

LSDA reports

Widening adult participation: a review of research and development

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Foreword

To coincide with the publication of the Learning and Skills Council's new national strategy for widening adult participation, we commissioned this review to assist those who are implementing the strategy – in particular, local LSCs and learning providers – by pulling together into a single report the key messages from all our relevant work. Such coordination between LSC and LSDA outputs is designed to support smooth implementation of policy, and both organisations are committed to developing this approach more systematically.

Learning works – the report of the committee chaired by Helena Kennedy QC that has driven debate and action on widening participation over the past six years – asserted that 'We know how to do it. We are not starting from scratch when we aim to widen participation'. Research and development by LSDA indicate that we do indeed know a great deal. However, serious equality gaps in access and achievement persist. There is still much to learn if we want to make widespread changes – changes that are needed to help trigger and sustain engagement in learning by adults whose circumstances make it difficult for them to get involved, or who perhaps see no great value in doing so.

Developments since the Kennedy report, including the government's twin agendas to tackle skills deficits and improve social cohesion, have sharpened the need for a clear, national focus on widening adult participation. This context makes it all the more important that we analyse the lessons from research and practice to help direct resources in effective ways.

We view this synthesis of existing evidence as a valuable starting point. Clearly, as the context changes (for example, new planning, funding and organisational arrangements), so will the opportunities and scope for action. New policy priorities and strategies, such as the Skills Strategy published in July 2003, provide additional impetus to some of our findings. We intend to use the review to identify gaps in our knowledge where further research and development may be needed – for example, the impact of Learner Support Funding on participation and the key triggers to participation for the least motivated learners. Initial work is under way in relation to some of the topics where the review suggests that evidence needs strengthening. A specific example is that we are taking a fresh look at the challenges of partnership working and what support is now needed in this area. The LSC's commitment to a programme of research on participation, signalled in the strategy document *Successful participation for all*, is welcome. LSDA will be working with key partners and stakeholders, particularly the LSC and the Department for Education and Skills, to deliver a coordinated programme of research and support.

Kate Anderson
Director of Research
LSDA

Key findings and conclusions

- 1 *Defining success in widening adult participation.* The main characteristics of good practice identified six years ago by the Kennedy Report – describing nine actions that learning providers should take to widen participation¹ – remain valid today. However, more recent research, as well as developments in the sector, make it possible to offer a new perspective. Work by LSDA on the FE college sector highlights key features of success, emphasising the value of a planned and thorough business approach by providers to the task of widening participation for adults. See Section 5.
- 2 *Focusing on mission.* Within LSDA's work there is a significant body of advice on strategies that learning providers can adopt to widen participation. However, by virtue of circumstance, history or local learner profile not all providers have developed expertise in widening participation to the same extent. The literature suggests that a quality improvement strategy is needed to extend good practice in widening participation and meet targets for growth across the learning provider network. However, it also cautions that any such strategy should concentrate particularly upon those providers that regard widening participation as core, or at least very important, to their business. See Section 5.
- 3 Bearing in mind the government's objective that all learning providers should review their missions and focus on their strengths,² the implication of this finding is that national and local LSCs should consider the potential for developing a cadre of colleges, working in partnership with other local learning providers, that are models of excellence in widening adult participation. See Section 5.
- 4 *Developing a demand-led approach.* Although our general understanding of how to widen participation has certainly grown over recent years, there are still specific gaps in our knowledge of how and why people participate. In particular, we need to know more about what influences decisions on learning among the groups who appear least motivated to learn. Gaps such as these could weaken our ability to make effective policy interventions and bring about change. See Section 1.
- 5 *Keeping latent demand alive.* Positive attitudes towards learning do not always translate into immediate participation in learning programmes; therefore, understanding what will encourage active involvement and how to keep interest in learning alive in the mean time are recurring themes in the literature. The implication is that LSCs and providers need to sustain communication with a wider market of potential learners, as well as responding to more predictable or known demand. See Section 1.
- 6 *Challenging attitudes to learning.* As part of an improved demand-side analysis we need to continue to develop our understanding of the barriers to participation and how these can affect and demotivate people who have shown interest in learning. We need to challenge poor perceptions of learning and learning providers and reach out actively to those who may lack the confidence to approach learning providers. See Section 2.
- 7 *Changing practice and provision to reduce inequality.* To be effective in reducing inequalities in access to learning, learning providers and information, advice and guidance services should devise proactive measures, targeting the groups of prospective learners who are least likely to come forward of their own accord. Action to adapt and tailor practices and provision at all stages is needed, from outreach, engagement and guidance, to the delivery of learning, on-course support and progression. See Sections 4 and 6.
- 8 *Creating a favourable funding environment.* Making effective provision for widening adult participation has cost implications for learning providers, such as outreach, engagement, staff development, set-up and support costs. Financial factors also influence prospective learners, though further research is needed to identify clearly how learner support funding influences participation. On both of these issues the research contains lessons relevant to the LSC. See Section 7.

- 9 *Making partnerships work.* Effective partnerships can yield results in widening participation. There is much that learning providers can do collaboratively to adjust the content and delivery of learning, including creating more coherent learning pathways and links between informal and formal learning. Broader partnerships involving other stakeholders at local and regional level can help promote learning, increase outreach and strengthen opportunities for learners to progress. A deeper understanding of the value of partnership is called for, and a more comprehensive analysis of the roles that partnership can play in widening participation.³ See Section 3.
- 10 *Introducing a national credit framework.* Many of the approaches and strategies described in this review would be assisted by the introduction of a common credit framework for learning within and beyond the National Qualifications Framework. A national credit system to support flexible learning (as recommended in LSC 2003) would advance widening participation as well as other government priorities such as workforce development. See Section 4.
- 11 *Refining the evidence of 'what works'.* Because of a shortage of good summative evaluation evidence, we still know relatively little about the likely impact of initiatives and policies on participation by different groups, what works and how best to apply the lessons learned. The research available does not always allow planners to develop an 'evidence-based' approach to devising widening participation strategies. Although it is possible to derive 'ideal' models for comprehensive strategies from the literature, it is less easy to discern the specific measures – or combinations of measures – most likely to address the needs of any particular target group. Better comparative information on the impact of policy initiatives to stimulate demand would assist the kind of evidence-based, targeted interventions needed. Creating an 'intelligence bank' of tried-and-tested initiatives that have been subject to evaluation could help generate systemic change in policies and practices. See Section 1.
- 12 *Spreading good practice.* Knowing what has worked in generating new demand for learning from particular groups of learners and what kind of impact was achieved would help in decisions about replicating good practice. We need to understand how to develop and 'embed' good practice and the extent to which it is possible to 'scale up' successful small initiatives. See Section 1.

Introduction

- 13 This report draws together recent work published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) on widening adult participation. It was commissioned by LSDA and prepared by Deirdre Macleod of Policyworks.
- 14 The Learning and Skills Council launched a new national strategy for widening adult participation in 2003 (LSC 2003). The government also published its Skills Strategy in July 2003 (DfES 2003). These strategies point to the urgent need to raise participation and attainment in learning, with a particular focus on people who have yet to gain a Level 2 qualification. It is timely, therefore, to take stock of recent research findings and advice on policy, strategy and practice.

Purpose of the review

- 15 This review is designed to help learning providers and local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) develop their widening adult participation strategies in the context of the LSC's national strategy. It aims to synthesise research evidence, good practice guidance and policy advice relating directly or indirectly to the issues raised in the LSC's consultation paper on its strategy. All the material reviewed has been published or is due to be published by LSDA and the Learning and Skills Research Centre.
- 16 The review also reveals where there are gaps in the evidence available from research. LSDA will take these into account in considering, in consultation with LSC, the LSRC Advisory Forum and other key stakeholders, what further work is required to support effective roll-out of the Council's strategy for widening adult participation.
- 17 The review offers:
 - an analysis of the main findings of over 30 pieces of work that have either been published or are due for publication soon
 - implications and issues for learning providers and local LSCs arising from the findings
 - references to the literature examined.

Structure of the report

- 18 For ease of reference, the source material has been organised under the following topics, broadly following the structure of the LSC consultation document on widening adult participation (LSC 2003).
 - *Motivating learners* This section examines what is known about the influences upon, and factors that affect, individuals' decisions to take part in learning. It also identifies strategies that LSDA believes are effective in stimulating demand for learning and issues that local LSCs and learning providers should bear in mind when developing strategies to widen adult participation.
 - *Barriers to learning* This identifies a range of supply-side and demand-side barriers to learning from the perspectives of prospective learners, learning providers and intermediary organisations. It examines barriers to initial engagement, continued participation and progression.
 - *Partnership approaches* This section considers how partnership working can widen adult participation and strengthen learning pathways, by reaching out to learners and their communities, providing a bridge between learning and employment, and 'brokering' learning.
 - *Appropriate, targeted provision* This discusses the needs of certain groups of adults that might require particular attention in widening participation strategies. It also considers what 'appropriate provision' might mean in terms of delivery methods and the nature of learning programmes.
 - *Organisational strategies* This considers organisation-wide approaches that can be effective in helping to widen adult participation. It also identifies particular roles and specialisms that learning providers might develop in relation to neighbourhood renewal provision and widening participation.
 - *Equality and access* This identifies issues associated with, and strategies for, improving equality and access to learning.
 - *Funding* The section covers both financial issues for people participating in learning and the impact of the funding of learning providers upon widening participation.

