

ED 405 474

CE 073 681

AUTHOR Reisenberger, Anna; Sanders, John  
 TITLE Adult Learners: Pathways to Progression. FEDA Paper.  
 INSTITUTION Further Education Development Agency, London (England).  
 REPORT NO ISSN-1361-9977  
 PUB DATE 97  
 NOTE 54p.  
 AVAILABLE FROM Further Education Development Agency, Publications Dept., Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG, England, United Kingdom.  
 PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)  
 JOURNAL CIT FE Matters; v1 n12 1997

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Academic Aspiration; Adult Education; Adult Learning; \*Adult Students; \*Educational Mobility; Educational Opportunities; Foreign Countries; Postsecondary Education; \*Student Participation; Technical Institutes; \*Vocational Education  
 IDENTIFIERS Great Britain; \*Informal Education

## ABSTRACT

A study focused on facilitating progression for adults from nonvocational adult education to qualification-bearing courses in further education (FE) and studied their patterns of progression and which factors helped or hindered such progress. Information was collected from adult learners in 10 adult and FE organizations in Britain through a questionnaire and interviews of selected students who had progressed from informal courses. Two groups of students were chosen: learners on courses that primarily led to national qualifications and learners on "informal courses" that did not. Both groups showed a general pattern of movement from preparatory, general, or basic education courses to mainstream, qualification-bearing academic or vocational courses. Much adult provision was of a stop-start nature. Four features aided progression: good teaching, building of personal and study confidence, access to built-in advice and choice, and progression targets and opportunities. Courses that encouraged progression offered the following: supportive teaching, stimulating subject matter, a friendly atmosphere, teachers who could relate to adults, and information or advice about the learner's next steps. Institutional factors that contributed to achieving progression included timing or location of classes, provision of support facilities, a reasonable fee level, provision of childcare facilities, and a welcoming adult ethos. (Appendixes contain 17 references, institutional audit form, and instruments.) (YLB)

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# Adult learners: pathways to progression

Anna Reisenberger and John Sanders

Volume 1 Number 12



# F E M A T T E R S

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# Adult learners: pathways to progression

Anna Reisenberger and John Sanders

**F E M A T T E R S**

**FEDA paper**

# Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the following project participants who undertook the fieldwork with students and carried out institutional audits:

Tom Carslaw	Norwich City College
Dawn Carter	Wakefield College
John Clarke	Bolton Community Education Service
Bridget Coates	Park Lane College
Dave Ellwand	Liverpool LEA
Erland Lee	City and Islington College
Sheila McAlpine	Gloucestershire LEA
Marjorie Schindler	South Devon College
Sandra Southee	Ford Motor Company
Graham Wilkinson	Suffolk College

Published by the Further Education  
Development Agency  
Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG  
Telephone 01761 462503  
Fax 01761 463140 (Publications Department)

Registered charity no: 1044145

Series edited and designed by the FEDA  
publications department  
Printed by Blackmore Press, Shaftesbury,  
Dorset  
Cover illustration: courtesy of Shipley College

ISSN: 1361-9977

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## Key findings

Facilitating progression for adults from non-vocational adult education to qualification-bearing courses in further education was the focus of this research project undertaken by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA). The key aim was to understand their patterns of progression and which factors helped or hindered such progress.

It was therefore important to study learners on both types of courses. This was carried out via a questionnaire. Some students from the non-vocational group of learners were also then interviewed. The first section outlines key issues in understanding progression and how the research was undertaken. This is followed by a section summarising the findings of the learners' responses. The institutions involved undertook an audit of their policies and practices for supporting progression; these are examined in section 3. The next section then recommends strategies for programme planning which will facilitate progression.

### *Learner characteristics*

- Linear one-dimensional models are too simple to apply to progression issues in adult and further education. To understand more fully the patterns caused by the variety of individual motivations and experiences further longitudinal work, using larger samples, may be necessary.
- In both groups studied there was a general pattern of movement from preparatory, general or basic education courses (sometimes accredited but usually not bearing qualifications) to mainstream, qualification-bearing academic or vocational courses, and of some movement up in terms of level.
- Lateral progression is important to broaden interest, gain confidence or secure a firmer grounding in study.
- Much of the adult provision is of a stop-start nature.

- The sector's complex range of clients includes a minority of well-qualified people who use institutions to take 'lower level' courses.
- Conventional demarcation lines, between academic and vocational, adult and further education, qualification-bearing and non-qualification bearing courses are frequently traversed.
- Adults attending qualification-bearing courses had engaged in more recent learning activities of all types than those on informal courses; this included having been on nearly twice as many unstructured learning activities outside educational institutions.
- Important outcomes of the courses were growth in confidence (personal and study) and self-esteem.
- Many adult learners in both groups had few initial qualifications.
- Adult learners generally have a strong commitment to progress despite obstacles to doing so.
- Further learning opportunities can have an immense transforming impact on adults' lives.

### *Institutional factors*

- Quality of the learning experience was the key factor in facilitating progression, in particular the student's relationship with the course tutor and the quality of the teaching.
- Courses which encouraged progression had the following features. They offered:
  - supportive teaching
  - stimulating subject matter
  - a friendly atmosphere
  - teachers who could relate to adults
  - information or advice about the learner's next steps

- Institutional factors which for some adults contributed to achieving progression included:
  - timing or location of classes
  - provision of support facilities
  - a reasonable fee level
  - provision of childcare facilities
  - a welcoming adult ethos
- Front-line course tutors were twice as likely as the institution's own guidance services to be the main source of advice on next steps.
- Taster and return to study programmes, sometimes accredited, encourage progression in a variety of directions and contain many of the characteristics of adult-friendly teaching.
- In a future where horizontal mobility in the job market is likely to be more important than the career ladder, institutions should consider broadening and extending learning opportunities as being just as important to lifelong learning as upward progression.
- Internal policies to promote progression and partnerships between providers can make an important contribution to widening participation.

### *Ways forward*

- Institutions need to extend their strategies on identifying learning outcomes and progression possibilities across both qualification-bearing and informal courses to take into account the specific needs of adult learners.
- Front-line tutors need support materials and staff development so that they can give students appropriate guidance on next steps.
- Institutions should take account of adult learners when they plan curriculum pathways and they should offer a range of courses specifically designed to allow adults to explore their capabilities, extend their skills and knowledge and gain confidence to move on.
- The review of schedule 2 (courses which lead to national vocational or academic qualifications or competence in basic skills as opposed to general or 'informal' adult education) should maintain the range of entry routes available for meeting adults' diverse needs.

# 1. Studying progression: purpose of this research

## Understanding progression

Progression is one of the key words in contemporary adult and further education. It is desirable, demonstrable and above all fundable. However, there is no clear consensus about what the term really means or whose definition should be embraced.

In theory, progression is a deceptively simple notion. It is almost by definition 'a good thing' with its implied momentum of forwards and upwards. In reality, and particularly for adults, its full dimensions need to be understood and its patterns systematically analysed. Simple metaphors of ladders and bridges do not describe what happens in practice.

Recent Scottish research (Arney et al., 1993) identified three broad types of progression:

- from non-participation to participation
- from one subject to another or from one institution to another, at the same level
- from one level upwards to another (sometimes including a move to another institution)

While useful as an analytical tool, such one-dimensional models are too simple to cover all the complex dynamics or chronology of progression, such as the 'zig-zag' pattern of adult learners' progress, the way in which adults dip in and out of provision, have voluntary or enforced rests, mix formal and informal modes and look to certain types of provision at different life-stages.

When people talk about progression they usually mean vertical progression to a higher level (the third of the Scottish types listed above). However, lateral or sideways progression where learners consolidate or extend skills, or develop confidence and knowledge at the same broad level, has been found to be just as important. It is also important to acknowledge that some learners

move in a downwards diagonal direction, for example, from A level French to IT Awareness, or from Advanced Computer Studies to Beginners German or Assertiveness. The propensity of highly-qualified people to be avid consumers of education is well attested. Equally, adults often feel the need to 'go back to basics' after a break from education, because of loss of study confidence or a perception that their knowledge or skills are out of date. So overall, simple vertical and horizontal axes are often inadequate for explaining the reality.

Progression patterns can only be properly explained by looking at the big picture using time-lapse techniques. These may also reveal the extent, timing and rationale for progression from informal to formal learning or from semi-structured to structured provision: from general learning to specific skills or subject knowledge; from general adult education to academic or vocational types of programmes or between different types of institution.

Progression usually refers to the point of transition from one course to another or to employment, but it can also take place within learning programmes. If adult learners are aware of their progress they are more likely to continue in other formal learning situations. The motivation to continue learning at a level that meets individual needs may be as important to promoting lifelong learning as a hierarchical concept of progression.

Large-scale studies have taken place on such areas as adult participation in education and training and on student retention and withdrawal in further education (Martinez, 1995, 1996). However, the issue which links these areas, that of progression, is still awaiting comparable attention. While there has been plenty of interest and practical activity on progression over a number of years — among education advice and guidance organisations, open college networks (OCNs), individual further education (FE) colleges, Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and local adult education services — these have provided anecdotal evidence only. Most have focused on progression or access into adult or further education, or from there into higher education;

few have concentrated on progression within adult and further education, as addressed in this research.

This neglect is partly due to the logistical difficulties of tracking such a disparate set of learners, the diversity of the sector and the complexity of the issues involved. Research that has been undertaken has focused on particular target groups, organisations, localities or regions, or on the perceptions of providers rather than those of students.

Most learners' motivation to progress exhibits a mix of personal, vocational and educational aspirations. Progression is affected by external factors such as role constraints, social class, funding and access to available opportunities. Policy tends to focus on one area of influence at a time, often at the margins where things are simpler. Consequently, it is unable to engage adequately with the actual experiences and needs of adult learners.

This research sought to explore some real progression routes and to understand the factors which facilitated or impeded the journeys which people make. Its focus was on how students move on from more informal courses to assessed accredited provision, whether or not it was at a higher level.

## Research aims

Many involved in adult and further education have long believed in the need for a multiplicity of accessible entry points for adults returning to education and training. It is argued that by keeping 'first-step' provision open, accessible and user-friendly, individuals are able to test the waters. Through gaining study confidence and skills they can then move on to more demanding, more sharply-focused, often qualification-bearing courses.

This research project was set up to identify:

- characteristics of adult learners who have made the transition to schedule 2 provision (qualification-bearing courses) from informal learning on non-schedule 2 courses

- how adults arrive at their decision to progress and what they think about their choices
- systems and structures which facilitate such progression
- curriculum design features which facilitate such progression

For the purposes of funding, the 1992 Further and Higher Education (FHE) Act separated courses leading to national vocational or academic qualifications or competence in basic skills (schedule 2) from general or 'informal' adult education (non-schedule 2). The continuum of provision for adult learners was divided in organisational terms. This research project was able to explore progression issues in the post FHE Act context and to examine the experiences of individuals and institutions within the new funding environment.

Initial discussions revealed that different interpretations of funding opportunities and variations in funding relationships mean that the same type of provision might be classified as schedule 2 in one area, and non-schedule 2 in another. This was especially true for schedule 2d courses which prepare students for access to a course leading to an academic, vocational or Access to HE qualification (see Appendix 5). The key distinction that the research would therefore make would be between more formally structured qualification-bearing courses and more informal non-qualification bearing courses.

## Research methods

Taking part in the study were ten adult and further education organisations in England selected to reflect some of the diversity within the sector:

- six FE colleges
- three LEA adult education services
- one company-based employee development programme with close links to local providers

The learners surveyed therefore came from a range of providers from rural and urban areas across the country, with different proportions of schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 provision (see Appendix 1). The organisations were selected to represent as wide a range as possible of the providers that exist among this diverse sector.

Information was collected from the adult learners via two means:

- a questionnaire
- interviews of selected students who had progressed from informal courses

In this way both quantitative and qualitative data could be gathered. A co-ordinator from each institution was responsible for selecting and briefing students, administering the questionnaires and interviewing students.

Two groups of students were chosen: learners on courses which primarily led to national qualifications (major national awards) such as NVQs, GCSEs, kitemarked Access Certificates and learners on 'informal' courses which did not lead to major national qualifications. It proved impossible to find a totally satisfactory descriptive title for either of the main groups of respondents. For the purposes of this report the first group are referred to as 'qualifiers', and the second group as 'informal learners'.

The questionnaires, one for each of the two study groups, covered learners' recent learning history, current courses, motivation and future plans. The co-ordinators helped to design the questionnaires. The two differed only slightly; for example, the questionnaire for 'qualifiers' focused more on the students' immediate intentions and on their reasons for choosing their current course. This questionnaire is included in the report in Appendix 3.

The questionnaires were not given 'cold' to the students, but introduced with a discussion — and sometimes exercises — on the purposes of the research. A total of 200 students for each group were surveyed between March and May 1995. Equal numbers were surveyed from each institution. They were selected to be as representative a cross-section of students as

possible. A quarter (50) of the informal learners were interviewed individually six months later in November. An interview schedule, devised by the project team and the co-ordinators, focused on their experiences, motivation and plans in greater depth.

The questionnaire respondents and interviewees were generally 'successful' students, that is, not early leavers, and were more likely to have had a positive experience in adult and further education. Basic Skills students were excluded because of the detail of the questionnaire.

To set the findings in context, the policies and practices in the institutions where the students were studying were also investigated, using the institutional audit given in Appendix 2.

Progression is a complex phenomenon with many dimensions contributing to the overall picture. There are a range of socio-economic factors which lead to exclusion from learning opportunities. This study chose to focus on the students' perceptions of what helped or hindered progress. The experiences and testimonies of the students surveyed can give providers an invaluable insight into what factors can achieve successful progression, especially if the findings are set alongside evidence from non-participants and people who left provision. The sample was small and the students were tracked over a relatively short period, so essentially the research provides some 'snapshots', alongside a recent 'album' (covering learning in the last five years). A larger comprehensive longitudinal survey is needed to follow up some of the key issues revealed by this research.

## 2. Learners' experiences

### Characteristics of respondents

For the purposes of the report, it was decided to use the term 'qualifiers' for those on qualification-bearing courses and 'informal learners' for those on courses not leading to national qualifications.

