per cent were undecided and the remaining 3 per cent were currently employed. Two learners were interested in taking up paid employment on a part time basis, one as a secretary and the other as a consultant (*Life Begins at 50*), one was interested in working in accounts and another working with old people (*Better Government for Older People*). Four learners from the *Family Learning* programme were seeking work in an office,

‘family work’ and as an IT trainer and only one learner, a buddy, from the *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* course was interested in taking up paid employment, perhaps in residential childcare or working with people with learning disabilities. Two learners from the *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* programme were also seeking employment in accounts and community projects.

Asked if they intended to become involved in community work, of those that responded (68 per cent), 45 per cent indicated that they would not become involved in community work, 38 per cent stated they would and 15 per cent were already involved. On *Better Government for Older People*, individuals were keen to pursue voluntary activities relating to support for the elderly such as Age Concern, or to be involved in ‘befriending’, or in campaigning for pensioners’ rights, as well as working with children and being involved in community resource teams. Other areas mentioned by learners were hospice volunteers, fund raising to support those with Alzheimer’s disease, working with those with special needs, assisting with church activities, Beavers/Cubs, St John’s Ambulance, helping people in the local community, working in the local hospital, working with children, mental health intensive support living and so on.

When asked whether they would be attending other courses after the ARCA programme, of those responding (75 per cent), 90 per cent were keen to attend a wide range of other courses. On *Life Begins at 50*, the most popular areas were computing/IT, painting and family history. The majority of learners from *Better Government for Older People* did not provide details of future study intentions, although a minority mentioned courses related to their organisation. Others included IT, health awareness, caring and Esperanto. *Family Learning* students expressed interest in IT/Computing courses as possible areas for future learning as did students on the *Developing ICT skills for Volunteers Networks*, while learners on *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* wished to continue study in the arts.

Of those that responded to the question (78 per cent) 42 per cent indicated that they wished to work towards a qualification. Those specifically cited included CLAIT, GCSEs, NVQs, RSA, City and Guilds and various access courses to bachelors and higher degrees, as well as professional qualifications like accountancy. Almost 75 per cent of learners thought they had developed new areas of interest, which were largely a function of the course of study. Learners on *Life Begins at 50* mentioned painting and computing, family history and history of the local area, yoga/keep fit,

gardening and cookery as new areas of interest. *Family Learning* participants developed an interest in creative writing, while learners on *Developing ICT skills for Volunteers Networks* developed new interests in digital imaging, publicity skills, producing a newsletter, using PowerPoint and techniques for improving old photographs.

Of those responding (75 per cent), 52 per cent confirmed that they had received advice and guidance, and of those commenting on its effectiveness (36 per cent), 91 per cent rated it extremely effective. Case study programmes differed in the extent to which students had received advice and guidance. On *Life Begins at 50*, all but one learner had received advice and guidance from college tutors and rated this highly. About 50 per cent of learners on *Family Learning* received advice and guidance and again all rated this highly. On *Better Government for Older People* and *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*, however, only three and two students respectively reported receiving advice and guidance, while on *Developing ICT skills for Volunteers Networks*, none reported this.

9. Financial details of course provision

Having established in the previous section the added value of residential provision, it remains to examine the costs of the programmes under the ARCA initiative in order to make an assessment of the extent to which this approach represents value for money in widening participation.

For a variety of reasons, it proved difficult to explore financial issues in the detail that we would have wished. While the ARCA project organisers maintained accounts for audit and scrutiny by the Department, they were unable precisely to quantify the financial value of partners' contributions to several of the projects, largely because the partners had no mechanism for valorising their participation. In addition to the financial information provided under the procedure for drawing down Departmental funds, as part of the evaluation, colleges were asked to complete a form (see EF3 in Appendix 2) giving financial details of course provision for each course involved in the initiative, including both specially designed provision and recruitment to existing provision. The form sought to identify the various course cost components: tuition costs, residential costs, other costs and overheads, and the specific contributions by the college, partners, learners and DfEE.

Information was provided for 15 of the 24 specially designed programmes, representing 247 learners out of 353 involved and 61 per cent of the 6,219 learner hours in the group projects under the initiative. In the case of individuals recruited to existing provision, information was supplied for 8 of the 17 programmes, representing 42 learners out of 119 and 31 per cent of the 1,658.5 learner hours in that part of the initiative. In all cases, colleges were asked to supply total costs, broken down into tuition, residential and other costs, including overheads. The following sections deal in turn with the non-residential costs (tuition and other, including overheads), the costs of residence and the question of cost-effectiveness.

The statistics on which the following analysis is based are shown in Tables 12 and 13 on the following pages, which relate to the group projects and individual projects, respectively.

Table 12 Financial details: Group Projects (£)

Course Code	Number of learners	Full course cost	Tuition costs	Residential costs	Other costs	Claim from DfEE	College/Partner contribution	Course hours	Non-res'l cost/l.hr	Resid'l cost/l.hr
A	18	3433.60	320.00	1710.00	1403.60	3133.60	300.00	12	7.98	7.92
B	9	3730.16	1500.00	645.00	1585.16	2230.16	1500.00	11	31.16	6.52
C	15	2480.00				1744.00	736.00	18		
D	12	3428.12	450.00	1560.00	1418.12	2190.80	1237.32	16	9.73	8.13
E	15	5235.00				3125.00	2110.00	28		
F	16	4262.00				3290.00	972.00	28		
G	27	4208.40	406.00	2430.00	1372.40	3368.40	840.00	14	4.70	6.43
H	9	3735.00				1730.00	2005.00	15		
J	9	2920.00				1780.00	1140.00	15		
K	12	3350.00	1578.00	1314.00	458.00	2830.00	520.00	16.5	10.28	6.64
L	26	3460.00	597.00	2132.00	731.00	2332.00	1128	12	4.26	6.83
M	8	4050.34	1030.00	1040.00	1980.34	2746.54	1303.80	16	23.52	8.13
N	16	2592.50	450.00	2073.00	69.50	2592.50	n/k	14	2.32	9.25
P	15	3522.06	562.46	1650.00	1309.60	3222.06	300.00	12	10.40	9.17
Q	10	3960.00				2270.00	1690.00	15		
R	16	5525.00	2725.00	2300.00	500.00	2100.00	3425.00	20	10.08	7.19
S	12	3250.00	1470.00	1254.00	526.00	2870.00	380.00	16.5	10.08	6.33
T	12	1816.00	336.00	880.00	600.00	1516.00	300.00	12	6.50	6.11
U	12	4057.66	534.80	1560.00	1962.86	2678.86	1378.80	24	8.67	5.42
V	16	5422.00				3100.00	2322.00	28		
W	30	3788.00	707.00	2460.00	621.00	3367.00	421.00	12	3.69	6.83
X	10	2788.00	1500.00	1170.00	118.00	2788.00	0.00	12	13.48	9.75
Y	16	2537.00				1957.00	580.00	28		
Z	12	4920.00	420.00	2080.00	2420.00	2870.00	2050.00	34	6.96	5.10
Totals	353	88470.84	14586.26	26258.00	17075.58	61831.92	26638.92	429		
Averages	14.71	3686.29	1326.02	2387.09	1552.33			17.88	8.41	6.97

Table 13 Financial details: Individual projects (£)

Course code	Number of learners	Full course cost	Tuition costs	Residential costs	Other costs	Claim from DfEE	College/partner contribution	Course hours	Non-res'l cost/1.hr	Resid'l cost/1.hr
1	2	546.00	96.00	450.00	0.00	200.00	346.00	27	1.78	8.33
2	19	1900.00				1805.00	95.00	18		
3	1	108.90				100.00	8.90	14		
4	18	1600.00				1600.00		12		
5	4	440.00	80.00	360.00	0.00	260.00	180.00	10.5	1.90	8.57
6	1	108.90				100.00	8.90	14		
7	1	100.00				100.00		16		
8	13	1430.00	260.00	1170.00	0.00	1300.00	130.00	10.5	1.90	8.57
9	2	220.00	40.00	180.00	0.00	144.00	76.00	10.5	1.90	8.57
10	1	98.00				70.00	28.00	15		
11	13	1485.00				650.00	835.00	9		
12	1	130.00	25.00	85.00	20.00	100.00	30.00	14	3.21	6.07
13	1	136.00	25.00	87.00	24.00	100.00	36.00	14	3.50	6.21
14	22	2200.00				2200.00		18		
15	1	176.00	65.00	89.00	22.00	100.00	76.00	17	5.12	5.24
16	1	126.00				100.00	26.00	14		
17	18	2085.00	220.00	1415.00	450.00	1800.00	285	12	3.10	6.55
Totals	119	12889.80	811.00	3836.00	516.00	10729.00	2160.80	245.5		
Averages	7	758.22	101.38	479.50	15.38			14.44	2.58	7.46

9.1 Tuition and other costs

In examining tuition and other costs, specially designed provision and the individual learner projects are first considered separately since it is to be expected that the special provision would involve additional costs.

