EPP

REVIEW

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A systematic review of effective strategies to widen adult participation in learning

Review conducted by the Post-Compulsory Education Review Group

The EPPI-Centre is part of the Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no known conflicts of interest.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABE	Adult basic education
ACLF	Adult and Community Learning Fund
AGP	Adult guidance pilot
ASE	Adult secondary education
BEI	British Education Index
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
CHAID	Chi-square interaction detection
CSA	Cambridge Scientific Abstracts
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EPPI-Centre	Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre, Institute of Education, University of London
ERA	East of the River Alliance
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre
ES	Even Start
ESL	English as a second language
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
EU	European Union
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
GED	General education diploma
IAG	Information, advice and guidance
ICT	Information and communication technologies
LLSC	Local Learning and Skills Council
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NI	Northern Ireland
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NQF	National qualification framework
NVQ	National vocational qualification
OCN	Open College Network
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PVT	Pre-vocational training
RDA	Regional development agency

READS	River East Alliance for Developmental Skills
REEL	Research Evidence in Education Library
TABE	Test of adult basic education
TAFE	Technical and further education
ULF	Union Learning Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VET	Vocational education courses
WoE	Weight of evidence

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SUMMARY

Background

The consultation document on the widening adult participation strategy of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), published in March 2003, emphasises the importance of having the best evidence, based on high quality research into what helps widening participation (Learning and Skills Council, 2003a). It notes that much research evidence on 'what works' exists, but that it has not yet been synthesised, so that we do not always 'know what we know'. The LSC proposed commissioning a systematic review on 'what works' in order to provide a solid foundation for future research on participation and strategies for widening it.

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) organised an international research seminar on widening participation in 2001. In preparation for that seminar, it commissioned an independent review of literature on international evidence and practice in attracting new learners. The review was conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies (Hillage and Aston, 2001). The current systematic review takes account of what LSDA learned from this earlier, international work and is designed to contribute towards improving knowledge about the most effective means of widening participation, based on trustworthy evidence.

Aims

The review's aims are as follows:

- to identify effective strategies for widening adult participation

- to contribute to the development of an objective, comprehensive and authoritative basis for action by local LSCs to extend good practice

- to support the LSC's national strategy for widening adult participation by providing a sound basis for improvements in practice at local LSC level

- to contribute to LSC's programmes of action research and quality improvement on widening adult participation

Review questions

The research questions are as follows:

Which strategies have been reliably proven to raise, or not to raise, participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation?

Which strategies do, or do not, offer compelling evidence that they raise participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation?

With reference to strategies that provide evidence of raising participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation, how and why do these strategies work?

Methods

The review began by establishing a clear process for involving users, including policy-makers and planners who, via the Advisory Group, played a key role at the outset in deciding the scope and conceptual framework for this review.

The Review Group then agreed a set of criteria for including and excluding studies. To be included in the systematic map a study had to:

- report on a strategy to widen participation in learning by adults, including strategies to reach and engage learners, help and support success of adult learners, and enable progression of learners

- include adults who are educationally or economically disadvantaged and in either formal or informal learning

- be an evaluation and published after 1992

Effort was made to identify as many studies as possible undertaken from 1992 onwards that might answer one or both of the review questions.

Studies were identified by systematic searches of electronic databases and websites. In addition, relevant journals were handsearched and those with specialist knowledge in the field were contacted and asked to recommend relevant studies. As well as these methods, bibliographies in other reviews and relevant papers were examined to uncover studies not already identified.

A search log was created to record details of each search, and details of studies found were stored on two EndNote databases. The first contained details of all studies found and the second contained details of all studies that were judged to meet the review's inclusion and exclusion criteria on the basis of title and abstract only.

Great care was taken to define the criteria used to screen papers, so that those screening against inclusion and exclusion criteria would interpret them in the same way. To ensure that all reviewers were making the same judgements, they each screened the same first 30 independently. Where there were discrepancies, these were discussed. Checks of the decisions made on 20 random studies (1.9% of the total studies screened at full document stage) were made by a member of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre).

Studies meeting the review's inclusion and exclusion criteria were assigned descriptive keywords in order to produce a descriptive map of research activity. One generic set of core keywords was provided by the EPPI-Centre and these were applied, using definitions specified in the EPPI-Centre's Keywording Strategy (EPPI-Centre, 2002a). Additional keywords, specific to the context of this review, were devised and also applied.

A descriptive map was produced, which described research activity in the field, and this was also used to identify the most suitable subset of studies for answering the review questions. From 1,058 studies, 82 met the criteria for inclusion and were keyworded, using the EPPI-Centre's generic keywording tool (EPPI-Centre, 2002a) as well as specific keywords developed for use in this systematic review.

The decision was then taken to narrow the field to a coherent and manageable set of studies for the in-depth review**.** These formed a subset of studies that were relevant to the review topic, covering a wide range of topics and containing 'robust' evidence. Exclusion criteria were based on the review specific keywords, to ensure the inclusion of a group of studies which were relevant to the review question.

To be included in the in-depth review, studies had to meet the following criteria:

- They had to be carried out in a developed country.

- They had to be coded with the topic focus of 'widening adult participation'.

- They had to be coded as an external evaluation.

- They had to to have among their objectives, *at least three of the following* from the objective of the intervention, including one from each of engagement and achievement and progression:
  - *Engagement intervention objectives* (A.7.1 Outreach, A.7.2 Targeting, A.7.3 Stimulating demand, A.7.4 Information, advice and guidance)
  - *Achievement and progression intervention objectives* (A.7.8 Retention, A.7.9 Achievement, A.7.10 Qualification or assessment reform, A.7.11 Progression)

Application of these criteria left 17 studies to be included in the in-depth review. These studies identified as meeting the criteria, were analysed in-depth using the EPPI-Centre's software (EPPI-Reviewer) and data-extraction tool (EPPI-Centre, 2002b). EPPI-Centre tools were used to make explicit the weight of evidence apportioned to each study.

The evidence was synthesised to group and amalgamate material from the studies which answered the review questions and which met the quality criteria for appropriateness and methodology. This was done by grouping studies according to three main dimensions of widening adult participation and by indicating, for each study in the in-depth review, the overall review-specific weight of evidence.

Data-extraction and assessment of the weight of evidence brought by the study to address the review question were conducted by pairs of reviewers, working independently, and then comparing their decisions and coming to a consensus. A Member of the EPPI-Centre carried out a reliability check by data-extracting a subset of the sample of studies.

The first review question seeks reliable proof of success or failure in widening adult participation; and the second, 'compelling evidence' – a less demanding criterion, applied to studies that are judged by the reviewers, on the basis of the relevance of the study and thus the study's ability to offer useful insights.

It was decided that the findings in this report would be based on studies that were judged to be of either a *high* or *medium* overall weight of evidence D (or 'compelling'). However, studies of low weight are also included since they provide

supporting evidence and contribute to the overall conclusions. However, to be judged as offering 'reliable proof', the Review Group expected studies to be high-rated overall (WoE D).

Studies were considered to be 'compelling' using the weight of evidence (WoE) judgements applied to all studies included in the in-depth review. Two decisions were applied to studies based firstly on WoE C: one decision for studies rated as high and one decision for studies rated as medium.

The following criteria applied:

1. Studies rated high on WoE C were judged as 'compelling'

2. Studies rated medium on WoE C and at least medium on D (overall weight of evidence) were judged as 'compelling'.

The idea of 'compelling' is situated around the relevance of the topic and the extent to which studies can offer some guidance on effective widening participation strategies. Studies with high WoE C would closely match our target population and would therefore automatically qualify as providing some compelling guidance for policy and practice in the UK. Studies judged as medium WoE C would be less closely matched to our target population of under-represented group, who have traditionally low participation and would need stronger methodological/internal coherence in order to provide 'compelling' evidence (WoE D).

Results

The 17 studies meeting the criteria for the in-depth review contained a higher proportion of British studies compared with those in the systematic map. The criteria for inclusion favoured interventions, which addressed engagement, achievement and progression, and a high percentage of studies in the in-depth review were about interventions related to targeting, stimulating demand, achievement and particularly progression.

In general, the in-depth review was representative of populations in the map. However, there were sizeably higher proportions of studies focusing on those who were reluctant learners, unemployed, not in education, employment or training (NEET), or those who were homeless.

The weights of evidence for each of the 17 studies included in the in-depth review were as follows:

*   Two studies received a high rating.
*   One study received a medium-high rating.
*   Seven studies received a medium rating.
*   One study received a medium-low rating.
*   Six studies received a low rating.

It should be remembered that the findings of low weight of evidence have to be treated with caution due to methodological weaknesses. However, in a large majority of cases, studies of low weight of evidence did not differ greatly in their conclusions from the medium- and high-weighted studies.

The findings of each study were related to one or more of the three key aspects of widening participation:

- outreach, targeting and engagement
- participation and retention
- achievement and progression

The evidence from six studies that provided evidence on the issue of **outreach, targeting and engagement**, and which were rated medium and low (on WoE D), suggests that the strategies which appear to widen participation in this area share some of the following elements:

- Presence of initiatives within the community through outreach work, and more specifically, person-to-person recruitment (word of mouth), is more likely to attract potential learners from minority communities. *This finding emerges from Tyers et al. (2003), rated medium, and is also present in Field et al. (2001) and HA Associates (2002) work, both rated low.*

- There is evidence to suggest in the study by Tyers *et al*. (2003), rated medium, that tailored flexible support and provision created through networking and partnerships between key organisations which is responsive to individual learner needs is more likely to engage 'hard to reach' learners. *This is also supported by the work of two low-rated studies by HA Associates (2002), and Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992).*

- A sound understanding of the needs of target group(s) and clarity about the provider can go some way to pre-empting disengagement. Additionally, funding projects to target the needs of certain 'hard to reach' groups can be successful in engaging learners from these groups. *This finding is from Tyers et al. (2003), rated medium, and was also evident in Field et al. (2001), HA Associates (2002) and Squirrell's (2001) studies, all of which were rated low*.

- Catalysts, such as intermediary bodies (e.g. Basic Skills Agency (BSA) and the National Institute for Adult and Community Education (NIACE)) or trade unions can play a key role in engaging new learners, through developing effective partnerships with community-based organisations and employers. *This finding was drawn from Shaw and Armistead (2002), rated medium; it was also a finding of the study by Field et al. (2001), rated low*.

The evidence from six studies that provided evidence on the issue of **participation and retention**, and which were rated medium-high to low (on WoE D), suggests that the strategies which appear to widen participation in this area have some of the following themes in common:

- One of the findings from Paris (1992), a medium-high rated study, found that a shared understanding between learners, learning providers and employers about what motivates learners and what are their key barriers to accessing learning opportunities can be used to create responsive learning opportunities and shape learning provision to encourage participation and retention. *This also emerges out of the Grief and Taylor (2002) study, rated medium*.

- The delivery method, the nature of support offered, and the suitability of a learning programme's design to the needs of the learners together with the characteristics of the staff delivering the programme (experience, knowledge of target community) seem to be some of the important ingredients which can

enhance learner participation and retention. *This finding emerges from Paris' (1992) study, rated medium-high; it also emerges from the studies of Grief and Taylor (2002) and Young et al. (1995), rated medium, and from the studies by Field et al. (2001), and Hawaii University and College of Manoa's (1992), both rated low.*

- Some evidence shows that provision of funding which can be used flexibly to support additional costs incurred by learning providers can help to set up and sustain innovative learning provision for hard to reach groups. *This finding comes from the studies by Grief and Taylor (2002), and Young et al. (1995), both of which were rated medium*.

- Evidence from Young *et al.*'s (1995) study, rated medium, indicates that sustained attendance in a learning programme appears to depend on the appropriate level of support available to learners, in accordance with their needs, during the early stages after enrolment; and the efforts made by the providers to link the learning programme to outcomes desired by the learner. *This finding is also backed up by findings in the studies by Robinson and Hughes (1999), rated medium-low, and Field et al. (2001), rated low*.

The evidence from ten studies that provided evidence on the issue of **achievement and progression**, and which were rated high to low on WoE D, suggests that the strategies which appear to widen participation in this area have some of the following features in common:

- Tailored learning programmes which address learners' desired outcomes; skilled trainers; clarity about the expectations of the learners and the extent to which they can be met by the learning programme, together with appropriate and sensitive assessment of progress, can help learners to achieve accreditation and/or progress to suitable employment, or other learning programmes. *This finding emerges from the BMRB study (2001), rated high, and the study by Taylor (2002) study, rated medium. It also emerges from the studies undertaken by Coats (1999), Field et al. (2001), and McRoberts and Leitch (1998), all of which were rated low)*.

- The findings from St Pierre *et al.* (1998) found that high level of learner support, especially to those from 'hard to reach groups'; skilled and experienced staff in the provider organisation; effective networking and collaboration between learning provider and local agencies to improve learning pathways and support progression, can all contribute to positive outcomes for learners. *Similar findings are also reported by Taylor (2002), rated medium*.

- Embedding or tailoring basic skills training to the needs of employers and employees in workforce development programmes can lead not just to improvements in learners' self-confidence and self-image, but also to improving the quality of their work, and their economic position. *This finding emerges from three medium-rated studies by Paris (1992), Scheer (1993), and Zandniapour and Conway (2001)*.

- Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services can have a useful role to play in the planning of learning provision and progression, both in the community and the workplace settings; and also in identifying smaller steps which learners can take to gain confidence and achieve substantial and measurable progress. *This finding comes from two medium-rated studies by Taylor (2002), and Tyers et al. (2003)*.

Themes that appeared to be important in the success of interventions to widen adult participation in learning were then identified. Each of the seven themes are highlighted in at least two studies as being important success factors. At least one of the two studies, on which the seven themes are based, are rated as either high, medium high, or medium on WoE D:

- Sufficient, suitable resources including quality support services: Young *et al*. (1995), Tyers *et al*. (2003) – both medium-rated studies

- Effective use of resources and good management of interventions: Grief and Taylor (2002), Taylor (2002), and Tyers *et al*. (2003) – all medium-rated

- Suitable ways to measure learning gains: Taylor (2002) – medium-rated

- Listening to learners, responding to feedback, encouraging realistic expectations about what learning programmes offer: BMRB (2001) – high; Grief and Taylor (2002) and Tyers *et al*. (2003) – medium

- Steps that break down barriers to learning: Paris (1992) – medium-high, Grief and Taylor (2002), Tyers *et al*. (2003), and Young *et al*. (1995) – medium-rated

- Flexible and tailored delivery and support: Paris (1992) – medium-high; Grief and Taylor (2002), Scheer (1993), and Tyers *et al*. (2003) – all medium-rated

- Networking and partnership, including the use of intermediary organisations: Grief and Taylor (2002), Shaw and Armistead (2002), Taylor (2002), and Tyers *et al*. (2003) – all medium-rated

Conclusions

No studies provide evidence of strategies that can be confidently described as 'reliably proven' to raise, or not to raise, participation in learning by adults. Thus, the review confirms the earlier finding by Hillage and Aston (2001) that there is a shortage of effective evaluation evidence in this field.