Qualifiers were younger and more likely to be in full-time employment, education or training. They tended to be on courses at a higher level than the informal learners and to be on mainstream vocational or academic courses, although half had undertaken a Level 1 course in the last five years (for details of what the levels refer to see Appendix 4).

Qualifiers' motivation to study was more likely to be explicitly instrumental (to improve job or career prospects). Informal learners were more likely to be taking courses for personal interest or self-development reasons and a higher proportion had either no qualifications or Level 1 at all or no higher qualifications. Qualifiers had undertaken slightly more formal learning and nearly twice as many unstructured learning activities in the last five years as current informal learners.

There were overlaps between the groups: nearly half of the 50 informal learners interviewed had moved on to qualification-bearing courses by November 1995. However, the two main groups of respondents were not simply two similar groups of learners at different stages in their educational careers.

Plenty of qualifiers had accessed qualification-bearing courses from a preparatory course, or without any preliminary or intermediary stage. Many were already focused, confident and knowledgeable about education and training. The informal learners included some who would never be attracted to qualification-bearing courses, because they already had plenty of qualifications; or who would take some time to get there, because of low existing skills or study confidence.

Just over two thirds of both groups were women: more informal learners were aged 50 or older, and nearly two thirds of qualifiers were less than 40 years old. The difference in the age-profile of the two groups is reflected in the numbers of dependent children. The number of people from minority backgrounds from both groups was about 10 per cent, which reflects national statistics, but, given the location of some of the participating institutions, individuals from minority groups may be underrepresented.

Informal learners were less likely to be in employment, to be looking after the home or family, or caring for dependents. They were more likely to be retired or doing voluntary work and to classify themselves as doing part-time education. The figures, however, do reveal the residue of domestic duties and caring taken on by many people (particularly women), whatever their official employment status: 'Looking after home or family', ranked first in total responses, but only third as a main activity.

Both questionnaires asked respondents questions about their highest level of qualification. One fifth of both groups had higher education level qualifications, and a significant proportion in both cohorts (43 per cent of qualifiers and 37 per cent of informal learners) had Level 1 or no formal qualification. The 50 informal learners interviewed six months after completing the questionnaire were broadly representative of that group.

The majority of students on qualification-bearing courses were at Levels 2 (47%) or at Level 3 (32%). Half were on vocational courses, and 41 per cent were on academic courses (this includes 15 per cent on Access to Higher Education courses). It was difficult for local co-ordinators to assign a level to nearly half of the informal courses, and three quarters of those learners for whom a level could be allocated were on Level 1 courses. The majority were on general adult education courses (60 per cent, drawn mainly from those aged 40 and older), with sizeable numbers (22 per cent, predominantly aged 20-39) on preparatory courses.

## Reasons for studying

Both questionnaires asked the respondents to identify their main reasons for doing or intending to do a course.

An increase in instrumental reasons from recent past to present courses is revealed by those on qualification-bearing courses and from present to future courses by those on informal provision. Perhaps surprisingly, among the informal learners women were more likely than men to cite job-related reasons for wishing to do their next course.

Undertaking further courses for personal interest was still the main reason cited, but this declined from 26 per cent for their current

course to 17 per cent for their next course. Qualifiers have less interest in doing courses for personal interest (6%) and are more interested in getting a qualification or improving their job prospects (59%).

When interviewed in depth the informal learners revealed a complex mix of reasons for returning to formal education and training, with personal, educational and job-related factors often overlapping. The shift from non qualification-bearing to qualification-bearing courses for those who had progressed to another course was marked by an increase in the prominence of job-related motivation.

*'I failed my School Certificate and had a sense of failure all my life, even though I have run businesses.'*

### Case study 1

Robert is in his early 20s and works full-time in a factory. He is single and suffers from epilepsy. He feels that he "messed up" his studies at school and came out with no qualifications.

Robert is on a 'Learning with Confidence: Maths' programme, with an option of doing GCSE mathematics. He likes the workshop setting: with its adult atmosphere "it's not like school". His tutor has encouraged him and provides "plenty of explanations and attention". He finds he can learn easily now. He had not done a course since leaving school and the only other recent learning activity he noted was the 'Britain in Bloom' competition a couple of years ago.

Robert was encouraged to return to education by his family and a friend who was doing a mathematics course. Robert originally started on a more basic course. Achieving his City and Guilds Numeracy Certificate boosted his confidence and encouraged him to tackle GCSE. He was very proud of his "first certificate". He always knew he had ability and wanted "something to put on job applications under qualifications".

He feels he is "stuck at a machine" at work and needs something more demanding. His immediate plans are to do a Business course (possibly a non-examination course), and GCSE English; and then to do a Business course with qualifications.

In reality, individuals' testimonies often took in a number of dimensions. For example, responses from interviewees who gave vocational reasons ranged from the urgent need to get a job or the possibility of facing redundancy, to the belief that going on a German class might occasionally help at work in dealing with overseas visitors. For people whose reasons came within the personal-social category, taking classes might result from a sense of lack of fulfilment ("I needed something beyond clerking") or the desire to check out "whether I could or should go further". Equally, it might be linked to a powerful mission: for example to redress the legacy of an unequal marriage ("I was constantly put down ... and not allowed to do anything"), or to exorcise the ghosts of past school failures.

Interviewees were asked about any key incident, person or factor which facilitated their original return to education or training. Work and job-related factors were mentioned by 12 people. Ken, for example, was unemployed and did not want to go back to his previous occupation. Susan felt she had failed at school and wanted to gain some qualifications to put down on a job application form. For six other interviewees people, family or friends had aided participation. Jim noted the importance of "a familiar face" when he first went to classes.

Others cited encouragement from work colleagues or family members. Sometimes even negative encouragement could work. Janine, for example, had a sister-in-law who would correct her spelling and written work. She resented this and, despite lacking confidence, made the effort to join a course to do something about it. Case study 1 (below left) illustrates the importance of social influences on first steps, and of confidence-building on next steps.

Ten other people noted particular incidents or pressing factors which gave them the reason to return: separation or divorce, moving area, a particular publicity campaign, a desire to improve their physical or mental health.

By far the most common cluster of reasons (cited 18 times) fell within the personal-domestic category: the desire for intellectual stimulation as children were growing up ("I needed a bit more than Humpty Dumpty"); the need to get out of the house; or, the wish to do "something for me" and prove themselves. Kathy, who had been bullied at school and labelled a failure, in the words of the interviewer, wanted "to prove to herself and her teachers that she can do it".

## Previous learning

One key area of interest was how far previous experience of learning encourages progression. While just under a quarter of those studying for qualifications had undertaken no courses in the past five years, a third had been on one course and roughly equal proportions had each gone on, respectively, two, three or four courses. A fifth had completed more than four courses!

Half of these were at Level 1 or below, with a further third at Level 2. Only 10 per cent were at Level 3 or above, but nearly half were now studying at that level. Occupational and vocational courses were mentioned most frequently, followed by academic and general adult education courses. The subject range of courses studied was broad and the main groups of providers were: FE colleges (30%), adult and community education sector providers (29%), and employer or training organisations (22%). Case Study 2 (below) is just one example of how a previous course encouraged the learner to progress with his studies.

Informal learners had undertaken only slightly fewer courses (427 in total for the group compared with the qualifiers' total of 472) but

### Case study 2

*Jack's story illustrates the interplay of different factors influencing students' decision to progress. The influence of a key person — his probation officer — is complemented by his personal views on fate. His course had appropriate features and gave him confidence. Although his views of his environment are negative, they are not a determining factor in his decisions. He has benefited from help in his previous transition and is concerned about who to turn to — and whether financial constraints will prevent him achieving his goals.*

Jack is unemployed and on income support and needed to change career direction. He knew what he wanted to do and found the answers quite easily. "I fell on my feet when I came to this college because obviously everyone here knows exactly what's going on and what FE is all about. There is a system set up." He is on 'Access to FE' which provides a foundation for Diploma in Social Work. It involves 15 hours a week, a higher level, more intense and "much more stimulating" study than his previous course, his first since leaving school. His Probation Officer encouraged him to return. He also thinks "destiny" played a part. "Return to Learn was a stepping stone — it made me realise although I had no qualifications I have been doing a lot for the last 30 years like writing reports and essays etc." The course gave him a sense of self-worth. On the current course teachers are very good and help with motivation and he likes the group. However, "the mess students leave everywhere is indescribable", the class is so large that room is tight and "we often get moved from one classroom to another in the middle of a lesson". He spent most of last winter watching TV and since starting this course he has hardly turned the TV on. He now feels much more positive and hopeful about the future. He is worried that money will hold him back because grants are so poor. He is very concerned about who to turn to for advice — guidance played a big part initially and he thinks his "overworked tutor is the only one who can help him apply for next steps".

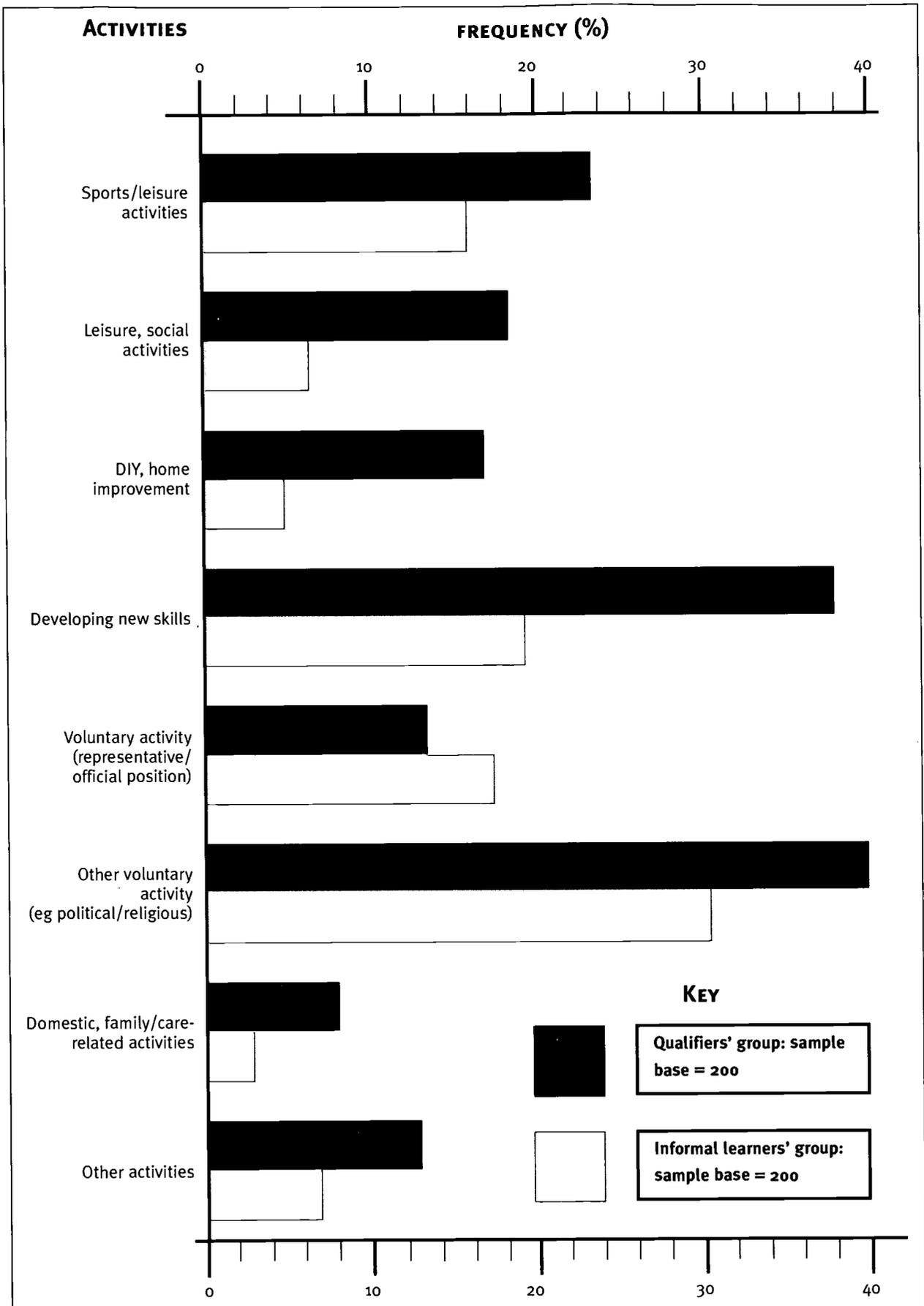


FIGURE 1: TYPES OF NON-STRUCTURED LEARNING ACTIVITIES (DURING LAST FIVE YEARS)

tended to take fewer explicitly vocational or academic courses and undertake their study at a broader spread of levels and institutions. General adult education was by far the largest single course type for informal learners. Slightly more informal learners had experience of adult basic education programmes. These broad course type differences were reflected in subjects studied. Given these trends, it is not surprising to see that adult and community education institutions (the largest single category) and higher education establishments were the most common type of institution used.

Both questionnaires also included questions about personal or non-structured learning activities which respondents had engaged in during the same five year period (see question 20 in Appendix 3 and Figure 1).

Nearly two thirds of qualifiers and half the informal learners said they had taken part in some non-structured learning activity during this period. The total number of these learning activities identified by qualifiers was more than twice that of the informal learners. This difference could be due to qualifiers listing activities which informal learners might not consider relevant, rather than being pure evidence that they undertake more non-structured learning opportunities.

The range of learning activities mentioned was exceptionally diverse: from bungee-jumping to Tae Quon Do; from Neighbour-hood Watch to curtain-making; from using a PC to running a youth club.

Attempts were made to classify this wealth of individual experience; no single form of activity stands out from this analysis for the qualifiers.

Voluntary activities of different sorts were mentioned most often (31% of all the learners), followed by sports, leisure and social activities and activities to develop new skills.

Voluntary and community activities are proportionally more important for informal learners, while home improvement, domestic activities and 'family care-related' activities are much reduced.