Specially designed provision

In the case of the 16 group programmes for which full financial details were provided, total tuition costs ranged from £320 to £2,725. Tuition costs were independent of the number of students involved (there were 18 people on the course costing £320 and 16 students on the course costing £2,725) but related to the total course hours (not learner hours). Three other courses involved tuition costs of around £1,500, while another eight courses cost about one third of this. In other words, there was significant variation in tuition fees. It might be expected that the cost of specially designed provision would depend upon the subject area and target group, and to some extent this does appear to have been the case. The most expensive course in terms of total tuition costs was designed for individuals with learning difficulties (*Communications for Independence in Training*), although in another programme with a similar target audience (*Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*), total tuition costs were one fifth.

Tuition costs and other non-residential costs can be regarded as the fixed costs of provision, largely independent of the number of learners, so it is possible to compare the courses in terms of non-residential costs *per hour of learning* (rather than per learner hour). On this basis, the average non-residential cost per hour of learning was £125, with a range of £37 to £280. By any standard, the upper range of costs is high, and almost 8 times the lowest cost, even though the most expensive course involved considerable outreach activity.

When non-residential costs are calculated per learner hour, there is still substantial variation about an average of £8.41 per hour, from £2.32 to £31.16, a factor of over 13 times difference in non-residential costs per learner hour. The two most expensive group programmes on this basis, at £31.16 and £23.52 per learner hour, respectively, were designed for elderly learners (*Retirement Preparation for early Retirees* and *Elderly Learners and Reminiscences*), which seem high compared with £10.8 and £8.67 per learner hour on the programmes for individuals with learning difficulties (*Communications for Independence in Training* and *Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties*). There were 9 and 8 learners on the elderly courses, compared with 16 and 12 on the other two, so part of the cost differences are

explicable in terms of the numbers recruited, but even after allowing for this, the courses for older learners were putting more resource into each learning hour than the programmes for individuals with learning difficulties.

Individual learner projects

In the case of the individual learner programmes, total tuition costs were not declared since the ARCA initiative provided a fixed maximum contribution of £100 per learner recruited to existing provision. Hence non-residential costs per hour are not comparable with the figures cited above for the specially designed provision. The comparison must therefore be made on non-residential costs per learner hour, even though non-residential costs are largely fixed costs independent of learner numbers. Again there was substantial variation about the average non-residential cost of £2.58 per learner hour, from £1.78 to £5.12 per learner hour, a difference factor of almost 3 times in non-residential costs between the most and least expensive provision for individual learner projects.

9.2 Residential costs

Residential costs represent the major part of variable costs, so it is only meaningful to compare costs per learner hour, since residential costs are both a function of the number of learners participating in each programme and the overall duration of the course. Moreover, there is little *a priori* reason why residential costs per learner hour should differ between the specially designed provision and individual projects. Each set of projects is considered in turn below.

Specially designed provision

The average residential cost per learner hour for the group projects was £6.97, ranging from £5.10 to £9.75 per learner hour, a difference factor of almost 2 between the least and most expensive group project provision. The differences in residential costs per learner hour are not entirely the result of the particular residential costs of different colleges, since all five courses at college B had different residential costs, ranging from £6.43 to £9.75 per learner hour, even though three of the courses involved exactly the same number of contact hours.

It might be expected that residential costs, like tuition costs for individuals with learning difficulties, could also be higher for those with special needs or for whom mobility was a problem, yet for the two courses of this nature that supplied financial information, residential costs were £5.42 and £7.19 per learner hour, close to the cheapest and average costs, respectively. Moreover, the two most expensive courses

in tuition terms were the community course *Introduction to Residential Learning*, and the *WEA National Foundation Programme* (both of which were at college B).

Individual learner projects

In the case of the individual projects, the average residential cost per learner hour was £7.46, ranging from £5.24 to £8.57 per learner hour, a difference factor of 1.6 between the least and most expensive individual project provision. The differences in this case do appear to be a function of the colleges involved, although college E cites three different residence costs ranging from £5.24 to £6.21 per learner hour, including two courses with exactly the same number of contact hours. Programme content and target audience seem to have no particular effect on residential costs on the basis of the information provided.

9.3 Cost-effectiveness

The key question for this evaluation, having demonstrated the potential role that residential provision can play in widening participation in learning, is to assess the extent to which it represents a cost-effective means of doing so. Cost-effectiveness includes the question of value for money but in relation to the impact or effectiveness of the initiative. The information available within the timescale of the project and the resources available to undertake the evaluation limit the extent to which we can assess the effectiveness of the initiative against the objectives of widening participation among hard-to-reach learners. With this caveat in mind, the following points should first be reiterated.

Section 5 demonstrated that the initiative did succeed in attracting older learners (57 per cent over 50), those in receipt of benefits (63 per cent) and those who had not been involved in any formal learning in the previous 12 months (52 per cent). It was less successful in engaging males (31 per cent), members of minority ethnic groups (12 per cent) and those from social classes IV and V (27 per cent).

At the reaction level, section 6 showed the majority of learners on all the programmes regarded the teaching methods as highly effective (91 per cent) and believed they had adequate opportunity to contribute to discussion (81 per cent). In terms of wider effectiveness, section 7 demonstrated a broad satisfaction with the content of programmes and a wide range of personal and learning benefits. Section 8 suggested a substantial amount of learner progression, with individuals intending

to become involved in community work (45 per cent) or further learning opportunities (90 per cent), some towards a qualification (42 per cent).

Equally, section 8 showed considerable consensus on the benefits of studying in residence, and rated the residential aspect as highly important (94 per cent) for a wide range of very positive reasons. Nevertheless, a substantial number of learners (52 per cent) would have been prepared to follow a similar course without the benefit of residence, so the evaluation must be clear on what specific value is added and at what cost.

The costs of residential provision, as indicated by the financial information provided for programmes under the ARCA initiative, are summarised in Table 14 below.

Table 14 Average costs under the ARCA initiative (£ per learner hour)

	Tuition and other	Residential	Total
Group projects	8.41	6.97	15.38
Individual learner projects	2.58	7.46	10.03

There is a substantial difference between the group projects and individual learner projects in terms of tuition and other costs, which probably reflect the reporting system used, the additional costs of specially designed provision and the lower learner numbers on group projects. The costs are probably somewhere between the two, and in any case there is no *a priori* reason for assuming these costs would be any higher than similarly designed provision organised on a non-residential basis.

Having established the *added* value of residential provision, it is the *added* cost that should be the focus of the cost-benefit analysis. The residential costs are of the same order for both group and individual projects and are probably a good indication of the additional costs of residential provision. Assuming an average 7-hour day of study, the average residential costs in round terms give a daily cost of *£50 per learner for the residential part of the initiative*. Government needs to be convinced that this represents value for money against the attainment of the objectives of widening participation and in turn this will depend upon the extent to which widening participation is seen as a priority among competing objectives. Given the need to target resources for maximum effect, this would suggest that residential provision should play a major role in widening participation among those excluded groups for whom mobility, travel and security are major issues.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

In drawing conclusions and making recommendations concerning any future follow-up of the ARCA initiative, we address six themes: programme design; target groups; recruitment, advice and guidance; learning benefits; the added value of residential provision; and progression. Each is considered in turn below.

10.1 Programme design

The ARCA residential colleges sought funding from DfEE for two pilot projects aimed at widening participation in learning as a route to social inclusion. The first project was to provide opportunities for individuals to participate in ARCA's existing residential course provision and the second project was to target groups of learners for which provision related to the specific needs of each group would be specially designed. In the event, the two projects ran concurrently and the logic of assigning students and courses to each project was unclear. The 31 ARCA colleges demonstrated varying levels of participation in the initiative; only 11 colleges were involved and 4 of these accounted for 54 per cent of the recruits.

Some courses did not fit well with the aims of the Initiative, did not seem to access a relevant target group or could possibly have been funded from alternative sources. For example, *Teenwise* aimed to recruit participants 13-20 years old, thereby involving participants who were not adult learners. Similarly, the *WEA National Foundation Programme*, part of a nationally recognised OCN accredited course in the study of society, would normally be funded through different means. We also did not know whether students who took part in what we understood to be *Training for Change* courses (a programme launched in 1998 by NIACE) could have been funded by other means, particularly since a residential weekend had been part of this programme in the previous academic year and funded by other means.

Recommendations for any future initiative:

- ◆ **In any future initiative of this sort, the distinction between individual and group projects should be dispensed with.**
- ◆ **If repeated, more of the ARCA colleges should be involved to demonstrate ARCA's commitment to widening access, increase geographical coverage and meet target numbers.**
- ◆ **Courses that could be funded from other sources should not be included in any follow-on initiative since this raises the risk of the programmes representing substitute rather than additional provision.**

10.2 Target groups

The programmes in the ARCA Initiative successfully targeted excluded groups: 30 per cent attended courses for the over 50s; 16 per cent joined programmes for those with disabilities; and 7 per cent entered courses for parents. Of the 427 participants, 69 per cent were female and 31 per cent male; over 57 per cent were at least 50 years old. Of those providing information on ethnic background, 77 per cent were ethnically white and 12 per cent from other ethnic backgrounds. Some 28 per cent suffered from a disability and 18 per cent were registered disabled; 63 per cent were in receipt of benefit. An analysis of social class based on most recent employment found 33 per cent of those responding came from Social Classes I and II and only 27 per cent from social classes IV and V. However, 39 per cent did not respond to this question and many of these had never had paid work, for example those with learning disabilities.