The following conclusions are drawn from the 17 documents subjected to in-depth review:

- Twelve studies provide evidence that is compelling. (The criteria used to make this judgement are provided in the 'Methods' section of this chapter). Of these 12 studies, two studies (rated high on WoE D) show that the programmes they evaluated failed or provided outcomes that are inconclusive, or that the interventions were not of great help to participants (BMRB, 2001; St Pierre *et al.,* 1998). One of the two points to factors that contributed to failure (BMRB, 2001).

- Ten studies (eight medium and two low-rated studies on WoE D) provide compelling evidence on strategies to widen participation, but each is marred to some extent by methodological and reporting weaknesses: Grief and Taylor, (2002), Paris (1992), Scheer (1993), Shaw and Armistead (2002), Taylor (2002), Tyers *et al*. (2003), Young *et al*. (1995), and Zandniapour and Conway (2001) – all rated medium; Field *et al*. (2001) and Squirrell (2001)– both rated low on WoE D).

- Five studies cannot be confidently described as offering compelling evidence: Coats (1999), Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992), McRoberts and Leitch (1998), Robinson and Hughes (1999) and HA Associates (2002) – all rated low on WoE D.

Based on the analysis of studies included in the in-depth review, the most promising strategies (emerging from high, medium-high or medium-rated studies on WoE D) to raise participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation appear to involve:

- a substantial degree of flexibility in learning provision and support services, tailored to learners' needs. (e.g. Tyers *et al.,* 2003; Grief and Taylor, 2002)

- programmes tailored to the needs of employees and the workplace, including occupationally specific learning (e.g. Paris, 1992; St Pierre *et al.,* 1998)

These findings echo the results of previous studies that call for 'appropriate, targeted provision' (Macleod, 2003 p 16). It is also in tune with the learner-centred approach advocated by the LSC's widening adult participation strategy, *Successful participation for all* (Learning and Skills Council, 2003a), which proposes action to support learner interests, promote demand for learning opportunities, develop the supply of diverse learning opportunities, and create 'a learning environment for adults'.

It is therefore not surprising to note that the outcomes of interventions to widen participation are rarely clear-cut and that success or failure can be the product of interaction between many different factors.

Implications

National and local LSCs may wish to consider the following interventions:

- Work with providers to increase the flexibility and tailoring of provision and support

- Steps to ensure adequate funding and resourcing of interventions to widen adult participation

- Work with providers to ensure the effective management of such interventions

- Incorporation of widening adult participation strategies into workforce development programmes

- Piloting of interventions to widen adult participation, coupled with evaluation strategies that enable impact to be measured with confidence

Learning providers may wish to consider:

- Steps to increase flexibility and tailoring of provision and support, including provision tailored to workplace requirements

- Steps to ensure the effective management of widening participation interventions

The research community may wish to consider:

- What changes might be needed in research design, to ensure that the methods adopted are strong enough to yield evaluation evidence suitable for informing policy and practice

- Steps to ensure adequate recording and reporting of research methodology, evidence and results, to ensure that useful findings and conclusions can be used with confidence by planners and policy-makers

- Further use of the findings of this review. For example, the tables in Chapter 3 highlight potential gaps in research evidence and could help inform decisions on future research priorities in this field.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths

These can be summarised as follows:

- a rigorous search strategy and systematic methodology for assessing the value of studies, using procedures developed by the EPPI-Centre

- the high volume of references identified and keyworded

- a review that is informed by the LSC widening adult participation strategy, providing a clear context

- confirmation that there are few sound evaluations available in the English language in this field

Limitations

It is worth noting that the following limitations arise from the literature available for this review:

- lack of studies that evaluate the impact of interventions by comparison with a baseline or control group

- lack of testing of recommended practice

- extent to which lessons are transferable to the UK context

- weaknesses in the reporting of method and evidence

- only including references and studies in the English language, meaning that effective strategies reported in other languages have been overlooked

It may be argued that the limitations raised mean that there are concerns about the usefulness of the findings drawn from this review. However, their value lies in the fact that the features or common themes presented in the syntheses under each of the three key aspects of widening participation, and, indeed, in the section titled 'Key issues emerging from the studies', recur in more than one study, at least one of which is rated high, medium-high or medium. The key issues drawn

from the evidence selected for the in-depth review, that comprise the various syntheses and highlight some of the critical ingredients required to formulate strategies for successfully raising participation in learning by adults, have emerged from studies that are rated either high, medium-high or medium. These have often been corroborated by other high-rated or medium-rated studies.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Aims and rationale for current review

The consultation document on the widening adult participation strategy of the Learning and Skill Council (LSC), published in March 2003, emphasises the importance of having the best evidence, based on high quality research into what helps widening participation (Learning and Skills Council, 2003a). It notes that much research evidence on 'what works' exists, but that it has not yet been synthesised, so that we do not always 'know what we know'. The LSC commissioned and funded this systematic review on 'what works' in order to provide a solid foundation for future research on participation and strategies for widening it.

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) organised an international research seminar on widening participation in 2001. In preparation for that seminar, it commissioned an independent reviewof literature on international evidence and practice in attracting new learners. The review was conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies (Hillage and Aston, 2001). The current systematic review takes account of what the LSDA has learned previously , international work in this area and is designed to contribute towards improving knowledge about the most effective means of widening participation, based on trustworthy evidence.

The review's aims are as follows:

- to identify effective strategies for widening adult participation

- to contribute to the development of an objective, comprehensive and authoritative basis for action by local LSCs to extend good practice

- to support the LSC's national strategy for widening adult participation by providing a sound basis for improvements in practice at local LSC level

- to contribute to LSC's programmes of action research and quality improvement on widening adult participation

We set out to achieve these aims by:

- identifying and analysing relevant UK and international research evidence on widening adult participation strategies

- taking account of research commissioned by the LSDA and the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

- covering aspects of the widening participation process, from strategies for successful outreach and engagement, to interventions designed to promote retention, success and progression

- including relevant cross-disciplinary interventions and those which may not be primarily education-led (e.g. neighbourhood renewal, health)

- drawing attention to the evidence on strategies that have proved successful, or are likely to be successful, in widening adult participation

- drawing out implications for policy-makers, planners and managers

- indicating what further evidence is needed

1.2 Definitional and conceptual issues

1.2.1 Population group

The review focuses exclusively on those adults (19+) who are not participating in learning. Within this broad group, there are some adults who would not be included in the review due to their not being in a disadvantaged socio-economic position. The reason for their exclusion is because the LSC's widening adult participation strategy focuses specifically on increasing participation for adults from disadvantaged groups.

In planning the review, the categories below were viewed as likely to be particularly important, although not necessarily the only focus:

- adults (19+) who are not participating in learning

- those who have not yet achieved a National Framework Level 2 qualification or international equivalent

- those who belong to particular disadvantaged groups (for example, the homeless, ethnic minorities groups that fare less well in education and the labour market, those disadvantaged by a lack of appropriate local learning provision)

- living in a disadvantaged area (for example, as defined by postcode)

- those not in education, employment or training (NEET)

- those on a low income

- those with basic skills needs

- people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- unemployed adults, including, for example, older unskilled and low-skilled men

- lone parents

- travellers

- asylum-seekers and refugees

- older learners (i.e. aged 55 and over)

1.2.2 Setting

The setting for the review incorporates all the learning and skills sector. This sector includes so far:

- further education (FE) colleges, including sixth-form colleges

- adult and community settings, including voluntary sector provision

- workplaces

- private providers

- higher education (HE) in FE/interface between FE and HE (for example, access to HE programmes)

- other LSC and non-LSC funded settings (for example, library, prison, homeless hostel, etc.)

1.2.3 Interventions/strategies

Strategies to widen adult participation in learning cover a very broad spectrum of activity from interventions designed to reach and engage reluctant learners, to work that aims to help learners stay on course and succeed, and activities to encourage progression to further learning or work. This is clear from the LSC's definition, set out in section 1.2.4.

The levels of activity of interest to the review are similarly wide-ranging, from the micro level (for example, strategies adopted by individual local learning providers) to the macro level (for example, national policies and strategies designed to promote lifelong learning in the population at large and aiming to increase the take-up of learning among adults who have not traditionally participated). In the early stages of the review, we took a broad view of the types and levels of interventions that should be included. In the early stages, we considered the whole of the following spectrum of activity (noting that these activities are not mutually exclusive categories of work):

- Targeting/outreach work – including, for example, information, advice and guidance; community development and community learning strategies; learning 'brokerage'; engaging families

- Recruitment/engagement – including assessment and guidance, and the identification of learners' needs

- Retention – including curriculum development, designing motivating programmes, effective teaching and learning, flexible delivery, courses specifically for adults (not mixed with younger learners), methods including e-learning, encouraging learner feedback, pre-course preparation, appropriate workload and help with time management

- Achievement – ways to promote success through accreditation and qualifications (including credit transfer), skills acquisition or other methods including non-accredited learning

- Progression – ways to enable learners to move on to further learning or employment, or to achieve other personal goals or improved quality of life such as volunteering, community involvement, etc.

- Staff and organisational development to support and further these activities

- Policy and planning – at local, regional and national levels, and including cross-sector and community-led approaches, such as neighbourhood renewal and key agencies (for example, the LSC, regional development agencies (RDAs), Local Strategic Partnerships and Learning Partnerships)

- Learner and learning support – including financial, childcare (both provision of and financial support for) and counselling

1.2.4 Key terms

To assist the development of the search strategy and screening studies, our key terms were defined, namely:

- 'widening participation'
- 'participation in learning'
- 'successful strategies' (or 'interventions') for widening participation
- 'successful outcomes' for learners

Widening participation

The LSC strategy adopts a wide definition, as follows:

> Widening participation is a process where education and training providers successfully adapt their programmes and ways of working to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals and groups whose experiences or circumstances inhibit participation. It involves:
>
> - attracting and engaging learners;
> - identifying appropriate programmes;
> - appropriate support for learners during their programmes; and
> - securing achievement. (Learning and Skills Council, 2003b, p 9)

We sought studies that include any of these main elements.

Participation in learning

Participation in learning can include a range of learning 'types' (as well as learning settings, see above), such as:

- formal
- informal
- accredited
- non-accredited
- on-the-job training

Successful outcomes (for learners)

These are defined as follows:

- participating in learning, or continuing to participate
- gaining qualifications
- obtaining jobs (or jobs with better prospects)
- other 'learner identified' objectives
- skills acquisition
- personal developmental gains
- other social and community benefits

Successful interventions

These can be defined as interventions that can be shown to lead to the recruitment, retention, achievement or progression of adults (from the groups suggested in section 1.2.1), who would not normally engage in learning, or have not been involved in learning for some time.

1.3 Policy and practice background

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recognises the importance of increasing adults' opportunities for learning within the context of lifelong learning and acknowledges that there are inequities in access and provision. OECD countries have adopted a variety of approaches to target adult learning (OECD, 2003). Policies and strategies published by the European Commission (2003) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also reflect a desire to improve opportunities for adult learning and to remove obstacles to participation (UNESCO, 2002).

In common with a number of other countries, the UK Government regards higher participation in learning as crucial to economic productivity and social cohesion. The Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) *Strategy to 2006* has as one of its key strategic objectives to 'encourage and enable adults to learn, improve their skills and enrich their lives' (DfES, 2002, p 1).

The Government's Skills Strategy is designed to improve the skills of individuals and the workforce more generally (DfES, 2003). The Skills Strategy (primarily a strategy for England) acknowledges that, to raise skills, more adults need to be motivated and supported to re-engage with learning – particularly those who have not yet achieved a National Framework Level 2 qualification.

The Skills Strategy proposes several policy initiatives and interventions designed to encourage adults to learn, including financial incentives and support, better information, advice and guidance, and improved choice of opportunities.

Against this background, the LSC published its strategy for widening adult participation (Learning and Skills Council, 2003b). This proposes action in four cross-cutting areas:

- supporting learner interests

- promoting demand for learner opportunities
- developing a supply of diverse learning opportunities
- creating a learning environment for adults

The LSC's strategy emphasises that a key locus for action is at the local level, where it believes the true impact of efforts to widen participation will be seen.

1.4 Research background

Previous work in this field has indicated that a substantial body of literature is available on initiatives to address barriers to participation in adult learning. However, it appears that the quality of this research varies, as does the extent to which one can safely generalise from some of its conclusions. The LSC consultation document (Learning and Skills Council, 2003a) notes that locally-based studies tend to be variable and not consistent with each other, limiting their use when developing a national strategy. Moreover, some of the research applies primarily to the FE college sector, rather than to provision across the post-16 sector. Although a number of reviews have been conducted, none has adopted the rigour of the methodology developed by the EPPI-Centre.

Hillage and Aston (2001) conducted an independent, international review of literature on evidence and practice in attracting new learners for LSDA. In their review, Hillage and Aston point out that, while the international literature demonstrates clear interest in 'what works' in terms of generating and sustaining interest in learning, there is a lack of effective evaluation evidence. In particular, there is a dearth of data linking interventions to desired outcomes. The authors suggest that it will be useful to confirm these findings and to draw together existing evaluation evidence.

Macleod (2003) reinforces this argument:

> Because of a shortage of good summative evaluation evidence, we still know relatively little about the likely impact of initiatives and policies on participation by different groups, what works and how to apply the lessons learned. The research available does not always allow planners to develop an 'evidence-based' approach to devising widening participation strategies.... Knowing what has worked... would help in decisions about replicating good practice... and the extent to which it is possible to 'scale up' small initiatives. (Macleod, 2003, p 3)

In her work, McGivney observes that, over the years, policy and practice may have focused on the barriers to participation that are more easily addressed:

> Most institutional strategies to widen participation have been designed to remove the practical obstacles. Other personal barriers are less easy to change.... The major barriers to participation are attitudes, perceptions and expectations, although life situations and material circumstances also play a crucial part. Attitudes related to social class and gender roles are particularly resilient and difficult to change. (McGivney, 2001, p 70)

This is not to say that practical barriers (such as time, money and access) are less important to people who might participate in learning. Rather, it is to make the point that, in seeking to identify approaches that make a difference to

participation, we needed to examine strategies developed in relation to each perceived barrier to participation, not just those that have received most attention in policy and practical terms.