## Progression patterns

### Summary

There was a general trend from introductory or general courses to more specific or specialised programmes of study at the same or a higher level. Qualifiers had moved in significant numbers from preparatory, general or basic education courses up to more strictly defined academic or vocational courses. Informal learners intended to move in the same direction, although preparatory, general or basic education courses remained the most important 'intended next course' type. A number of qualifiers had moved to higher level courses, mainly from Levels 1 to 2 and 2 to 3; there was also significant 'lateral progression'. Many informal learners planned to take their next course at a higher level and most did so, although a considerable number also took a course at the same level.

The evidence points to substantial vertical progression, usually in manageable steps rather than leaps, bolstered by significant lateral progression. The experiences of these learners confirm that adults often use general adult education as a stepping stone to national qualifications. (See Figure 2 for the details.)

### Qualifiers

A third of this group had not carried out a course of study in the previous 18 months. From an analysis of the previous and current courses of the remaining two-thirds, a number of trends are noticeable. There was a general move to more specific academic and vocational courses. Preparatory, basic or general education courses were the most common 'previous course' type: comprising 29 per cent of the total (44 per cent of recent course taken, with women disproportionately represented) but only 10 per cent of these students were currently on these types of courses. This shift from more general or preparatory previous courses to more specific vocational or academic current courses is also reflected in the subjects studied. Among previous courses there is less emphasis on

business courses, sciences, art and design, and health and community care and more emphasis on humanities. Many of the unclassified courses given in the 'other' category were general preparatory courses.

There was not a massive shift in the type of institution attended among learners moving from general or preparatory courses to more specific vocational or academic courses. Further Education colleges were the largest provider of both previous and current courses and there was some movement from adult and

community education institutions to FE colleges. The issue of how many learners were transferring between sites or sections of colleges was not explored in the research.

Nearly half of those for whom the level of their previous course could be ascertained had undertaken it at Level 1, but only 15 per cent were currently taking courses at this level. With proportions carrying out Level 2 courses remaining fairly constant, the evidence suggests a shift from Levels 1 to 2 and from 2 to 3. Interestingly, a quarter of those who had

completed a recent previous course found it hard to compare the levels of the two courses. This points to difficulties in comparing different types of courses or curriculum areas and assigning levels for the wide-ranging courses previously taken.

Of those who could make a comparison, half believed that their present course was at a higher level than the previous one, a quarter considered the two courses to be at about the same level, while 15 per cent felt their current course was at a lower level.

The picture, then, is a mixed one. Vertical progression upwards was certainly a common feature but there was also evidence of apparent movement in the other direction. Of the 20 people who considered their previous course to be at a higher level than their current one, eight had previously completed courses at Level 4/undergraduate degree level. A

Comparisons of course type, and course subject						
	Qualifiers		Informal learners		Interviewees	
	Previous (%)	Current (%)	Current (%)	Intended (%)	Actual (%)	Actual (numbers)
<b>Course type</b>						
Occupational, job specific	10	18	2	7	8	3
Vocational (broadly)	24	31	5	20	10	4
Academic	17	26	1	12	15	6
Access to HE	3	15	-	11	13	5
Preparatory, bridging	18	6	22	2	13	5
General adult education	20	4	60	41	41	16
Adult basic education	6	-	7	4	-	-
Other	2	-	3	3	-	-
<b>Course subject</b>						
Sciences (including maths)	5	11	1	8	2	1
Agriculture	2	-	-	-	2	1
Construction	3	3	1	1	-	-
Engineering	5	3	1	2	2	1
Business	18	36	7	11	8	3
Hotel and Catering	-	-	2	2	-	-
Health and community care	6	10	8	10	15	6
Art and Design	10	13	9	9	5	2
Humanities	23	18	30	30	61	24
Basic	8	-	11	4	-	-
Other	20	6	30	23	5	1

FIGURE 2

significant amount of lateral progression in building skills or confidence at the same level, is also implied. The evidence suggests that level is of more interest to funders than learners, who are happy to take courses if they feel extended.

### *Informal learners*

Although qualifiers and informal learners differed in some key respects, the two groups displayed broadly similar progression patterns.

When asked about their study intentions in May 1995, 84 per cent of informal learners expressed a strong or fair likelihood of starting another course within the next six months. In reality, 39 out of the 50 people interviewed six months later had taken up another course by that stage. The 11 non-progressors included seven who had indicated that they were definitely intending to do another course. However, the completion of the questionnaire in a formal educational establishment in the presence of a co-ordinator may have led to the boosting or overestimation of intentions.

While preparatory, basic and general education courses remained collectively the most important category of intended next courses (47%), this figure was much less than the number currently on such courses (89%). More than half of those who had progressed to another course six months later were on preparatory or general adult education courses, 11 of these 39 interviewees (28%) were on academic courses and seven (18%) were on vocational programmes. Their broad intentions to take their next course at a higher level or, for 20 per cent, at the same level appear to have been borne out. More than two thirds were doing a course at a higher level, with about a quarter at the same level. No one was participating in, or admitting to being on a course at a lower level. There was a marked increase in the number of Level 2 courses undertaken by interviewees. Only two people were currently on courses at Level 4 or above.

The evidence suggests that substantial vertical progression is common among informal learners, bolstered by some lateral progression.

## **Progression factors**

One of the key aims of the research was to look at how individual, curriculum and institutional factors facilitated or inhibited progression. Through questioning the learners it was hoped to examine how the learning experience and some of the links between these three reference points impacted upon progression.

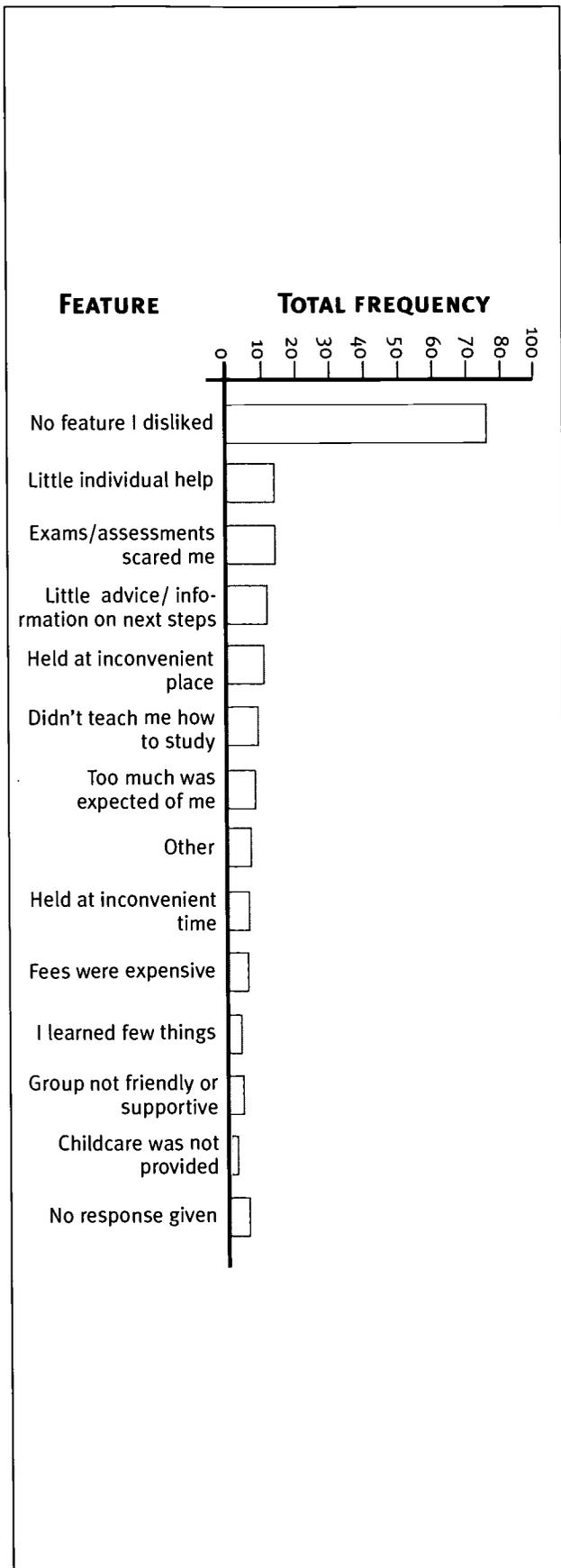
Interviewees identified a number of overlapping features which had aided progression; four interlinked features stand out:

- good teaching (encouraging, enthusiastic, empathetic tutoring)
- the building of personal and study confidence: "before, I was frightened of the subject"
- access to built-in advice and choice: "the course exposed many subject areas and it was like a process of elimination"
- progression targets and opportunities: "it encouraged me to think about what I might do next"

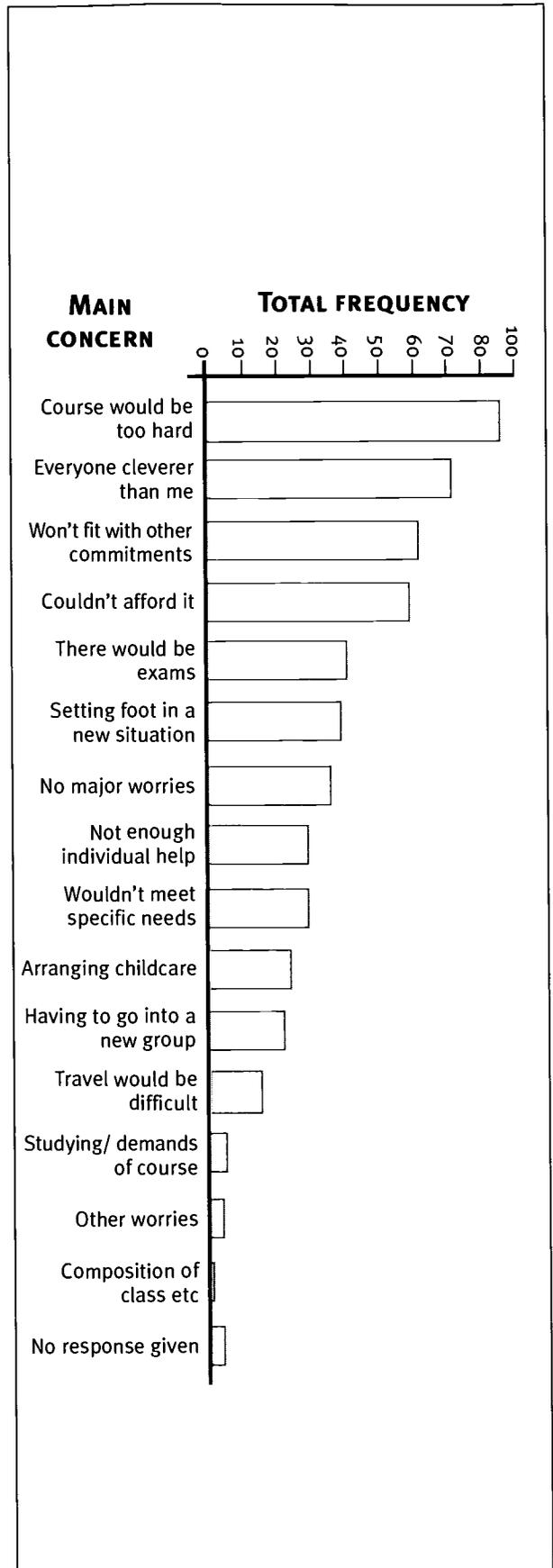
The main axis explored was that between the individual learner and tutor. This can be characterised as the 'internal' dimension. It focuses on the teaching/learning experience, links with other students and with the tutor, the amount of study support, the growth of confidence and knowledge.

The second main axis was that between the learner and the institution or organisation. Key elements of this 'external' dimension were such things as the location and timing of classes, fees, support facilities and provision of childcare.

The third, tutor-institution axis was not explored in any depth, though it figures in the institutional profiles provided by co-ordinators. Factors relating to the fourth axis — that is broader 'super-external' ones such as funding regimes, changes in national policy, the esteem in which education is held, perceptions of public safety — are only touched upon indirectly through the learners' responses and in the institutional profiles.



**FIGURE 3: FEATURES DISLIKED ABOUT PREVIOUS COURSE — QUALIFIERS**



**FIGURE 4: WORRIES BEFORE TAKING COURSE — QUALIFIERS**

It is not possible to place every possible factor precisely within this model. In reality some of the lines are blurred or factors take in all of the reference points. The provision of qualifications and certification, for example, touches upon all four domains in the model: individual activity, tutor attitudes and actions, institutional decisions, and national policy. Whatever its shortcomings the model at least provides a crude framework for exploring the learning experiences of students.

## Teaching and learning

*"The course tutor was very positive, never judged you or made you feel stupid. She related to students on all levels and always had good things to say about whatever was attempted."*

The chief features which learners liked about their previous courses were internal — to do with the teaching and learning taking place — with tutors' help being of particular importance to informal learners (see question 15 of the questionnaire given in Appendix 3). Conversely, qualifiers, especially those older than 40, emphasised the learning of new things.

Building confidence ranked second overall, for both groups combined, and was particularly important for those with no formal qualifications. The features which qualifiers disliked about their previous course are shown in Figure 3. Before they began their current course, qualifiers were mainly concerned that the courses would be too difficult or that everyone would be cleverer than them. This suggests that gaining confidence by acquiring a feeling of competence is a key factor in assisting progression. Supporting features such as social aspects, an adult atmosphere, or interesting subject matter, were rarely mentioned by the respondents. See Figure 4 for the details of the worries that qualifiers had before taking their course.

The centrality of the link with the tutor — the support provided, the relationship developed, the advice proffered — cannot be overstated in relation to learner retention and progression. It is a constant in so many of the responses to

different questions. For example, it shows up in identification of key people or incidents which brought about personal change or development. It surfaces in discussion of issues of information, advice and guidance. It also shows up, negatively, in a couple of the testimonies of the 11 interviewees who had not taken a further course. One felt that the teacher of her previous course had humiliated her in front of the class. Another felt that the tutor had a "school teacher approach" which she disliked.