While most participants qualified as 'hard-to-reach' learners at one level (such as elderly or disabled), there was little evidence of multiple deprivation. One case study focus group thought the course fees too low and would have been prepared to pay more to attend. Only two courses appeared to be designed to encourage the involvement of ethnic minority groups and one of these was not very successful in accessing this target group. During focus group discussions, mothers spoke of difficulties with childcare when absent from home and some had to withdraw, including from a college where there was a nursery on site that was not made available. Providing courses for elderly learners to develop leisure interests for retirement is valuable, but several individuals in their 50s wished to re-enter the labour market.

Recommendations for any future initiative:

- ◆ **In any similar initiative in the future, course places should be prioritised for individuals with greatest need, as indicated by postcode using the DLTR multiple deprivation index. Where participants can afford to pay course fees, they should do so, using DfES funds to support more individuals at risk of exclusion.**
- ◆ **More effort should be made to attract individuals from minority ethnic groups, through designing programmes to meet their specific needs.**
- ◆ **Childcare should be provided where young parents are included in the target group.**
- ◆ **Courses should be developed for learners over 50 wishing to re-enter the labour market, alongside those for individuals preparing for retirement.**

10.3 Recruitment, advice and guidance

The target groups identified in the original ARCA proposal were men over the age of 25 and older women learners in Phase 1 (widening access to current residential provision) and ‘the majority of those categories included within the Kennedy Report’ in Phase 2 (widening access through specially designed provision through outreach projects with specified groups). It was anticipated that 64 per cent of participants would be recruited on to existing provision and 36 per cent on to specifically designed group provision, this was reversed: 75 per cent were recruited to group provision and 25 per cent as individuals into existing provision. Nevertheless, the Initiative achieved 88 per cent of its target of 535 learners.

Participants were to be adult learners from defined socially excluded groups, and the project was to ‘widen participation in residential learning’, and to ‘provide an opportunity for those who do not currently participate to do so.’ Almost half (48 per cent) had been involved in learning activities during the previous 12 months, including in one of the case studies two individuals who had previously attended residential college. Some 4 per cent of participants were too young to qualify as adult learners and should not have been included in the project. Almost half of the recruits to the first *Preparation for Retirement* programme were under 50 years old.

The ARCA bid stated that its colleges are ‘experienced in providing advice and guidance’ and ‘uniquely placed ... to provide quality information on further learning opportunities’. Only 57 per cent of respondents had received advice and guidance during their programme of study, although those that had, commented favourably on its effectiveness.

Recommendations for any future initiative:

- ◆ **ARCA should only recruit adult learners, who have not previously attended residential programmes, which was a condition of DFEE funding of the initiative.**
- ◆ **Recruitment should be better geared to the target groups by using outreach and adult and community learning networks.**
- ◆ **Recruits should be properly screened to ensure the programme is appropriate to their needs, particularly those with learning difficulties.**
- ◆ **All participants should receive advice and guidance, preferably in partnership with local non-residential providers or other agencies involved in adult and community learning.**

10.4 Learning benefits

Learners had many expectations of what they would gain personally from attending ARCA programmes, including new knowledge and understanding, improved employment chances and more effective participation in the community. They also looked forward to the opportunity of learning with 'like-minded' people, gaining personal confidence and being stimulated to continue learning. After the courses, learners cited similar benefits, emphasising the development of new skills and noting that the scale of increased self-confidence went far beyond that anticipated. At the end of the programmes, learners also emphasised the benefits of group learning in terms of improved communication skills and had appreciated the opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds and ethnic origins, with varied educational abilities.

Learners were generally happy with their programmes of study, reporting that course objectives had been made clear, that they had acquired significant new knowledge and understanding were able to contribute to class discussion and that teaching methods on their individual programmes had been highly effective, particularly *listening* and *discussion* both inside and outside of the classroom. Individual engagement and teamwork were identified as key aspects of programme effectiveness by case study tutors.

Tutors were highly praised in terms of their commitment, skill, patience and adaptability. Tutor assessment was also viewed as extremely helpful by the majority of the 73 per cent of students that responded, although case study tutors expressed more reservations because it was sometimes difficult to assess all areas of the programme. However, there was little attempt to measure individual progress and provide an overall assessment of the learning gain or wider benefits of participation in the programmes.

Recommendations for any future initiative:

- ◆ **Every effort should be made to assess all parts of the programs using agreed, specific, criteria appropriate for, and sensitive to, the target groups.**
- ◆ **ARCA should endeavour to measure the learning gain of individuals in educational terms, as well as the wider benefits of learning.**

10.5 Added value of residential provision

The added value of residential provision for learners was in getting away from home, having no transport problems, concentrating without distraction in a relaxed learning environment, continuity of more intensive and focused learning and the opportunity to discuss the day's work and learn from others. Tutors and project leaders were unequivocal in their support of the residential aspect, which 'provides an inspirational environment for its learners.' The tuition is of high quality, geared to adult learning and allows a higher level of social interaction and discussion as well as continual reinforcement, where students learn in a more focused and enjoyable way, forming effective working relationships, extending the learning experience outside the class and facilitating 'team and capacity building'.

Non-residential courses were viewed as allowing insufficient time for reflection and reinforcement, tutors are less accessible for individual attention and there is less peer support. Non-residential learning was considered disjointed, suffering from a lack of continuity, reducing the amount of material that can be covered in a programme. Attendance on non-residential courses is more sporadic, the attrition rate high and learners with mobility problems would be likely to be excluded from attendance. Nevertheless, 52 per cent of participants would have been prepared to follow the course non-residentially, even though 94 per cent thought residence to be highly important.

There was considerable variation in the costs of tuition, residential fees and other costs but in round terms the additional cost of the added value of residential provision is around £50 per learner per day.

Recommendations for any future initiative:

- ◆ **Residential provision should target widening participation among those excluded groups for whom mobility, travel and security are major issues.**
- ◆ **Non-residential colleges should replicate some of the courses provided under the ARCA initiative to isolate the added value of residence.**
- ◆ **The ARCA colleges should work in partnership with other agencies in adult and community learning to achieve the objectives outlined in the widening participation agenda.**
- ◆ **All colleges should in future complete the forms giving full financial details to facilitate cost-benefit analysis.**

10.6 Progression

The ARCA bid proposed to provide ‘a starting point for many learners’. The project would be judged ‘successful if adults, at present excluded from participating in learning, continue with their studies in any formal or informal educational sector.’ The proposal explained that ‘given the diverse range of potential participants in the specially designed programmes, measurement of the added value that progression could bring would need to be identified specifically within each programmes outputs.’ This process was not always obvious to the evaluators from the documentation provided so it can only be assumed that there was little progression on a number of programmes.

Some tutors *hoped* that students would build on their learning experience, but others believed students ‘won’t do anything different’ afterwards. Before the courses, 79 per cent of participants anticipated becoming involved in other activities as a result of attending, in terms of further education, paid employment, community and voluntary activities. At the end of their programmes, most respondents said they *intended* to take other courses (90 per cent), some working towards a qualification (42 per cent). Only a minority (15 per cent) would seek paid employment, and many (45 per cent) would *not* become involved in community activity. Evaluating progression on the basis of expressed intentions, however, is unreliable and there is a need for longitudinal evaluation as well as studies comparing residential learning with other routes.

Recommendations for any future initiative:

- ◆ **Course objectives should be geared to widening participation rather than assuming that attending a residential programme will automatically facilitate social inclusion.**
- ◆ **Progression routes should be identified and criteria defined to measure progression within the context of each programme’s outputs, in line with the ARCA proposal.**
- ◆ **A longitudinal tracking study is recommended to follow individuals in the ARCA initiative, to explore: how far expressed intentions are translated into take-up of further learning; individuals’ expressed motives; perceived differences between residential and non-residential learning experiences; the extent to which new learners become active in further education, the community or the labour market (or combinations of these); and the role of learning in activation.**

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Appendix 1 Case studies

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Life begins at 50

The residential course, *Life Begins at 50*, aimed to encourage over 50s to use their leisure time as effectively as possible by introducing learners to ‘taster sessions’, giving the opportunity to explore subjects they might wish to pursue in the future, such as gardening, painting, computing, the Internet, folk dancing, cookery and tracing your family tree. The purpose was to broaden participation in the college’s curriculum, motivating learners to pursue a selection of the subjects to which they had been introduced in greater depth.

Of the 19 learners, 11 were female; all were classed as ethnically white and were at least 50 years old (10 were over 60 including 3 over 70). Learners came from a variety of social and economic backgrounds; 9 had last been employed in white-collar employment ranging from occupations such as a financial clerk to local government chief officer. One had been employed as an engineer, another had been self-employed and a third had never had paid employment. The remaining three in the group had worked as a van driver, care assistant and porter and handyman.

Only six of the learners were currently involved in voluntary activities, ranging from working as a Scope Volunteer to WRVS and helping with school dinners. Sixteen had not been involved in any form of learning, education or training for five years or more and only one learner had been involved in the last 1-2 years. Only one learner had not enjoyed their learning experience and all except one believed they had benefited from such prior learning.

A number of learners had joined the programme following a life change and were seeking a new role for themselves as well as social interaction and mental stimulation. The majority of learners became aware of the course through advertisements in the local paper and radio, without which they would have been unaware of its availability.