- 19 The source material is presented under the sections judged most relevant in each case. As much of the material fits under more than one category, cross-references to other sections of the report are provided where relevant in the introduction to each section.

Section 1

Motivating learners

Review of the literature

Introduction

- 20 This section examines literature by LSDA on the factors that influence individuals' decisions about whether or not to participate in learning. It highlights key messages that may be particularly helpful to local LSCs and learning providers in developing strategies to raise demand and widen participation. This includes the importance of recognising that a sympathetic attitude towards learning can take time to translate into active participation. Keeping potential learners 'warm' is therefore likely to be an important medium to longer term strategy for sustaining interest and stimulating demand.
- 21 A key theme in LSDA literature is the need to move debate on from a focus on issues associated with supply, to a greater emphasis on increasing demand. Developing a stronger analysis of the demand-side is important because, as the literature observes, we still have relatively little understanding of what really motivates people to take part in learning and the relationship between attitudes towards learning, people's wider aspirations and the decision to participate.
- 22 Related material may be found in other sections of this review, as follows:
- See Section 2 on barriers to learning for further discussion of strategies for turning positive attitudes towards learning into active participation.
 - See Section 3 for discussion of the value of partnership approaches in helping to identify the motivations of communities to learn.

Understanding motivation to learn

- 23 The importance of a better understanding of what motivates learners to participate is reflected in calls for a change of focus within learning and skills policies, from supply to demand, with a greater emphasis upon understanding how to encourage new learners and on the roles that organisations and individuals can play in engaging individuals and communities in learning. This is a strong theme in recent LSDA literature. Taylor and Cameron (2002) and Howard (2001) argue the case for finding new ways of making learning more attractive for those who are not yet involved, including changing the learning provision on offer and more effective methods and messages for communicating with learners.

- 24 A paper based on research on 'learning brokers' (Thomas *et al.* work in progress) warns of the dangers of assuming that there is a straightforward relationship between aspirations or attitudes towards learning, and actual participation. It suggests that:

The literature fails to acknowledge the way in which individuals and groups are actively marginalised. Much of the literature focuses on the aspirations of learners, rather than on how people actually make decisions either to become, or not to become, involved in learning. There has been a focus [in policy and practice] on changing the learner rather than looking at how learning providers can change.

- 25 Hillage and Aston (2001) offer a useful analysis of the different starting points for prospective learners. They note that people who do not participate in learning are not a homogeneous group; they include people who are not motivated to learn as well as those who are, but who experience external barriers which stop them taking part. Although the factors that contribute to each starting point are inter-related, Hillage and Aston argue that it is important to understand the causes of each position, as the measures needed to interest someone in learning might be quite different from those required to overcome a particular hurdle, such as the cost of course fees.

- 26 An analysis of learning needs in west London (Taylor and Knight 2002) observes that positive attitudes towards learning do not necessarily translate into immediate, active participation. Despite reported enthusiasm, the study found that many people interviewed regarded learning as something they might do in a year or so, but not now.

Key factors influencing motivation to learn

- 27 The literature describes and defines a range of positive and negative factors that can motivate people to learn, or affect their motivation. The conclusions of a number of literature, policy and practice reviews conducted by LSDA are supplemented here by empirical evidence from relatively small-scale, area-based studies and analyses.
- 28 The analysis of learning needs in west London (Taylor and Knight 2002) found that, among employees who were non-learners, the most significant incentive to learn was keeping work skills up to date, although the importance given to this varied by industrial sector. The same study found that learning to gain a qualification or a new job was important, as were learning to achieve promotion and to adapt to changes at work. Learning for personal interest was also high on the list.
- 29 Other reasons for learning, such as helping the community, helping the family and finding friendship were viewed by respondents as much less important. Few saw employer requirements for learning or learning as a route to self-employment as being important. The former response may indicate that employers were not exerting strong pressure on their employees to learn, despite the finding noted above that keeping work skills up to date is a strong motivator for learning. One of the conclusions of the study is that it may be important to stimulate employer demand, as well as employee demand.

30 Taylor and Knight's study also found that situational factors could either motivate or discourage learners. Proximity of the provision to the learner's home (the preference being for study close to home), financial support and the availability of childcare and time off for study were all regarded by learners as important influences.

31 The context in which learning is occurring, or might occur, is very important. Although Taylor and Knight's study indicated that most of the subjects' motivations were strongly work-related and, broadly, economic, McGivney (2001), quoted in Taylor and Cameron (2002), points to the influence of community-related and social objectives as motivators for others:

Informal learning that arises from social interaction and involvement in the community can be transformative and lead to significant personal development outcomes.

32 Taylor and Cameron warn that we should be wary of letting market values dominate our thinking about what motivates people to learn. Priorities for some individuals and groups of people can be quite different.

33 Attitudes formed by young people towards learning earlier in life can significantly affect their inclination to take part later. Hillage and Aston (2001) find some evidence from the US to suggest that initiatives aimed at preventing drop-out of young people from learning, based on increased choice and financial support, are important in maintaining their motivation to learn as adults.

Encouraging learners and stimulating demand

34 Hillage and Aston observe that most initiatives designed to attract learners focus on making it easier for people who would like to learn but who find it difficult, rather than on attracting those who appear to lack any interest in learning. This might explain why so little is known about what motivates people to learn; a limited number of initiatives and evaluation studies is likely to mean that examples of practice and 'what works' in attracting reluctant learners are relatively scarce.

35 Despite a shortage of evidence, Hillage and Aston recommend what they describe as an 'ideal approach' to stimulating demand for learning that would contain most or all of the following:

- multi-level approaches – including measures that would act at a national level to develop a lifelong learning culture (such as Adult Learners' Week) and local initiatives to bring the message to doorsteps
- multi-stranded approaches – including preventative measures in addition to well-targeted remedial measures for specific problems.

36 A supportive infrastructure that makes it as easy as possible for reluctant learners to find appropriate learning, including a range of intermediaries and flexible learning provision, is also important. However, Hillage and Aston argue that the precise combination of approaches for any particular target group is less easy to discern.

37 Howard (2001) advises that new demand might best be stimulated by building on existing social networks and people's habits and motivations through:

- communities – including community and family learning activities
- interest groups – by 'unleashing' the learning potential in existing membership organisations, social and humanitarian movements
- building on existing knowledge and skills – hobbies and interests
- harnessing people's habits and desires – for example by using popular forms of communication such as texting.

38 Taylor and Cameron (2002) find international evidence from Sweden that centrally driven policies can help to create new demand. Big media campaigns, one example of a centrally driven strategy, can work, but Howard (2001) cautions that they need time to build up, must be carefully focused on target audiences and need critical mass. Media campaigns must also be supported by marketing drives at local level.

- 39 Howard observes that a serious flaw in the marketing approaches of the early 1990s was the 'collapse into advertising and selling learning'; there is little evidence to show that they contributed to growth or repaid the costs involved. She argues that there is a strong case for direct marketing using sophisticated techniques to promote radical new approaches to learning, based on the known aspirations of different groups. However, it appears that 'word-of-mouth' approaches have actually been the most successful means of recruiting for colleges.

Implications for providers and LSCs

- 40 Much of LSDA's literature points to gaps in our understanding about what motivates people to learn and the dynamics of the decision-making process. Research into motivations that affect different groups of people could be conducted by **local LSCs** as part of their marketing work to complement the LSC National Office strategic marketing function. Such research is essential to ensuring that the information upon which recruitment and participation strategies and other interventions are based is accurate. For example, the market analysis techniques that are increasingly used to inform learner recruitment strategies need real understanding of how motivation translates into participation, as well as more conventional 'snapshot' surveys of learner aspirations and attitudes towards learning.
- 41 Colleges might conduct detailed action research supplementing wider scale studies by LSC to increase understanding of the reasons for drop-out between recruitment and enrolment, and also after starting a learning programme.

Understanding motivation

- 42 For both **learning providers and local LSCs**, a better understanding of motivations and participation triggers for those who do not currently participate is important so that we can develop effective engagement and participation strategies and forecast more accurately the impact of policies and initiatives.

- 43 The studies discussed in this review suggest that, to be useful, information on attitudes and aspirations needs to be supplemented with better information on the dynamics of decision-making processes among particular groups of individuals.
- 44 In finding ways to improve the lot of disadvantaged communities, **learning providers and local LSCs** need to keep in mind the goals and underlying value systems driving different communities and individuals; aspirations will not necessarily be driven primarily by improving work skills and economic goals. Conceptions of communities and their learning needs must be better understood.
- 45 For **local LSCs**, understanding the relationship between young people's attitudes to learning and participation later in life is vital, particularly in view of the hypothesis that measures preventing drop-out at an early stage might be more effective than remedial measures aimed at re-engaging adults later on.