Insights into successful teaching approaches occasionally emerge through the interviews:

*"The tutor was important. I've been taught by her previously and liked her approach... friendly, approachable, she can explain things clearly."*

*"The tutor's style and enthusiasm were important. She was very understanding and started the 2nd year with revision."*

*"My first tutor encouraged me to speak out and ask questions in class."*

In some instances, tutors provided powerful role models, particularly those who themselves had been adult returners. One student spoke of:

*"the general quality of tutors — throughout... (and) the consistent level of support and encouragement. Most of my tutors were Women Returners themselves and have acted as role models".*

Many of those interviewees who had progressed to another course noted that not only was this at a higher level, but that it involved more study time with, in general, less support from tutors unless they requested it and higher expectations of their capabilities.

However, students generally did not perceive these 'new' features as a problem which implies that they are not a barrier to progression. Instead, they viewed them as a sign of their development as learners as they took on more serious study.

## *Return to study provision*

Return to learn, bridging and taster courses were particularly successful in facilitating progression.

One of the key progression pathways identified through the questionnaires was from general, bridging or preparatory programmes to more specifically focused academic or vocational courses. The case studies drawn from interviews include some powerful testaments to the broad access role of introductory, taster and return to learn programmes. The experiences and expectations of these interviewees were different to those of students on 'traditional' adult education programmes, such as modern languages. From their comments, key features of return to learn programmes emerged:

- putting emphasis on, and being successful in, building confidence
- providing a supportive teaching approach
- focusing on advice and guidance
- having built-in options for progression and accreditation

They were not just the first step for those returning to learn. Many students on such courses had previously been on other individual courses or had engaged in a range of informal learning activities. However, for many of these students these programmes appeared to offer a chance to take stock and consolidate skills and confidence and to provide a launching point for further learning at the same or a higher level. They also acted as an important bridge between more *ad hoc* or informal learning activities and more formal courses with qualifications.

## *Institutional environment*

Although factors such as the timing, location and cost of courses were not the main features students liked, responses showed that, along with the reassurance provided by a friendly and supportive group, they are necessary to underpin a satisfactory learning experience.

In comparing their present study location with that of their previous course, interviewees highlighted mainly positive features such as the provision of clean, comfortable and spacious facilities (good libraries, canteens and workshops), and a relaxed adult-friendly atmosphere. Issues of location, particularly in relation to travel and to a good choice of courses, were also mentioned by a significant number.

Both groups surveyed by questionnaire were generally positive about the courses they had taken and levels of dissatisfaction were low. However, when asked to compare their present course with the previous one, the negative features identified mainly related to:

- physical environment ("the mess students leave everywhere is indescribable")
- organisation ("we often got moved from one classroom to another in the middle of a lesson")
- poorer facilities or location

The impact of broader external factors occasionally shows through. Issues of public safety and fear of crime, for example, are revealed in comments about unlit parking areas; and, more obliquely, in some of the preferences for day-time classes. There is often an implied reliance on private (car) transport. It can be concluded that for some individuals, environmental factors can inhibit progression.

## *Finance*

The question of fees and financial barriers is a bit of an enigma. At first sight the evidence from the questionnaires and interviews does not seem to tally with other local research which stresses the impact of financial considerations on progression. Yet below the surface the issue of cost is clearly a far more significant factor. One learner commented:

*"It is hard to come up with fees when they have to be paid by the end of the first term. Pay when you can and as much as you can would be better."*

Although not a leading factor, reasonable fees were mentioned by a quarter of qualifiers, and by nearly half of the informal learners as a feature which they liked about their previous or current course. Financial reasons were the leading cluster cited by informal learners as to why they may be unable to fulfil future plans: “costs are rocketing”; “I need to earn some money”. Concern that courses would not be affordable was ranked fourth by qualifiers when reflecting on their move to their current course. Money was not a concern for all, but for some it was a past and potential future barrier. One respondent felt so strongly that she dictated a strongly-worded postscript to the interviewer urging government action to tackle the anomalous and discouraging financial situation in which many adult returners are placed.

## Childcare

*“I wouldn’t have been able to do this without a crèche”*

Childcare issues did not directly affect most respondents. However, for a large section of one sub-group — women in their 20s and 30s with young children — it was perceived as being a critical issue. As with the issue of fees, the provision of crèche or childcare facilities is a more significant factor than it first appears. Several interviewees mentioned family commitments, particularly looking after dependent children, as a major factor holding them back from participating in education in the past and, potentially, in the future. One third of the qualifiers who had dependent children mentioned worries about arranging childcare as a concern when they progressed to their current course. In the words of one interviewee:

*“Lack of full-time nursery education will hamper me seriously over the next two years. I might have to delay or defer my plans for a couple of years.”*

Another learner’s studies were being hampered by the lack of crèche places at her institution. It should be remembered that these are largely the testimonies of successful students who had progressed (childcare is likely to present even more of a barrier to non-participants).

## Certification

*“Yes, it would have been nice to have got something to prove what I had achieved”*

Student attitudes to certification were not uniform. Some interviewees felt that it was not appropriate or relevant. However, particularly in areas where ‘first-step’ certification was available through OCNs or an awarding body, it was commonly achieved and viewed positively by recipients.

A central concern of this research was access and progression towards qualifications. The attainment of certification and qualifications figured prominently in students’ initial motivation and in their short- and long-term ambitions. A third of informal learners mentioned “to get a recognised qualification or certificate” as a reason for taking their current (non-qualification bearing) course! About half of those interviewed six months later had received some type of certificate, although not a national award. Case study 3 (overleaf) cites the experiences of one of these learners. Although there were mixed views on the value of attendance certificates a number of recipients of OCN awards emphasised their motivational value especially if it was their first certificate.

Informal learners who did not have access to certification were asked whether they would have liked the opportunity to gain a certificate or qualification. Well-qualified people on language courses were mainly against it, as were some others: “No, only if it was meaningful”; “No, I preferred to ease back into study”. A few were cautiously positive: “Yes in theory”; others were more assertively positive: “Yes, it would be an incentive to do the next level”. Views on attendance certificates were mixed: a couple of people mentioned that “even an attendance certificate would have been nice”, but others felt that such a certificate must “mean something” and one person who had gained one felt that it was “of no real value”.

Some people believed certification would introduce more pressure and formality, giving echoes of a fear of examinations which several mentioned as a worry when moving into their

current qualification-bearing course. This also featured prominently in the lists of dislikes expressed by both groups of respondents. However, in areas where certification was well-embedded, particularly OCN accreditation, it rarely provokes comment, except in a positive way. It was part of the furniture, providing reward and recognition for initial achievement. Together with schemes such as RSA Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) and City and Guild Numberpower and Wordpower, such 'first-step' accreditation appears to be a valuable adjunct to a broader package of facilities and approaches which encourage the progression of adult learners who have no formal qualifications.

### *Advice and guidance*

The issue of information, and of advice and guidance, rarely ranked high in respondents' listing of factors which effected participation and progression. However, it remained a recurring issue in many facets of the investigation. For example, three interviewees identified their lack of knowledge and absence of information about educational provision as a key barrier holding them back in the past. In the words of one:

*"After my older children went to school there didn't seem to be any opportunities for women. I didn't realise that courses like Women Returners were available."*

Separate questions were asked about information sources, and about advice and guidance. Two sources of information stand out from the qualifiers' responses: paper-based information and current or previous course tutors.

College admissions and guidance units accounted for 12 per cent of the main sources of information, with a further six per cent of people using a local advisory service. People tapped into a range of complementary sources of information: more than half mentioned leaflets, posters and prospectuses, and nearly half mentioned their tutors. Two thirds of informal learners intending to do another course had sought some information about their next step. Again, their main source of information was the tutor of their current or a previous course (41%). A further 19 per cent (disproportionately men) sought information from leaflets, prospectuses and pamphlets. See Figure 5 for the details. Those who sought information from college admissions or guidance services tended to be in their 30s and 40s.

#### **Case study 3**

Carol came back into education without any qualifications. She came from a large family and was made to leave school at 15 in order to get a job. She works as a part-time care assistant and has three children, two old and one young.

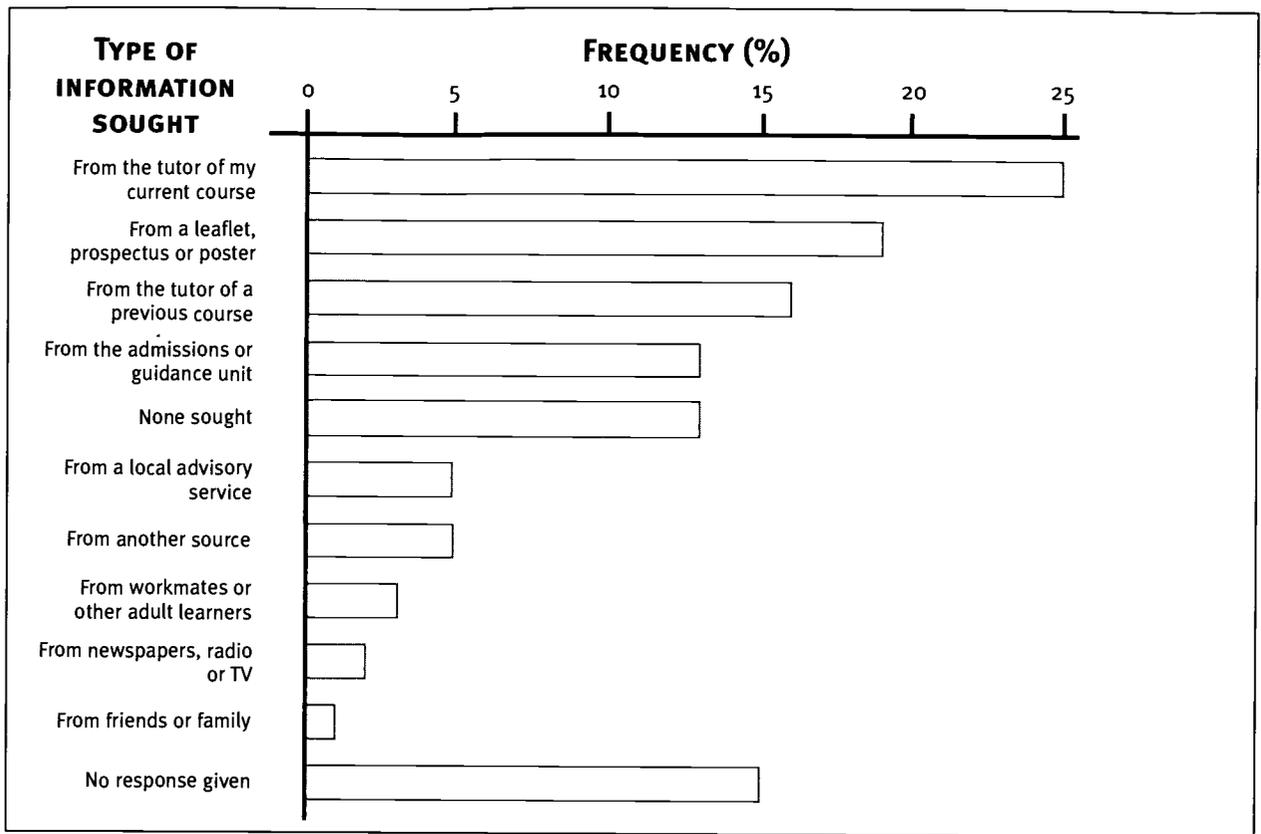
Although she had been thinking about it "for a few years before", Carol was originally "terrified" of coming to college. However, she saw an advert, sent for a leaflet, steeled herself and joined a 'Getting Back to Study' course. She really enjoyed it. There was a mix of ability levels and a very relaxed approach. She completed the course and achieved OCN credit at Level 1. It was her first ever certificate. The college admissions and guidance unit gave her good information and advice about what to do next.

Carol is now on an 'Adult Academic Programme' doing GCSEs in mathematics, English Language and Literature at the same college. She prefers daytime study and likes "the adult atmosphere, the facilities and range of courses offered". The course has a more "serious" approach, but it is still very enjoyable with "good tutors" and an adult approach.

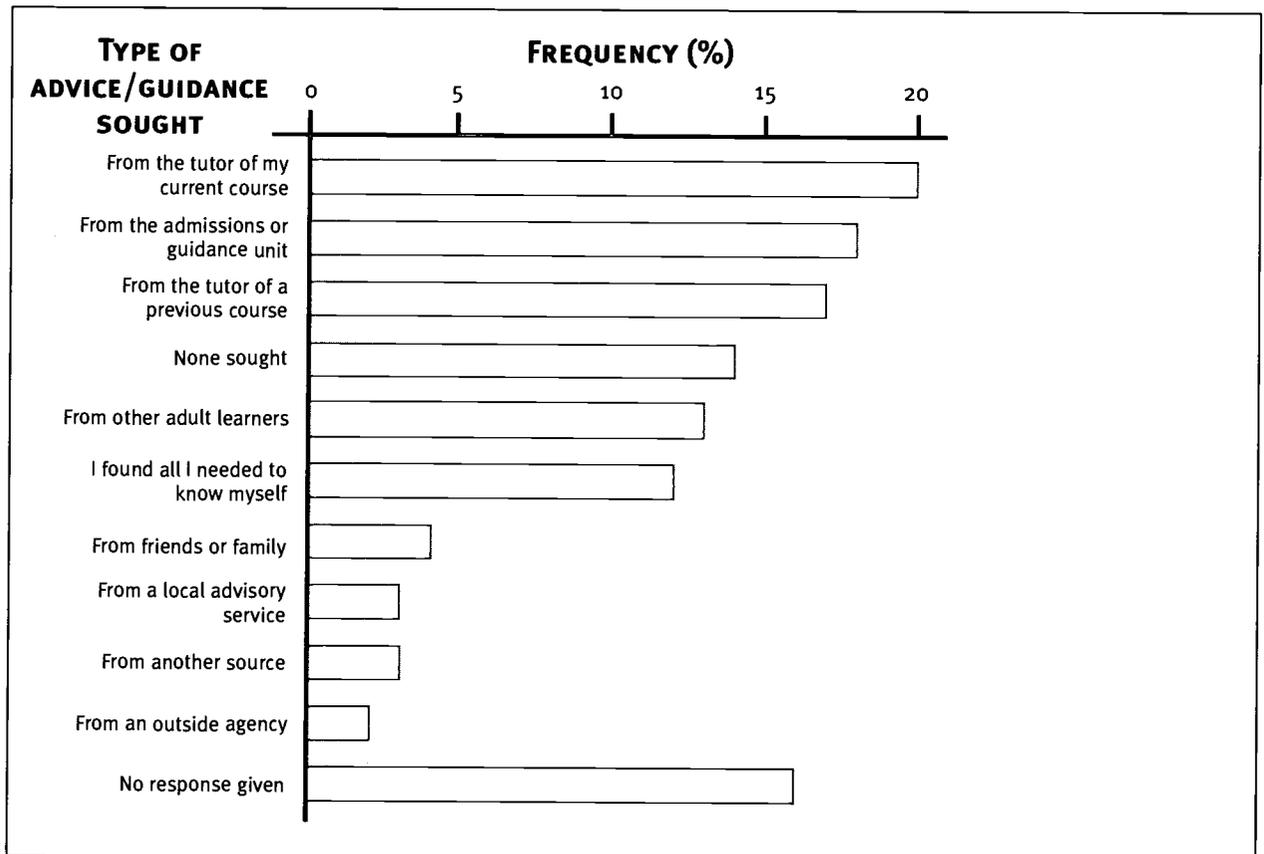
Apart from a First Aid course at work, Carol had not taken any formal classes before the 'Getting Back to Study' course. However, she had been very active in her local community as a Parochial Church Council member, a Tawny Owl (Girl Guide) and a Toddler Group Assistant.