1.5 Authors, funders and other users of the review

The authors of the review are Sue Taylor, Deirdre Macleod, Nicholas Houghton, Rosie Zwart, and Darshan Sachdev. The funders are the DfES and the LSC.

We anticipate that the users of the review will include:

- national, regional and local LSCs
- post-16 learning providers
- the DfES
- other national agencies, including quality improvement organisations, concerned with ways to raise participation by disadvantaged adult groups
- International organisations with an interest in this field (e.g. OECD)
- UK research organisations

1.6 Review questions

The scope of the review was decided by the Review Group, in consultation with the Advisory Group, in the light of knowledge that literature on the subject was unlikely to yield a substantial body of robust evaluation evidence (see section 1.4). The research questions were therefore formulated to embrace not only evidence derived from studies with robust empirical methodologies, but also studies that, while not meeting these standards, nevertheless offer useful evidence likely to assist those who plan and organise widening participation interventions. These two standards are reflected in the questions set out below.

The research questions are as follows:

Which strategies have been reliably proven to raise, or not to raise, participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation?

Which strategies do, or do not, offer compelling evidence that they raise participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation?

With reference to strategies that provide evidence of raising participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation, how and why do these strategies work?

2. METHODS USED IN THE REVIEW

This chapter describes the methods used for this review. It begins by outlining methods for involving users, and goes on to describe how we searched for, and screened, studies, and how we coded them in order to create a systematic map of research in this area. This is followed by a description of methods used for the in-depth review and synthesis of evidence.

2.1 User-involvement

2.1.1 Approach and rationale

Members of the Advisory Group were selected because they represent organisations with a direct involvement in participation by adults in learning as planners, funders, policy-makers and providers, or have significant knowledge and experience of the subject through research or professional engagement.

2.1.2 Methods used

- Policy-makers and planners had a close involvement, via the Advisory Group, in deciding the scope and conceptual framework for this review.

- Learners' perceptions were examined through a focus group session designed and organised by the NIACE, and results were used to help shape the protocol. The focus group comprised a group of mature 'Access' students, mostly women, attending a further education college.

- Members of the Advisory Group were sent drafts of the conceptual framework, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and review-specific keywords for comment. Their responses were carefully considered at a series of meetings of the Review Group.

2.2 Identifying and describing studies

2.2.1 Defining relevant studies: inclusion and exclusion criteria

We set out to try to identify as many studies as possible that might answer one or more of the review questions. Only those studies based on verifiable evidence were to be included. Before identifying potential studies, the Review Group had lengthy discussions and from these agreed a set of criteria for including and excluding studies. When first drafted, there appeared to be some slight ambiguity in the wording and we took great care to eliminate this to make the criteria as clear as possible.

The review therefore excludes studies that are not evaluative, not on topic, not target population and not published after 1992.

1. Not evaluative

Studies that are descriptions, that is those that exclude any analytical or evaluative component or exploration of relationships between variables, showing whether the interventions, programmes or policies are successful in widening participation in learning. At a Review Group meeting in July, it was decided to amend this also to exclude exploration of relationships studies, so that only evaluations (either naturally occurring, or researcher-manipulated) were included in the map.

2. Not on topic

- Studies that do not report on whether a strategy has been successful or unsuccessful in widening participation in learning by adults

- Studies that do not report an intervention, programme or policy about:
    - reaching and engaging reluctant learners and those who experience barriers to learning
    - helping and supporting learners to succeed
    - enabling progression to further study or employment

3. Not target population

- Studies that are not concerned with adults who are not in formal or informal learning

- Interventions, programmes and policies aimed at adults who are:
    - already well-qualified (above national qualification framework (NQF) Level 3 or equivalent)
    - not disadvantaged in terms of education and access to the labour market

- Studies that do not report an intervention, programme or policy about:
    - adults who have not yet achieved a full NQF Level 2 qualification or equivalent
    - adults who live in an economically disadvantaged area or neighbourhood (e.g. as classified by the Index of Deprivation; areas eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal funding; areas of high unemployment and low income)
    - adults who have not been involved in learning since leaving school
    - Adults belonging to specific educationally and economically disadvantaged groups (see section 2.2.2)

- Those interventions, programmes or policies that are not specifically aimed at widening participation in learning among educationally and economically disadvantaged adults, even if this is an incidental bi-product

4. Not published after 1992

We decided that selecting studies published after 1992 would enable us to capture work relating to the impact of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, the Kennedy Report (1997) and the Learning and Skills Act 2001.

2.2.2 Identification of potential studies: search strategy

The scope of the literature review includes international research. This is a deliberate and important aspect of the review and reflects the lessons of LSDA's international research seminar in 2002.

Search sources

We identified studies by systematic searches of electronic databases and websites. To do this, we first investigated the kinds of terms needed for finding studies that might be 'on topic'. These fell into three categories: those that describe the population, those that describe the intervention context, and those that describe the type of education. These were combined, using Boolean operators to form a search string as follows:

> TI OR AB = Adult* OR "Adult Learning" OR "Minority Groups" OR "Underrepresented Groups" AND "Participation" OR "Widening Participation" OR "Access to Education" OR "Course Completion Rates" OR "Course Completion" OR "Program* Completion" OR "Program* Completion Rates" OR "Student Retention" OR "Student Recruitment" OR "Student Progression" AND "Community Education" OR "Adult Education" OR "Post Compulsory Education" OR "Work Based Learning" OR "Transitional Education" OR "Equal Education"

Major databases – such as Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and British Education Index (BEI) – were searched using two portals, Dialog or Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA). Using these portals, it was possible to use the whole string. Therefore, where possible, the same search string was used for each database and, moreover, the same portal was able to search more than one database with this one string. However, for websites such as the DfES and Campaign for Learning, it was necessary to modify it and use a much smaller number of terms. For these websites (25 in total), searching and screening were combined. Due to the tight timescale for the review, a decision was taken not to undertake any handsearches of journals. (Appendix 2 provides a list of databases and websites searched.)

A search log was created to record details of each search. In the case of searches of electronic databases, the following details were recorded: database searched; search strategy; number of 'hits'; name of downloaded file; type of filter used; name of database into which the results were imported; time and date of search; name of person who undertook the search; and any further notes about the search. For website searches, the following details were recorded: website searched (name and URL); details of relevant studies identified; time and date of search; name of person who undertook the search; and any further notes about the search.

2.2.3 Screening studies: applying inclusion and exclusion criteria

Details of studies found were stored on two EndNote databases. The first contained details of all studies found and the second of all studies that were judged to meet the review's inclusion and exclusion criteria on the basis of title and abstract only. Studies found by hand that met the review's criteria, were also entered on the first database. The EndNote software automatically assigned a

number to each study when first entered and we used this number to trace and track studies thereafter. Sometimes, on closer examination, we found that one paper reported more than one study. In this case, new numbers were assigned and a note of the new tracking numbers made on the previous entry. The EndNote databases were also used to store information about why a study was excluded and the name of the reviewer. Details of all studies that met the inclusion criteria and were therefore included in the map and in-depth review were stored on an EPPI-Reviewer database, keeping the same numbers they were originally assigned on EndNote.

2.2.4 Characterising included studies

Studies meeting the review's inclusion and exclusion criteria were assigned descriptive keywords, to produce a descriptive map of research activity. One set of generic keywords was provided by the EPPI-Centre and these were applied using definitions specified in the EPPI-Centre's Keywording Strategy (2002a). Additional keywords, which are specific to the context of this review, were devised and also applied. For a list of these review-specific keywords, see Appendix 2.3. All studies that have been assigned keywords were added to the EPPI-Centre's Research Evidence in Education Library (REEL).

2.2.5 Identifying and describing studies: quality-assurance process

We took great care to define the terms used to screen studies, so that those screening against inclusion and exclusion criteria would interpret them in the same way. To ensure that all reviewers were making the same judgements, they each screened the same first 30 independently. Where there were discrepancies, these were discussed. In addition, an experienced member of the Review Group checked a random sample of those screened by the other reviewers. Where there were differences, the reason for these was discussed. Where reviewers felt unable to make a decision, they discussed it with a colleague. When two reviewers could not decide, it was taken to the project manager for a final decision. Checks of the decisions made on 20 random studies (1.9% of the total 1,058 potential includes) at full document screening were made by a member of the EPPI-Centre.

A similar procedure was used for assuring the reliability of assigning keywords. Three studies were being keyworded by all reviewers, to ensure that the same decisions were being made. Where there were discrepancies, these were discussed. As a second reliability check, 16 studies were keyworded by two reviewers working independently. A staff member from the EPPI-Centre assisted by also doing a quality-check of 20 random keyworded papers (24% of the keywording exercise).

2.3 In-depth review

2.3.1 Moving from broad characterisation (mapping) to in-depth review

A descriptive map was produced, describing research activity in the field investigated by this review. This used frequency counts and cross-tabulations of the assigned keywords to reveal characteristics of the studies, identifying where research activity had been concentrated and where there were gaps. The map was also used to identify the most suitable subset of studies for answering the review questions.

Studies were excluded from the in-depth review on the following grounds:

1. They were from developing countries.

This was because their findings were considered to be less transferable to a UK (Western) widening participation context.

2. They were not keyworded as the 'topic focus of study' widening adult participation

It was decided that studies in the in-depth review should have widening adult participation as their main focus of study rather than as an additional focus to another topic area.

3. They were not designated 'external evaluation' under A.1 study type for review-specific keywords.

In order to find 'robust' evidence and look more closely at 'effective' widening participation strategies, the Review Group decided that external evaluations would be the most suitable study type to include in the in-depth review.

4. They did not have among their objectives, at least three of the following from the objective of the intervention A.7.

Engagement intervention objectives

A.7.1 Outreach

A.7.2 Targeting

A.7.3 Stimulating demand

A.7.4 Information, advice and guidance

Achievement and progression intervention objectives

A.7.8 Retention

A.7.9 Achievement

A.7.10 Qualification or assessment reform

A.7.11 Progression

5. They did not have at least one objective of the intervention studied (A7) under engagement, AND at least one objective of intervention studied under achievement/progression.

There is no single definition of widening participation or a consensus on what is involved when trying to widen participation in learning. In this review, the following spectrum was devised; objective of interventions were mapped (see Table 3.20) and eight of the most important objectives from the fourteen were identified and have been categorised as falling into two broader groups – *the engagement of learners* and *strategies which focus on the achievement and progression of learners.* The Review Group decided that studies in the in-depth review had to have not only at least three objectives from these two broader categories (exclusion criteria 4) but that studies encapsulated both kinds of objectives (exclusion criteria 5).

Overall, in order to narrow the field to a coherent and manageable subset of studies, the decision was made to include studies in the in-depth review that were:

(i) relevant to the review topic (exclusion criteria 1 and 2)

(ii) contained robust evidence (exclusion criterion 3)

(iii) covered a range of strategies relevant to widening participation (exclusion criteria 4 and 5)

2.3.2 Detailed description of studies in the in-depth review

Studies identified as meeting the criteria were analysed in-depth, using the EPPI-Centre's software (EPPI-Reviewer) and data-extraction tool, *Guidelines for Extracting Data and Quality Assessing Primary Studies in Educational Research* (EPPI-Centre, 2002b). This asks detailed questions about the aims and findings of a study, as well as about the methods used for sampling, collecting and analysing data.

2.3.3 Assessing quality of studies and weight of evidence for the review question

EPPI-Centre tools were used to make explicit the weight of evidence apportioned to each study. Three discrete components were considered:

- A: Soundness of studies (internal methodological coherence), based upon the study only

- B: Appropriateness of the research design and analysis used for answering the review question

- C: Relevance of the study topic focus (from the sample, measures, scenario, or other indicator of the focus of the study) to the review question

- D: An overall weighting for each study, based on A, B and C

The first review question seeks 'reliable proof' of success or failure in widening adult participation; and the second, 'compelling evidence' – a less demanding criterion, applied to studies that are judged by the reviewers, on the basis of the relevance of the study and thus the study's ability to offer useful insights.

Lower WoE studies were not excluded from the synthesis, but to be judged as offering 'reliable proof', the Review Group expected studies to be high-rated overall (WoE D).

Studies were considered to be 'compelling' using the WoE judgements applied to all studies included in the in-depth review. Two decisions were applied to studies based firstly on criteria C: one decision for studies rated as high and one decision for studies rated as medium.

The following criteria applied:

3.   Studies rated high on criteria C were judged as 'compelling'.

4.   Studies rated medium on criteria C and at least medium on D (overall WoE) were judged as 'compelling'.

The idea of compelling is situated around the relevance of the topic and the extent to which studies can offer some guidance on effective widening participation strategies. Studies with high WoE C would closely match our target population and therefore automatically qualify as providing some compelling guidance for policy and practice in the UK. Studies judged as medium for WoE C would be less closely matched to our target population of under-represented group who have traditionally low participation and would need stronger methodological/internal coherence in order to provide 'compelling' evidence (WoE D).

2.3.4 Synthesis of evidence

The evidence was synthesised to group and amalgamate material from the studies which answered the review questions and which met the quality criteria for appropriateness and methodology. This was done by grouping studies according to three main dimensions of widening adult participation and by indicating, for each study in the in-depth review, the overall review-specific WoE.

2.3.5 In-depth review: quality-assurance process

Data-extraction and assessment of the weight of evidence brought by the study to address the review question were conducted by pairs of reviewers, working independently, and then comparing their decisions and coming to a consensus. A member of the EPPI-Centre carried out a reliability check by data-extracting a subset of the sample of studies. The five studies that were data-extracted amount to 29% of the total number of studies included in the in-depth review.

3. IDENTIFYING AND DESCRIBING STUDIES: RESULTS

This chapter reports on the number and characteristics of studies at each stage of the systematic review. Figure 3.1 displays a detailed breakdown of the number of studies identified, excluded and retained at each stage of the review. Section 3.2 discusses the characteristics of all keyworded studies and section 3.3 describes the quality-assurance checks implemented at each stage.