Encouraging learners and stimulating demand

- 46 **Learning providers** need to investigate what kind of learning people want and find ways to deliver it. Taylor and Cameron (2002) suggest that providers should link learning with goals that really matter in people's lives and work to strengthen communities as locations for learning and supporters of learning.
- 47 Encouraging individuals and communities to play a part in developing learning provision is also critical. Cameron *et al.* (2003) describe the value of engaging potentially less motivated learners – specifically homeless people – in decisions about developing learning provision. They note that giving potential learners an opportunity to influence the development of learning can greatly benefit motivation and take-up.
- 48 Sustaining the passive interest of those who might learn later on, but not now, is also important. Providers and LSCs are advised to develop a strong public profile for learning and find ways of continually reminding people of the benefits of learning.

- 49 **Local LSCs** can take action to support the efforts of learning providers. Initiatives that focus on encouraging the reluctant to participate will help explore, understand and tackle motivational issues. Such initiatives should include further efforts to harness the potential of cultural and other organisations to contribute to attracting new learners and delivering learning. Good practice identified through these schemes should be better disseminated and replicated.

Section 2

Barriers to learning

Review of the literature

Introduction

- 50 This section identifies a range of supply-side and demand-side barriers to learning from the perspectives of prospective learners, learning providers and intermediary organisations. It examines barriers to initial participation, to continued participation and to progression.
- 51 The literature reviewed in Section 1 argues the case for a greater emphasis on understanding the demand side and influences on motivation to learn. Despite the need for such a shift in focus, it is still important to continue to develop our knowledge of both the supply-side and demand-side barriers to participation and whom they are most likely to affect. It is clear from the survey of the literature that there are still deep-seated attitudinal, physical, material and structural barriers to participation. Financing learning, finding and paying for childcare, and a lack of employer support can all be significant barriers to participation, but the way in which learning is structured, such as a lack of clear learning pathways or information and guidance, or limited range of appropriate and accessible learning provision, can also act as a barrier.
- 52 Related material may be found in other sections of this review, as follows.
- Material on factors that act as barriers to learning can also be found in Section 1.

Key barriers to engaging in learning

- 53 Barriers to participation are reasonably well documented. Hillage and Aston (2001) summarise them as:
- attitudinal (lack of confidence and motivation, the influence of the peer group and perceptions of irrelevance)
 - physical and material (eg geographical isolation, difficulties of access, lack of finance)
 - structural (the way in which education and training are provided and disincentives inherent in the benefit system).

- 54 LSDA studies support this from a range of stakeholder perspectives. Empirical evidence from an area-based study of Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire (LSDA 2002) found that barriers perceived by learners included:
- the cost of learning: fees for courses and examinations, textbooks and journals for training, and continued updating
 - childcare problems.
- 55 Fieldwork with learners and prospective learners undertaken as part of an analysis of learning needs in west London (Taylor and Knight 2002) found that a lack of suitable courses and not being able to get time off work had been stumbling blocks. Finding the right course was particularly difficult for people who had most to gain from learning, such as some people from ethnic minority groups, those with low or no qualifications, and unemployed people.
- 56 Providers' perceptions of the main barriers for potential learners, identified in an evaluation of FEFC non-accredited learning projects by Greenwood *et al.* (2000) and Greenwood (2001), included:
- negative attitudes towards education
 - fear of entering a large institution where their particular needs might not be taken into account
 - a lack of knowledge about the different kinds of learning available
 - concerns about the cost, travel and time involved in learning, and the availability of childcare and transport.⁴
- 57 Intermediaries, such as Jobcentre advisers, working with disadvantaged groups, identified the most common barriers for their clients as lack of funding and lack of confidence.
- 58 Some people face additional and more severe barriers as a result of personal circumstances. Cameron *et al.* (2003) note that the particular experiences and circumstances of homeless people can act as barriers. These include: high levels of anxiety about learning; having had unhappy experiences of learning; not being in full control of their own timetable; being easily deterred by the bureaucracy and form-filling sometimes required of learners; and having other priorities, such as finding housing or employment.
- Factors associated with drop-out from learning*
- 59 In his study, *Improving student retention and achievement*, Martinez (2001) notes that, at the beginning of the 1990s, the prevailing view was that drop-out was largely due to factors external to colleges. The main thrust of research since then has been to displace that view. A survey of 9000 students by Martinez and Munday (1998) shows that students have complex and multiple reasons for withdrawing from programmes of study and may see their decisions to withdraw as rational and positive. Among the reasons given by students for withdrawing, Martinez's study found that college, work and personal or family-related factors were identified consistently by a number of different studies as important.
- 60 Martinez (2001) found that financial hardship did not seem to be strongly associated with decisions to drop out to gain employment, nor did part-time work or 'external time commitments' correlate strongly with drop-out. However, other evidence, such as Fletcher and Kirk's review of learner support funding (2002), suggests that finances can play a strong role in encouraging or discouraging continued participation.
- 61 Martinez identified teaching, learning and support, and information, advice and guidance processes to help place students on appropriate courses, as key factors in encouraging retention.
- 62 Interestingly, Martinez concludes in his review of research literature on retention and achievement that social deprivation correlates poorly with retention and achievement across the college sector as a whole, reinforcing the potential benefits to be gained by devoting efforts to successful engagement.

Barriers to progression

- 63 A study on progression pathways (LSDA 2002) found that particular groups of learners and potential learners face barriers to progression.⁵ These groups include: people with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those with mental health problems; older workers; people with poor command of the English language or other basic skills needs; and ex-offenders.
- 64 Also at risk are people who are partially qualified at the end of a course, and who cannot progress further without workplace experience, but who might not be allowed to work as a partially qualified person.
- 65 Employment conditions and circumstances can act as barriers for unqualified employees whose employers, supervisors or managers do not encourage and support staff training or learning in the workplace or who are unable or unwilling to release staff for training. Employees in small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can experience particular problems in this respect.
- 66 In the area study referred to in paragraph 63 childcare problems are repeatedly cited as a barrier to progression (LSDA 2002). This was not only a question of cost: the flexibility and timing of childcare provision and the ages at which children are accepted were also critical.
- 67 In the same study, structural issues associated with the way in which learning provision and ancillary services are configured and delivered were also identified, including:
- learning pathways being difficult to understand
 - shortcomings in the availability of good information sources, contributing to a lack of awareness of options available and difficulty in finding the right kind of advice at the right time
 - a lack of coordination of lower level provision
 - 'supply-led' rather than 'demand-led' learning provision, which made provision inflexible and under-responsive to learners making contact with providers.

- 68 LSDA's analysis of the proposals contained in the government consultation paper on widening participation in higher education (LSDA 2003) concludes that, by focusing particularly on entry to higher education by young school leavers, the government's strategy could discourage older learners. This would thwart the potential for building on the achievements of learners in FE colleges who wish to take their learning further. LSDA's response argues that the vision of widening participation described in the proposals is too limited, thus carrying the risk of undermining the government's aspirations for raising attainment. The introduction of a more diverse array of measures is recommended, to encourage prospective learners other than the traditional school-leaver intake.

Implications for providers and LSCs

- 69 It is clear that much remains to be done to tackle deep-seated attitudinal, physical and structural barriers to participation. As individuals' motivation to learn can be affected positively or negatively by a range of factors, many of the messages in this section build upon those in Section 1 on motivating learners.
- 70 Much of the practical advice contained in LSDA literature takes the form of issues to be addressed and measures to adopt to reduce supply-side barriers and combat negative perceptions that communities may hold of their organisations. For example, the literature advises that outreach has a key role in activating latent desire to learn and in improving poor perceptions of providers. **Learning providers** can, and should, review and adjust the content and delivery of provision to make it fit more closely with what learners want. They can also ensure that learners have clear expectations of their learning programme and know what will be expected of them.
- 71 The findings raise a number of points relevant to **local LSCs**, such as the need for effective targeting of learner support funding and funding learning programmes that are particularly attractive to people with little prior experience of, and low confidence regarding, learning.

Tackling supply-side barriers effectively

- 72 For **learning providers**, several measures are suggested to reduce 'supply-side' barriers.
- An evaluation of the FEFC's non-accredited learning provision projects by Greenwood *et al.* (2000) and Greenwood (2001) advised that providers should work actively with their communities to tackle perceptions of learning providers, which can affect the attitudes of people towards learning.⁴
 - Access to learning opportunities could be made more equitable by linking innovative and outreach provision into all support mechanisms and learning pathways and by making it easier for potential learners to find out about suitable courses. Ensuring intermediary services reach those that need them most would also be helpful.
 - Negative labelling of learners should be avoided – for example, providers should avoid describing people as 'non-learners' and use the more positive term 'potential learners' instead.
 - The west London study (Taylor and Knight 2002) observes that turning latent demand into active participation might require **learning providers** to make learning more accessible, flexible and designed to fit around work and childcare commitments.
 - Hillage and Aston (2001) note in their literature review that successful outreach efforts involve intensive, targeted promotion, using a combination of methods, for example local radio broadcasts, leafleting, setting up desks in places where target groups are likely to go and word of mouth.
 - Learning pathways and options should be better documented.