The programme

Post course feedback demonstrated that the majority of material presented on the course had increased learner knowledge, and that course objectives were clear.

Learners generally had difficulty detailing the new knowledge acquired, although 15 mentioned new technology.

All learners rated teaching methods as highly effective, 9 referring directly to the tutor's experience and enthusiasm. Listening, supporting other group members and group discussion both in and out of class were viewed as the most effective teaching methods. Generally, learners felt able to contribute to class discussion. The course tutor explained that confidence levels vary significantly, often as a function of social background. Once participation in classes is achieved, it becomes easier to repeat.

Learners found tutor assessment and comments extremely helpful, although it was impossible to assess all areas of the programme. An integral part of practical subjects, like computing, necessarily involved constant feedback and interaction with learners directly related to their progress in the session.

Effectiveness of the programme

Generally there was little criticism of the programme; learners accepted that not all sessions would necessarily be to their taste. Painting and IT were viewed as the most useful parts. The course tutor explained that the two history sessions had some overlap and that there was an enormous range of subjects that could be included in such a course.

Twelve learners did not feel any improvements to the course were necessary, although a number of the elderly learners found the course a little intense and needed more leisure time. Teaching needed to be sensitive to differing ability. The range of ages involved meant that a learner who was just 50 and intended to return to work saw the course as a stepping stone back into employment, whereas those 58 and over were operating to a different agenda.

Participants anticipated personal benefits from learning about new areas and developing 'ideas for the future'. Other personal benefits expected were a motivation to learn, 'improving my mind', 'improving my concentration', 'learning with like-minded people' and general personal satisfaction. Learners felt they had benefited personally in terms of self-confidence in both themselves and their ability to learn and emphasised the personal importance of meeting new people.

Anticipated benefits in learning outcomes included the opportunity to take up a variety of new subjects, being stimulated to learn more and broaden interests and

developing a greater understanding of various subject areas, as well as learning together as a group and through helping others to learn. At the end of the programme learners identified similar benefits, focusing on a greater understanding of new subjects, broadening the mind and creating the confidence to keep learning, with the message ‘education can be enjoyable’.

Participants anticipated that their self-confidence would increase by learning from others, listening to different views, exchanging ideas and socialising as a coherent group. Feedback forms completed at the end of the course emphasised the benefits of meeting and making friends with new people, sharing views and having the opportunity to socialise as a group.

Learners generally thought that the major benefits from studying at a residential college would be a chance to get away from home and have a break from the ‘everyday routine’, in a relaxed learning environment that gave them the chance to concentrate without outside diversions. They would have time to reintegrate into a learning environment, which would create the right kind of atmosphere, allowing continuity of learning as well as greater opportunities to make friends. Other benefits anticipated included passing knowledge learnt on to others

Added value of residential provision

The majority of course participants had not specifically selected the programme for its residential nature and had taken it up because ‘this was what was on offer’. Most thought similar courses were not available in local non-residential colleges or did not know. While only one learner believed that they could have studied the course in a non-residential environment, 10 would have been prepared to follow the course non-residentially. Nevertheless, all learners rated the importance of the residential aspect of the course highly and all but one felt that the course would have been less successful if taught at a non-residential college as this would have resulted in a lack of continuity, focus and group support. Also learners believed it would have been necessary to reduce the number of subjects covered. Only two learners felt that the residential aspect of the course could have been improved.

The course tutor believes the college provides an ‘inspirational environment’ for its learners. The quality of tutors teaching on the programme tends to be higher than on day or evening programmes where staff have to be drawn from the immediate locality and therefore the choice is limited, whereas for the residential college tutors are drawn from a ‘national or even international community’ of tutors.

Participants rated the social interaction achieved during the course as a key part of the learning process, extending this outside the class. Learners enjoyed a level of individual attention unavailable in college classrooms where there is less time available. A residential setting offered a more relaxed and peaceful environment, allowing more time for discussion. Tutors were accessible and responsive; learners can chat to them at mealtimes, exploring issues raised in class in greater depth. Tutors and learners do not rush away at the end of the class so give full commitment to the course. In a non-residential course you have to 'get the knowledge in quick' and 'if you miss anything you have to wait a week before you can find out what you don't know.' Learners liked the continuity of the programme, which is missing from a conventional college course where gaps between each session allow learners to forget what they have learnt instead of capitalising on this.

Learner progression

Before the course the majority of learners anticipated becoming involved in other activities as a result of attending, such as IT training, voluntary work, reading up on family history, painting or drawing, becoming involved in leisure activities with local groups and a general wish to build on what was learnt on the course by continuing in further education. Only two learners were interested in taking up paid employment on a part time basis, one as a secretary and the other as a consultant.

All learners were keen to attend further courses such as IT, painting and family history. Only one learner wished to work towards a qualification, CLAIT. All learners thought they had developed new areas of interest, painting and IT being the most popular, followed by family history and history of the local area, yoga/keep fit, gardening and cookery. All but one learner had received advice and guidance from college tutors and rated this highly.

Conclusions

Learners had enjoyed the programme, learnt new subjects, developed self-confidence and now viewed learning as 'fun'. The residential aspect was key to this process allowing them to concentrate on study, in a relaxed learning environment with a supportive group culture and no outside distractions.

The course had succeeded in bringing together a group of people, *many of whom had become socially isolated*, who were all now keen to attend other courses, both residential and non-residential.

Better Government for Older People

The purpose of the *Better Government for Older People* (BGOP) programme was to encourage socially excluded older adults to explore new methods of democracy and participation. Learners were introduced to a variety of sessions, focusing on areas such as the Art and Science of Aging, Grey Power and Combating Social Exclusion, along with more general historical and political issues. A member of a local University attended the programme and was assigned a session to involve learners in a project entitled *Older people in Deprived Neighbourhoods: Social Exclusion and Quality of Life in Old Age*. Of the 26 learners, 20 were female and 15 were classed as ethnically white. Only 5 learners were under 60 years of age; 5 were in their 60s and 15 were 70 or older (including 4 in their 80s).

The majority of learners were drawn from two community groups in London; 11 learners suffered from a disability and 5 were registered disabled; 21 were claiming benefit. Eight participants had last been in white-collar employment ranging from accounting to office work, while others had worked in care, transport, and building. All but 3 learners were currently involved in voluntary activities, especially support for the elderly. Eight learners had not been involved in any form of learning, education or training for 5 years or more, one had been involved in the previous 1-2 years, and 14 had engaged in learning, training or education in the previous 12 months. All had enjoyed and benefited from their prior learning experience

Learners had been recruited by the Group Project leader using contacts in organisations such as the Council for Older People and the Community Resource team. Students joined the course to increase knowledge and understanding of issues relevant to their voluntary and community work, particularly in relation to *BGOP*. The programme was expected to widen their perspectives.

The programme

Post course feedback demonstrated that course objectives had been clearly stated and the majority of material presented had increased learner knowledge and understanding, while building on current experience. Learners had gained a greater understanding of issues related to the elderly in 'other minority/majority groups' and acquired new knowledge of direct relevance to their voluntary activities.

Eighteen learners felt that teaching methods had been highly effective and many made direct reference to the high calibre of teaching staff. Group discussion, listening and supporting other group members both in and out of class were viewed

as the most effective teaching methods. Generally, learners felt able to contribute to class discussion, explaining that they ‘were encouraged to ask questions’, ‘everyone was given a chance to speak’ and participants received ‘feedback from the group.’

Effectiveness of the programme

Generally there was little adverse comment on the programme; the NHS and pensions sessions were viewed as the most useful parts of the course, although a study visit to a local factory and related session were less popular. Participants felt there was insufficient time for discussion and found the course too intense. Some learners also felt that including some written and practical work and providing the opportunity for learners to report on their own areas of work would have improved the course. Also, teaching aids with larger print would have been appreciated.

Learners anticipated a number of personal benefits from attending the programme, including new knowledge and understanding about aging and supporting the elderly. They would be able to share views with others, developing a greater understanding of their own lives as well as exploring the experiences of people from different cultures. Other anticipated personal benefits included confidence building, empowerment and the ability to help more vulnerable members of society. At the end of the programme learners confirmed their confidence had increased as a direct result and that this would increase their effectiveness in volunteer networks.

Anticipated learning outcomes in relation to content included more effective lobbying of MPs, a greater awareness of aging, an increased satisfaction from work with the elderly and direct financial gain leading to a higher living standard and the ability to share this knowledge with others. In retrospect, learners acknowledged they had a better understanding of the aging process, had developed new ideas and had widened their knowledge of different groups from varied backgrounds.

Before the course, learners were looking forward to becoming more aware of other people’s needs, socialising, ‘meeting other ethnic groups and ‘learning from each other’, and developing confidence to talk in front of others’. Improved training of volunteers, recruitment, networking and fundraising were also expected outcomes of group interaction. Feedback forms completed at the end of the course emphasised the benefits of group discussion and the sharing of ideas, the importance of the multicultural context, learning more about each other and exploring the ‘different reactions to certain situations’ exhibited by various members of the group.