3.1 Studies included from searching and screening

A total of 4,986 papers identified as a result of the search strategy described in Chapter 2 were screened, based on a reading of their title and/or abstract, resulting in the identification of 1,129 potential 'includes'. Of these reports, 1,058 were obtained and the full document screened; the remaining 71 were unobtainable by the cut-off date of 30 August 2004. Following full-text screening, a total of 82 studies were considered to meet the inclusion criteria. The filtering of the papers through the review process is shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Filtering of papers from searching to map to synthesis

Continued

N = 88 papers

1. Not from developed countries
N = 5

2. Study topic not widening participation
N = 36

Linked reports*
N = 6

Studies in map but excluded from in-depth review*
N = 65

3. Not external evaluation
N = 3

4. Not chosen objective of intervention topics**
N = 20

3. Characterisation

Systematic map
Studies included
N = 82

5. Not both types of intervention topics
N = 1

4. In-depth review

In-depth review
Studies included
N = 17

* Please note that one study may be described in more than one paper. These are described as linked reports and only the main paper was included in the systematic map.

**See section 2.3.1 for full description of exclusion criteria

3.2 Characteristics of the included studies

Eighty-two studies met the selection criteria for the keywording stage. Each study was systematically analysed to determine its value to the review. There were two types of keywording:

- generic – a standard EPPI-Centre keyword list
- review-specific – a set of keywords specifically designed for this review

The tables below define the range of these 82 studies using frequency counts and cross-tabulations. They analyse the studies by country, topic, curriculum, population, location, setting, level of intervention, type of intervention, study type, type of learning programme, mode of learning programme, age of learners and review location.

Studies by country

Table 3.1 provides details on the number and proportion of included studies according to the country in which they were published. The majority of studies were undertaken in the USA and the UK. Australia also provided a handful of valuable studies.

Table 3.1: Country/countries in which the studies were carried out (N = 82, mutually exclusive)

Country (generic)	Number
USA	42
UK	29
Australia	6
Uganda	1
Botswana	1
Kenya	1
Nepal	1
Mali	1
Total	*82*

Studies by topic focus

Using the generic EPPI-Centre keywords, Table 3.2 shows the dominance of studies on teaching and learning, equal opportunities, and organisation and management. It should be noted that these are not exclusive categories. Some studies have more than one topic focus (for example, equal opportunities *and* teaching and learning).

Table 3.2: Studies by topic focus (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Topic focus (generic)	Number
Teaching and learning	41
Equal opportunities	39
Organisation and management	32
Curriculum	18
Other topic focus	12
Policy	13
Assessment	12
Methodology	2

Table 3.3 lists themes of other topics noted by reviewers.

Table 3.3: Other topic focus (N = 12, mutually exclusive)

Other topic focus	Number
Service delivery	1
Information, advice and guidance	1
Social exclusion, community development	1
Funding programmes	1
Access to education; educational technology	1
Progression	1
Health education	1
Effectiveness of information.	1
Accreditation; women's education	1
Effectiveness of educational programmes	1
Effectiveness of work and basic skills training.	1
Career guidance counselling	1
Total	*12*

Review-specific topic focus

Table 3.4 shows the number of studies that focus on each review-specific topic. Educational disadvantage and widening adult participation are the most common themes. Studies looking at widening access and socially excluded groups also feature strongly.

Table 3.4: Review-specific topic focus (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Topic focus (review-specific) N=82	Number
Educational disadvantage	46
Widening adult participation	45
Widening access	34
Social exclusion/socially excluded groups	33
Other	15

Table 3.5 lists other review-specific topics recorded by reviewers with studies focusing on training in the workplace being the most prominent but still in a minority compared with studies focusing on education disadvantage and widening adult participation.

Table 3.5: Review-specific topic focus (N = 15, not mutually exclusive)

Other topic focus (review-specific)	Number
Workplace training/learning	6
Community development	2
Effectiveness of training intervention	2
Personal development	1
Progression	1
Coping strategies for care givers	1
Advice and Guidance	1
The benefits of accreditation	1
Workplace training/learning	6

Generic topic focus/review-specific topic focus

Table 3.6 cross-tabulates generic topic focus and review-specific topic focus, to show the main areas of overlap. The main overlaps with the review-specific topics relevant to widening adult participation occur for studies concerned with equal opportunities, organisation and management, and teaching and learning. There are fewer overlaps with the curriculum, assessment and policy.

Table 3.6: Cross-tab report – generic topic focus/review-specific topic focus (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

	Widening adult participation	Widening access	Educational disadvantage	Social exclusion/ socially excluded groups	Other
Assessment	7	4	5	5	1
Classroom management	0	0	0	0	0
Curriculum	13	8	15	3	4
Equal opportunities	23	23	29	19	2
Methodology	1	0	1	1	1
Organisation/management	20	16	26	13	3
Policy	7	6	8	8	0
Teacher careers	0	0	0	0	0
Teaching and learning	22	16	25	14	8
Other topic focus	8	9	5	5	5

Studies by curriculum focus

Table 3.7 shows that studies with no curriculum focus constitute the largest group, followed by studies concerned with literacy. Table 3.8 lists other curriculum topics noted by reviewers.

Table 3.7: Studies by curriculum focus (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Curriculum (generic)	Number
The material does not focus on curriculum issues	40
Literacy – first language	35
Literacy further languages	20
Other curriculum	14
Mathematics	10
Vocational	9
ICT	8
Citizenship	2
Music	2
PSE	2
Science	2
Art	1
Business Studies	1
General	1

Table 3.8: Other curriculum focus (N = 14, not mutually exclusive)

Other curriculum	Number
Parenting	3
Family education	1
A range of HE topics	1
Basic skills	1
Pre-vocational	1
AIDS awareness	1
GED	1
Variety of curriculum topics covered	1
Personal and social development training	1
ESOL	1
Literacy for those whose first language is not English	1
Cherokee nation history, culture and language	1

Curriculum focus (generic) and topic focus (review-specific)

Table 3.9 cross-tabulates generic curriculum focus and review-specific topic focus to show the main areas of overlap. Studies that overlap with the review-specific topics relevant to widening adult participation are overwhelmingly concerned with literacy both as a first language and further languages, or have no curriculum focus. A few relate to vocational learning.

Table 3.9: Cross-tab report – generic curriculum focus/review-specific topic focus (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

	Widening adult participation	Widening access	Educational disadvantage	Social exclusion/ socially excluded groups	Other
Art	1	1	1	1	0
Business studies	1	1	1	1	0
Citizenship	2	0	2	1	0
Cross-curricular	0	0	0	0	0
Design and technology	0	0	0	0	0
Environment	0	0	0	0	0
General	0	0	0	1	0
Geography	0	0	0	0	0
Hidden	0	0	0	0	0
History	0	0	0	0	0
ICT	4	4	6	5	1
Literacy – first language	19	12	23	12	5
Literacy further languages	10	6	16	7	5
Literature	0	0	0	0	0
Mathematics	9	5	9	2	3
Music	2	1	1	1	0
PSE	0	0	0	2	0
Physical education	0	0	0	0	0
Religious education	0	0	0	0	0
Science	2	2	2	1	0
Vocational	6	6	7	5	1
Other curriculum	7	5	9	7	0
Does not focus on curriculum issues	19	14	16	14	8

Studies by population

Table 3.10 indicates that the largest group of studies focuses on learners. Teaching staff and 'other populations' are also the subject of a significant number of studies.

Table 3.10: Studies by population (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Population focus (generic)	Number
Learners	67
Teaching staff	24
Other population focus	18
Non-teaching staff	13
Parents	10
Senior management	5
Other education practitioners	5
Government	2
Local education authority officers	1

Considering Table 3.5, which showed that six of the studies were concerned with workplace training, it is expected that the other population would reflect this with studies looking at both employers and employees. The remaining breakdown of the other population focus ranges from the general community to specific sections of the community, such as parents under the age of 24, black and minority ethnic groups and welfare recipients.

Table 3.11 shows the characteristics of the 'other populations'.

Table 3.11: Other population focus (N = 18, not mutually exclusive)

Other population focus	Number
Employers	4
Employees	2
Partnerships of unions and employers	1
Adults from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups	1
Potential learners	1
Local residents in WUC areas	1
Welfare recipients	1
Community members, offenders, etc.	1
Leaders of community projects	1
Employees in the workplace	1
Learning Partnership Management	1
Employers, IAG workers, potential learners	1
Community	1
Parents under the age of 24, etc.	1

Characteristics of learners

Table 3.12 shows the review-specific populations of learners described in the studies. Several studies have more than one population focus. The largest groups of studies focus on learners with poor basic skills, learners from ethnic minority groups and unemployed learners.

Table 3.12: Review-specific population focus (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Population (review-specific)	Number
Poor basic skills	47
Ethnic minority	22
Unemployed	20
Below level 2	17
Social class	15
Industry sector	17
Reluctant learners	13
Not in education, employment or training	14
Learning difficulties and/or disabilities	11
Disengaged learners	8
Older learners	7
Homeless	5
Refugees and asylum applicants	5
By age	2
Staff responsible for interventions to widen adult participation	3
Travellers	0

Studies by location of setting

Table 3.13 shows the location of the settings described in the studies. Significant numbers of studies focus on rural areas and inner city urban areas. Inner city and rural areas are represented in almost equal numbers. Forty-four studies were not keyworded for location and setting. This was a result of the Review Group not being able to accurately categorise the studies under the headings available, as the majority of studies were either more wide ranging or did not report exactly where the setting was located.

Table 3.13: Location of setting (N = 47, not mutually exclusive)

Location of setting (review-specific)	Number
Urban area – inner city	16
Rural area	12
Urban area – other	8
Urban area – small town	5
Neighbourhood	3
Urban area – suburb	3
Not coded	44

Studies by educational setting

Table 3.14 shows the educational settings described in the studies. Several studies are concerned with more than one educational setting. Post-compulsory education institutions, the workplace and 'other educational settings' comprise the largest groups of studies.

Table 3.14: Educational setting (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Educational setting (generic)	Number
Other educational setting	30
Post-compulsory education institution	23
Workplace	22
Community centre	12
Home	8
Local education authority	5
Primary school	5
Higher education institution	4
Secondary school	3
Correctional institution	2
Nursery school	1
Special needs school	1

Table 3.15 indicates the varied characteristics of the 'other educational settings', many of them community based and many studies set in more than one location.

Table 3.15: Other educational setting (N = 30, not mutually exclusive)

Other educational settings	Number
Variety of settings	6
Community-based settings	5
Junior / Community colleges	3
Distance learning	2
Radio broadcasts	2
Libraries and high street shops	1
A collaborative social services agency	1
A classroom setting (unspecified)	1
Housing authority	1
IAG Partnerships	1
Church	1
Literacy centres – based either outside or in churches	1
In rural villages	1
Mostly outdoors or in borrowed space	1
Employment training centre	1
Family development centres	1
Long-term care facility	1

Studies by setting of intervention

Table 3.16 indicates the review-specific settings of the interventions described in the studies. Studies of interventions based in further education colleges and in the workplace are dominant. However, the largest group consists of studies that

describe 'other' settings. Under this umbrella (see Table 3.17), a variety of settings are noted by reviewers; these have been grouped under thematic headings of community, distance, educational, work-related and various.

Table 3.16: Setting of intervention (review-specific) (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Setting of intervention (review-specific)	Number
Other	28
Workplace	22
FE college	18
Adult and community learning centre	11
Neighbourhood learning centre	9
Community centre	9
School	7
Home	7
Higher education institution	4
Prison	3
Church/faith setting	3

Table 3.17: Other settings of interventions (N = 28, mutually exclusive)

Other settings	
Community settings	**8 studies**

Examples
- Libraries, high street shops
- Mostly outdoors or in borrowed indoor space
- Educational projects for homeless people held at different venues (e.g. TRACKS; Advice Café; and both St. Mungo's Professional Mentoring Project and Training for Life Peer Mentoring which had a central location project base for clients to access their services)
- Local education authority (two studies)
- Libraries, community organisations, training centres, residential
- A collaborative social services agency and the community room of a local housing project
- Housing authority

Distance settings	**6 studies**

Example:
- Digital college (Coleg Digidol)
- Online, linked to 'classrooms' (institution not specified)
- Radio broadcast (i.e. virtual)
- UK Online centres

Educational settings	**5 studies**

Examples
- Local public adult schools, community colleges or other community-based organisations
- Specialist residential training providers (two studies)
- Junior college

Work-related settings	**2 studies**

Examples
- Union hall
- Employment training centre

Other settings	**2 studies**

Examples
- External institutions
- Long-term care facility

Variety of settings	**5 studies**

Table 3.18: Studies by level of intervention (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Level of intervention (review-specific)	Number
Partnership of providers/agencies	25
Individual learning provider	20
National government or national government agency – other	16
National government or national government agency – England	12
Regional agency – federal state	9
National government or national government agency – UK	5
Local agency	5
Regional agency – local LSC	3
Regional agency – RDA	1
National government or national government agency – NI	1

Studies by type of intervention

Table 3.19 looks at the nature of the interventions described in the studies. It indicates that they are overwhelmingly concerned with practice-based interventions, although significant numbers of studies describe funding and policy interventions.

Table 3.19: Type of intervention (review-specific) (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Type of intervention (review-specific)	Number
Practice	64
Funding initiative	17
Policy	16
Plan	1
Other	2

Studies by intervention objective

As stated in section 1.2.4, this review defines 'widening participation' as incorporating a range of objectives, from targeting learners and stimulating demand through to retention, achievement and progression. These interventions are grouped into categories in Table 3.20, showing the three main stages of widening participation:

- targeting, outreach and engagement (A)

- participation and retention (B)

- achievement/progression (C)

Studies that do not describe these objectives are categorised as Other/Outside Spectrum (D).

Table 3.20 indicates large numbers of studies dealing with each of the three stages of intervention. Clearly, many studies range across the whole spectrum of

widening participation objectives. It is, however, striking that few appear to deal specifically with retention or with the reform of qualifications and assessment.

Table 3.20: Objective of intervention (review-specific) (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Objective of intervention (review-specific)	Number	
Targeting	28	A
Stimulating demand	22	A
Outreach	19	A
Information, advice and guidance	16	A
Learning support	20	B
Learner support	17	B
Curriculum development	18	B
Retention	4	B
Achievement	38	C
Progression	28	C
Qualification or assessment reform	4	C
Organisational development	14	D
Staff development / training	11	D
Other	7	D

Type and mode of learning

Table 3.21 indicates the type of learning described in the studies. Informal learning and short courses occur frequently as well as a large category of 'other' types of learning programme. Table 3.22 looks at learning mode: most of the learning described in the studies is part-time; very little is fulltime.