Reducing learner drop-out

- 73 Sadler (2002) suggests ways in which learning providers can improve their recruitment and admissions processes to widen participation and attract new learners into the sector and, in doing so, encourage learners to stay on at colleges. Advice, drawn from practice across the FE sector, suggests that **colleges** might:
- establish and maintain pre-entry relationships with potential applicants through a range of 'keeping warm' activities (such as offering 'taster' sessions and extra guidance on choice of programmes) and, in some cases, using current students as ambassadors for their institution
 - improve applicants' understanding of what their programme of study will be like
 - identify 'at risk' students at the pre-entry or entry stage so that they are able to put adequate support in place early enough to make a difference.
- 74 **Local LSCs** might support these strategies by ensuring that resources allocated to ameliorate the impact on learners of the costs associated with learning, such as childcare, transport, fees and materials, are targeted towards those that need them most. Regarding policy and structural barriers, local LSCs should treat informal learning as part of mainstream provision and help to link learning to wider social policy objectives, pursued by other national and local stakeholder organisations.
- 75 Attitudinal barriers are perhaps the most difficult to tackle. **Local LSCs** should seek to develop and disseminate among providers better understanding of what underlies negative attitudes towards learning and how best to tackle them.
- 76 **Local LSCs** might also work to improve the extent to which learning provision takes account of sector differences in employment patterns and resources for training. More and better information, and increased resources for personal guidance, might help encourage greater demand. The 'brokerage' role of Jobcentres and other organisations could be more strongly encouraged by LSCs and other relevant stakeholders, so that no opportunity is missed to promote learning opportunities to people in most need.

Section 3

Partnership approaches

Review of the literature

Introduction

- 77 This section discusses work by LSDA on the theme of partnership working in widening adult participation and in strengthening learning pathways. It should be noted that partnership is not the primary theme of the work reviewed: it does not give a comprehensive view of the issues associated with partnership working and how it might be best employed in widening participation. Rather, partnership working is highlighted as an approach or a strategy to address particular problems, such as how to improve the prospects of people with learning difficulties who are preparing for work or getting a job, or how to improve information about learning pathways and options within a local area.
- 78 The partnership arrangements examined and described in the literature differ in purpose, context and scope. However, a common theme in all of the arrangements is the idea of mutually beneficial outcomes for the partner organisations, as well as for the learners involved.
- 79 Related material may be found in other sections of this review, as follows.
- Discussion of partnership as a means to overcome barriers to participation and progression in learning is dealt with in Section 2 on barriers to learning.
 - The role of partnership in identifying the real motivations of some communities and individuals to learn is discussed in Section 1 on motivating learners.

Using partnership to reach out to new learners

- 80 Reisenberger and Dadzie (2002) argue that many people miss out on learning because they believe, rightly or wrongly, that what is available will not meet their needs. In the context of adult and community learning, they suggest that learning providers should maintain regular, two-way contact with representative groups, agencies and individuals as a way of keeping a finger on the community's pulse and reaching new learners. Outreach activities can also help learning providers maintain a high local profile. They advise that formal and informal contacts can provide a wealth of ideas, contacts and critical feedback, as well as giving useful insights into the frustrations and aspirations of local people.
- 81 LSDA's area study on progression pathways (LSDA 2002) notes that employers' expectations that staff should be 'self starters' who 'put themselves forward' for training over and above essential company requirements, can disadvantage people who need extra help but have little self-confidence. The report suggests that the variability in employer support for employee development offers scope for providers to develop partnerships with employers as a means of making contact with adults who are unlikely to take the initiative to demand training.

Partnerships as a means of promoting learning within communities

- 82 Social partnerships can play a role in widening participation. Taylor and Cameron (2002) note that social partnerships with a commitment towards a goal other than learning, such as pursuing improvements within a community, can spur participants on to learn. Networks and associations at various levels, from local to regional, can be valuable in creating and promoting learning, as they can also be in overcoming social exclusion. By helping to find and exchange information about successful practice, networks can encourage more people at grassroots level to become engaged in learning, as well as acting as a force for change in public policy.

- 83 LSDA's study on learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal (Taylor and Doyle 2003) identifies working in partnership as a key ingredient in promoting learning in deprived neighbourhoods. This means effective working with partnerships such as local strategic partnerships, Learning Partnerships and New Deal for Communities (NDC) partnerships, and developing innovative approaches to working with local residents, regeneration practitioners and other stakeholders.

Using partnership as a bridge to employment

- 84 Hughes and Kingsford (1997) find that partnership between providers and employers can bridge the employment gaps for people with no skills, no experience or poor basic skills. Moreover, employers' emphasis on recruiting people with a certain 'threshold' of skills and attributes points to unmet demand for learning provision to assist people who are disadvantaged in the labour market to develop 'job readiness'. This assistance should preferably include a guarantee of a specific job into which they can progress (Taylor and Knight 2002). Partnership between providers and employers can help people into work.
- 85 Hughes and Kingsford (1997) observed that opportunities for people with learning difficulties and disabilities to achieve accreditation were not matched by opportunities for progression into employment. They found that college–employer partnerships for supported employment schemes could be effective in helping people with learning difficulties and disabilities obtain and maintain employment. The authors advised that colleges could become the first point of contact when clients require further training, if good links were established with supported employment agencies.

Using partnerships and networks to broker learning

- 86 Learning brokers are increasingly recognised as an important means of helping learners match needs with opportunities. Taylor and Cameron (2002) note that there are at least two different types of brokers and intermediaries with clear roles in relation to stimulating demand. The first group is organisations whose role as brokers is often driven by policy – whether their own or government policy. The second group is private individuals who act as mentors or leaders for learners. They might be teachers, parents, coaches, enthusiasts or peers. Taylor and Cameron argue that understanding the motivational force of such interactions is a critical area for research.
- 87 An LSRC study (Thomas *et al.* 2003) aims to throw light on this by defining and developing concepts of 'brokerage'. The authors emphasise the importance of seeing learning brokerage as a process of mediation between potential learners and learning providers: a 'network' or 'chain' rather than the function of an individual or even a single institution. Conceiving of the learning broker as a generic 'job' is likely to be misleading – partnership between a range of different organisations is likely to be key to its success.
- 88 Brokerage has to understand the 'coded language' of potential learners about their learning needs and desires, and pass these messages on to education providers. It also has to understand the complexities of the situation the learner might enter into and communicate them effectively.
- 89 Early findings from this study suggest that there is no one single model of best practice. Learning brokerage arrangements will differ from setting to setting, such as the workplace, voluntary sector, communities and the education sector.

Partnerships to strengthen learning pathways

- 90 LSDA's investigation of adult learning pathways (2002) showed that collaboration between learning providers is important in developing effective progression routes. Collaboration and partnership working can assist in documenting local learning pathways, identifying gaps in provision and support for learners, and helping to resolve progression problems.

Implications for providers and LSCs

- 91 Several reports point to the benefits of partnership working for widening adult participation. They indicate a range of contexts in which partnership might be helpful, as well as offering some analysis of the conditions, attitudes and qualities that organisations might seek in prospective partner agencies. Further research may be helpful to define more clearly the functions of partnership in the learning and skills sector, and to develop a deeper understanding of what kinds of partnerships work best in different contexts. This knowledge would assist **local LSCs** as well as **learning providers**.

Using partnership as a means of developing outreach

- 92 **Learning providers** need to consider where partnership might add value and with whom and how partnerships might be built. Committing time to building the partnership; giving priority to good working relationships; and selecting the right staff are key principles which emerge from the literature.

- 93 Reisenberger and Dadzie (2002) advise that learning providers can develop partnerships with individuals and community groups by:
- joining or developing local networks that are representative of local communities
 - actively engaging in bodies with a remit to identify needs – local learning partnerships, LSC task groups and local strategic partnerships
 - negotiating active partnerships with voluntary sector groups
 - holding discussions and community forums with interest groups, specialist agencies and individuals who can help identify unmet needs – and covering their time, travel or childcare costs, where appropriate
 - organising meetings, social or community events that pull people in.

Acting as a bridge to employment

- 94 Turning to strategies for working with more disadvantaged individuals, *Getting employers involved* (Taylor 2001) advises that there is no single blueprint for engaging with employers. A range of approaches will be needed to fit the different needs and expectations of large and small employers.
- 95 To ensure that any placements are as successful as possible, **learning providers** working with employers to help assist people into employment should:
- help employers to understand the learners' courses and qualification requirements
 - match learners to employers and prepare thoroughly on both sides, through initial assessment
 - offer work tasters, trial periods, pre-placement training and good induction
 - prepare an individual learning plan for each learner at the start
 - prepare clear, simple information for employers
 - keep up to date with industry requirements
 - give authoritative advice on the legislative requirements covering learners, such as health and safety and equal opportunities.

- 96 In terms of supported employment schemes for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, colleges should establish early links with supported employment agencies for individual students and accredit activities that learners undertake with the college as part of their preparation for work. Effective liaison with employers and other relevant agencies to ensure a coordinated programme is a key part of the approach that will be needed.