Learners anticipated benefits from sharing experiences, companionship, making new friends, meeting people they would not normally meet, hearing new ideas, and broadening their knowledge through others' life experiences. At the end of the programme learners felt that they had broadened their outlook by meeting new people, had more interesting debates and discussions and made new friendships that would outlast the course.

Learners thought that the major benefits from studying at a residential college would be a more focussed and intensive learning experience, companionship and the opportunity to make new friends. Participants would be free from transport concerns and able to discuss topics whenever they wished with a 'sympathetic forum'. Social contact would be an integral part of the programme and students would feel 'refreshed' by being in a different environment. They would have time to concentrate and study would not be 'cut off after two hours.' At the end of the course, learners concluded it was easier to study in residence, without distraction and having to deal with travel arrangements or domestic duties. The atmosphere was relaxed and they felt safe and secure in the residential college environment.

Added value of residential provision

The group project leader had consciously selected a residential programme and marketed this with the target audience. *BGOP* has established learning networks, involving day conferences, but a residential programme allowed a broadening of topics studied and a deeper academic approach to issues. When asked whether similar courses were available in local non-residential colleges the majority thought not, or did not know. While 15 learners would have been prepared to follow the course at a local non-residential college, 6 would not have been. All but one of the learners rated the importance of the residential aspect of the course highly and the majority felt that it would have been less successful on a non-residential basis.

The residential aspect was key to the learning process allowing students to concentrate on study, in a relaxed, safe and secure learning environment without having to concern themselves with issues such as transport and other domestic commitments. This was a particular bonus for a group that contained a number of learners with mobility problems. Social interaction outside classes made the course more effective by facilitating in-depth discussion. The project leader felt that the residential environment was unique in creating an atmosphere that is more tolerant, which was especially effective for those from black/ethnic minority communities.

Learner progression

The course tutor felt that the students ‘won’t do anything different’ after the course and focus group members confirmed that they would ‘carry on as usual’. However, before the course, the majority of learners anticipated becoming involved in other activities as a result of attending the programme. Among possibilities mentioned was further education, particularly geared to older learners and volunteer activities.

Two learners were interested in securing employment in accounts with old people and two were currently in paid employment; 19 learners cited increased involvement in voluntary activities, mainly in support for the elderly. Most learners were keen to attend other courses and 15 said they had developed new areas of interest, both academic and practical, such as politics and knowing more about pensions. Only 3 learners had received advice and guidance from college tutors but rated this highly.

Conclusions

The course succeeded in bringing together a group of elderly people in a formal learning environment, who indicated at the end of the programme that they were all now keen to attend other courses (both residential and non-residential) after the residential experience. Learners had enjoyed the programme, gaining new ideas, widening their knowledge of relevant issues and increasing self-confidence, which participants believed would make them more effective in their volunteer networks.

Over half of the group were not new to learning and had been involved in learning, training or education in the last twelve months; 2 learners were studying for degrees. The group was larger than anticipated and the combination of two groups damaged internal cohesion. Learners would have welcomed more discussion, which in learning terms received the highest rating. Some of the sessions on local historical issues did not seem entirely appropriate to an audience drawn from the other end of the country, and while participants were interested in learning about the research project *Older people in Deprived Neighbourhoods* this might have been better as an optional evening extra since its main purpose was to recruit participants. Also, 25 per cent of course members felt that the residential aspect of the course could have been improved by greater sensitivity to the needs of elderly learners, for example, providing ground floor accommodation and supplying information on extra support facilities like the loop system and teaching materials with larger print.

Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks

The course *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* was designed 'to provide a residential experience for a group of adult learners from a local community in a relaxed and supportive environment.' The IT focused programme introduced students to MS PowerPoint, explored how to create text slides, use master views and manipulate photographic images, with a view to applying these techniques in community newsletters. Learners also explored how the project could help Community Action Partnership (CAP) organisations and how skills and ideas from the programme could be disseminated throughout the community organisational structure. Students were also able to take part in an individual skills audit to aid their personal development.

All 12 learners were female and ethnically white with ages ranging from the 20s to 50s. One student was aged 18 years old and technically should not have been involved, since the definition of adult learner is at least 19 years old. Four learners suffered from a disability; 3 were registered disabled and 8 were claiming benefit. Learners had last been employed in a variety of occupations; 4 had been neighbourhood workers, one had worked in a community action partnership and 2 had been accounts clerks. Others cited van driver, decorator and canteen assistant. The majority were currently employed part-time or unemployed and all but one were involved in voluntary activities, mainly to support children in some capacity.

Nine of the learners had been involved in learning, education or training during the previous 12 months, one in the previous 24 months and 2 in the previous 3-4 years. All of the learners had enjoyed and benefited from their learning experience. Course participants were CAP neighbourhood workers and voluntary members of community groups. Organising childcare was a determining factor in the decision to participate. Learners joined the course to gain greater knowledge of IT skills, to develop skills, which would help to promote their community group and its work, improve employment prospects, increase confidence and to share knowledge and skills acquired with members of the community, creating a cascade effect.

The programme

The majority of learners believed that the course objectives had been made clear to them and that they had acquired extensive new knowledge and understanding, particularly about the use of PowerPoint, the digital camera and the scanner. Eight learners had been introduced to new technologies and made specific reference to knowledge of new software packages.

All learners felt that teaching methods had been highly effective and tutors were praised for being sympathetic, patient and adaptable, with practical work being given the highest rating by all students. Learners felt able to contribute to class discussion and the small group size facilitated this process, as did a relaxed atmosphere. Participants all felt that tutor comments and assessment were extremely helpful and valued their 'encouragement and positive feedback'. This confidence building process was enhanced by peer assessment when presentations were made in class.

Effectiveness of the programme

The most useful aspects of the programme were identified as the sessions on PowerPoint and the digital camera. Learners explained that the course would enable them to use equipment to which they had access to its full capacity and facilitate the production of 'more professional news letters' for their community work. The majority felt that all parts of the programme were necessary and only two learners felt that any improvements to the course were needed; one suggested that more computers could be fitted with the Adobe Photo deluxe programme and the other that the length of the working day needed to be reduced. 'On one occasion we worked from 9.00 a.m to 9.50 p.m and this was too long.'

Course members anticipated a number of personal benefits, including better IT skills which would make them more effective in the community, as CAP members, councillors etc. Increased confidence and skills were expected to improve interaction with diverse age groups and raise employment chances. At the completion of the programme learners referred to increased self-confidence, improved IT skills, ability to help others and personal satisfaction.

Anticipated learning outcomes were described as the opportunity to gain IT skills to 'publicise', 'advertise' and 'promote' their groups more efficiently and professionally. At the end of the programme, learners identified the benefits of what they had learnt in terms of their increased IT knowledge and skills. Other benefits cited were confirmation of participants' own ability to learn and using skills gained on the programme to improve employability.

Before coming on the course participants were looking forward to learning more about each other and 'getting to know everyone better.' Learners felt that the course would provide the opportunity to 'team build' creating a better 'understanding of each other' through shared knowledge and support, enabling the group to 'gain a

greater team spirit and friendship on both a personal and professional level.’ Feedback forms completed at the end of the course emphasised the benefits of team building, mixing, being at ease with each other and the ability to discuss issues ‘more comfortably.’

Participants were hoping to learn from other people’s experiences, particularly about ‘how other people work in different areas.’ At the end of the course learners had benefited by gaining new knowledge, meeting people with different skills, having the opportunity to network and sharing talents and developing friendships with people who had different jobs, backgrounds and came from different communities.

Added value of residential provision

The group project leader explained that the course had been deliberately organised in a residential setting to free learners ‘from work and family’ and provide an opportunity to ‘cement positive relationships’. CAP offered to pay for childcare or support where necessary and made a deliberate choice not to use the college’s nursery provision as the ‘object was to allow students to be detached.’ When asked whether similar courses were available in local non-residential colleges the majority of the group thought not or were uncertain. Although 3 learners believed that such courses were available on a non-residential basis, only 2 would have been prepared to participate in a non-residential setting.

Learners anticipated the major benefits from studying at a residential college would be a more relaxed atmosphere, free from ‘worry about travel’ and ‘home commitments to prevent you from giving the course your full attention’. Participants would have the ‘time to learn by putting daytime activities aside’ and have the ‘chance to go over the day’s work with the rest of the group’. At the end of the course all learners rated the importance of the residential aspect of the course highly and felt it would have been less successful if taught on a non-residential basis, which would mean insufficient ‘time and support’ and a ‘lack of continuity’. Non-residential courses are ‘not as intense’ and suffer a higher attrition rate. In residence, learners felt free from domestic pressures, the atmosphere was relaxed, peaceful and quiet allowing participants to concentrate. Tutors were friendly and accessible, support networks developed in class continued out of class and the confidence of participants grew. Learners were delighted to have been given the opportunity to access what they viewed as a privileged form of education, which they described as ‘total, focused, uninhibited learning.’

Learner progression

The group project leader believed that students would want to build on and develop their skills after the programme; perhaps move into mainstream education, but also develop an awareness that these opportunities exist. The course tutor explained all employed members of the group were nearing the end of three-year contracts and that attending the course would be 'beneficial for job hunting.'

Before the course, all learners anticipated becoming involved in other activities as a result of attending, such as working in a volunteer capacity with the community action partnership, further IT training and taking up FE programmes with, for some learners, a view to obtaining paid employment.