Table 3.21: Type of learning programme (review-specific) (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Type of learning programme (review-specific)	Number
Other	20
Informal	19
Short course	20
Formal	16
Distance learning	7
Long course	4
'Taster course'	2

Table 3.22: Mode of learning (review-specific) (N = 62)

Mode of learning (review-specific)	Number
Part-time	35
Other	18
Day release	8
Fulltime	6

Age of learners

Table 3.23 indicates the age of learners described in the studies. Most studies are concerned with learners aged 19+; a much smaller group of studies deals specifically with learners aged over 55.

Table 3.23: Age of learners (review-specific) (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Age of learners (review-specific)	Number
19+	58
25–54	33
19–24	26
55+	20

Study type

Table 3.24 indicates that the vast majority of the studies were naturally occurring evaluations rather than researcher-manipulated evaluations.

Table 3.24: Study type (N = 82)

Study type (generic)	Number
Evaluation: Naturally occurring	76
Evaluation: Researcher-manipulated	6
Total	*82*

Review-specific study type

Table 3.25 shows that most of the studies were external evaluations. Some studies involved more than one type of evaluation, but few case studies and action-research reports were included.

Table 3.25: Review-specific study type (N = 82, not mutually exclusive)

Study type (review-specific)	Number
External evaluation	65
Self-evaluation	11
Case study of practice	4
Action research	4

3.3 Identifying and describing studies: quality-assurance results

The quality-assurance method used for screening decisions is explained in section 2.2.5. Throughout, care was taken to ensure all reviewers applied screening decisions consistently. To begin, all reviewers screened the same 30 papers, working on their own and then discussed any differences. These were mostly about the population and at first the reviewers found it difficult to interpret the definition used for the review.

Next, a random sample of screening decisions by each reviewer was also screened blind by a second researcher. For the first check, a random sample of 10% (nine items) was checked. For five of these, there was agreement; for three, there was difference in the interpretation of the population and, for one, the first reviewer had coded it as include but the second coded it as exclude. The differences were discussed but not considered important, because the differences would not have resulted in the exclusion of studies that might have been relevant. For the second check, 10 items (5%) were checked. For eight of these, there was agreement; for one, there was difference in the interpretation of population (although agreement that it should be excluded). However, for one, the first reviewer had excluded the study, while the second reviewer disagreed. This was considered more serious, because, if repeated, studies that might be relevant could be excluded and this would have had the potential to bias the outcome of the review. Therefore, a second sample of excluded studies by this researcher was checked (10 studies) but no further disagreements about inclusion were uncovered. For the third reviewer who undertook screening, a random sample of 10 items (5%) was checked and there was complete agreement for all of them.

When more screening had been completed, a further random sample of 18 items (by all reviewers) was screened blind by a second reviewer. There were three disagreements: one about population, one about whether it was considered to be on topic, and one where it had been screened to be included, but the reviewer doing the second screen considered that it was not evaluative.

In addition to in-house, quality-assurance checks, a random sample of 18 items was checked by an EPPI-Centre staff member, working blind. For seven of these there was agreement; for one, the decision was to exclude, whereas the original reviewer had included it, while for another the result was the other way round, which was considered more of a concern by the Review Group. All the other disagreements were about population. Although the EPPI-Centre staff member had interpreted it differently, it was agreed that the Review Group members had been interpreting it among themselves in the same way.

4. IN-DEPTH REVIEW: RESULTS

4.1 Comparing the studies selected for in-depth review with the total studies in the systematic map

The 17 studies meeting the criteria for in-depth review are listed in full in section 6.1. The following analyses show some characteristics of studies in the in-depth review (N=17), compared to those in the systematic map (N=82)

Firstly, comparison between the systematic map and the in-depth review in terms of the countries where studies were carried out is shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Country in which study is carried out: comparison between in-depth review and systematic map
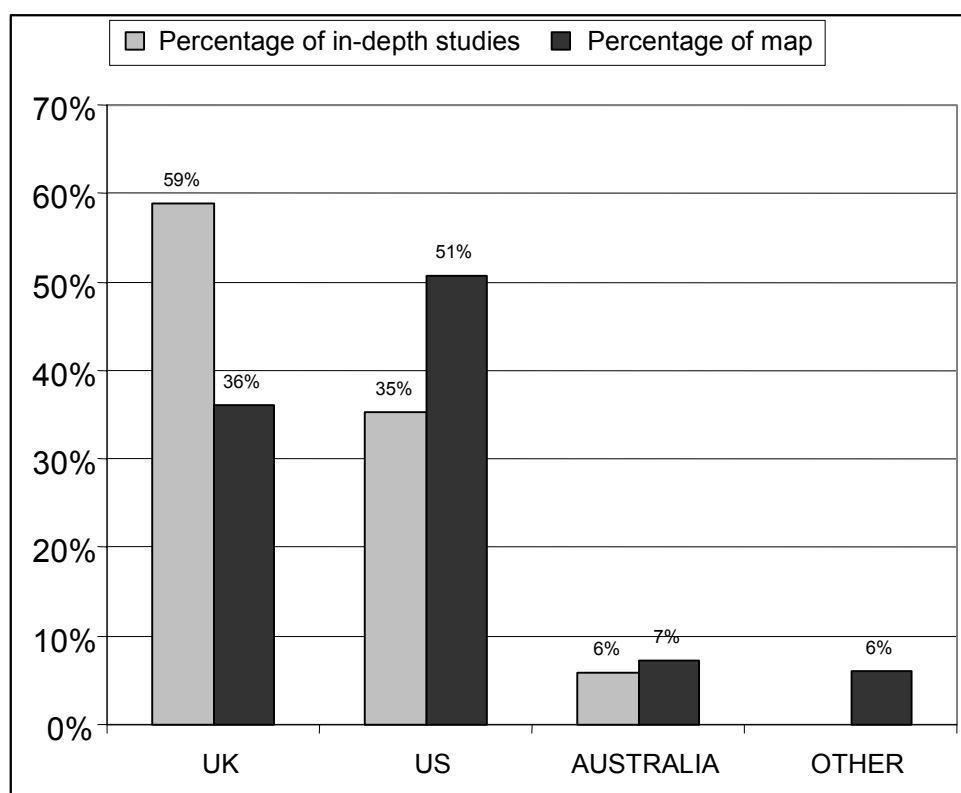
The chart shows that the in-depth review contained a higher proportion of British studies and a lower proportion of American studies. This is due to the fact that studies from developing countries were excluded and that the inclusion criteria favoured studies about particular types of interventions which were more relevant to the UK policy context.

The criteria for inclusion favoured interventions which addressed engagement, achievement and progression. This is reflected in Figure 4.2, which compares the topic focus of the intervention for in-depth studies with those in the systematic map.

Figure 4.2: Topic focus of intervention in study: comparison between in-depth review and systematic map (not mutually exclusive)
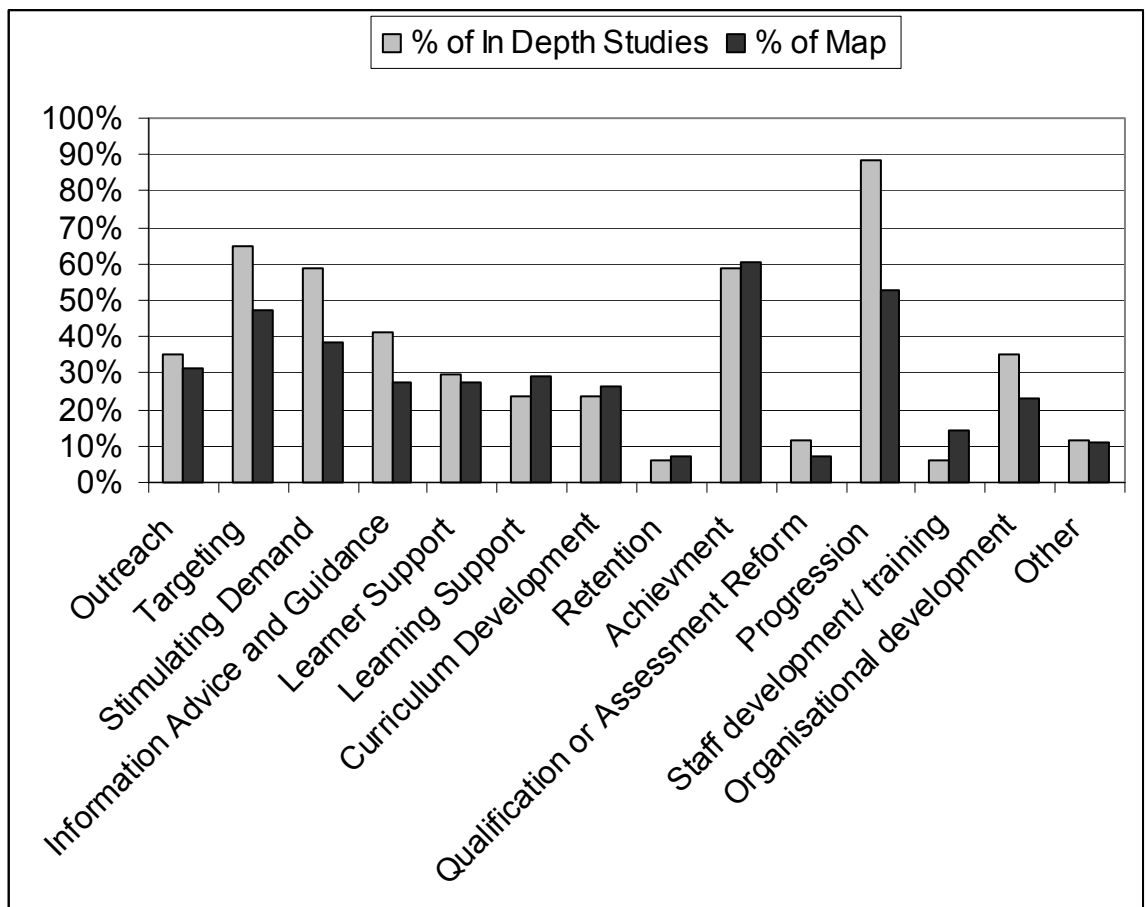
The chart clearly shows that a high percentage of studies in the in-depth review were about interventions related to targeting, stimulating demand, achievement and particularly progression. This is a result of the inclusion criteria set for the in-depth review which excluded studies which did not relate to these areas.

Figure 4.3 shows the review-specific population focus of studies in the in-depth review compared with those on the map.

Figure 4.3: Review-specific population focus: comparison between in-depth review and systematic map (not mutually exclusive)
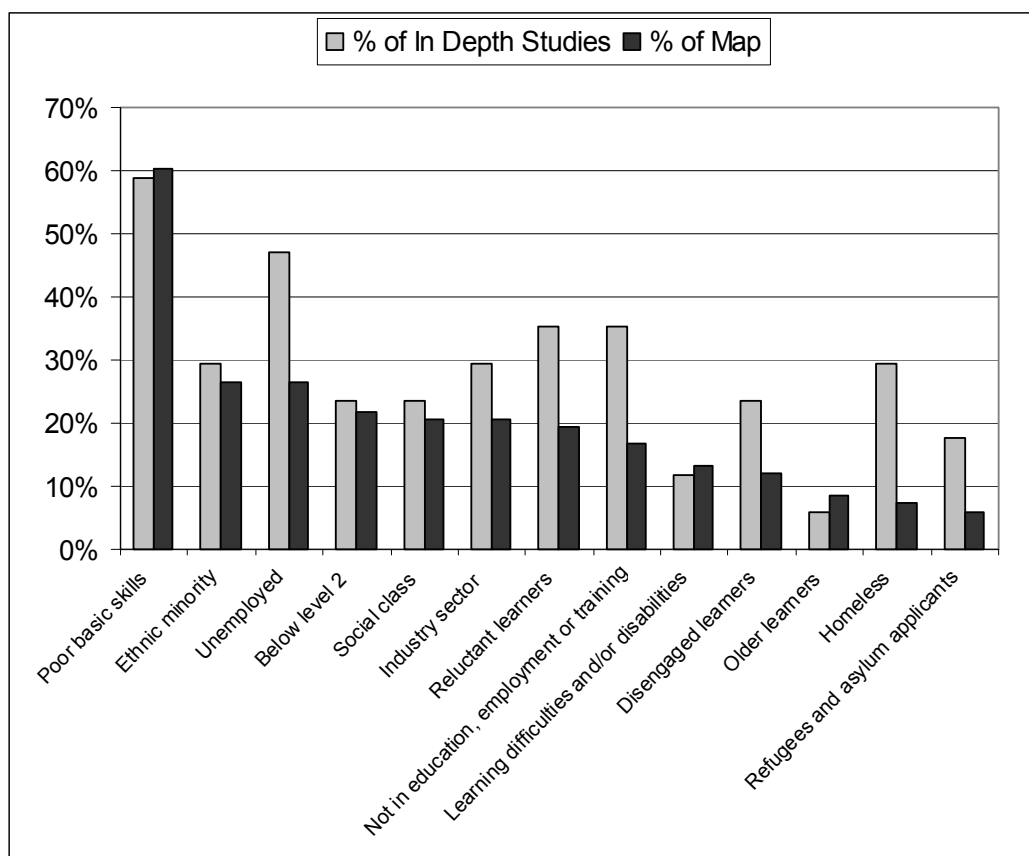
The chart indicates that, in general, studies in the review had a similar population focus to those in the map, and that, overall, a large proportion of studies were concerned with learners with poor basic skills. In general, the in-depth review was representative of populations in the map. However, there were sizeably higher proportions of studies focusing on those who were reluctant learners, unemployed, not in education, employment or training (NEET), or those who were homeless.

4.2 Weight of evidence (WoE)

Table 4.1 shows the weight of evidence (WoE) of each study:

- *Column A* makes a judgement on the soundness of the study and its internal coherence and execution of the design in its own terms. Thus, it is a judgement

on how well the study was carried out in terms of accepted good practice and logical consistency between aims, methods, and conclusions.

- *Column B* makes a judgement about the appropriateness of the research design and analysis shown in each study, *for this review*.

- *Column C* is also specific to this review. It makes a judgement about the relevance of the focus of the study *for this review*.

- *Column D* is the most important of the four columns and is used to guide the commentary on the studies in this section of the review. Column D gives an overall weight of evidence to each study, based on quality of execution, appropriateness of design and relevance of focus, *for this review*. The guidelines adopted by the research team for making this judgement are as follows:
  - The overall weight of evidence (column D) cannot be higher than the rating for the internal coherence and trustworthiness of the study (column A)
  - The overall weight of evidence (column D) may be lower than the rating for internal coherence and trustworthiness (column A). This will be the case if either the research design and analysis (column B) or the relevance of the study topic focus (column C) are given a lower rating than the rating given in column A.