Section 4

Appropriate, targeted provision

Review of the literature

Introduction

- 97 This section discusses how specific groups of adults may need particular attention in any efforts to widen participation. It also considers what 'appropriate provision' might mean in terms of delivery methods, the nature of learning programmes and learners' wider experience of the learning organisation.
- 98 Much has been written by LSDA about how appropriate types of learning provision can assist efforts to widen access. It is also clear, however, that widening participation depends not only on what is offered but also how and where it is offered, how provision is advertised to learners, and the advice and guidance services that are available to guide people towards the provision.
- 99 Material is therefore included on: meeting the needs of particular groups of people; the need to take a wider view of what 'appropriate provision' means, including ensuring effective pre-course and on-course support, appropriate assessment methods and recognition of a diverse range of achievements; and how provision might be most appropriately configured and delivered to meet different learner needs.
- 100 Related material may be found in other sections of this review, as follows.
- Discussion of how best to configure and deliver provision to meet learner needs also occurs in Section 2 on removing barriers to learning.
 - Section 6 on equality and access also discusses how best to meet the needs of learners.

Meeting the specific needs of particular groups

- 101 We know little about the extent to which there is likely to be growth in demand for learning and, if growth does occur, whether it will mean 'more of the same' or the engagement of different, less-traditional groups of learners. LSDA and LSRC are currently conducting a research project on the prospects for growth in the FE sector that explores these issues. A literature review by Denholm and Macleod (2003), conducted as part of this research project, concludes that it is likely that more *will* mean different in terms of the client groups from which future markets and growth might derive. This has implications for the ways in which FE colleges and other existing providers offer provision.
- 102 Several pieces of work suggest the importance of thinking carefully about the needs of the client group and the contexts in which learning is being delivered.
- 103 Taylor and Knight (2002), in their analysis of learning needs in west London, found that some groups, notably refugees and asylum seekers, and people with special learning needs, experience greater problems than others in having their learning needs met. Key priorities for additional help were identified as support with communication skills, English language, vocational training and computer use. Creating the right opportunities in the right place at the right time was seen as crucial. Greater flexibility in learning provision is needed, with opportunities for learning based in the home, the community and in the workplace, as well as in institutions.
- 104 Learning can make a significant contribution to neighbourhood renewal activities, but it is important that learning providers are able to recognise the specific types of learning that might be needed in this context. Fieldwork by LSDA as part of a study of learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal by Taylor and Doyle (2003) indicated that learning providers tend to interpret learning for neighbourhood renewal as being synonymous with widening participation activities, rather than as a distinctive set of skills and knowledge. One implication of this is that providers might not deliver what is actually needed for, or wanted by, the client group. The report concludes that, while widening participation and neighbourhood renewal provision are not entirely discrete categories of provision, there are distinctive aspects. It is therefore helpful to view widening participation and specific skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal as opposite ends of a continuum. Learning provision that covers the full extent of the continuum is essential for successful neighbourhood renewal.
- 105 With regard to the particular needs of homeless people, Cameron *et al.* (2003) advise that involving all parties before the learning programme starts is likely to improve commitment and ownership. They suggest briefing teachers and homeless agency workers on the aims of the programme, inviting them to submit proposals and feedback; asking clients if they have any particular enthusiasms; and considering incentives that will motivate homeless clients to attend.

Taking a wider view of appropriate provision

106 These examples indicate that developing appropriate provision is about more than just getting the content of the learning programmes right. Reisenberger and Dadzie (2002) suggest that effective strategies for widening participation and social inclusion incorporate a range of approaches to encourage access, participation and progression, including:

- effective pre-course assessment to identify any learning needs and establish strengths and weaknesses
- on-course support with a range of aspects of learning
- modularised, flexible programmes
- ways of recognising and accrediting individual achievements
- clear progression routes into employment and further study.

Components of appropriate provision

107 A recurring theme in the literature is the value of 'taster' provision for widening participation. The FEFC non-accredited learning projects and 3- and 6-hour courses were designed to assess the impact of offering people with little experience of learning the opportunity to participate in 'first-rung' provision. Evaluations by LSDA of the non-accredited learning projects (Greenwood *et al.* 2000; Greenwood 2001) and of the 3- and 6-hour courses (Kirk *et al.* 2001; Kirk and Kirk 2002) conclude that taster provision has crucial value for many learners. It enables participants to gain confidence and establish a foothold in education. Very short courses enable people to sample the experience of learning as well as the subject area, letting them discover how it feels to be part of a group of learners and to get to know a tutor. Taster experience can be a valuable part of the 'entry' process, alongside advice and guidance, in helping people to decide their next steps and improve their self-confidence. Tasters also help in terms of progression and achievement, because they can help people to gauge their ability and interest, and to decide their preferred progression route.

108 In the context of homeless people, but arguably of relevance to other disadvantaged people lacking confidence in learning, Cameron *et al.* (2003) observe that engaging in short learning programmes offers participants structure and the chance to start, complete and achieve something. To motivate learners and help them stay on course, a degree of choice should be offered within the programme so that they can explore and express their ideas. Taking time to develop and deliver a curriculum that responds to the specific needs and experience of this client group will promote greater participation and achievement.

109 Several pieces of work refer to the importance of a coherent framework that helps learners understand what they are learning, its value and potential opportunities for further learning. Taylor and Cameron (2002) note that for adults with low or no qualifications access to reputable certification at lower levels is important. Lack of clear paths from informal to formal learning can inhibit progress, as can weak connections between qualifications at different levels.

110 Even for those with some experience of learning, learning pathways need to fit with their lives if learning is to be encouraged and maintained. LSDA's area study of Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire (LSDA 2002) observed that adults have complex reasons for wanting to learn and are liable to dip in and out of learning, or change direction. Combining learning with earning and family commitments may necessitate breaks en route to a qualification. Moreover, progression is not necessarily upwards in a straight and uninterrupted path.

111 Both the Oxfordshire and west London studies (Taylor and Knight 2002) identified the importance of progression pathways for widening participation. Both concluded that learning pathways for adults should be built on an understanding of what motivates adults to take up learning and how learning will fit around their work and home lives.

- 112 Credit can go a long way towards creating a coherent framework for learning provision. In his survey of the role of credit in widening participation, Tait (2003) notes that there is already considerable experience of using credit-based provision, much accredited by Open College Networks. Examples include college-based credit progression pathways and access to HE programmes, accreditation of learning in the community (eg WEA), in the voluntary sector (National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux), and in employment (BT and the TUC training programme). This provides substantial evidence that accreditation of small pieces of learning and the award of credit can help in the provision of learning for non-traditional students, and that credit can play a major part in drawing new groups of learners into education, building their confidence and motivating them to continue. It also offers a way for learners to see their 'learning account' grow and build towards qualifications at a pace and in ways that take account of their personal needs and circumstances.

Delivery of provision

- 113 Evidence from an evaluation of the FEFC's 3- and 6-hour courses (Kirk *et al.* 2001 and Kirk and Kirk 2002) showed that learners on short courses were more likely to be dissatisfied and feel that they were left to their own devices. On the other hand, tutor-led courses, where students are taught as a group, were a key feature of good practice described by learners, tutors and managers. Learners valued working with a tutor who could explain things clearly and did not just 'leave them to it'. Some learners said that they had decided to enrol for a further course because they knew that the same tutor would be leading it.
- 114 A review of literature on the role of distributed and electronic learning (DEL) in widening participation by Crawley and Attewell (2001) found that many governments, educationalists and researchers believe that it could contribute to addressing problems of social exclusion and non-participation in learning. People with access to the internet were twice as likely to be learning as people without and that there is widespread concern about the so-called 'digital divide'.

- 115 Crawley and Attewell note that DEL delivery methods offer a number of potential benefits, including the potential to make higher quality content more cheaply available and the potential to include more visual content, making it better suited to people who are less at ease with the written word. However, they also observe that high-quality, relevant content and materials are still limited in quantity and scope. There are dangers of information overload and content that is 'rich in poor information'.

Implications for providers and LSCs

- 116 A key theme in this section is the need to create and configure provision in a way that fits with people's lives, based on a better understanding of what those needs and motivations to learn are. There is a range of practical and strategic action that can be taken to achieve a better 'fit' between learning and learners.

Providing better information on options

- 117 Preceding sections of this review identified the importance of information about learning in improving its accessibility. The study of Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire (LSDA 2002) identified a number of actions for **learning providers** including:
- ensuring that progression data is set out in course prospectuses
 - providing case studies showing the destination patterns of 'real' adults to demonstrate the possibilities for progression, and to motivate and inspire potential learners
 - using course templates to improve the quality of course leaflets
 - improving availability of information on the internet.

Adjusting provision to meet the needs of learners

118 Taylor and Cameron (2002) suggest a number of 'supply-side' adjustments that learning providers might make to **learning provision** to achieve a better match with the needs of non-traditional learners, including:

- developing more innovative learning settings that attract new learners, with appropriate staff development in place
- creating learning opportunities that fit into the patterns of daily life
- developing school curricula that pave the way for lifelong learning for all – recognising the powerful influence of school on attitudes to learning later in life.

119 Some groups of individuals who experience significant disadvantage might require more extensive support and consideration if they are to be engaged and get the best out of learning. Advice given in the context of homeless groups might be transferable to others. Cameron *et al.* (2003) advise that providers should be prepared for potential learners:

- with a wider range of learner abilities and needs than 'conventional' groups
- being 'out of practice' in social and communication skills
- having had unhappy previous experiences of learning environments
- having experienced a lot of disrespect and appreciating having their opinion sought
- needing extra time to build relationships and trust.