Of the 8 learners, 6 wished to work towards a qualification, including an NVQ, a community work qualification, a CLAIT qualification and accountancy. Learners had developed new areas of interest, such as digital imaging and publicity skills. Also, participants were keen to take back the knowledge and skills acquired on the programme and share this with those without the opportunity to access similar courses. Learners had not received advice and guidance from college tutors.

Conclusions

The purpose of the *Developing ICT Skills for Volunteer Networks* course was to provide participants with specific IT skills, the opportunity to network, build a team and develop knowledge and skills that could be disseminated amongst the CAP volunteer organisations, building capacity in the community. Learners developed new computer skills and a stronger team identity, extended their network of contacts and felt confident to take the knowledge and skills into the community and apply for paid employment. However, the majority of course participants had been involved in courses over the previous twelve months so were not new to learning; one even had a degree, albeit not in a related subject area.

Generally there was little adverse comment on the programme, the quality of teaching was high and the residential aspect was perceived as key to the learning and team building process, although providing transport and using the college's nursery might have allowed greater access to disadvantage groups.

Family Learning 2000

The *Family Learning* programme was designed to enable participants to 'acquire a range of basic skills through selected guided oral and written activities.' Learners had the opportunity to explore a variety of areas that would both support their children's learning and extend their own. The course involved a range of subjects from computing to exploring working from home, spelling, creative writing and producing a newsletter. The project was intended to reach vulnerable parents. All of the 15 learners were female and of the 11 that provided information on their ethnic origin, 9 were white, 1 was Indian and another Bangladeshi. Understandably, most of the learners were in their 20s; 2 were 18 so should not technically have participated under the 19+ definition of 'adult learners'.

The target group for this course was parents, mainly mothers, who were not in paid employment. Only one learner suffered from a disability and was registered disabled, while 10 were claiming benefit. Four of the learners had not had paid employment outside the home; another 4 had been employed in factory work, and 2 in catering, while other occupational backgrounds included retail, bookkeeping, payroll officer, bus passenger transport assistant and nursery nurse. Several of the participants worked outside the home in a voluntary capacity, for example in play groups. All learners except one had been involved in education or training in the previous 12 months and that individual had been involved in the previous 3-4 years.

The course participants were a tightly focused target group who were recruited by representatives of the basic skills unit. Learners joined the course to gain new knowledge, reinforce or refresh old skills and to extend their knowledge and understanding, particularly in relation to ICT and the Internet. They wished to develop transferable skills from which their children could benefit, and to study away from domestic pressures. They also attended for the pleasure of learning, to gain confidence and to help prepare for paid employment.

The programme

Learners were not unanimous on whether the course objectives had been made clear; 7 of the 13 rated the clarity of course objectives as 1 or 2 on a scale of 1-5, 5 gave a rating of 4 or 5 and one a rating of 3. However, the majority of learners believed they had acquired new knowledge and understanding, especially in relation to computer related skills, specific areas being use of the Internet, word processing, MS Publisher, word art, clipart and using CD Rom.

All learners felt that teaching methods had been highly effective and tutors were helpful and supportive. Discussion, written work, practical work, listening, group work, preparing a project, and helping others were all highly rated. Generally, learners felt able to contribute to class discussion. The atmosphere within the group was relaxed and friendly, which helped build student confidence, and tutors made sure that all group members were involved. Learners unanimously felt that tutor assessment and comments were very helpful, encouraging and supportive.

Effectiveness of the programme

The majority of participants enjoyed the whole programme, especially creative writing and the IT sessions: use of the Internet, MS Publisher and word processing were mentioned specifically but participants thought sessions on using email and scanning documents should have been included. The course leader felt that better recruitment would have improved the programme. Two young mothers left the course as they found it too basic: 'our expectation was that mothers' IT skills would not be good but this was not universally the case'. Also, 5 learners felt the course should have been longer so that they could have covered more material. Some felt the 'aims and objectives should be set out before each session' and that learners' existing abilities should have been assessed so they could work at their own level.

Learners anticipated personal benefits as a result of being away from their home environment, allowing them to 'take a break from the kids and a rest from the everyday routine', 'concentrate on myself' and 'work with no distraction in an adult environment'. Educational benefits expected included improved IT skills leading to more career opportunities and increased confidence. At the completion of the programme the majority of learners thought they had benefited personally in terms of self-confidence, increased knowledge, improved social skills, recognition of self and establishing personal objectives. Learners broadly anticipated these benefits, but the scale of increase in confidence was unexpected

Anticipated benefits in learning outcomes included the ability to use computers and familiarity with the Internet, the development of skills to increase employability, the ability to support and share knowledge with their children and achieving an NVQ. At the end of the programme, learners identified the benefits of what they had learnt in similar terms, focusing on a greater knowledge of computing, the Internet and the development of new skills.

Learners felt that they would benefit from being given the opportunity to ‘get to know other members of the group’ as individuals rather than just another parent, having the chance to ‘compare experiences’ and exchange ideas, improving individual members’ confidence to become active members of the group. By the time the programme ended, new friendships had been formed and students had benefited from the support generated by the group, which facilitated the learning process. Learning had become fun. Feedback forms reiterated the benefits of making new friends, developing communication skills, and sharing views with people in a similar domestic position but with varied personalities.

Learners generally thought that the major benefits from studying at a residential college would be a chance to experience ‘intense learning with no distractions’, learning in a ‘relaxed environment’, ‘away from family duties’. Other potential benefits included improving English language skills, making more contacts, having time for themselves and raising self-esteem by proving it possible to leave their children, improve their communication skills and learn about other college courses.

Added value of residential provision

The course leader explained that a residential course was selected because it would give students the chance to remove themselves from everyday pressures, allow continual reinforcement of learning and avoid the problems faced by the isolated learner. Student confidence increases at a much faster pace, as does their ability to contribute to sessions, so the learning experience in a residential setting, ‘is double value.’ When asked whether similar courses were available in local non-residential colleges the majority was unsure: 2 learners believed that they could not have studied the course in a non-residential environment and 2 thought it was possible.

Surprisingly, 9 learners would have followed the course at a local non-residential college, were it available. However, all learners rated the importance of the residential aspect of the course highly since it freed them from ‘family duties’ and the distractions and stress of home life and work, providing the opportunity to concentrate on learning. The venue allowed students to work longer and more intensively, increasing the knowledge and understanding gained. Being in residence allowed students to ‘get to know each other’; it was ‘a bonding experience, a sharing of thoughts ideas and feelings you wouldn’t express on day courses’.

Learners mentioned the value of a relaxed and quiet environment, free from stress, the chance to ‘be ourselves and not have to play a role’, ‘forming self on a personal

as well as career level', and a supportive environment where students helped each other and interacted socially. Ten learners felt that the course would have been less successful if taught at a non-residential college because the level of social interaction would have been inadequate. A fundamental part of the learning process was perceived as 'gaining new ideas from other students'. Non-residential learning was perceived as 'disjointed' without the advantage of 'learning being concentrated into a few days so you don't forget as much in between sessions.' Only one learner felt that the residential aspect of the course could have been improved.

Learning progression

Before the course, the majority of learners anticipated becoming involved in other activities as a result of attending, especially continuing in further education. Three learners specified IT as their chosen area of study and another English, while 2 intended to become involved in community work, in which 10 were already active.

Four participants intended to seek paid employment after the course; one was already employed as a caterer, while others expressed interest in office work, 'family work', nursing and IT. Further study in ICT was mentioned by 10 learners and 9 wished to work towards a qualification, such as CLAIT, Science Access and GCSE Accounting. Ten learners thought they had developed new areas of interest, 6 in creative writing, 3 in 'computers', one in word processing and another in Tai chi and Reiki. Seven learners had received advice and guidance from college tutors and rated this highly.

Conclusions

Learners had joined the course to gain new skills, reinforce or refresh old skills and improve and extend their knowledge and understanding of IT, with the particular objective of becoming more capable of supporting their own children. Post course feedback demonstrated that the majority of learners had acquired new knowledge and understanding, although 2 learners felt this was limited. The majority identified creative writing as particularly useful, followed by the ICT sessions.

All learners except one had participated in education or training in the previous 12 months, so were therefore not new to learning and were probably all on a learning trajectory before they started the programme. However, the course was a success in that it brought together a group of socially underprivileged people and provided an opportunity to develop new skills in a unique environment, which facilitated an intense learning experience.

Developing Creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning difficulties

The purpose of the *Developing creative Skills in Adults with Moderate Learning Difficulties* programme was to bring together volunteers who would be prepared to 'buddy' adults with learning difficulties with a group of adults with learning difficulties on a creative arts weekend, with a view to 'buddying' long term. The group had three pre-course sessions prior to the weekend to introduce participants to other members of the group, and establish an appropriate agenda for the programme. The course involved exploring different craft and painting styles and completing a group project. The residential weekend was the first time that many of the students with learning difficulties had been away from home or care on their own and created the opportunity for a type of independence not experienced previously. The course was divided into two groups: 6 students with learning difficulties and 5 buddies; all members of the group were involved in all activities. Of the 11 participants, 6 were female and all were white. Five of the participants were in their 30s, one in their 20s and one in their 50s. Two were aged 16 and 17 years old and technically should not have been involved in the initiative given the definition of adult learners, but were training as care assistants and keen to gain experience towards NVQ 2 in Care.