Taking the 17 studies in the in-depth review, the numbers of studies given each overall rating are as follows:

- Two studies received a high rating (BMRB, 2001; St Pierre *et al.,* 1998).

- One study received a medium-high rating (Paris, 1992).

- Seven studies received a medium rating (Grief and Taylor, 2002; Scheer, 1993, Shaw and Armistead, 2002; Taylor, 2002; Tyers *et al*., 2003; Young *et al*., 1995; Zandniapour and Conway, 2001).

- One study received a medium-low rating (Robinson and Hughes, 1999).

- Six studies received a low rating (Coats, 1999; Field *et al*., 2001; HA Associates, 2002; Hawaii University and College of Manoa, 1992; McRoberts and Leitch, 1998; Squirrell, 2001).

Table 4.1: Weight of evidence (WoE)

Study	Soundness of study (internal coherence) (M11)	Appropriateness of research design and analysis for this review	Relevance of study topic focus for this review	Weight of evidence for this review
	A	B	C	D
BMRB (2001)	High	High	High	High
Coats (1999)	Low	Medium-low	Medium	Low
Field *et al.* (2001)	Low	Low	High	Low
Grief and Taylor (2002)	Medium	High	High	Medium
HA Associates (2002)	Low	Medium	Medium	Low
Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992)	Low	Low	Medium	Low
McRoberts and Leitch (1998)	Low	Medium	Medium	Low
Paris (1992)	High	Medium	High	Medium-high
Robinson and Hughes (1999)	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium-low
Scheer (1993)	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Shaw and Armistead (2002)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
St Pierre *et al.* (1998)	High	High	High	High
Squirrell (2001)	Low	Low	High	Low
Taylor (2002)	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Tyers *et al.* (2003)	Medium-high	Medium	High	Medium
Young *et al.* (1995)	Medium-high	High	Medium	Medium
Zandniapour and Conway (2001)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium

4.3 Synthesis of findings: evidence of effective/less effective strategies to widen adult participation

This section relates the findings of each study to three key aspects of widening participation:

- outreach, targeting and engagement

- participation and retention

- achievement and progression

These three headings are based on the detailed list of intervention objectives used to keyword the studies (see Figure 4.2 and Appendix 2.3). They represent the three main stages of intervention to widen participation.

Each study is reported under the heading(s) for which its findings are most relevant. The summaries and conclusion in this report are based on studies that are of either a high or medium overall weight of evidence (WoE D). However, studies of low weight are also included since they provide supporting evidence and contribute to the overall conclusions. Although the findings of low weight evidence have to be treated with caution due to methodological weaknesses, in a large majority of cases, studies of low weight of evidence did not differ greatly in their conclusions from the medium- and high-weighted studies.

4.3.1 Outreach, targeting and engagement

Six studies provide evidence on this topic (Field *et al*., 2001; HA Associates, 2002; Shaw and Armistead, 2002; Squirrell, 2001; Tyers *et al*., 2003; Hawaii University and College of Manoa, 1992). Reviewers gave none of these a high rating. Two (Shaw and Armistead, 2002; Tyers *et al*., 2003) were medium rated. The remaining four were found to have weaknesses in methodology or in reporting that make their findings and conclusions less robust; these have a low rating. Evidence from the low-rated studies is summarised where reviewers judge that it is pertinent to the review questions, notwithstanding the weaknesses observed.

Medium weight of evidence

The **medium-rated** study by **Tyers *et al*** (2003) examines the impact upon 'hard to reach' learners of Adult Guidance Pilots (AGPs). AGPs were established by the DfES to explore the additional value of offering in-depth guidance in ways that complements basic provision of information and advice already offered through IAG partnerships. The reviewers state that the study provides compelling evidence about an effective strategy for widening participation.

The study found the following:

- AGPs were successful in reaching 'hard to reach' groups. AGPs appear to have been particularly successful in attracting men, minority ethnic individuals, those not in-paid work and those with low qualifications. Evidence of the success of AGPs includes the fact that nine per cent of AGP clients had improved their

qualification level since their first contact. Gains had been particularly marked among those who began with no qualifications. Also, more than one-quarter of individuals who had been unemployed for less than six months had found work following contact with an AGP. Of those unemployed for more than six months, around 17 per cent had found a full- or part-time job.

- A presence within the community was key to attracting clients from minority ethnic groups. Outreach and word of mouth were found to be the most common way to engage new clients. The authors observe that these forms of communication are particularly important since many potential clients are believed to mistrust authority.

- Clients preferred face-to-face services to telephone and email services. Outreach was important to the service delivery.

- Tailored support and networking, and partnerships between different organisations involved in delivering the pilots were important in achieving success. Client needs could be communicated via the pilots, which meant that local provision could be changed to meet client needs. Tailored flexible provision which involves outreach is expensive, but necessary for targeting the right group.

The study makes a number of relevant observations on practice:

- The nature of the target group needs to be clear. Successful pilots knew not only the barriers faced by their potential clients, but also what they would respond to. If this knowledge is not already available in an organisation, it should either be bought in, or ascertained from a feasibility study.

- For some client groups, it is not only the individual that has to be considered in guidance delivery. People around that person are also important, particularly in ensuring that guidance results in positive actions. In some cases, in particular with many disabled clients, it is not appropriate to view an individual in isolation. People in the individual's life may construct barriers that also have to be removed.

- Providers need to be very clear about what they can offer. Over-selling or misunderstanding may result in disengaged clients.

- Provision has to be tailored to need. A 'one-size-fits all' approach can end up fitting no one. By taking some risks and being prepared to change tack, or work with new target groups, provision becomes more flexible.

The **medium-rated** study by **Shaw and Armistead** (2002) evaluated the management of, and employer involvement in, a 'catalytic fund' - the Union Learning Fund (ULF), which helps to promote innovative activity by trades unions to support the creation of a learning society. The ULF was announced in 1998. The Fund helps promote innovative activity by trades unions to support the creation of a learning society. The aims of year 4 of the ULF (the year which is being evaluated here) include the following:

- involving new unions or encourage new ideas
- consolidating and spreading good practice
- developing partnerships with employers, intermediaries, providers and other unions

This round of evaluation, as opposed to evaluations of the three previous years of the ULF, was concerned particularly with assessing the impact of the projects within the ULF from the employers' perspective. The reviewers conclude that the study does not provide robust empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the intervention; however, they do note that overall, the report provides some very useful and relevant discussion about the "how" of widening participation strategies which will be of assistance to this review.

Shaw and Armistead (2002) conclude that trade unions have continued to show that they can make a contribution to engaging and supporting individuals in lifelong learning. In the fourth year of the evaluation of this fund, there was an increase in volumes of activity overall, as well as by project, and there continued to be a wide range of activities offered, including improving access and relevance of learning. The authors report that unions, in general, exceeded performance targets set for the projects and had become much more able to access additional resources to maintain and enhance core ULF activities. Targets were achieved in relation to learners achieving qualifications; the number of learning centres established; and the numbers of individual learning accounts opened. Targets were not met in relation to the number of employers involved and the numbers of learners starting courses.

The survey of employers establishes that they value their involvement with ULF activities and that they had observed benefits. Employers had also increased their contribution to the overall resources going into projects. The study found that employers perceived that the ULF had made their workforce more confident and more receptive to training. Employers felt that the benefits were largely 'softer' benefits – for example, confidence, improved relations and communications – rather than harder economic benefits.

Qualitative responses gathered during research also indicated that the ULF had a positive impact on learners and organisations; these findings were particularly associated with good partnership working between providers and other partners.

The main barriers to achieving ULF targets are reported to have been:

- difficulties in opening or using individual learning accounts
- lack of support from employers
- difficulties in arranging, or getting access to, courses

There is a sense from the authors' conclusions that they see certain aspects of the strategic framework for the ULF as becoming less effective. The authors argue that the strategic aims and expected outcomes of the fund need to be reviewed to refocus the 'catalytic principle'; that is, the role of the fund in encouraging action by a range of organisations receiving funding under the intervention. They suggest that, in future, activity needs to be measured in different ways: for example, through 'distance travelled' (in terms of learning gain) by individuals who participate. This might be something to note in terms of improving practice in similar 'catalytic' initiatives.

Low weight of evidence

The **low-rated** evaluation of the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) by **Field** *et al*. (2001) looks at the benefits of the fund for non-traditional learners. The ACLF was launched by the Government in July 1998 as part of its strategy for widening participation in lifelong learning. Its stated aims include:

- engaging new learners in a range of opportunities

- improving basic skills

- developing capacity in community-based organisations to deliver learning opportunities

- building partnerships involving local people, community organisations and voluntary agencies with education providers.

Overall management of the Fund at national level was devolved to two intermediary bodies: the BSA and the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), working in partnership with, the then, DfEE (Department for Education and Employment).

Field *et al*. (2001) find that 'ACLF projects have been highly effective overall in bringing about significant learning gains for client groups who are non-traditional learners' (p 3). The evidence reviewed suggests that, by and large, the ACLF has indeed supported activities that have brought men and women into organised learning who otherwise would almost certainly have stayed outside. Despite various reservations about the quality of the data on which the findings are based, the reviewer concludes that the study does still provide useful evidence about how participation is raised among the precise target group on which the review is focused.

The study finds that the fund has widened individual participation as was intended and has contributed towards new ways of improving basic skills. Learner gains include personal qualities and capacities, such as an enhanced sense of purpose; growing confidence and respect; improved basic skills; and the appetite and ability to continue learning.

The study highlights messages about operating the ACLF that may be relevant for improving practice. For example, the authors observe that the involvement of two intermediary bodies, the BSA and the NIACE, with considerable standing and experience in the field allowed ACLF to flower more quickly than it would otherwise have done, and to work systematically to support and nurture the work of a wide range of organisations whose applications were approved.

The Fund fostered a high level of 'capacity building' at local level; a wide group of organisations has become involved, and a range of non-standard approaches to learning have been employed. Over time, capacity building projects were less likely to be led by learning providers and more likely to be led by voluntary or community groups. The authors conclude that working through intermediary bodies seems to have worked extremely well; existing networks were exploited and many new groups and organisations were contacted. The authors find that 'the new roles given to partner organisations in the voluntary and community sector is one of the Fund's most distinctive features' (p 102). However, the Fund

had not achieved its aim of securing large-scale funding for the programme at the national level from the private or charitable sectors.

The authors argue that there is a reasonable consensus on "what works" in engaging new learners. This includes the importance of direct person-to-person recruitment. More observations on 'what works' in terms of outreach and engagement come from the individual project reports of projects within the Fund:

- regular partner meetings
- close working with shop stewards
- securing full commitment from the company
- range of effective partnerships
- accessibility of venue
- simple direct realistic publicity
- use of IT to engage men

Barriers to success are seen to include:

- changes to key project personnel
- changes in location
- restructuring in larger supporting partner bodies
- problems of sustainability
- sheer physical risk (of women going out and developing learning activities in some areas)

The study also makes a number of recommendations which are relevant to improving practice:

- DfEE (now DfES), NIACE and BSA should consider how best to ensure better liaison, communication and co-operation at national, regional and local levels between bodies responsible for adult learning on the one hand, and those concerned with regeneration and community development on the other.

- In commissioning future programmes of activities of this nature, greater attention should be paid by the managing agents to the specification of target groups and the subsequent collection of data on a range of participant characteristics, with a view to monitoring closely and systematically whether activities are contributing to the programme's objectives.

- Engaging learners through small community-based organisations appears to be highly effective, both on educational and cost grounds, and further research and policy should reflect this.

- The intermediary body model shows considerable promise as a means of engaging with the least connected and most marginalised groups and individuals in the population on a cost-effective basis, and its use should be considered more widely in future.

- Communicating effectively with small grassroots organisations requires time, credibility and expertise, as well as sustained and consistent commitment from policy-makers. These features have made a considerable contribution to the Fund's overall impact.

HA Associates (2002; low weight) evaluate the impact of pilot UK information and communication technologies (ICT) online pioneer and pathfinder projects on

reaching target groups of individuals, with particular regard to establishing the economic and other benefits gained by centre users. UK online centres were established to help widen access to ICT. The Government's target was to provide 6,000 centres. The centres are intended to be located in places that people visit everyday, with convenient opening hours to offer easy access. The key success criteria are the extent to which the centres increase ICT awareness, ICT skills and people's participation in local communities.

The study was designed as a follow-up survey of respondents to an earlier survey undertaken soon after the pioneer and pathfinder centres were established. This involved a survey of new users and a telephone survey of centre managers. In this follow-up evaluation, UK online centre managers were surveyed to look at how the UK online centres had evolved since the original pioneer and pathfinder study.

This study is low-rated for the weight of evidence that it offers to answer the research question. The reviewer finds that the methodology is poorly described and identifies problems with the samples, but argues that the conclusions of the evaluation are worth considering because they are relevant to the review focus and because the study 'does raise important issues'.

Despite reservations about methods of data-collection, the reviewers conclude that the study does show some evidence that UK online centres are an effective intervention. HA Associates (2002) find that the online pilot centres have helped existing users to continue to make good progress in terms of confidence-building and informal learning, and in relation to progress towards further learning and employment.

In support of this finding, they note that a follow-up survey of early users indicates that 58% of respondents were still using the UK online centres a year after their original visit. Computer ownership among respondents has increased by 30% since they first attended the centres, compared with a national trend of 10% increase over the same period. The number of economically active UK online centre users has increased among survey respondents by almost one-third. The number of centre users classifying themselves as not working has dropped by over 40% compared with a 12% drop nationally over the same period. Also, around half of all respondents had indicated that attending the centres had definitely helped them secure a job or a better job or move onto further education or training. Among new users of the pathfinder or pioneer centres, a similar survey indicates that the percentage of users drawn from the most disadvantaged targeted groups has increased significantly.

In terms of key success factors, the authors note the following:

- The marketing method that UK online centre managers felt worked best was word of mouth.

- The combination of programming, location, marketing and staffing, and the balance of drop-in **access to IT facilities**, versus programmed courses have a major impact on the target groups attracted. For example, women appeared to respond better to programmed courses, whilst men responded better to drop-in access. The success of centres in overcoming barriers to learning could be attributed to their location, nature of provision, informal atmosphere, nature of staff support and links to existing activities.

- Private sector partnership was particularly important in attracting men.

- Partnership was a key element in many successful projects.

The aim of the **low-rated** study by **Hawaii University and College of Manoa** (1992) is to evaluate a project which aimed to meet the literacy needs of hotel employees. The study concludes that 'evaluation by instructors and management suggests that participants in the project had improved their job-related literacy skills' (p 3). This finding is confirmed by the results of the evaluation questionnaire, in which employees indicated that they believed that the classes and/or tutorials had helped them improve their literacy skills.