120 Understanding the context in which learning is being delivered is important. Neighbourhood renewal is a key part of the government's agenda and Taylor and Doyle (2003) advise that, ideally, the nature and mix of provision available to assist neighbourhood renewal should reflect the stage that the local community has reached in its development. For example, is the need primarily for 'first-rung' learning programmes, or are there individuals and groups ready to take up more specific courses to equip them to embark on, or increase their involvement in, regeneration work?

121 The **local LSCs** have a role to play here, in concert with other regional and national stakeholders, in ensuring that the opportunities for, and potential applications of, neighbourhood renewal learning provision are well understood.

Developing appropriate provision

122 A number of pieces of work have drawn attention to the value of informal learning and 'threshold' activities that aim to engage people in learning in an unthreatening way. Nashashibi and Watters (2002) advise that **learning providers** need to consider how to make links between formal, informal and non-formal learning.

123 For any activity to become 'learning-ful', Nashashibi and Watters advise that **learning providers** should consider how to develop:

- potential for learning within the activity
- motivation to learn on the part of curriculum designers, tutors and learners
- self-awareness and reflection so that learning is recognised and evaluated
- support for this process and confirmation from an informed source that learning has occurred.

124 Findings from the evaluation of 3- and 6-hour courses by Kirk *et al.* (2001) and Kirk and Kirk (2002) showed that many of the learners participating in taster ICT programmes had poor basic skills. In terms of curriculum design, therefore, these findings suggest that it is important that **local LSCs** develop policies and strategies to link basic skills provision with short ICT programmes. This finding is also very significant for **learning providers**. There are implications for curriculum design, course materials, tutoring arrangements and learner support. Some providers are mapping ICT courses against the national literacy and numeracy standards. Institutions need to provide learners with opportunities for screening and to consider how to provide support for learners with basic skills needs – especially those who progress to other courses. Many of these issues will have significant staff development implications.

- 125 With regard to progression, the evaluations by Kirk *et al.* (2001) and Greenwood *et al.* (2000) demonstrate that people doing taster courses may well choose to go on to sample learning in another area, which is progression in terms of continuing with learning. Therefore, **local LSCs** need to take account of a broad definition of progression and, in reviewing the adequacy of learning provision, should ensure a range of horizontal as well as vertical progression opportunities.
- 126 The funding system must also be able to accommodate and encourage the development of taster provision. The Greenwood *et al.* (2000) evaluation of the FEFC non-accredited learning projects argues that funding should provide the incentive to do the work but not straitjacket it within a model devised for other purposes.⁴ **Local LSCs** should recognise tasters as a valuable first step in learning and fund them accordingly.
- 127 The development time required for new provision needs to be recognised. Although this conclusion was drawn in the context of past project funding, it is likely to be valid for **local LSC** future project-funded provision. There can be a long lead-in time for the development of some provision and funding bodies need to take a longer-term view where possible. There is a danger that short-term funding can damage aspirations and lead to loss of reputation in the community if funding is withdrawn.
- 128 Taylor and Cameron (2002) argue that new, short-term initiatives need to be prevented from overwhelming tried and tested practice. Although it is important that new initiatives are developed, there is a danger that good practice is never really embedded. This is an important issue for local LSCs to bear in mind.
- 129 Taylor and Cameron suggest a number of other steps that **LSCs** and **other key stakeholders** might take to help improve the policy and operational framework for learning provision:
- investigate robust and creative ways to recognise achievements resulting from informal learning⁶
 - improve pathways between different types and levels of learning and market these effectively
 - raise the status and profile of informal learning by bringing it into mainstream provision. This entails making closer connections between social policy objectives and resources and those of the learning and skills domain.
- 130 Taylor and Cameron also highlight the need for simplification of the qualifications system to address the complexities that can be a deterrent for prospective learners and employers alike. The government has now made a firm commitment to develop a national credit framework for adults (DfES 2003 paragraph 5.40). As part of this, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), LSC and the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) are engaged in a major programme to reform vocational qualifications and create a 'more responsive and flexible qualifications system'. The programme states that this 'will provide learners with more systematic recognition of experience acquired through work and will support individuals' progression through fundable units, which carry recognised credits that can lead to qualifications'.⁷
- 131 Although the brief does not specifically address simplification, increased flexibility and responsiveness will help to address the concerns raised through this research.

132 Lessons from Crawley and Attewell's (2001) review of literature on distributed and electronic learning suggest that **learning providers** wishing to improve the inclusion potential of DEL provision should consider:

- offering 'bite-sized chunks' of learning or 'first-rung' opportunities to make learning more accessible and manageable
- using a range of technologies (eg TV, digital video, mobile telephone, games) not just the internet
- careful planning
- effective use of human resources in teaching and learning situations
- use of assistive technology for learners with disabilities
- digital and web-based technology to help learners build credit-based portfolios to act as a personal database of their achievements.

Developing a credit framework

133 Tait (2003) argues that 'a nationally recognised system of credit encompassing all qualifications and achievement could play a major role in reaching the large numbers of adults yet to become involved in lifelong learning'. Such a development was called for by the Kennedy report in 1997 and is now being taken forward by QCA, LSC and the SSDA (see paragraph 130).

134 The published work programme highlights many elements emphasised by Tait, including close working with Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to ensure alignment of the system across the UK. Although the timescale for reform will be lengthy – the work programme proposes full implementation by 2010 – the clear commitment to this direction should encourage curriculum innovation and support the continued development of credit-based provision.

Section 5 **Organisational strategies**

Review of the literature

Introduction

- 135 This section considers organisation-wide approaches that LSDA believes can be effective in helping to widen adult participation. It also identifies particular roles and specialisms that learning providers might develop in relation to neighbourhood renewal provision and widening participation, bearing in mind the context, environment and learner population with which they work, and the stage of development that they have reached in relation to widening participation.
- 136 An important piece of work by LSDA on widening participation is an analysis by Taylor (2002, 2003) of the characteristics of learning providers that are effective in widening participation, and the strategies that they have adopted as part of their approach. A key conclusion of this work is that, while the guidelines set out in the Kennedy report (1997) remain a valid guide, for colleges with a serious mission to widen participation for adults, a fresh definition of the key characteristics is now appropriate.
- 137 Related material may be found in other sections of this review, as follows.
- Section 2 addresses barriers to learning.
 - Section 3 looks at partnership working.
 - Section 4 considers ways to create appropriate provision.

Organisational strategies

138 Taylor's (2002, 2003) review of widening adult participation and ways to extend good practice identified the following key characteristics of good practice and strategies for widening participation:

- positioning widening participation as an integral part of the college's business, with commitment at all levels
- a sound business-like approach to seeking and deploying resources for widening participation for adults
- the constant search for new ways to widen adult participation, and persistence by staff in efforts to reach the 'hard to reach'
- continuous engagement with the community at all levels in the college and in all parts of the community
- a rigorous approach to quality assurance
- thoroughness in curriculum design and teaching and learning strategies, ensuring that widening participation objectives are reflected and reinforced throughout the college
- support for learners is treated as an entitlement, including practical and financial support as well as additional help with learning.

139 Nashashibi and Watters' guide to good practice for adult and community learning providers (2002) supports this analysis. They note that providers who are likely to be successful are those for whom widening participation is genuinely part of their vision and mission. These providers make a long-term commitment, which includes a strategic approach, sustained investment and a properly resourced development plan. Their strategies are likely to include:

- purposeful engagement with communities
- changes to the curriculum portfolio, curriculum design and delivery
- seeing support for learners as an entitlement, not an optional extra
- commitment to quality assurance and improvement
- a willingness and ability to work in partnership to good effect.

140 Nashashibi and Watters also identify the importance of learning providers having a presence on the ground, dealing with people face to face and ensuring that development workers have essential skills, tenacity and diplomacy. Known and trusted local people willing to act as intermediaries and learning 'champions' should be sought and encouraged to use word-of-mouth to inform people in their communities about opportunities. Accessible and welcoming local premises should be used as venues for learning.

141 The same guide also advises that, where possible, tutors and support staff should have some characteristics in common with the client group, in terms of gender, ethnicity or experience. There are benefits for the provider, and for local capacity building, in 'growing your own' outreach staff by training volunteers or encouraging ex-students to become volunteers or intermediaries and then undertake tutor training.

142 The importance of learning providers possessing similar characteristics to those mentioned above have been observed in relation to the New Deal programme. In addition, Ratcliffe *et al.* (2001) observe that colleges that are most successful in delivering New Deal have effective working relationships with employers and a strong support system for clients.

143 McGivney (1992) quoted in Hillage and Aston (2001) identifies the following organisational strategies, preferably acting in combination, as important in encouraging adults into learning:

- demonstrating clear links between education and training and employment
- offering widely recognised qualifications
- ensuring that the benefits of participation exceed the potential risks
- offering financial incentives to those who undertake education and training
- using targeted outreach approaches
- recognising personal circumstances
- responding to individual learning needs
- providing counselling support
- encouraging group support
- providing practical work experience and help with establishing a work routine.