Six of the learners suffered from learning disabilities and one buddy had mobility problems. Six learners indicated that they were claiming benefit. Learners came from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. The five buddies had occupational backgrounds that ranged from teaching and care to landscape gardening. Seven learners were currently involved in voluntary activities. Participants with learning difficulties had joined the course because they were interested in Art and wanted to learn more about this whilst gaining some personal independence. The buddies wanted to gain skills working with people with learning difficulties. The group project leader explained that most of the adults with learning difficulties had attended the local FE College. A community support worker had recruited the students to the programme working with social services, individual care workers and various institutions. The buddies were recruited through the college prospectus. Eight of the learners had been involved in learning, education or training in the previous year, one in the previous 1-2 years and another in the previous 3-4 years.

The programme

All learners, apart from one buddy, believed that the course objectives had been made clear to them and rated highly the extent to which they had acquired new knowledge. Learners acquired new painting techniques particularly using pastels,

while buddies increased their understanding of people with learning disabilities. The course tutor explained that the extent to which students' knowledge and understanding increased was very much a function of 'how receptive they are.' All learners rated teaching methods highly effective and tutors responsive to individual needs, with listening, group work, preparing a project and helping others all highly rated. Generally, learners felt able to contribute to class discussion.

Effectiveness of the programme

The course tutor believed that the most useful part of the programme was the group work, which involved developing team skills to produce a piece of work that conformed to certain criteria. Two learners found all sessions useful. Buddies felt that the opportunity to experience how people with learning disabilities work and live was most enlightening, especially for those wishing to pursue a career in this field. Criticism of the programme tended to focus on the preparation for and organisation of the course. Buddies felt the programme was too intensive and that sessions should have been shorter, with more relaxation time. All learners agreed that the course needed to be longer. Both the buddies and the course tutor felt that the buddies had not been adequately prepared for the programme and were 'unsure of their own roles and what they should do.'

Before the course buddies indicated that they would benefit from the course on a personal level by experiencing how to work on a one to one basis with the learning disabled and expected the course to be an 'awareness raising' process, as well as gaining artistic skills and evidence for NVQs. Participants with learning disabilities were anticipating personal benefits through acquiring new artistic skills as well as from meeting 'new people and learning in a different way'. After the course, those with learning difficulties confirmed they had benefited personally in terms of increased independence.

The buddies described anticipated learning outcomes derived from 'experience with watercolours' and from learning about other 'people's approach to the group and learning'. One individual with learning disabilities expected to benefit from learning about use of pastels and other techniques. At the end of the programme, learning benefits were related to new skills and improved drawing and painting techniques. Before the course, all learners looked forward to meeting new people, while buddies also expected to improve their social skills and understanding of the learning disabled. Feedback forms completed at the end of the course confirmed these anticipated benefits were gained from the experience.

Added value of residential provision

The group project leader explained that a residential course was selected because the funding was in place to support attendance. Those with learning difficulties were attracted to a residential course: one ‘wanted to come away from home as I knew I could learn more’; another wanted the ‘chance to be more independent.’ The buddies, however, had not all initially realised the residential nature of the programme. When asked whether similar courses were available in local non-residential colleges most learners did not know or did not respond. While 3 learners would have been prepared to follow the course at a local non-residential college, generally the residential aspect of the course was rated highly and 2 learners felt that the course would have been less successful if taught at a non-residential college because attendance would have been sporadic and there would have been little time for reflection and reinforcement. The continuity and stability of the college environment made students more receptive and the course more effective, with a multiplier effect in the way that ‘students gelled together and worked as a team.’

Individuals with learning difficulties had much more personal freedom than allowed them in their normal day-to-day lives: ‘the first time I have been independent for a very long time’, as one put it. The residential college was more personal and less intimidating than the FE College, and tutor support was more accessible. The buddies were divided on the relative importance of a residential setting for the course. Although living with the students helped to break down barriers, one buddy thought ‘a full day spent with students with learning difficulties and a trip out’ might have achieved the same objective: ‘It doesn’t have to be residential it just needs to be longer.’ Others felt that the atmosphere was more relaxed in a residential setting, giving learners the opportunity to develop social skills such as eating in a restaurant.

Learner progression

The course tutor thought course participants would continue to attend courses at the local FE College and probably build on the skills gained on the programme. Before the course, 5 learners anticipated becoming involved in other activities as a result of attending the course. Those with learning difficulties focused on further Arts courses, while one buddy hoped to gain employment with social services and another to become more involved in support activities.

Only one learner, a buddy, was interested in taking up paid employment and two were already working on a part-time basis. Three learners were not looking for paid employment, 2 intended becoming involved in community work, in which 7 were already active, and one did not wish to become involved. Five learners wanted to attend other arts and crafts courses, and 2 learners wished to work towards a qualification, one buddy mentioning an NVQ in care. Four learners thought they had developed new areas of interest mainly in artistic techniques. Two learners had received advice and guidance from college tutors and one rated this highly.

Conclusions

The course was difficult to evaluate through evaluation forms. The response rate was low, particularly from the buddies, and inaccurate information was provided. However, the focus groups proved effective in evaluating and validating the qualitative issues raised in the evaluation forms. The course had succeeded in bringing together volunteers prepared to buddy adults with learning difficulties, with a group on a creative arts weekend. Whether this would be translated into long term buddying, however, is debatable on the evidence from the evaluation.

The group project leader felt that they had been a 'bit ambitious' with the programme, 'especially the buddy side of it.' It was apparent that two very diverse groups had been brought together on the course for different purposes: those with learning difficulties who wanted to develop their artistic skills had teaching support to this end, whereas the buddies who wanted to learn this role had no such support and were expected to develop skills 'experientially' without support or guidance during or before the programme. Although buddies became more familiar with students with learning difficulties during the programme, 'little mixing seemed to take place' over the weekend between the two groups.

The students with learning difficulties had improved their artistic skills and were able to experience a degree of independence during the programme that was not normally possible in their everyday lives. This was a profound experience for them, but since they were regular FE College students and would continue to be in the long term, it is difficult to conclude whether the course would affect the structure or content of those programmes in the future.

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Widening Participation in Residential Adult Education EF1 Learner details

The College organising the course you are going to attend needs to collect some information about you for the Department of Education and Employment and for its own records. You will be helped to fill in this form by someone from the organisation working with the college or by a member of staff from the College.

Please ask for guidance if you are unsure of any question.

1) Personal Details

First Name	
Family Name	
Address	
Post Code	
Telephone No.	

2) Sex: Female Male (tick one only)

3) Age (years)

4) Ethnic origin code (see notes for details)

5) Are you disabled in any way?

6) Are you registered disabled? Yes No

7) Please give code number(s) of any state benefits or allowances you receive.

.....(see notes for details)

8) What was your most recent paid employment?

Please be specific (e.g. ambulance driver, security guard, secretary)

.....
If you have not been employed please note any other activities (such as parent, voluntary worker with community group, charity worker, self-employed)

9) Are you, or have you been, involved in any voluntary or community work?

Yes No

If yes, please give details of these activities

10) When were you last involved in any learning, training or education?

less than 12 months ago 1-2 years ago 3-4 years ago 5+ years ago

11) Please give details of the learning, training or education that you most recently took part in

.....

.....

12) Did you enjoy this learning? Yes No

Did you benefit from this learning? Yes No

13) Why have you decided to attend this course at college?

.....

.....

14) How do you think you will benefit from attending this course?

What benefits do you expect on a personal level?

.....

.....

What benefits do you expect in terms of what you will learn?

.....

.....

What benefits do you expect in terms of mixing with your own group? (*for groups only*).....

.....

.....

What benefits do you expect from meeting new people?

.....

.....

What benefits do you expect from studying in a residential college?

.....

.....

15) Is there anything else you expect to gain?

.....

.....

.....

16) Do you expect to get involved in other activities as a result of attending this course (such as further education, other courses, employment, training, voluntary activities etc?)

Yes No

If yes, please give details of what you plan to do next

.....

.....

Thank you for filling in the form.

Please give it back to the person who has been helping you fill it in or a member of the college staff.

Course Title:

College:

Learner Assisted by (please print)

Organisation Date

Widening Participation in Residential Adult Education EF2 Course evaluation

It will be very helpful for us to have your comments on the course – your responses may help you to reflect on what you have learned from this experience; they will certainly assist this College and the Adult Residential Colleges Association in making future programmes more effective. Thank you.

Name	
Course Title	
Course Tutor	
College	

Please circle the number which indicates the extent to which you feel able to give a positive or negative response to the following questions. Please make further comments in the spaces provided.

1) To what extent were the course objectives made clear to you?

☺ Very clear
☹
Unclear ☹

1
2
3
4
5

Please give details:

.....

2) To what extent have you acquired new knowledge and understanding?

☺ Great extent
☹
Very little ☹

1
2
3
4
5

Please give details:

.....

3) To what extent were the teaching methods effective?

☺ Very effective
☹
Ineffective ☹

1
2
3
4
5

Please give details:

.....