Gains in literacy skills were indicated by gains outside the workplace: three received high school diplomas; four enrolled in community college; four passed naturalisation exams; and several obtained their driver's licence with the help of project staff.

The report mentions several features of the study that are of potential interest to the review question. However, it is not clear from the report whether there is evidence that these were critical to the outcome of the intervention. With regard to engagement, the report notes that the project adopted an open entry/exit policy by which participants of the tutorial programme could enter and leave any time that they wished. This allowed for continual recruitment and encouraged inactive participants to return at any time.

The study by **Squirrell** (2001), rated **low**, assesses the Government's pilot schemes for rough sleepers. The *Off the streets and into work* initiative was designed to help homeless people (mainly men) back into employment or training, through guidance and vocational development. Due to methodological weaknesses (e.g. a general lack of data and an absence of pre- and post-intervention testing) and an emphasis on description and opinion rather than evaluative commentary, the reviewers give this study a low rating. The author records the challenges met in these pilots, indicating issues believed to be important in addressing the needs of homeless learners. Many of these are management and staffing issues:

- insufficient or unsuitable resources and accommodation in organisations hosting the learning provision (e.g. hostels)

- gaps in organisational and staff understanding of the problems of homelessness and how to work with this client group; a need for staff development and recruitment of suitable staff

- planning effective lead-in time and an appropriate, but not disproportionate, emphasis on throughput targets

- organisational responsiveness to short-term pilot projects that have an emphasis on delivery within a limited timeframe

- the length of time it may take to bring people up to a starting point, before they can embark on any programme that might lead to tangible outcomes – possibly to be addressed by 'tiered' programmes offered to clients who can be assessed as having the potential to benefit

- planning a range of methods of promoting innovative programmes to this client group

- recognising the effectiveness of time that is necessarily invested in a range of client-related tasks, but which might not obviously lead to a clear outcome

4.3.1.1 Summary

The evidence from these studies, rated medium to low, suggests that the strategies which appear to widen participation in learning through **outreach, targeting and engagemen**t share some of the following elements:

- The presence of initiatives within the community through outreach work, and more specifically, person-to-person recruitment (word of mouth), is more likely to attract potential learners from minority communities. *This finding emerges from Tyers et al. (2003), rated medium, and is also present in Field et al. (2001) and HA Associates (2002), both rated low.*

- There is evidence to suggest in the study by Tyers *et al*., 2003 (medium rating) that tailored flexible support and provision created through networking and partnerships between key organisations which is responsive to individual learner needs is more likely to engage 'hard to reach' learners. *This is also supported by the work of two low-rated studies: HA Associates (2002) and Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992).*

- A sound understanding of the needs of target group(s), and clarity about what the provider can do, go some way to pre-empting disengagement. Additionally, funding projects to target the needs of certain 'hard to reach' groups can be successful in engaging learners from these groups. *This finding is from Tyers et al. (2003), medium-rated, and was also evident in Field et al. (2001), HA Associates (2002) and Squirrell (2001), all of which were rated low.*

- Catalysts, such as intermediary bodies (e.g. BSA and NIACE) or trade unions, can play a key role in engaging new learners, through developing effective partnerships with community based organisations and employers. *This finding was drawn from Shaw and Armistead (2002), medium-rated study, and also a finding of the study by Field et al. (2001), rated low.*

4.3.2 Participation and retention

Six studies provide evidence on this topic: Field *et al. (*2001), Grief and Taylor (2002), Paris (1992), Robinson and Hughes (1999), Young *et al.* (1995), and Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992). None of these is highly rated; one (Paris, 1992) is rated medium-high; two (Grief and Taylor, 2002; Young *et al.*, 1995) are rated medium; and one (Robinson and Hughes, 1999) is rated medium-low. The remaining two are low-rated (Field *et al.,* 2001; Hawaii University and College of Manoa, 1992).

Medium-weighted studies

A study by **Paris** (1992), rated **medium-high**, analyses the results of a job-specific basic skills programme in improving the academic and job-related skills of workers in the USA (Wisconsin). Participants in the programme reported that they

were motivated to attend workplace learning centres primarily by the opportunity to learn to use computers, a desire for self-improvement and desire for education. Local partners (colleges, unions and employing companies) suggested a different set of motivators. They saw company incentives for attending as the most powerful. Examples include the following:

- paying employees for attending (one example seen) – data collected in 1990 shows that paying employees for participation was linked with a participation rate of 22% compared with a participation rate of 7% for companies which did not pay for participation

- release time during work hours (one example)

- holding classes during company time

- paying partial wages for attendance

- providing bonuses for completing 50 hours

- giving monthly door prizes for attendance

Other important motivators, according to local partners, were on-site location; communicative peer advisers; promotion possibility; knowledgeable, supportive instructors; interesting and varied courses and materials; desire for self-improvement; convenient hours; sense of pride and enhanced self-esteem; self-paced one-on-one instruction; positive comments from participants; fear of job loss; confidentiality; awareness of workplace changes; computer skills; increased job skills; and supportive management.

Partners and employees were in agreement about the top four barriers to participation: lack of time; overtime and long hours; family and child care responsibilities; and inconvenient hours. On the latter point, a promising practice identified in the study was that of building learning centre hours around workers' shifts. Both the programme participants and the local partners argued that 'more learning centre hours' was the top priority in terms of improvements needed.

Grief and Taylor (2002), in a study rated **medium**, examine the success of the Basic Skills and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) in Local Communities initiative in encouraging adults with literacy and numeracy and ESOL needs to take up basic skills learning. This evaluation focuses on pilot projects and summer projects to extend outreach provision in community settings, funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The inferred hypothesis is that releasing learning providers from funding constraints by offering resources in addition to unit costs would stimulate innovative learning provision, build providers' capacity to develop effective outreach provision, and help them meet government targets for reducing the number of adults with basic skills needs.

The authors find that the outcomes were very positive. Although a small number of projects failed and a significant percentage under-recruited from their initial target groups, overall there was demonstrable success in engaging new adult learners and in promoting new and imaginative approaches to recruiting learners from 'hard to reach' groups.

The authors argue that the essential ingredients for reaching and engaging the target group are careful research into community needs and development of responsive learning opportunities:

- linking of basic skills with practical activities and learning that has immediate interest or relevance to the target group

- identification of barriers to learning and how to overcome them

- effective partnerships between providers and local organisations that have strong links with potential learners

- qualified and experienced staff

- willingness to listen to learners and flexibility to respond to their feedback

- careful planning of courses with clear targets

- sensitive approaches to initial assessment

They find that the key features of projects that help to attract new learners are as follows:

- the way in which a programme was delivered (e.g. accessible, familiar venue, learner-centred approach by staff)

- nature of programme offered (e.g. innovative provision, practical activity, access to ICT)

- support offered (e.g. travel, childcare, progression)

- staff: development workers and others who know the target community

The authors draw the following conclusions:

- Development time for research and planning is vital, especially when partnerships are involved.

- Many projects are not sustainable without funding to cover specific additional costs.

- Working with local communities requires specific skills additional to those required of teachers in mainstream programmes.

- 'Basic skills by stealth' (i.e. linking basic skills to other learning), while a successful means to recruit adults and young people who are new to learning, may not always be an appropriate or effective approach. It may lead to loss of opportunities for effective basic skills teaching.

- Providers need guidance on the recognition and recording of non-accredited achievement.

- The majority of asylum-seekers are well-motivated to attend language classes, but providers need flexible funding to set up provision and address barriers.

The aim of the other **medium-rated** study by **Young *et al*.** (1995) is to evaluate the effect of the basic grants section of the USA Adult Education Act on deficits in literacy, English proficiency and secondary education. Although impressed by the range of study methods used, the reviewers found some weaknesses in the reporting of these as well as acknowledged problems with the tests used in the study. These points, as well as the fact that the US context may mean reduced relevance for the UK, led to a medium rather than high rating.

- The study finds that: Many adults who participate in the programme benefit, but many leave before achieving measurable gains. The greatest benefits are in the area of English language and other basic academic skills; about a third of the clients indicate that they benefit in some way in terms of employment, mostly by improving themselves on jobs they already had when they enrolled in the programme. Learning was found to be more beneficial for those already in employment when joining the programme. Almost half of those who start the programme leave for reasons external to the programme, such as employment, health or childcare problems.

- Most participants, especially those in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE), stay in the programme for a very short time. There are many reasons why adults do not stay longer in the programme, and what amounts to a realistic expectation in this regard is not clear.

The study makes the following points, which have implications for practice:

- There might have been a tendency within the project to serve those who are easiest to reach. These tended to be adult on courses in English as second language, as opposed to ABE or ASE. Members of the ESL (English as a second language) target group tend to be highly motivated to enrol in services and to stay longest once they begin.

- Clients' motives for enrolling in adult education are related to client persistence and learning gains. Most clients have several reasons for enrolling in adult education and for many no single reason is paramount. Enrolling to comply with public welfare or other programmes or because of employer requirements are not necessarily strong predictors of sustained programme attendance or of learning gains.

- The crucial time for programmes to work with clients to sustain attendance appears to be during the early months of instruction. Overall, clients who receive instruction are likely to stay about five and a half months. Those who continue into the second month are likely to stay eight months, while those who continue into the fifth month are likely to stay 11 months.

To increase the likelihood that clients will remain in the programme longer and increase the basic skills and employment-related benefits they receive, programmes should include the following:

- have at least some full-time instructional and administrative staff
- provide at least four or five client-support services
- give increased attention to helping clients continue beyond the initial month following their enrolment
- identify and encourage the use of the most appropriate instructional structures and designs

Many programmes need to improve their information management and reporting systems. Few programmes have client-based record-keeping systems which enable them to keep track of clients for at least a year at a time. As a result, they can only estimate certain kinds of programme statistics and they are in a weak position to monitor and improve the services they provide.

Predictors of retention are as follows:

- presence of support services
- instruction during the day rather than at night
- type of setting

Factors affecting positive ABE post-test performance include the following:

- ability on entering
- voluntary attendance
- full-time staff
- individualised curricula
- classroom plus laboratory environment.

Robinson and Hughes (1999), in a study rated **medium-low**, report on the enrolment, retention and achievement of indigenous people on vocational education courses (VET) at technical and further education (TAFE) institutes in Australia. Reviewers have given this study a medium-low rating: although the findings include a large amount of statistical data, there are doubts about the conclusions, as these appear to go beyond the reported findings. The report finds that indigenous people are enrolling and being successful in VET programmes, although to a lesser extent than all students on such programmes. Despite narrowing gaps in outcomes, indigenous students continue to show lower pass rates and higher withdrawal and fail rates than other VET students and go on to experience higher unemployment rates. In many VET programmes of relevance to them, indigenous students are under-represented, while, in general and lower level programmes, they are over-represented. The authors note that TAFE institutes have given little or no attention to monitoring indigenous students' performance across programmes and developing ways to improve outcomes and reduce drop-out rates. Indigenous education units within the institute's target and support students enrolled on special 'indigenous' courses, rather than the indigenous student population throughout the institute. Few examples were found of efforts to link the delivery of VET to employment. There is a lack of evidence on what was actually done to increase participation.

Low-weighted studies

The **low-rated** study by **Field *et al*.** (2001) draws some conclusions on 'what works' in relation to participation and retention, including the following:

- the role of inspiration and example in encouraging diffident or uncertain adult learners to continue
- building the curriculum on the basis of identified needs
- flexible and adaptive teaching approaches
- learning by stealth (ie embedded basic skills)

Success factors identified by the individual ACLF projects included the following:

- involving participants in planning programme

- shorter periods of commitment from students
- quality support with a high staff student ratio
- ongoing commitment to confidence building
- clearly defined, achievable goals backed by personal diary
- individually tailored programmes
- a ready availability of wide range of appropriate materials (up-to-date learning resources)
- staff flexibility allowing for 'just-in-time' basic skills sessions

The other **low-rated** study by the **Hawaii University and College of Manoa** (1992) observed some points of potential interest in relation to factors affecting participation:

- Hotels paid employees to attend classes; the authors believed that this helped achieve high completion rates.

- The most common reason employees stayed in the tutorial programme for a short time was lack of time. Irregularity of work schedules also made it difficult to develop a regular pattern of learning and a stable tutor-student relationship. When the tutorial pattern was irregular with frequent interruption, employees' motivation was affected and, once they stopped attending, it was difficult to get them back into the programme.

4.3.2.1 Summary

The evidence from these studies, rated medium-high to low, suggests that the strategies which appear to widen participation in learning through **participation and retention** have some of the following themes in common:

- One of the findings from Paris (1992; medium-high rated) found that a shared understanding between learners, learning providers and employers about what motivates learners and what are their key barriers to accessing learning opportunities can be used to create responsive learning opportunities and shape learning provision to encourage participation and retention. *This also emerges out of the Grief and Taylor (2002) study, rated medium*.

- The suitability of a learning programme's design, its delivery method, and the nature of support offered, to the needs of the learners together with the characteristics of the staff delivering the programme (experience, knowledge of target community) seem to be some of the important ingredients which can enhance learner participation and retention. *This finding emerges from Paris' (1992) study, rated medium-high, and also emerges from Grief and Taylor (2002) and Young et al. (1995), both medium-rated studies, and from Field et al. (2001) and Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992), both low-rated studies*.

- Some evidence shows that provision of funding which can be used flexibly to support additional costs incurred by learning providers can help to set up and sustain innovative learning provision for hard to reach groups. *This finding comes from the studies by Grief and Taylor (2002) and Young et al. (1995) study, both of which were rated medium*.

- Evidence from Young's (1995) study, rated medium, indicates that sustained attendance in a learning programme appears to depend on the appropriate

level of support available to learners, in accordance with their needs, during the early stages after enrolment; and the efforts made by the providers to link the learning programme to outcomes desired by the learner. *This finding is also backed up by the study by Young et al. (1995), rated medium, and was also one of the findings of studies by Robinson and Hughes (1999), rated medium-low, and Field et al. (2001), rated low.*

4.3.3 Achievement and progression

Ten reports provide evidence on this topic, including two high-rated studies (BMRB, 2001; St. Pierre *et al.*, 1998). One study was rated medium-high (Paris, 1992); four received a medium rating (Scheer, 1993; Taylor, 2002; Tyers *et al.*, 2003; Zandniapour and Conway, 2001); and three were low-rated (Field *et al.*, 2001; McRoberts and Leitch, 1998; Coats, 1999).