144 Taylor and Doyle (2003) identify four organisational strategies that can be particularly important to neighbourhood renewal learning and can help to widen participation:

- *offering effective learning provision for neighbourhood renewal* That is, offering provision specifically designed to increase the capacity for neighbourhood renewal among local people and local organisations, or which contributes indirectly to this work.
- *engaging the community in planning and developing learning provision for neighbourhood renewal* This means enabling residents, regeneration practitioners and professionals to play an active part in planning and developing programmes. Providers with a clear commitment to neighbourhood renewal often look for ways to build confidence in learners and communities so that they can become engaged in local action.
- *developing partnerships to promote learning for neighbourhood renewal* This means effective working with a range of partnerships, such as local strategic partnerships, as well as developing innovative approaches to working with local residents, regeneration practitioners and other stakeholders.
- *using resources that are conducive to good practice* This means using income streams in effective ways and attracting staff with the necessary skills and attributes.

The importance of recognising different starting points

- 145 An important observation, in the context of considering how to stimulate growth and encourage providers to become more effective at widening participation, is that providers start from different places. In her review of good practice in widening participation (2002, 2003), Taylor notes that for a variety of reasons – some historical and circumstantial, some based on choice – colleges will differ in the extent to which they pursue a mission to widen participation for adults. A variety of factors influence whether widening participation for adults is seen as core business and may affect the likelihood of successful growth in future. Some of these factors might be outside a college's control, such as the presence of other local learning providers already heavily engaged in widening participation for adults.
- 146 Taylor's review observes that colleges' widening participation activities tend to follow an evolutionary pattern, from a largely reactive response to community needs, to a much more proactive stance involving the re-shaping of mainstream provision and structures. The stage that a learning provider has reached on this journey will influence the nature and extent of external advice and support required to extend and improve provision. Second, colleges differ in the degree of emphasis given to widening participation for adults in their missions and business focus. For some, widening adult participation constitutes their core business, while for others it is an important activity but not central to their main work.

147 For example, colleges with a strong emphasis on widening participation may have a large amount of provision at, or below, Level 1, but a smaller volume at Level 3. In colleges where widening adult participation is important but not core business, this picture may be reversed, with the strongest emphasis placed on work at Level 3. In productive local partnerships, colleges in the second group might see their contribution to widening participation as offering a progression route for adults who have entered further education via partner colleges or other learning providers. In a third group of colleges, such as sixth form colleges with little adult provision, widening adult participation will remain marginal to their business.

148 It is likely too that learning providers vary in their levels of awareness and involvement in neighbourhood renewal. This might help to explain why some providers have a less clear understanding than others of what neighbourhood renewal provision is and how it can be developed and applied. This issue is discussed further in paragraph 104.

Implications for providers and LSCs

Developing providers' strategies and roles in relation to widening participation

149 Starting from different points in relation to widening participation has important implications for provider development strategies: in particular, the way in which providers might be encouraged to extend their practice in widening participation and how resources for quality improvement are focused and strategies designed. Taylor's (2002, 2003) review of characteristics of good practice in widening participation recommends a broader view, taking account of the activities of a range of providers in a given location and how they collaborate and complement one another in helping adults to progress.

150 Taylor's review recommends that LSC should consider developing a national strategy for quality improvement and development, to improve the capacity of colleges to widen adult participation. It recommends that the focus should be on colleges' skills and strategies to improve learners' success, including not only good practice in recruiting adult learners, but also creative ways to improve retention, achievement and progression.

151 The approach suggested is to prepare an 'audit and business development tool', based on the features of success identified in the study. Expert external advisers would use the audit tool as part of a quality improvement and development process, involving visits to FE colleges to help develop their widening participation strategies.

152 To achieve rapid progress in meeting government targets for growth, these findings suggest that it may be helpful to focus a national quality improvement strategy on:

- *colleges for whom widening participation for adults is core business* Such colleges should be enabled to increase their numbers of adult learners from widening participation groups in a managed way. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and LSC may also wish to support them to share their practice with other colleges.
- *colleges for whom widening adult participation is an important activity, but not core business* Such colleges may be assisted to increase their focus on this type of work.

153 In all cases, including those where widening adult participation is viewed as central to the colleges' business, the quality improvement advice would be aimed at continuing to improve practice and develop new, imaginative and more effective ways of working.

Developing an appropriate role in widening participation

154 LSDA's work on widening participation suggests that **learning providers** should seek an appropriate role for their organisation in widening participation that fits with their environment and experience of this issue.

- 155 Taylor and Doyle's report on learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal (2003) showed that there is scope for learning providers to increase their contribution to the neighbourhood renewal agenda, where this activity is consistent with their mission and strengths. The report suggests five strategic roles that providers can play:
- *'gateway to learning'* Courses up to Level 2, including first-rung, pre-entry and entry-level courses; and skills for employability and social inclusion. These provide the 'hook' for deeper engagement in learning and essential building blocks for more specific neighbourhood renewal learning
 - *skills for economic competitiveness* Provision at Level 3 and above to equip local people with skills and qualifications to become employed or work more productively, with benefits for inward investment
 - *specific skills and knowledge for neighbourhood renewal* Courses to meet the requirements set out in *The learning curve* (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2002), to develop and support residents, regeneration practitioners, professionals and civil servants working in deprived areas
 - *strategic partner* Working with other organisations to build community trust and cohesion; brokering consensus; and supporting smaller learning providers via funding and quality assurance arrangements
 - *community empowerment* Developing and supporting local learning communities and assisting individuals and groups to play an active role in local affairs.
- 156 In some cases, though by no means all, other organisations might be better placed to lead widening participation work. The study of learning needs in west London by Taylor and Knight (2002) found that responsibility for providing learning and training opportunities for disadvantaged clients is generally seen by intermediary organisations to lie with the local authority, followed by the intermediaries themselves, and 'government'. Few see it as the responsibility of employers and even fewer as the responsibility of the LSC, LEA or colleges. A possible reading of this is that the LSC, LEA and colleges are seen by these organisations as less prominent in supporting their particular clients.
- 157 The study also found evidence that some of the smaller providers are playing a key role in providing intensive support for disadvantaged learners, to assist them into training and jobs. Larger providers may not be as well placed to give this degree of support.

Section 6

Equality and access

Review of the literature

Introduction

- 158 This section identifies issues associated with, and strategies for, improving access to learning. It describes some key characteristics of good practice in promoting equality of access, and some approaches and strategies that learning providers might consider to improve access to learning.

Creating a learning environment that promotes equality and diversity

- 159 Reisenberger and Dadzie (2002) set out a number of key dimensions of inclusive learning and wider participation:
- pre-course assessment – fair and impartial pre-course assessment to establish individuals' prior learning, skills and achievements; identify their strengths and weaknesses; clarify any learning support needs and map out learning and progression routes
 - on-course support – help with basic skills, ESOL, information technology or other aspects of learning, as well as access to a signer, counsellor or welfare adviser, to childcare or financial help and to other forms of individual support, if needed
 - accessible buildings – learning environments and physical resources that are accessible to wheelchairs and pushchairs and do not present obstacles to people with sight, hearing or other physical or sensory impairments
 - mainstream provision – mainstream courses that integrate people with learning difficulties or disabilities and encourage positive interaction between different groups of learners, regardless of their age, ethnic origin, gender, social status, religion or educational background
 - resources and equipment – user-friendly hand-outs, course materials, technology and equipment that encourage full participation and access to all services, facilities and areas of the curriculum

- modularised programmes – flexible, 'bite-sized' provision, designed to accommodate, motivate and retain adults with work, caring, family or other competing priorities
- ways of recognising and accrediting individual achievements including 'value-added' benefits such as increased confidence or enhanced social skills
- clear progression routes into employment, training, adult or further education; enabling learners to build on what they have achieved and to realise their career or life aspirations.

Information, advice and guidance

- 160 LSDA literature indicates that information, advice and guidance has a key role to play in promoting more equal access to learning and increasing the likelihood of adults from widening participation target groups taking up learning sooner rather than later. However, literature concerned with widening participation, equality and diversity suggests that people may prefer, and benefit from, different approaches. For example, the analysis of learning needs in west London (Taylor and Knight 2002) found that many in these target groups show a preference for personal advice and guidance (as opposed to general information). They would value this type of guidance to help them decide what course to take and to advise on sources of financial support. It appears that few learners responding to the survey received this kind of service.
- 161 LSDA's study on adult learning pathways (LSDA 2002) conceptualised information, advice and guidance (IAG) services as a continuum, with 'information' being the lighter-touch and the least intensive service, and guidance being the most in-depth, thorough and client-specific. It noted that many unemployed clients are likely to require a broad range of support, with an emphasis on intensive and 'bespoke' work. At the same time, resources (including suitably qualified staff) for the 'guidance' aspect of IAG services appear to be in short supply, leading to waiting lists for basic skills clients, for example.

The role of intermediaries in promoting inclusion and engagement

- 162 Intermediaries can have a key role in promoting inclusion and engagement. People giving advice and information about learning opportunities – practitioners working for public, private and voluntary learning providers and for general and specialist advisory organisations – need a good understanding of local ‘learning pathways’ or ‘progression routes’ (LSDA 2002). This is supported by Hillage and Aston (2001), who note in their review the importance of a supportive infrastructure that makes it as easy as possible for reluctant learners to find the most appropriate learning opportunity, including a range of intermediaries and flexible learning provision.
- 163 The study of learning needs and provision in west London (Taylor and Knight 2002) found indications that Jobcentre advisers were perhaps not consistently informing people about learning opportunities in a timely fashion and that at times, too little interest was being shown in the skill and learning needs of clients.