She now felt that she wanted to achieve something for herself. Her ex-husband had constantly put her down and had "not allowed" her to do anything. "Before, I didn't think that I was worth anything". She felt "much more confident now" and "can converse better with people". Family commitments and her ex-husband had held her back in the past. Now, although a single parent, her domestic situation is easier. She had encouragement from her boyfriend. Her next step is an Access to HE course; then a degree and "possibly, eventually Social Work". She feels she has proved her worth.

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**FIGURE 5: MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION SOUGHT BY INFORMAL LEARNERS ABOUT INTENDED COURSE**



**FIGURE 6: MAIN SOURCE OF ADVICE OR GUIDANCE SOUGHT BY INFORMAL LEARNERS ABOUT INTENDED COURSE**

For all students who sought advice or guidance the main source was 'front-line' tutors of current or previous courses:

*"The Tutor of my pre-Access course prompted me to take up my present course."*

About half as many (16-17%) cited an admissions or guidance unit as the main source, but nearly a third of those who had sought advice and guidance, had made some contact with an internal admissions or guidance unit. Just less than half of the informal learners had sought advice or guidance about their next course. Some had found out all they needed to know themselves or had not sought any advice or guidance. Friends and family, workmates and other learners appear as important supplementary sources of advice and guidance. See Figure 6 for the details for informal learners.

The majority of interviewees who had progressed to another course six months later (31 out of 39) were either very or partly aware of the choices open to them, before moving to this course. Most had discussed their options with someone. The minority who had not, were "self-assured", "aware of options" or "very independent". They also generally had a high level of initial education. More than one third of these interviewees recognised in-built advice as a key feature which had facilitated progression. For example, one of the women who was originally "terrified" of coming to college saw a 'Getting Back to Study' course advertised, wrote for a leaflet, and joined. She enjoyed the course and received guidance while on it, which resulted in her progressing to her current programme of GCSEs (see Case study 3 on page 22). The quality and accessibility of information was cited by nine of these interviewees as a factor which attracted them to their present course.

The format and quality of discussions ranged from a quick chat with a tutor "after class while we were leaving", to a full guidance interview. One student was referred to college by a careers guidance worker, interviewed by a guidance worker at the college, then saw the course tutor and later had another formal interview. Thankfully, she was happy with her choice!

The inescapable message from both groups is that the chief sources of both information and guidance on next steps are usually closely linked to the learning situation. However, one woman's experience illustrates both the fragility of confidence among adult returners and the dangers of well-meaning tutors carrying out an advisor's role:

*"I had hoped to do another course on Access to HE, following the study skills. I was coming to enrolment to sign up and I met the Study Skills tutor in the car park. She told me that there was a good group for the Access to HE and I would enjoy it. She said many had got GCSE English. I panicked and decided not to enrol. I felt I wouldn't be on the same level as the other students. I've never told the tutor why I didn't enrol .... I still think about whether I should have done the Access to HE course."*

The implications for staff development on the issue of advice and guidance are set out in Section 4 on curriculum planning.

### *Gaining confidence*

*"I'm more confident — I was so shy last year, I couldn't speak in the class. Now I can contribute."*

Interviewees were asked whether, and in what way, they saw themselves as being different since returning to education. Eleven out of the 50 did not perceive any significant change. As one put it: "I've always been confident". A handful said they were more motivated about, and aware of, educational options: doing a course "made me look widely at what I could do". The most notable changes were in how people saw themselves and related to the outside world. Ten people noted an increase in self-worth. Demonstrable personal growth and change was mentioned in a further six testimonies, including: "I have more things to talk about with other people"; "I can measure my thoughts better".

The most predominant factor among the responses related to people's increase in confidence, mentioned by more than half of those who had recognised some transformation. Feelings of confidence are often demonstrated

through people's actions. Having the confidence to take on new challenges is an important prerequisite for progressing on to a more difficult or higher level course. Increases in confidence are usually based on gains in competence, which provide a foundation for moving on. Confidence should not be dismissed as a nebulous by-product of a good learning experience but should be seen as an important outcome of adult learning which tutors should plan for and encourage. Two key influences stand out: family encouragement, support or role models and that of friends; and the influence of a tutor or group of tutors. In the words of one respondent:

*"The course tutor was very positive, never judged you or made you feel stupid. She related to the students on all levels and always had good things to say about whatever was attempted."*

### Next steps

Large numbers within both groups of respondents intended to do more courses in the short term. Job and qualification-related factors figured more prominently among the ambitions of those studying for qualifications, whereas the

informal learners placed more emphasis on learning new skills or doing courses for personal interest. A break-down of qualifiers' long-term ambitions is given in Figure 7. Interviewees' detailed testimonies revealed the difficulties of separating out the personal, educational and job-related domains.

When asked about next steps after completing the course (see question 9 in Appendix 3), two-thirds of the qualifiers said they intended to do another course. The remaining intentions primarily related to getting or improving a job. Most of the informal learners said they would "definitely" or "probably" be doing another course within the next six months (84%). The main factors mentioned by the interviewees break down into three main clusters. Sixty-two per cent mentioned their intention to continue on their present course or to do another course in the immediate future. Twenty-eight per cent, including 16 per cent of the above, mentioned their ambitions to get a degree or qualification; and 10 per cent mentioned their hopes of getting a job or changing career. Qualifiers were more focused on doing further courses to achieve long-term ambitions related to jobs (37%) or better qualifications (22%) and only 15

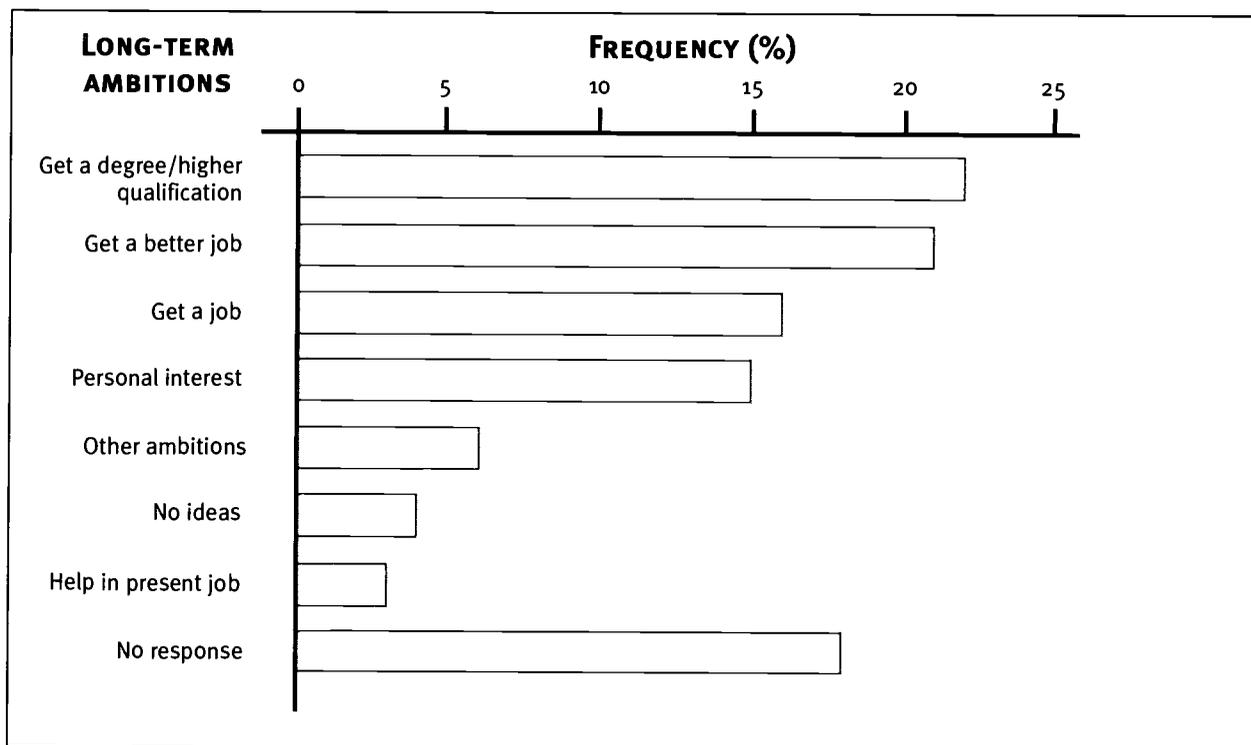


FIGURE 7: LONG-TERM AMBITIONS IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING — QUALIFIERS

per cent envisaged doing courses primarily for personal interest. By contrast, 27 per cent of informal learners saw themselves doing future courses for personal interest, with a further 11 per cent seeking to learn new skills. Interestingly, men were disproportionately represented in both of these sub-sets.

Attaining qualifications is mentioned in roughly equal numbers between the two groups (often linked to career change). In respondents' long-term plans, vocational ambitions and imperatives (the desire for more challenging and fulfilling jobs/careers) become more important than taking further courses.

The testimonies of the interviewees highlight this complexity. One woman who hoped to become an art teacher said she wanted to:

*"be a good role model for my children .... I hope in particular that my eldest son takes notice and encouragement from what I'm doing."*

Another, who intended to progress to a part-time degree, commented:

*"I won't be employable — I'll be too old. All this is for me."*

Providers who understand the variety of motivating factors, both short-term and long-term, are more likely to meet students' needs.

### 3. Strategies adopted by institutions

As part of the research into the experiences of 400 students, the local institutions profiled in Appendix 1 (see page 43) undertook an audit of their provision. This section outlines some of the findings and includes examples of good practice and recommendations for achieving progression for adult learners.

An audit is the first step in identifying the adequacy of progression possibilities and how they match the needs identified by students. It should cover the following key aspects:

- information on progression
- institutional policies
- collaboration with local institutions
- programme planning
- guidance and support

The audit tool provided in Appendix 2 (see page 44) can be adapted to your institution's framework. Having analysed your portfolio of learning activities and any gaps in provision, the next step is to identify priorities, decide on short-, medium- and long-term strategies and from this draw up an action plan. This should identify key targets and tasks and estimate the resources in terms of staff time and additional costs, with ways of sharing these costs between departments or institutions. A method of calculating the cost-benefits of introducing improvements is included in *Supporting adult part-time learners in colleges* (FEDA, 1995).

#### Using national and local information

National data on progression for adult learners within further education is not easily available. However, recent Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) statistics based on the individual student record (ISR) shed some light on college provision covering the period of this study: (see *Student numbers, retention, achievements and destinations at colleges in the FE sector in England in 1994-95*, FEFC, September

1996). Local authority and other external provision and adult designated colleges funded by the FEFC are excluded. Of college provision funded by the FEFC (schedule 2 provision) 31 per cent was full-time and 69 per cent part-time, whereas of the provision not funded by the FEFC (mainly non-schedule 2, our 'informal learners') only one in 12 was full-time. Overall, 71 per cent of students were older than 19, and of these only 14 per cent were studying full-time. On average each adult student studied 1.3 qualifications and more than half of all qualifications studied in FE are taken by adults between 19 and 59. However, only about two thirds of students overall achieve their qualification aims. The importance of first step or second chance courses is demonstrated by the fact that adults are seven times more likely than younger students to take Level 1 qualifications in FE.

The retention rates of adult students (those older than 21) were slightly higher than those of younger students: 86 per cent of students on year-long part-time courses registered in November were continuing or had completed their courses by the following July. There is no data on the destinations of more than half the adult students, and destinations are recorded for only 24 per cent of part-time students, who are mainly adults. Of these, 48 per cent went on to more FE, four per cent to higher education and 41 per cent to employment, although this may include those continuing in existing jobs. The fact that almost half of these part-time learners continued in FE demonstrates the importance of looking at progression routes.

Although the statistics are thought by FEFC to underestimate the number of students on non-FEFC funded provision and do not answer the question of how many students moved from non-schedule 2 to schedule 2 courses, they do provide partial baseline data. Institutions could compare their data with national or regional patterns and in future map changes over a period of time. As ISRs include data on particular programmes, progression routes could be mapped and displayed in graphical form to influence future programme planning.

## Audit data

Curriculum managers participating in this FEDA study found data on progression difficult to access in their institutions. Where it had been collected (usually for funding bodies), they were often not able to interrogate it due to lack of time. However, new management information systems and ISRs were seen as potentially valuable sources of future evidence. Some colleges had carried out surveys of information centre enquiries and tracked the students' subsequent steps, and most organisations were tracking the destinations of full-time students. The findings of one college's study are outlined below in Figure 8.

Statistical evidence could also be used to:

- identify both the typical and more complex routes adults take

- identify destinations of part-time students to see if there are patterns of underachievement by certain groups

Evidence of curriculum areas where progression is particularly strong or weak, and possible reasons for this, was mostly anecdotal.