4) Please rate the effectiveness of each learning method listed below:

	☺ Very effective		☹		Ineffective ☹
Discussion	1	2	3	4	5
Written work	1	2	3	4	5
Practical work	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Group work	1	2	3	4	5
Preparing a project	1	2	3	4	5
Outside dicussion	1	2	3	4	5
Helping others	1	2	3	4	5

5) To what extent did you feel able to contribute to class discussion?

☺ Great extent 1 2 3 4 Very little ☹ 5

Please give details:

6) To what extent were the tutor's assessment and comments on your course work helpful?

☺ Very helpful 1 2 3 4 Not helpful ☹ 5

Please give details:

7) What parts of the course were most useful to you?

Please give reasons or examples of how this was useful:

.....
.....

8) Were there any parts of the course that could have been omitted?

Please give details and explain why:

9) Were there any areas that should have been included?

Please give details and explain why:

10) What improvements would you like to see in the course or any part of it?

.....

11) Please add any other comments about the course.

.....

12) Are courses like this available in local non-residential colleges?

Yes No Don't know

If it were available, would you have followed this course in a local non-residential college?

Yes No

13) How important was the residential aspect of the programme?

☺ Very important 1 2 3 4 Unimportant ☹ 5

Please give reasons for your answer:

14) How do you think you have benefited from attending this course? In particular, how have you benefited:

- on a personal level?.....
- from what you have learnt on the course?
- in terms of mixing with your own group?
- from meeting new people?
- from studying in a residential college?



Widening Participation in Residential Adult Education EF3 Financial Details of Course Provision

Please provide the following information for each course organised under the above project.

Name of college:

Name of course:

Number of students participating:

Total costs

Cost component	Source of finance			Total
	College	Students	DfEE	
Tuition costs				
Residential component				
Other costs				
Overheads				
Total				

If students made a contribution towards the costs, please explain whether this was fixed or dependent upon individual circumstances, whether voluntary or obligatory, and provide details of any exemptions or bursaries.

Please complete the above and return by mail to:

Ruth Winterton
Eldwick Research Associates
14 Stone Hill
Eldwick
BINGLEY BD16 3DS

or email to: eraconsulting@btinternet.com

Interview schedule for course tutors

This is a short interview about widening participation in residential adult education and I would like to ask you a few questions about the course, the type of learners who participated in the programme and the reasons for selecting this course.

1. Why do you offer this course?

if necessary, prompt in relation to
 rationale
 aims/objectives

2. What type of person picks this course?

Start by asking the following supplementary question:

Do they have anything in common?

Then prompt where needed:

- age (*identify age groups most likely to attend*)
- employment status (*identify employed/unemployed/redundant/about to retire*)
- previously involved in education/voluntary/community work
- other

3. Why do they choose to attend this course?

Start by asking the following supplementary question:

What are the main reasons people come on this programme?

Then prompt where needed:

- for interest and leisure
- to get back into education
- to improve employability/re-enter the labour market
- to support their involvement in voluntary/community work
- other

4. Where did they find out about this course?

Prompt where needed:

- course brochure (*where did you find this in a library/community Centre/elsewhere*)
- media (*TV/Radio/Newspaper/Magazine/Newsletter*)
- employer
- Internet
- other

5. What new knowledge and understanding do you believe course participants have acquired?

please give details

6. Which activities were most effective in terms of learning?

Prompt in relation to

- discussion
- written work
- practical work
- listening
- group work
- preparing a project
- discussion outside classroom
- helping others

7. To what extent are individual learners able to contribute to class discussion?

please give details (explore relative effects of learner ability/ confidence and the structure of the course)

8. How are your assessments and comments on individual learner work helpful to learners?

please give examples

9. What parts of the course are most useful to learners?

please give details

10. Are there any parts of the programme that could be omitted?

please give examples

11. Were there any areas you feel should have been included?

please give examples

12. What improvements would you like to see in the course or any part of it?

please give examples

13. Do you believe that learners deliberately pick/ select a residential course?

Prompt where needed:

- if yes why did they pick a residential course?
- if no, how did they come to be on the programme?

14. Do you think attending a residential course as opposed a traditional non-residential course makes any difference?

Prompt where needed:

- to what they learn (*different teaching methods or knowledge and understanding*)
- to how they learn (*in what way is it different in the residential setting*)
- in terms of mixing with their own group (*how is this different here*)
- in terms of meeting new people (*have you met new people/who?*)
- to participants as individuals (*why is residential learning special for them?*)
- other benefits

15. What will they do after this programme?

Prompt where needed

- will they follow another course (*if so, which course, where, residential/ non-residential*)
- will they become involved in voluntary or community work? (*what type, when, where?*)
- will they seek employment (*if so what type of employment- part-time/full time?*)
- other

16. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the course?

17. Are there any other issues you would like to raise?

*In particular, have I missed anything that might be relevant to **widening participation in residential adult education** and any points you would like to make about learning in a residential college?*

(Close by thanking respondent).

Focus group agenda

This short discussion is about widening participation in residential adult education and I would like to suggest a few questions to start us off.

1. What type of person picks this course?

Start by asking the following supplementary question:

Do they have anything in common?

Then prompt where needed:

- age (*identify age groups most likely to attend*)
- employment status (*identify employed/ unemployed/ redundant/ about to retire*)
- previously involved in education/voluntary/community work
- other

2. Why have you chosen to attend this course?

Start by asking the following supplementary question:

What are the main reasons people come on this programme?

Then prompt where needed:

- for interest and leisure
- to get back into education
- to improve employability/re-enter the labour market
- to support their involvement in voluntary/community work
- other

3. Where did you find out about this course?

Prompt where needed:

- course brochure (*where did you find this in a library/community centre/elsewhere*)
- media (*TV/Radio/Newspaper/Magazine/Newsletter*)
- employer
- Internet
- other

4. Did you deliberately pick/ select a residential course?

Prompt where needed:

- if yes why did you pick a residential course?
- if no, how did they come to be on the programme?

5. Do you think attending a residential course as opposed a traditional non-residential course makes any difference?

Prompt where needed:

- to what you learn (*different teaching methods or knowledge and understanding*)
- to how you learn (*in what way is it different in the residential setting*)
- in terms of mixing with your own group (*how is this different here*)
- in terms of meeting new people (*have you met new people/who?*)
- to you as an individual (*why is residential learning special for you?*)
- other benefits

6. What is your overall opinion of the course?

Start by asking the following supplementary questions:

- what did you expect to get from the course?
- did the course meet your expectations?
- what did you like most about the course?
- what did you like least about the course?
- are there any changes you would like to see in the course?

7. What will you do after this programme?

Prompt where needed

- will you follow another course (*if so, which course, where, residential/non-residential*)
- will you become involved in voluntary or community work? (*what type, when, where?*)
- will you seek employment? (*if so what type of employment- part-time/full time?*)
- other

8. Are there any other issues you would like to raise?

*Have I missed anything that might be relevant to **widening participation in residential adult education** and any points you would like to make about learning in a residential college?*

Interview schedule for project leaders

This short interview is about widening participation in residential adult education. I would like to ask you a few questions about this programme.

1. What type of person is in this group?

Do they have anything in common?

Prompt where needed:

- age (*identify age groups most likely to attend*)
- employment status (*identify employed/unemployed/redundant/about to retire*)
- previously involved in education/voluntary/community work
- other

2. Why did they choose to attend this course?

Start by asking the following supplementary questions:

What are the main reasons people come on this programme?

3. Where did they find out about this course?

Prompt where needed:

- course brochure (*where did you find this in a library/community centre/elsewhere*)
- media (*TV/Radio/Newspaper/Magazine/Newsletter*)
- employer
- Internet
- other

4. Why did you choose this course for the group?

Start by asking the following supplementary question:

What are the main reasons why you selected this particular programme?

5. How did the course participants pick this course?

Prompt where needed:

- course brochure (*where did you find this in a library/community centre/elsewhere*)
- media (*TV/Radio/Newspaper/Magazine/Newsletter*)
- employer
- Internet
- other

6. Did you deliberately pick/ select a residential course?

Prompt where needed:

- if yes why did you pick a residential course?
- if no, how did they come to be on the programme?

7. Do you think attending a residential course as opposed a traditional non-residential course makes any difference?

Prompt where needed:

- to what learners learn (*different teaching methods or knowledge and understanding*)
- to how they learn (*in what way is it different in the residential setting*)
- in terms of mixing with the group (*how is this different here*)
- in terms of meeting new people (*have you met new people/who?*)
- to participants as individuals (*why is residential learning special for them?*)
- other benefits

8. What is your overall opinion of the course?

Start by asking the following supplementary question:

What did you expect to get from the course?

Did the course meet your expectations?

What did you like most about the course?

What did you like least about the course?

Are there any changes you would like to see in the course?

9. What do you think participants will you do after this programme?

Prompt where needed

- will they follow another course (*which course, where, residential/ non-residential*)
- will they become involved in voluntary or community work? (*what, when, where?*)
- will they seek employment (*if so what type of employment- part-time/ full time?*)
- will they become involved in any new activities as a result of the programme (*give details*)

10. Are there any other issues you would like to raise?

*Have I missed anything that might be relevant to **widening participation in residential adult education** and any points you would like to make about learning in a residential college, particularly with regard to your own group?*