Acting on learners’ views

- 164 Listening to learners is recognised increasingly as a way of helping improve the quality of provision and achieve equality and diversity objectives. LSDA’s area study on adult learning pathways (LSDA 2002) emphasised the importance of listening to learners in order to help improve ways to engage learners and raise awareness of learning opportunities. Discussion with learners suggested a number of measures including:
- developing awareness-raising materials that are effective with particular groups of individuals (such as a proactive, well-targeted newsletter to registered child-minders)
 - providing accessible, tailor-made advice and guidance services for some prospective learners
 - addressing the financial implications that affect some individuals’ decisions to train
 - taking steps to resolve the childcare problems that are persistent barriers to progression, including the cost, timing and flexibility of childcare provision.

- 165 LSDA’s work on learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal (Taylor and Doyle 2003) illustrates how learning providers can engage prospective learners from educationally disadvantaged groups. The report cites the example of one LEA’s ‘citizen’s conference’, organised to inform its adult learning plan.
- 166 The work of Cameron *et al.* (2003) on developing provision for homeless people supports this approach. They note that listening to and acting on the ideas and experience of homeless people should be intrinsic to the design of provision as it will help staff to:
- gain a realistic understanding of the type of provision that will suit the client group
 - improve the understanding of all involved of the specific needs of homeless learners.

Implications for providers and LSCs

- 167 This section has drawn attention to the need for active strategies to widen adult participation among those who are not currently participating. Without conscious, targeted efforts, inequalities in access are unlikely to diminish. There is a need for targeted information, advice and guidance strategies and outreach strategies. Intermediary organisations have a key role in implementing these strategies, either as the lead party or as part of a partnership with learning providers.
- 168 As part of their concern to close equality gaps in access to learning and employment, **local LSCs** will wish to treat widening participation for adults as a high priority and ensure that proactive approaches are developed by providers to engage those least likely to come forward themselves.
- 169 Case studies prepared as part of the LSDA’s work on learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal (Taylor and Doyle 2003) provide some examples of strategies that **learning providers** might adopt to target under-represented groups.

Information, advice and guidance

- 170 The findings (see paragraph 160) that some learners prefer personal advice and guidance suggests that **learning providers** might examine how a more tailored service can be developed for those who need the most help. More course information needs to reach people who may be less proactive about seeking out information. In general, the literature suggests that providers should ensure that advice and guidance services are strong and visible.

The role of intermediaries

- 171 The research points to the importance of the role of intermediaries in helping advise on learning options and progression routes. The implication is that **learning providers** must find ways of helping organisations and individuals acting as intermediaries – including, in many cases, their own staff – develop a comprehensive understanding of options, pathways or progression routes in their own and in other local organisations.

Listening to learners

- 172 Ravenhall (2001) describes a range of ways in which, as part of an overall quality development strategy, **learning providers** might listen to, and involve, learners as part of the quality improvement process. These include: questionnaires and surveys; comments, suggestions and complaints; invitations for written input; observations; and citizen's panels.

Section 7 Funding

Review and implications of the literature

Introduction

- 173 This section covers both financial issues for people participating in learning and the impact of the funding of learning providers on widening participation. The implications of both sets of work are primarily for the **Learning and Skills Council**.
- 174 A key observation from LSDA's work on funding is that we still do not know enough about the impact of financial issues faced by learners on participation. Current financial barriers to participation appear to be most acute for adult learners outside the HE sector.

Financial issues and participation in learning

- 175 LSDA research shows that the availability of support for transport costs is fragmented and variable. The amount of support and the conditions under which it is offered depend largely upon the accident of where one lives (Fletcher and Kirk 2000). Despite its potential barrier to access, there are few studies of the impact of transport costs upon participation. In their review of learner support funding for the LSC, Fletcher and Kirk (2002) note that a significant proportion of it is spent on transport. They recommend to the **Learning and Skills Council** that the allocation system for learner support funding should take account of higher transport costs in areas with sparse population density.
- 176 Fletcher and Kirk (2002) conclude that there is no question that learner support funding has helped institutions enormously in engaging with more needy learners and in meeting their needs. They observe that learners who receive learner support funding are more successful in terms of retention and, occasionally, achievement than those who do not. However, they note that it is difficult, using ISR data alone, to assess whether Learner Support Funding is helping to widen participation. They recommend to the **Learning and Skills Council** that such an assessment should be undertaken.

Funding providers for widening participation

- 177 Howard (2001) notes that there is much evidence, particularly from Scandinavian countries and Australia, that public funding to stimulate participation need not be too prescriptive to be effective. A lighter touch and a simpler system in which the state funds learning that ‘goes with the grain’ of what people want, regardless of immediate economic utility, can reap dividends for skills and employability.
- 178 Other literature, such as evaluations of the FEFC non-accredited learning projects and taster courses, draws attention to the diversity of provision and support arrangements that are needed to widen participation effectively and the funding implications of making these arrangements. The **Learning and Skills Council** might consider the following implications for the funding method.
- Provision such as non-accredited learning programmes tends to use a group model of learning with group support needs.
 - The greatest bulk of expenditure on provision such as non-accredited learning projects happens before programme delivery. These costs are in partnership management, project coordination, community liaison, programme development, outreach work and childcare support. A model based more on core or block funding for infrastructure and outreach costs plus formula funding for programmes delivered would be appropriate and easier to administer and explain to delivery partners.
 - A funding system that is based only on actual learners recruited can operate as a disincentive to providers to invest time and resources in development work where the outcomes are not guaranteed. Given the intended beneficiaries of widening participation programmes, a funding system needs to be able to tolerate a reasonable degree of variance between planned and actual outcomes without applying financial penalties.
 - Some projects tend to allow the funding methodology to determine the length of their learning programmes. Any future funding system needs to reduce the incentive for providers to do this.
 - There are hidden costs to organisations working to widen adult participation. Smaller community-based organisations often have little spare capacity for the extended development work that is sometimes necessary in setting up a project.
- 179 Taylor’s review of good practice in widening participation (2003) supports these observations and emphasises the need for a favourable funding environment to stimulate further widening of adult participation. This includes resources to support:
- additional costs incurred by colleges in widening adult participation, particularly learner and learning support
 - development of new provision, which might involve risk
 - staff development activity.
- 180 She argues that some of the extra costs need to be met on a continuing basis by the funding factor for disadvantage. Some, such as a national programme of staff development activity to help spread good practice, may be shorter term.
- 181 Fletcher and Faraday (2003), writing on additional learning support, advise that the method for assessing and meeting additional learning support costs needs to be the simplest possible that is consistent with two goals:
- enabling providers to meet the needs of individual learners for additional learning support appropriate to their context
 - enabling providers to plan ahead, with confidence that their resources will be a fair and adequate reflection of their need to spend on additional learning support. Providers need to be supported in accessing assistive technology (specialist equipment) and the associated technical support.

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Notes

- 1 The Kennedy Report derived nine main characteristics of good practice in widening participation. These were that:
 - marketing should be planned and based on intelligence
 - there should be strategies for contacting non-participants
 - there should be good quality, impartial information and that guidance should be readily available
 - there should be effective support for learning
 - financial and practical support should be provided
 - the curriculum should be relevant and enable students to progress
 - there should be effective teaching and promotion of learning
 - there should be mechanisms for recording students' achievements which acknowledge all learning, are meaningful to students and which are recognised by employers, education providers and others
 - management information should be accurate and should be used to evaluate students' progress and other aspects of provision.

Source: Macleod D (2001: 51). Good practice in widening participation in further education. A survey of recent literature for the Learning and Skills Development Agency. In Taylor (2002): *Widening adult participation: ways to extend good practice. A research report for the Learning and Skills Council*. LSDA, March 2002 (available at www.LSDA.org.uk)

- 2 'We expect all providers... to look afresh at their education and training mission and to focus on their strengths.' See *Success for all* (DfES 2002:12).
- 3 LSDA is organising a seminar in autumn 2003 to examine the state of knowledge about effective partnership working and the implications for future research and development to support the learning and skills sector.

- 4 The learning provision developed as part of these projects was known prior to 2000 as 'non-schedule 2' provision and is now termed 'non-accredited' learning provision.
- 5 LSDA (2002) defines progression as follows.
Progression might involve:
 - vertical progress from a lower qualification to a higher qualification
 - lateral progress – from one course to another at the same level, to broaden knowledge, add a new specialism or make skills more secure
 - progress in the same or a different subject
 - diagonal progress – from a higher level to a lower level course, to refresh an old skill or try a new one
 - progress from informal or unstructured learning to formal learning
 - progress from non-vocational learning to vocational learning
 - progress from learning into work, or from work into learning, or progress at work, achieved through learning.
- 6 In a related development, LSDA and NIACE are collaborating in research funded by LSC to develop a way of recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning. See LSC (2003). *Position paper on recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning*. Available on www.lsc.gov.uk
- 7 The work programme, entitled 'Developing a more responsive and flexible vocational qualifications system' can be downloaded at www.qca.org.uk/nq/framework/develop_flex_voc_qual_sysm.asp