Progression was particularly good within English and languages, and from dedicated courses for returners or for Access to HE, where progression is one of the key aims of provision. Information technology and childcare courses were also cited.

Part-time GCSE courses were areas of concern. More than one institution cited the lack of progression in arts and crafts groups, although others pointed out that continuing in the same class could broaden and extend skills.

### Research within an institution

One college, supported by the local Training and Enterprise Council, had undertaken a detailed study of internal progression routes. The research was undertaken by the college information and guidance service. It recommended a proactive strategy including:

- discussion of expectations
- systematic grouping of information on destinations and progression routes
- using MIS to track progression patterns
- agreeing targets for progression on courses

The study identified several barriers to internal progression including:

- curriculum gaps
- confusion in course titles
- areas where there was unfilled demand

The role of information or guidance in providing both data to staff and ongoing rather than just initial support to students was stressed. The recommendations would have impact across the institution, for example, in:

- clarifying entry requirements
- internal marketing
- cross-site coherence

Every part of the curriculum offer would be affected:

- tutorial provision and guidance for all students
- development of Levels 1-3 for all areas
- modularisation of the curriculum
- establishing measures to avoid repetition of core skills

This would be a costly exercise, but there were clear benefits to individual students and to the college, as 'repeat business' would help it to meet its growth targets.

FIGURE 8

## Tracking individual students

The Employee Development Programme investigated what students have achieved through the scheme during the past six years. One student had taken the following route: swimming; language tapes (unsuccessful experience); bricklaying; badminton; GCSE economics; Open University, now in his third year. The students identified the main barriers to progression as work commitments (such as being on shift work) rather than curriculum or personal barriers.

Their findings are confirmed by a national evaluation of employee development schemes (*Employee Development Schemes: what impact did they have?* DfEE, 1996). This report reveals that significant numbers of these students take their first steps through fitness or general adult education courses and then move on to qualification-bearing courses.

Institutions were unable to identify particular groups or types of student who did not progress. An analysis of the ISR could indicate if there were particular difficulties for students from, say, a particular postcode district or ethnic minority group. There may be patterns of underachievement or lack of opportunities within different college or community sites, or different barriers for students with different personal circumstances, such as the work patterns faced by shiftworkers.

One local authority provider noted that students were inhibited in changing sites, and therefore planned progression opportunities accordingly. A flexible curriculum will not only offer a variety of courses and progression routes, but will also ensure students have a choice of different modes of learning including full-time, part-time and open learning.

## Policies and strategies

Policies for adult learners tend to refer to 'opportunities for accreditation' rather than a specific commitment to progression. However, a minority of colleges recognised progression as a separate issue.

One college included a statement on its commitment to progression in its prospectus (see Figure 9). Other comments included:

*"There are appropriate opportunities for progression irrespective of ability."*  
(College Mission Statement)

*"To develop more avenues of progression via accreditation in line with National Targets for Education and Training."* (LEA Strategic Plan)

This LEA plan went on to set targets for three years, with tasks and evidence identified (for example, recording actual progression routes, providing maps of progression for all areas).

### Commitment to progression

*"We regard all our Community and Leisure Learning courses as Access provision in its broadest sense. Students who attend leisure courses such as Keep Fit or conversational French are often taking a tentative first step back into learning after a long gap since their initial education was completed. If they have a favourable experience this will encourage some of them to progress into other areas. Hence, much of our work can be seen as Pre-Access. Our Commitment statement... helps flag this up."*

Extract from the Commitment statement in the prospectus:

*We aim to:*

- *provide clear and accurate information on the wide range of learning opportunities available*
- *ensure these opportunities are available in accessible locations*
- *ensure you achieve the learning goals that you have discussed and agreed with your tutor at the start of your studies*
- *provide opportunities for advice and guidance about further learning opportunities*
- *arrange special help wherever possible for students with physical disabilities or those with learning difficulties*

FIGURE 9

In other institutions there were progression policies or charter entitlements in some areas of provision, such as Access to HE, return to study, community provision. Frequently, there is an unspoken assumption that progression to further opportunities exists in other areas but only rarely does an institution spell out its commitment to help learners progress from informal classes.

In most institutions either a senior member of staff or the college academic board has responsibility for drawing up and ensuring the implementation of the progression policy. A coherent strategy is more likely to occur where there are links to curriculum managers, specifically through development plans.

In one college, the quality mechanism, which asked for identification of progression opportunities and progression outcomes, was implemented through whole faculty plans.

Some colleges have undertaken special activities to promote progression, such as "information evenings for students on our GCSE courses in community outstations", and new curriculum initiatives such as articulating craft work pathways. However, they have been unable to give statistical evidence of the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Colleges outside the study which have mapped all provision on to levels to assist progression or to gain the wider benefits of a credit framework, claim that progression rates have increased as a result. Most organisations are focusing on retention rather than progression at present, as the direct benefits to institutional funding are most immediately apparent. However, the old marketing adage that it is eight times easier to sell to an existing client than to a 'cold' customer, is also pertinent to colleges with restricted budgets and catchment areas.

An internal marketing strategy which focuses on repeat business and monitors uptake, can be more cost-effective than simply promoting the institution to the wider community.

## Cross-institutional planning

Many institutions had formal and informal partnerships ranging from agreements with local universities, client/contractor agreements with the local authority and service level agreements with careers services through to less formal links with community groups and tutors from other providers.

Adult Education Working Parties and local Adult Consortia in rural areas were seen as partnerships productive for progression. One involved voluntary groups as well as institutional providers and established targets for restructuring provision into a credit framework. Ideally, in future all students would be able to move from institution to institution, taking their credit with them, which would be in a currency that would be valued by all of the local providers.

There were some community networks in cities; by involving training providers and others interested in economic regeneration, progression routes outside mainstream education providers can be identified.

Both a college and an LEA provider pointed out that relationships were more formal when they were competitors — where an institution's budget is dependent upon maximising recruitment it will be more reluctant to share information on curriculum plans.

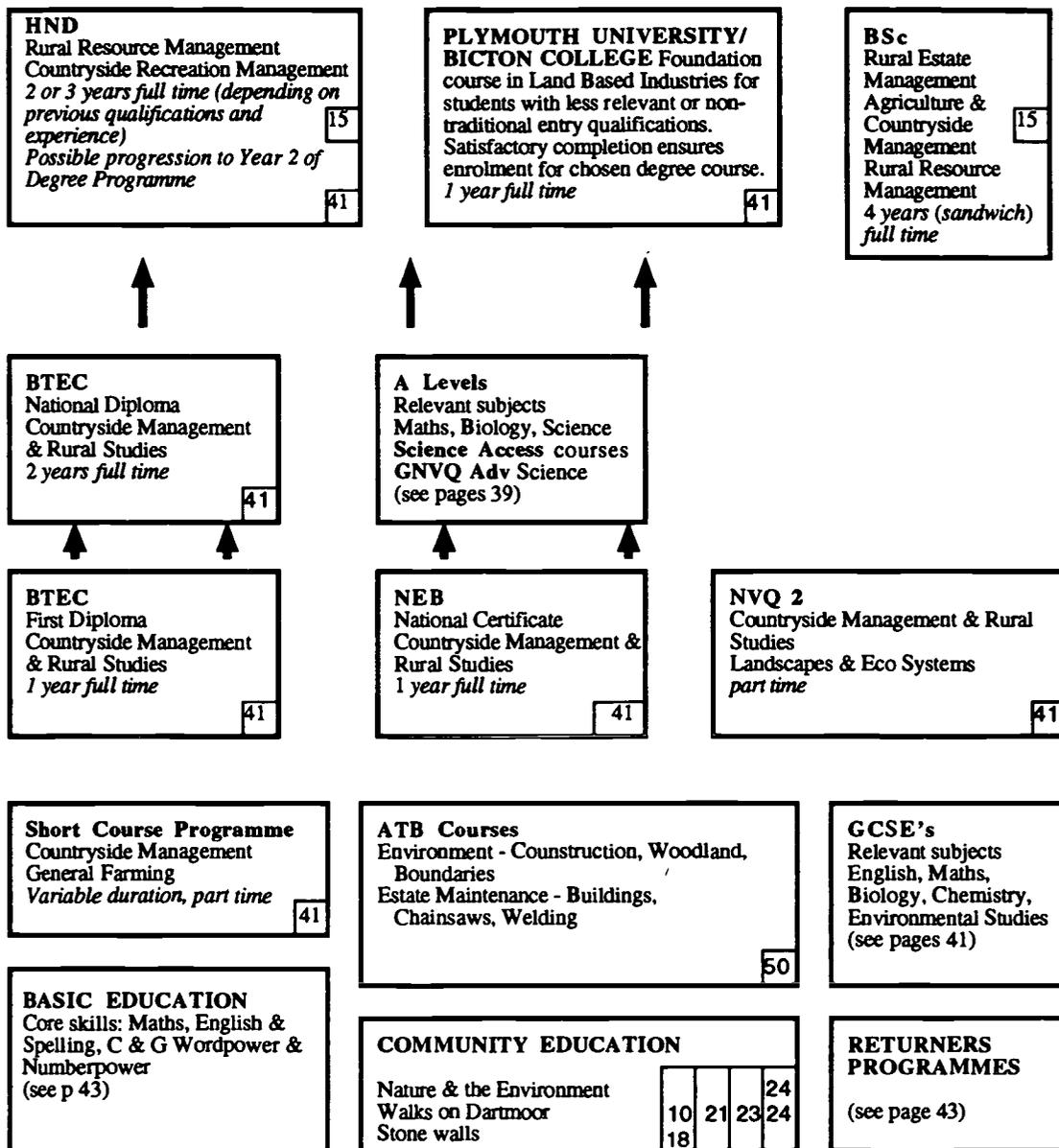
The loss of free community-based adult guidance providers, who often acted as the champion of the individual learners, suggests that the level of information networks available to adult learners is even fewer.

Colleges reported that opportunities for external networking between their guidance workers had declined. More formal service level agreements with careers services were clarifying careers provision.

However, the priority for careers service targets is 16-19 year olds, although adults on vocational part-time courses and all full-time non-HE courses have a statutory entitlement to individual careers guidance.

**Progression Routes**  
**COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT & CONSERVATION**

(see also Agriculture)



EXTRACT FROM *Progression Routes in Devon and Cornwall 1994-95*, DEVON AND CORNWALL TEC/DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL COMMUNITY EDUCATION

FIGURE 10

In some instances, an 'external' provider, such as a Training Enterprise Council, careers or educational guidance provider, could facilitate the development of inter-institutional progression pathways — there is clearly scope for development here.

In one case a TEC had sponsored a comprehensive mapping of progression routes in its area, producing five local directories with contact names, locations and pathways in education and training (see Figure 10 on the previous page).

## **Planned development**

Many of the institutions taking part in the research were already geared up to providing a study environment suitable for adults and were aware of factors which inhibited participation. They recognised that worries about finance, childcare and accessibility were important to students, even if they were not the overriding factor for existing students when making decisions about whether or not to progress with their learning.

Detailed feedback from the interviews of the informal learners was especially valuable to individual institutions. In some places a change of location from a familiar centre was noted by respondents as a significant curb on students' ambitions and actions.

Individual interviews are a costly method of research, but focus group interviews with students in different locations on a regular basis can also provide useful feedback on provision on such issues which will not be revealed through satisfaction questionnaires.

As a result of undertaking the surveys and interviews with adult students, almost all of the providers who took part in this research project were to carry out follow-up activities to build on the findings.

Some examples follow of the issues that they identified in their institutional development plans.

## *Guidance and marketing*

- Making potential students more aware of support services provided.
- Supplying more information to informal learners about formal courses available.
- Ensuring advice and guidance is available at all information sessions.
- Monitoring courses to ensure they take account of providing an adult ethos.

## *Staff development*

- Offering class tutors staff development to increase their awareness of further opportunities available.
- Formalising and developing the role of the tutor in linking courses and advising on progression.

## *Curriculum management*

- Referring findings to team and management level meetings.
- Addressing weaknesses in tracking the progression of students.
- Mapping the curriculum against needs.
- Introducing internal validation systems for all proposed new courses.
- Extending course outline proposals to include a section on progression.

## *Collecting and using data*

- Extending the survey of adult progression to the wider student body.
- Making better use of existing data (for example, using it to bid for further research funding).
- Undertaking market research into how students hear about courses and what makes them attractive.

## **Key institutional features facilitating progression**

From the evidence given by students and the providers, key factors which support progression within an institution can be identified. Such an institution will have:

- a welcoming adult ethos and support services
- cross-site and inter-departmental coherence
- references to progression in policy and entitlement documentation
- an implementation strategy with named staff responsible for certain aspects of this
- information and research which is used to inform planning
- a system whereby learners are tracked and their views surveyed
- a flexible curriculum offer
- networks, partnerships and route-maps
- standards for information and guidance

The next section focuses on how curriculum planning can assist.

## 4. Curriculum planning

### Programme planning

Planning a coherent suite of courses across a programme area was more structured in colleges than in local authority adult education providers, where most staff are part-time and the curriculum is very diverse. Several institutions reported that progression planning was weaker for non-accredited programme areas, where part-time tutors and centre heads often had most responsibility. Whereas an academic board might oversee all programmes leading to qualifications, there was often a lack of strategic overview for the perceived lower status 'leisure' programme. In the best examples, the institutions scrutinised their complete portfolio of learning activities to ensure a balanced range of subjects and levels, accessible in different locations, and then addressed any gaps and over-provision.

Most, but not all, institutions expect tutors to produce internal documentation which specifies progression routes. However, this is not always used in publicity for students. Course outcomes are more likely to be specified than next steps. In most of the institutions surveyed, progression information is more readily available for returners, Access to HE,

vocational and academic provision than for informal courses. The example below (Figure 11) shows that it is feasible to identify progression options for any programme. FEDA is currently undertaking a study of how learning outcomes on non-schedule 2 courses can be described and measured in order to benefit both the individual and the institution.

Levels of provision are being clarified as OCN accreditation accelerates, both in response to student interest and funding possibilities. Decisions about which courses to accredit are often taken following an audit of current accreditation and within a clear framework which ensures that individual submissions are co-ordinated. One organisation also identifies the key skill levels required for all accredited courses and uses this to identify and plan learner support — all Level 3 students have tutorials and study skills support. Another institution started a newsletter for tutors explaining OCN procedures. Others have established credit frameworks for their modular provision, which allow students to move on without repeating learning.

The students interviewed had mixed views about accreditation, but it was particularly significant for those with no prior qualifications taking their first steps back to education.

#### Information on progression

One college does include students' comments and 'Progression — what next?', as well as 'Learning outcomes' in its publicity leaflets. Statements for non-qualification courses are simple and direct and students are invited to add their own goals and are then given ideas on how they can judge if they have achieved what they set out to do.

#### Floristry

**Learning outcomes:** by the end of the course students will be able to... Wire fresh flowers, Make a design with wired flowers, Put flowers into a presentation, Have confidence when buying flowers, Understand how to keep and condition flowers, Make funeral tributes... etc.

**Progression:** students can go on to take a Level 2 and 3 accreditation certificate. This course will enable students to move into the flower shop trade as a beginner.

#### Morris dancing

**Learning outcomes:** by the end of the course students will be able to... Perform a North West Dance, Perform a Cotswold dance... etc. Recognise different types of Morris, Appreciate the importance of maintaining our traditional dance... etc

**Progression:** students can progress to join one of the various Morris teams in our area.

FIGURE 11

All organisations participating in this project had established standard levels for language courses and for some other specified provision (variously described as Beginners, Improvers, Advanced or Stage 1, 2, 3 and so on). However, it is more difficult to achieve comparable co-ordination in other subject areas. For example, it may be inappropriate to assign levels to workshop classes which are designed so that students can learn at their own pace and ability level.

Nevertheless, as this research has demonstrated, students on these courses often wish to move on, so will want to know the options available and how well the current course has prepared them for the next step.

### *Schedule 2 and non-schedule 2*

Many providers argued that ascribing a level to a course, especially a creative or exploratory subject, is not always constructive for adult learners. Students returning to learning often lack confidence and tend to underestimate their skills. In a workshop class, for example, students of different abilities and aptitudes can often work on different projects at different paces, and can broaden and develop new skills even when re-enrolling in the same class. Tutor feedback is crucial to allow students to recognise their own learning gains so that they are then able to progress within the same environment.

The outcomes for students even on informal courses can vary from personal development to vocational relevance.

One local authority in this study had surveyed the outcomes of non-schedule 2 craft classes and found that some, but not all students, were taking the courses for work-related reasons and that they frequently led to employment or self-employment opportunities. This research confirms that women, in particular, take informal adult education courses to improve career opportunities and that the divide between schedule 2 and non-schedule 2, while convenient for funding purposes, is an arbitrary division for many learners.

A recent project on courses for students with learning difficulties (*The curriculum and schedule 2d and 2j*, an unpublished paper by FEDA, 1996) found that most staff did not realise that progression under schedule 2j (see Appendix 5) meant progression to a mainstream course. They felt that progression on to another schedule 2j course, where progression routes were well-developed, satisfied the criteria. Progression to mainstream programmes was also inhibited by a lack of learner support and suitable accreditation to ensure students fulfilled the entry requirements. This project recommended that schedule 2j should be clarified and that progression to another schedule 2j course, as well as progression to employment, should be deemed a positive outcome. The Tomlinson report on learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, *Inclusive Learning* (FEFC, 1996), also makes the case for courses which help these students extend or maintain their level of skill.

### **Guidance and tutor support**

The information, advice and guidance facilities available, and the impact of policies, varied between the institutions investigated. For some, advice and guidance was at the heart of their programmes; for most, however, it was *ad hoc* or variable. Some institutions had well-established systems; others were currently updating and improving their facilities.

Most organisations now have drop-in guidance facilities available for adults on informal programmes, and enhanced guidance for schedule 2 students, because of FEFC audit requirements for entry units. These specify that all students should have discussed their choice of course, the entry requirements and their financial or other support requirements.

One LEA service appointed a dedicated guidance worker to meet these requirements and to extend services to non-schedule 2 learners. Although some gave equal entitlements to all students regardless of the course they were on, most expected those on informal courses to take the initiative and ask for guidance.

Some managers indicated that not all part-time students needed initial guidance and that some older students and tutors resented its imposition. However, this approach can be dangerous. It is important to ensure that all students have the opportunity to confirm that they have considered alternatives and are confident in their choice of programme.

The Employee Development Scheme in the study places particular emphasis on guidance to address the difficulty of arranging appropriate provision to fit shift times: Ford EDAP estimated that approximately 10 per cent of its clients had a formal guidance interview. However, none of the other organisations could put a figure on the number of adults taking up guidance entitlements.

In another college, the guidance service's survey of internal progression had identified that little information was available to students already on courses, so this was then prioritised.

Most of the project institutions stressed the centrality of the course tutor in giving on-course information and guidance on next steps (also a significant finding from the student survey). One college was offering all staff the opportunity of gaining the RSA certificate in educational and vocational guidance. There are clear implications for initial tutor training and subsequent staff development. Course tutors will need to be aware of:

- progression routes in their own programme area
- opportunities with other local providers
- the limitations of their knowledge
- where to refer students for more specialist advice
- the importance of impartiality in the guidance offered

Students will be able to make more informed decisions about their next steps if tutors recognise that their role is to help students clarify learning goals, give feedback on progress and help them to assess their development.

A recent FEDA study on *Action planning and recording of achievement for adult learners* (unpublished paper, FEDA, 1996) found that a diary of progress or other flexible formats integrated into the learning programme provided valuable formative tools for reviewing progress and setting achievable goals.

Support materials for students as well as staff were important so that they did not feel that this activity detracted from their 'core' learning time. Students who evaluated and recorded their learning gains were better able to use other services and educational opportunities.

The learning outcomes of guidance, often described as the D.O.T.S. model, include: Decision-making; Opportunity awareness; Transition skills and Self-assessment. These are key components of many return to study and option courses. They were identified by many students as playing a part in the increase in confidence achieved on other informal and qualification-bearing courses, which had then encouraged them to continue their studies.

## Course design and delivery

From this research it is possible to identify key features of a course which facilitates progression for adult learners. These are:

- good supportive teaching
- a tutor who is able to relate to adults
- built-in advice and progression opportunities
- a friendly, adult atmosphere
- stimulating subject matter

It would be held at a convenient place and time, in a pleasant room in an institution with:

- a welcoming environment
- good support facilities
- an adult ethos
- a good range of programmes, with built-in progression options

The return to study course is the one experienced by the respondents that came closest to this ideal, but there is no reason why other programmes should not demonstrate all these features.

Access to HE programmes integrate guidance and study skills alongside subject specific development to help adults to progress more rapidly to degree-level study. Similar 'access to FE' models are not as widespread, and tutors of short courses in specific subjects need more help in how to incorporate key learning skills and support to give their students the confidence to progress.

## Key curriculum features

The students' responses emphasised the key role of the tutor in giving information and advice, and influencing their self-perception and confidence. The following curriculum measures which facilitate progression can only succeed if underpinned by tutors who have excellent student interaction skills. The key features are:

- recognising the range of individual learning needs
- providing a range of courses covering exploratory and creative learning
- providing systems for recognising and, where appropriate, accrediting students' prior learning and achievements
- planning programmes for all curriculum areas and levels
- analysing and addressing gaps
- providing curriculum or credit frameworks which incorporate levels or progression routes
- providing course information on learning outcomes and progression
- offering distinctive returners courses with in-built progression options
- recording achievement and progress
- clarifying roles of tutors
- embedding guidance and support into part-time courses
- focusing on building students' learning skills and confidence
- supporting tutors with staff development and support materials

## 5. Conclusions

This research has given valuable new insights into the motivations and patterns of progression of adult learners since the creation of schedule 2 in the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. The detailed testimonies demonstrate that adult learners have complex reasons for starting and continuing to learn. Certain key messages stand out. These are:

- the centrality of course tutors in supporting learning and progression
- the amount of uncharted learning that precedes formal engagement
- the importance of Level 1 and general courses
- the value of curriculum design and institutional frameworks that enable adults to gain confidence and take a variety of different routes

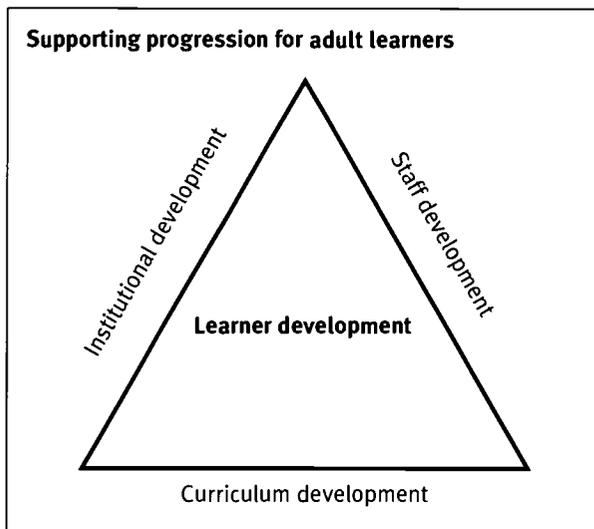


FIGURE 12

Some adults will be able to chart their personal pathways confidently and fight the barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals.

However, many will benefit from an improvement in the guidance and support that they receive from their course tutors and from clearer descriptions of the outcomes and options for progression.

Local providers could learn more about their existing adult students, their patterns of learning and the barriers to progression that they encounter. They could do more to retain adult students by nourishing their motivation to continue learning. This will be cost-effective in marketing terms. They could use the lessons from successful learners to help address the issue of those who do not participate at all.

Learner development — or progress — can be facilitated by developments in institutional policy and practice, developments in overall programme planning and curriculum design, and in staff development so that tutors are more able to deliver the information, guidance and support that students expect (see Figure 12).

In future, continuing to learn, whether to broaden skills and knowledge, or achieve greater specialisation in a particular area, may be a more helpful concept than progression. In a world where everyone will experience many job changes, and 'horizontal mobility' will be as important as climbing the 'career ladder', the concept of progression may need to be reframed in employment, education and in training. Adults will need to acquire skills at many different levels and see opportunities for learning in many situations, not only in institutions. The qualifiers in the survey recognised twice as many instances of learning outside institutions in the past five years as the informal learners. It could be argued that the capacity to see the learning potential in a situation demonstrates the benefits of the key skill of 'learning to learn'.

Institutions will need to become more flexible and support opportunities for learning in the home, community and at work. They could incorporate some of the beneficial features of return to learn provision into any education or training offer. Learning pathways and accreditation packages could combine increasing specialisms (vertical progression) in some areas, with broadening skills (lateral progression) in others.

Facilitating upward progression routes for adults will support policymakers' efforts to improve levels of achievement in line with

national targets. However, policymakers also have an interest in widening participation and developing a culture of lifelong learning — or, as described above, continuing to learn. Policies should keep a range of options available to encourage adults to re-enter learning and take next steps at whatever level is appropriate to their circumstances.

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# Appendix 1

## Institutional profiles

Institution	Non-schedule 2 enrolments	Schedule 2 enrolments	Location
LEA 1	6600	5,800	Urban
LEA 2	28,000		Rural, contracting to colleges
LEA 3	12,000	5,000	Urban
College 1	4000	8,000	Merged AE/FE
College 2	2342	8,927	Urban/rural
College 3	1694	16,688	Urban
College 4	19,000	700	Schedule 2 figure in AE department only. Rural.
College 5	3000	16,664	Urban
College 6	2000	5,000	Small town/rural
EDP	1400	230	One factory site

## Appendix 2

### Institutional audit

This audit tool is designed to provide a useful starting point for auditing your progression policies and practice. You can adapt it to your institutional framework or give it as it stands to be answered by different staff within your organisation, such as curriculum managers, lecturers and guidance specialists, to see how perceptions compare. When answering each question, it is important to consider what evidence is available to back up your responses. For example: What does the policy actually state?; What examples do you have from different curriculum areas?; How is staff development carried out for new and experienced staff?

#### *Institutional policies*

- Does your organisation have any policy statements specifically referring to progression?
- Does your organisation have development plans or implementation plans which demonstrate a strategy to improve progression rates?
- Who has responsibility for drawing up, and ensuring the implementation and monitoring of such policies?
- How do statements on progression relate to other policies, such as on equal opportunity, student charters and so on?
- How are progression policies and pathways communicated to staff and students?

#### *Programme planning*

- What are the processes for curriculum planning within programme areas?
- Are part-time tutors involved?
- Are there identifiable stages or levels (for example, in languages) and if so, is this a result of agreed policy or individual initiative?
- How do you decide which courses are accredited, and by whom?
- Can you list all your OCN accredited courses with their levels?

- What is your range of Return to Learn and Option courses?
- What do your course tutors have to produce for the public (externally) and for the organisation (internally) about the programme they offer?
- Does this documentation include course outcomes and/or identify next steps?
- Have tutors received training on identifying and describing outcomes?
- Do the progression pathways take account of the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities?

#### *Guidance*

- How do external guidance agencies for adults work with your organisation?
- What sort of information and guidance service do you have in-house?
- Are there different arrangements for informal or formal courses, or for courses of different lengths or hours?
- Is a guidance interview an entitlement for adults? Do you know the take-up in percentage terms?
- In reality, for most students, is guidance on choosing which courses to join given by specialist staff or the course tutor?
- Who gives on course guidance on next steps? Are they trained and supported?

- Please comment on how the audit evidence for entry units for schedule 2 has affected guidance provision?
- What mechanisms, such as tutorials, action plans, logs, records of achievement, exist for recording students' progress?

### *Information and research*

- Do you have information on curriculum areas where progression is particularly strong or weak, and do you know the reasons for these specific levels of achievement?
- Have you collected any follow up statistics of early leavers, completers and achievers? In what programme areas, and what does the data tell you?
- How do you plan to use ISR data?
- Have you any particular groups/types of students where you have identified a need for greater retention and/or progression?
- Have you targeted any particular students for progression, and if so, what strategies did you use and how successful were they?
- Consider the previous two questions in relation to curriculum areas (as opposed to students)
- Have you worked with staff to identify factors which facilitate or inhibit progression in curriculum planning, delivery or institutional structures?
- How are issues about progression dealt with, if at all, in staff development provided for part-time tutors?

### *Collaboration*

- What are the key ways in which you and neighbouring organisations can collaborate to facilitate progression?
- Do you have any formal or informal agreements with neighbouring institutions on progression to or from your institution?
- Who is responsible for maintaining dialogue and making agreements?
- Are there any local processes designed to facilitate progression, such as local progression pathways, information directories and informal links?
- Do you have any evidence on how effectively the above arrangements work?

### *Future plans*

- Which part of the audit did you find most difficult to answer?
- What priorities for action can you identify as a result?
- What significant or interesting findings do you need to follow up immediately?
- Can you identify human and financial resources to action your proposals?

## Appendix 3

### Sample student questionnaire

#### *Adult learners' progression survey*

*(RP909)*

Thank you for agreeing to help with this national survey.

Its aim is to collect information about how and why people move from adult education and informal learning to courses with more formal qualifications.

The survey is in three parts:

- Part A asks you about the course which you are now on and how you chose it.
- Part B asks you about the class or course you were on before your current course, and your recent learning experiences.
- Part C asks some questions about you and your future plans.

The survey does not ask for your name. All the information you give is confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone else.

If you have any questions about this survey or need help in completing this questionnaire, please ask your local co-ordinator.

Please read the instructions carefully and then complete the whole of the questionnaire.

## PART A: CURRENT COURSE

This section asks you about the course you are currently on.

1 What is the course called?

.....  
 .....

2 What qualification does it lead to?

.....  
 .....

3 How did you find out about this course? What were your sources of information?

*(First tick all boxes that apply, then double-tick [VV] the main sources of information)*

From a leaflet, prospectus or poster

From newspapers, radio or TV

From friends or family

From workmates or other adult learners

From the tutor of a previous course

From the admissions or guidance unit of my current college/centre

From a local advisory service, eg careers, educational advice or training advisor

From an outside agency, such as Job Centre, D.S.S.

From the tutor of my current course

From another source (give details below)

.....

.....

.....

.....

I can't remember

4 Before choosing this course, did you receive advice or guidance about it, or about other education or training opportunities?

*(First tick all boxes that apply; then double tick [VV] the main source of advice or guidance)*

**Yes:**

From friends or family

From workmates or other adult learners

From the tutor of a previous course

From the admissions or guidance unit at my current college/centre

From a local advisory service, eg careers, educational advice or training adviser

From an outside agency, such as Job Centre, D.S.S.

From the tutor of my current course

From another source (please give details)

.....

.....

.....

**No:**

I did not receive any advice or guidance

I found out all I needed to know myself

5 If Yes, was the main source of guidance:

*(Tick one box only)*

Very useful?

Fairly useful?

Only moderately useful?

Not useful at all

6 What were your reasons for choosing to do the course?

*(First tick all boxes that apply; then double-tick [VV] your main reason for choosing to do the course)*

To help me go on to do other courses

Personal interest, eg "I've always been interested in this subject"

- For social reasons, eg "To meet people or to be with friends"
- To learn a specific new skill, eg book-keeping, machine-knitting
- To develop myself, eg "broaden my interests"
- To support a voluntary or community activity
- To help me get a job
- To help me in my present job
- To get a recognised qualification or certificate
- Some other reason (please give details below)

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**7** Before even setting foot in your present institution, what were your major worries about your new course?  
*(First tick all boxes that apply; then double tick [VV] if any of these fears have come true)*

- That I couldn't afford it
- Just setting foot in a new institution
- That the course would be too hard
- Arranging childcare
- That I wouldn't get enough individual help from my teacher
- That everyone would be cleverer than me
- That travel would be difficult
- That I wouldn't be able to fit it in with other commitments
- That the course wouldn't meet my specific needs
- That there would be exams
- Having to go into a new group
- Other worries (please give details below)

.....  
 .....  
 .....

I had no major worries

**8** What do you think of your choice now?

*(Tick one box only)*

- I am very happy with my choice
- I am fairly happy with my choice
- I am fairly unhappy with my choice
- I am very unhappy with my choice

**9** After completing the course, what do you see as your next step?

*(Tick one box only)*

- To do another course
- To get a job
- To seek promotion or get a better job
- To get a different job or make a career change
- To have a break from education and training
- To do other things (please give details below)

.....  
 .....  
 .....

I have no particular plans at the moment

**10** If you are intending to do another course, will this be:

*(Tick all boxes that apply)*

- At the same level as your current course
- At a higher level than your current course
- At a lower level than your current course
- At the same institution as your current course
- At a different institution (please give details below)

.....  
 .....

I have not made any firm plans yet

## PART B: PREVIOUS COURSE(S) AND LEARNING

This section asks you about your recent study and learning experiences.

Questions 12 to 18 are about the last course or class you attended (before the course you are currently on).

Questions 19 and 20 ask you about your study and learning experiences in the last five years.

- 11** Before starting your current course, had you recently attended an education or training course (i.e. in the period since September 1993?)
- Yes  -Go to question 12
- No  -Go to question 19

- 12** What was the course called? (Don't worry if you can't remember the exact title)

.....

.....

.....

*(If you attended more than one in this period, choose the most recent course. Please list other courses under question 19)*

- 13** What was the name of the institution or organisation which put on the course?

.....

.....

.....

- 14** What were your reasons for choosing to do the course?

*(First tick all boxes that apply; then double-tick [VV] your main reason for choosing to do the course)*

- To help me go on to do other courses
- Personal interest, eg "I've always been interested in this subject"
- For social reasons, eg "To meet people or to be with friends"
- To learn a specific new skill, eg book-keeping, machine-knitting
- To develop myself, eg "broaden my interests"
- To support a voluntary or community activity
- To help me get a job

- To help me in my present job
- To get a recognised qualification or certificate
- Some other reason (please give details below)

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 15** Were there particular features of the course which you liked?

*(First tick all boxes that apply, then double tick [VV] the main feature which applies)*

- The tutor gave plenty of individual help
- It taught me how to study
- It helped to build my confidence
- There was advice or information about what I might do next
- It was held at a convenient place
- It was held at a convenient time
- I learned a lot of new things
- Exams or other assessments provided a clear target to aim for
- The group was friendly and supportive
- The fees were reasonable
- Childcare was provided
- Other (please give details below)
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- There was no feature that I liked

**16** Were there particular features of the course which you disliked?

*(First tick all boxes that apply; then double-tick [VV] the main feature which applies)*

- The tutor gave little individual help
- It didn't teach me how to study
- Too much was expected of me
- There was little advice or information about what I might do next
- The location was not convenient
- It was not held at a convenient time
- I learned few new things
- Exams or other assessments scared me
- The group was not friendly or supportive
- The fees were expensive
- Childcare was not provided
- Other (please state below)

.....

.....

.....

There was no feature which I disliked

**17** Roughly speaking, the level of this course was:

*(Please tick one box only)*

- Higher than my current course
- The same as my current course
- Lower than my current course
- Difficult to compare with my current course

**18** Did you receive any of the following for completing the course?

*(Please tick all boxes that apply)*

- A certificate of attendance
- A college certificate of successful completion
- Open College or Access Network credit certificates
- A certificate from an examining body, eg GCSE, BTEC, RSA, City & Guilds
- A record of achievement
- A reference or letter of introduction

Statements of competence

Other (please give details below)

.....

.....

.....

I did not receive anything

I did not complete the course

**19** Please list all the education and training courses and classes you have taken in the last 5 years (i.e. since September 1990) Include things like adult education classes (eg pottery, French), training courses at work, correspondence courses, certificated courses like First Aid. (Don't worry if you can't remember the exact year. Start with the most recent and work backwards. If none, move on to question 19)

Year	Course Title	Organisation/Institution
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....

**20** Please list here any informal learning groups or activities you have engaged in during the last 5 years (i.e. since September 1990). Include things like craft groups, trade union activities, learning to drive or swim, voluntary or community activity. (If none, write 'none')

Year(s)	Activity
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....
.....	.....

## PART C: ABOUT YOURSELF

This section is to give us some basic details about people included in the survey

(In questions 22 – 26, please tick whichever box applies)

- 21** What is the first part of your postcode?  
(eg BL5 or IP13)
- 22** Are you:
- Male
- Female
- 23** How old are you?
- 19 or under
- 20 – 29
- 30 – 39
- 40 – 49
- 50 – 59
- 60 or over
- 24** Are you:
- Able bodied
- Registered disabled
- Disabled but not registered
- 25** Would you describe yourself as:
- Black – Caribbean
- Black – African
- Black – Other (please describe)  
.....
- White
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Ethnic group (please describe)  
.....
- 26** Are you:
- Married
- Single
- Divorced/Separated
- Widowed
- 27** Do you have dependent children under the age of 18?  
(If yes, please insert number; if no, please insert 0 [zero])
- 28** What is your present employment situation?  
(First tick all boxes that apply; then double tick [VV] the one which best describes your situation)
- Are you: (Please insert the title of your job here)
- Employed full time .....
- Employed part time .....
- Self-employed .....
- Registered unemployed
- Looking for a job but not registered unemployed
- Unwaged and not seeking work
- Retired from paid work
- Doing unpaid voluntary work
- On a government employment or training scheme
- In full time education
- Unable to work because of long-term sickness or disability
- Looking after the home or family
- Caring for dependents
- Other (please give details below)  
.....  
.....  
.....

**29** What is the highest level of qualification that you have?

*(Tick one box only, to indicate your highest level of qualification)*

I have no formal educational qualifications

CSE (other than Grade 1); Wordpower/  
Numberpower; Open College credits (Levels 1 or 2);  
basic RSA certificates eg CLAIT, typing; NVQ Level 1

CSE (Grade 1), GCE O level, GCSE; BTEC General  
Certificate or Diploma; Open College credits (Level 3);  
NVQ level 2, Professional or Craft qualifications  
below A level equivalent

A/S Levels, GCE A Level, Open College credits  
(Level 4); BTEC ONC and OND; NVQ Level 3;  
Professional or craft qualification at A level  
equivalent

Diploma in Higher Education; BTEC HNC or HND;  
NVQ4; Professional qualification at degree level

University (undergraduate) degree; Teacher's  
Certificate

Postgraduate degree

Other, including overseas qualifications (Please give  
details below)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Your comments:**

If there is anything else you would like to mention  
about progression or about your recent education or  
training experience, please use the space below.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**30** What are your long-term ambitions in education and training?

*(First tick all boxes that apply; then double tick [VV] your main long-term ambition)*

My aim is to do courses to help me get a job

I want to do courses to help me get a better job

I intend to do courses in the future for personal  
interest

I would eventually like to get a degree/higher  
qualification

I have no ideas at the moment

I have some other ambition (please give details below)

.....  
.....  
.....

# Appendix 4

## Definitions of levels used for the purposes of this research

### *Level 1*

CSE (other than Grade 1); Wordpower/Numberpower; Open College credits (Levels 1 or 2); basic RSA certificates eg CLAIT, typing; NVQ Level 1

### *Level 2*

CSE (Grade 1), GCE O level, GCSE; BTEC General Certificate or Diploma; Open College credits (Level 3); NVQ level 2, Professional or Craft qualifications below A level equivalent

### *Level 3*

A/S Levels, GCE A Level, Open College credits (Level 4); BTEC ONC and OND; NVQ Level 3; professional or craft qualification at A level equivalent

### *Level 4 and above*

Diploma in Higher Education; BTEC HNC or HND; NVQ4; professional qualification at degree level; university (undergraduate) degree; Teacher's Certificate; postgraduate degree

## SCHEDULE 2 TO THE FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION ACT (1992) AND THE COUNCIL'S ASSOCIATED CRITERIA

## THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

Cheylesmore House  
 Quinton Road  
 Coventry CV1 2WT  
 Telephone 01203 863000  
 Fax 01203 863100

<i>Schedule 2 paragraph reference</i>	<i>Summary description of course</i>	<i>Criteria for eligibility for funding by FEFC</i>
a.	vocational qualification	approved by the secretary of state
b.	GSCE or GCE A/AS level	leads to an examination by one of the GCE/GCSE examining boards
c.	'access' course preparing students for entry to a course of higher education	approved by the secretary of state
d.	course which prepares students for entry to courses listed in (a) to (c) above	i. primary course objective is progression to a vocational course GSCE, GCE A/AS level or an access course as outlined above; and ii. course includes external accreditation which entitles students to progress to courses (a) to (c)
e.	basic literacy in English	provides students with basic literacy skills
f.	teaching English to students where English is not the language spoken at home	improves the knowledge of English for those for whom English is not the language spoken at home
g.	basic principles of mathematics	course designed to teach the basic principles of mathematics
h.	courses under this part of schedule 2 (courses for proficiency of literacy in Welsh) will be the responsibility of the Welsh Funding Council	
j.	independent living and communication for those with learning difficulties which prepare them for entry to courses listed in (d) to (g) above	i. primary course objectives is progression to a course which prepares students for entry to courses listed in sections (d) to (g) above; and ii. course includes college accreditation which enables the student to progress to courses (d) to (g); or iii. evidence of progression to courses (d) to (g) can be provided to the Council

*Annex B*

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The following notes may be of assistance in determining whether or not a course falls within the scope of schedule 2.

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Sections (a) and (c) An updated list for 1995-96 of the vocational qualifications and access courses approved by the secretary of state is available from the Department for Education and Employment. Copies have been sent to chief education officers.

---

Section (d) Only qualifications which are externally accredited are recognised for funding purposes in 1996-97.

---

Section (j) The Council will expect evidence of assessment procedures to be available; acceptable evidence of a course ensuring a progression route to courses which fall under sections (d) to (g) includes student destination data or the student's achievement of a qualification which enables progression.

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Section (f) The Council's duty extends to the home population of England. It does not have a duty towards overseas students if they are temporarily resident in England solely for the purpose of study.

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