High-weighted studies

In a **high-rated** study conducted in 1999, **BMRB** (2001) report on the characteristics, experience and progress of participants in a government-funded pre-vocational training (PVT) programme. PVT was designed to help people with very basic skills needs move towards a position from which they can compete for jobs and vocational training. The authors draw conclusions on its effectiveness for participants generally, and specifically for a proportion of the participants categorised as 'the discontented'. Overall the findings suggest that the programme was not of great help to participants. Although it was most helpful in improving self-confidence (e.g. about getting and keeping a job), it proved less successful in overcoming a lack of qualifications (the most serious problem for participants). The value of the study is in indicating the factors that contribute to this disappointing outcome and ways to address them in future.

Among PVT participants in general, the following took place:

- One-quarter gained an NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) while on the programme.
- Two-thirds completed and one-third left early.
- One-quarter went straight into a job.
- Participants most likely to go straight into employment were women, those out of work for less than six months before PVT and those most confident about their work prospects before PVT.

In the minority (12%) 'discontented' group, the following took place:

- Participants had very low expectations of training and were often critical of the quality of trainers.
- Participants were characterised as feeling 'directionless' both before and after the course. Key reasons are too little individual attention; a standardised approach to training and lack of course tailoring; an almost complete absence of progress monitoring.

Other criticisms voiced by discontented participants included the perceived lack of relevance of the course and work placements. Those who held clear career aspirations felt that the course had not sufficiently prepared them for work. Criticism centred on poor and irrelevant work experience placements, and overly general job search advice and support. Those with less clear job goals could not

see how the courses they were taking would equip them for work. Given that many of the respondents wanted a job rather than training, it is perhaps not surprising that, unless the training appeared to be highly work-related, they would be critical of the training received.

Using CHAID techniques to analyse the characteristics of the discontented group leads the authors to conclude that discontent stemmed from participants' experiences and perceptions on or after the PVT programme, rather than pre-dating it. Some of these factors relate to disappointment that PVT was not of more immediate, 'practical' assistance in achieving the ultimate goal of employment. This suggests that many of the (wholly or partially) discontented were expecting too much from a training programme designed to address very basic skills needs, rather than to move them straight into employment.

Based on the findings, the authors outline an 'ideal PVT programme' to engage the discontented group, provide satisfaction with training and longer term work-related benefits. This would cover the following:

- induction
- job-counselling
- addressing the barriers identified in job-counselling
- a tailored learning programme, individually focused
- a job skills programme
- guaranteed work placements
- regular progress reviews
- an exit interview
- follow-through

The ideal programme emphasises the need for high quality, both in the content of the programme and in the skills of trainers, the latter being a topic attracting significant criticism from discontented PVT learners.

St Pierre *et al*. (1998), in another **high-rated** study, report on a US government-funded evaluation of the Even Start (ES) family literacy programme, designed to 'improve educational opportunities of the nation's children and adults by integrating early childhood education and adult education for parents into a unified program' (p 1). Under the law initiating ES (1989), projects were required to provide participating low-income families with an integrated programme of early childhood education, adult basic skills training and parenting education, using an intensive case management approach. Four-year discretionary grants to school districts were provided. The evaluation examines outcomes for parents as well as children.

The key finding from the evaluation is that, after five years of operation and despite success in generating high levels of participation, the programme showed no significant impact on participants, compared with control group families. For example, there were no statistically significant impacts on the economic self-sufficiency of participating mothers, nor on their parenting skills. Mothers in the control group performed as well on these measures as mothers in ES projects. The same conclusion was drawn for impact on the cognitive or social-emotional development of participating children. Although there were different impacts recorded for different sub-groups there was no overriding pattern in the findings that would allow the evaluators to conclude that ES worked better for some groups than others.

It is important to note that only a proportion of the study sample was matched against control groups: approximately 100 families, out of a total of over 16,500 families participating in ES. On some measures, the ES programme did achieve benefits that would not have been achieved otherwise: for example, much higher proportions of ES adults and children participated in educational services than was the case among those not in the programme. ES also led to a substantial increase in the percentage of adults achieving a general education diploma (GED); the authors comment that, without ES, it is likely that few of these adults would have found the needed assistance to reach this goal and that this view was supported by data from the study. Other significant points to be borne in mind in weighting the implications of this study are the wide variation found between projects in all facets of ES, from planning to implementation and outcomes; and the fact that there were more positive effects for families that were intensively engaged in ES services, than for families that were less intensively engaged.

There was an exception to the disappointing finding from the control group study: one of the 21 sites evaluated did show 'statistically significant and moderately large positive effects', including effects on families' employment and income as well as children's cognitive development. No single factor could be identified to explain why one site was able to buck the general trend; thus, the report concludes that the difference probably resulted from the combined effects of unique circumstances and context: for example, located in a state that provides a high level of support to low-income families; a strong project director and senior staff, all of whom stayed with the project for many years and 'appear to have done an especially good job of collaborating with local agencies'.

Medium-weight studies

The study by **Paris** (1992), rated **medium-high**, reports on the results of a job-specific basic skills programme in improving the academic and job-related skills of workers. The government-funded Wisconsin Workplace Partnership Training Programme operated at 23 worksites and involved partnerships at state and local level.

Results showed agreement among participants and local partners (colleges, unions, employing companies) that the programme improved workers basic skills and their self-image. This result is encouraging, given that the three top goals for employees participating in the programme were improving self-image, mathematics and reading skills (although they did not see reading for its own sake as a top priority). Employees tended to be more positive than local partners about their achievements in job-related areas, such as problem-solving and quality of work. Overall, the evaluation set out to measure improvement on 13 different outcomes. An interesting conclusion drawn by the author from the findings is that programmes should limit the number of objectives they seek to meet to those that are relevant to the needs of a particular worksite. This theme is developed with the recommendation that basic skills tuition should be embedded in work-based tuition via assessment of job skill requirement.

Another job-related basic skills programme is the focus of a **medium-rated** study by **Scheer** (1993). The River East Alliance for Developmental Skills (READS) was an on-site workplace basic skills programme for workers in four companies in Connecticut, USA. Successful completion of training by participants was only one of six goals of READS. Others related to the following:

- successful collaboration between the companies, including collaboration to benefit workers and the local economy
- company cost savings and improved quality of life for employees
- increased awareness of the lack of workforce literacy skills
- basic skills instruction tailored to specific occupational needs

The target set for successful completion of training by participants – a goal of 75% achieving meeting criteria based on a specific basic education test – was not met, although a majority of participants did meet the specified target. The author argues that the use of the particular norm-referenced test in question (known as TABE) became an inappropriate measure for the programme, given the shift to an increasingly work-related and company-specific curriculum with a focus on using literacy and numeracy to solve work-related problems. This in itself was regarded as a desirable and appropriate development, supported by training for instructors.

Among other benefits recorded are workers working better with supervisors, contributing excellent work-related ideas, asking more questions on the shop floor, communicating in English and improving the quality of their work. Overall, the participants considered READS valuable, said they would use what they had learned at work, and were interested in enrolling in similar programs. An important finding is that employees grew in their self-confidence to perform new tasks both inside and outside work.

Scheer (1993) concludes that the READS programme was effective and demonstrated the value of tailoring basic skills learning to the needs of companies and workers. She points to the need for more work to be done

- to improve senior management and supervisory support
- to refine the workplace curriculum model
- to refine competency-based skill assessment procedures
- to develop programme staff and instructors

Taylor's (2002) study on learning pathways has as its primary focus the progression of learners. This study is **medium-rated**: the reviewer finds that, while the study does not provide reliable evidence to answer the research question, and does not allow one to establish empirically which interventions have been effective in widening participation, it may nevertheless provide some useful evidence on the subject.

The study concludes as follows:

- A proactive well-targeted information service generates demand for learning.
- Partnerships are effective in helping adults to find out about learning.
- Prospects learners may need expert information about qualifications which IAG cannot give.
- There is a general issue about lack of funding for accreditation for prior learning.
- Financial considerations have an influence on decisions to train.
- Employers play a role in motivating employees to learn.
- Learning in chunks is valuable.
- There are market opportunities for learning providers to work in workplaces and they could work with employers in doing this.

The author goes on to make the following recommendations with relevance for improving practice:

- Learning providers should take action to improve collaboration, joint working and information. She argues that collaboration between organisations, with a view to improving learning pathways will be crucial to success. Learning providers should work to document local learning pathways, identify gaps in provision and support and resolve progression problems through partnership. Learning providers should also prepare case studies of the destination patterns of real adult learners and should include progression data in course prospectuses.

- IAG workers should give feedback to employers and programme planners, to develop a higher profile for IAG services and to report IAG concerns on a regular basis to programme planners.

- LSC, local strategic organisations and partnerships should ensure better strategic oversight of learning pathways in key learning sectors and better information for progression.

- Learning partnerships should increase and strengthen collaboration between providers by taking forward some of the actions listed above.

The **medium-rated** study by **Tyers *et al*.** (2003) of adult guidance partnerships (AGPs) makes a number of observations relevant to achievement and progression.

The study found that a significant minority of participants in the project had made steps into employment and enhanced qualifications. However, the authors argue that it is also important to recognise the role of the AGPs in facilitating smaller steps for some clients which may, over time, lead to more substantial and measurable progress. The study reported that many clients considered their awareness of career and learning options to be greater since their involvement with an AGP. This suggests that, in the longer term, these individuals might be able to take a more proactive approach in sourcing opportunities and making appropriate decisions. Thirty per cent of clients surveyed felt that they had gained new skills and half of these attributed it directly to the work of the AGP staff. Of those who had moved into work, half again felt that this was due to the AGP interventions.

The **medium-rated** study by **Zandniapour and Conway** (2001) is of a sectoral employment learning project. It is concerned with progression and career development among adults who are employed in casual employment or who are unemployed. This is one of the few studies regarded by the reviewer as offering robust empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the intervention.

This study finds that industry-based workforce development programmes, such as the sectoral employment learning project, hold great potential to assist the working poor and unemployed in accessing and maintaining employment, and moving up the economic ladder. The evidence cited is that, two years after training, the majority of participants in the sectoral programmes studied were more fully employed than previously and that they continued to advance in the labour market. Participants generally attributed their improved employment outcomes to participation in the sectoral programmes.

The authors conclude as follows:

- Industry-based workforce development programmes hold great potential to help the working poor and unemployed access and maintain employment and move up the economic ladder.

- The gains outweigh general economic growth. Findings prove that at least part of the participants' labour market success can be attributed to the training.

- Two years is not enough time to measure movement above the poverty line.

Low-weighted studies

The **low-rated** study by **Field *et al*.** (2001) contained some findings on achievement and progression. Case studies provide evidence of the progression of individual learners, whether to further learning or to other positive outcomes, such as new involvement as active citizens. As the evaluation took place before many projects had completed even a single cycle of activity, this evidence was extremely limited and should be treated with caution.

It was clear that, for some ACLF learners, educational progression might be delayed rather than immediate; for others, it might be horizontal rather than vertical. Such fragmented progression patterns might prove to be quite significant in allowing those with vulnerable 'learning identities' to test out and confirm their newly-won skills and aptitudes. In terms of 'what works', the individual projects find that the following are important:

- providing opportunities for progression
- accreditation and assessment for those who seek formal recognition of their learning
- building group cohesion and mutual peer group support

McRoberts and Leitch (1998), in a **low-rated** study, evaluated a community-based adult education initiative in Northern Ireland, funded under the EU European Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. The unstated hypothesis was that, by engaging in this programme, learners would become empowered, gain confidence and engender improvements in their own community. Thus, the initiative had a range of distinct goals:

- to provide a beneficial and enjoyable learning experience which would motivate participants and offer a gateway to further education and training
- to raise the self-esteem, confidence, personal and social skills of disaffected adults
- to encourage community involvement and participation
- to provide adults with opportunities to explore attitudes and feelings in relation to the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland (NI) as a contribution to peace and reconciliation
- to increase the employability of participants

Lack of information about the courses offered and certain methodological faults in this study (including perceived bias in the study sample) lead the reviewers to give it a low rating. However, it is worth recording that, on the evidence of the participants, the programme was generally beneficial. Examples include the following:

- increased motivation and confidence to pursue further education and training (with a large minority already enrolled at the time of a follow-up survey)
- increased feelings of community involvement and reduced feelings of alienation; a majority active in the community at the time of the follow-up survey
- increased self-confidence, particularly among women
- greater expressed tolerance and acceptance of others
- greater optimism about work prospects

The **low-rated** study by **Coats** (1999) aims to examine how accreditation affects provision designed specifically for women. It reports on two studies: a survey of courses for women, designed to identify how women-only 'threshold' learning provision is affected by requirements for accreditation; and a case study of a women's training scheme in a rural mining area. The reviewers find that this paper is undermined by a lack of solid evidence from the questionnaire and case study, and by the confusion of study evidence with author's opinion, based on other knowledge. The study might be more appropriately described as a description and exploration of relationships, rather than an evaluation. The case study, for example, relies on author report about the progress of the scheme, rather than on the outcomes of specific research instruments.

4.3.3.1 Summary

The evidence from these ten studies, which encompass the entire rating continuum from high to low, suggests that the strategies which appear to widen participation in learning through **achievement and progression** share some of the following features:

- Tailoring learning programmes which address learners' desired outcomes; skilled trainers; clarity about the expectations of the learners and the extent to which they can be met by the learning programme, together with appropriate and sensitive assessment of progress, can help learners to achieve accreditation and/or progress to suitable employment, or other learning programmes. *This finding emerges from the BMRB (2001) study, which was rated high, and Taylor's (2002) study, which was rated medium. This finding also emerges from the studies undertaken by Field et al. (2001), McRoberts and Leitch (1998), and Coats (1999), all of which were rated low.*

- The findings from St Pierre *et al.* (1998) found that high level of learner support, especially to those from 'hard to reach groups'; skilled and experienced staff in the provider organisation; effective networking and collaboration between learning provider and local agencies to improve learning pathways and support progression, can all contribute to positive outcomes for learners. *Similar findings are also reported by Taylor (2002), rated medium.*

- Embedding or tailoring basic skills training to the needs of employers and employees in workforce development programmes can lead not just to improvements in learners' self-confidence and self-image, but also to improving the quality of their work, and their economic position. *This finding emerges from three medium-rated studies by Paris (1992), Scheer (1993) and Zandniapour and Conway (2001).*

- IAG services can have a useful role to play in the planning of learning provision and progression, both in the community and the workplace settings; and in

identifying smaller steps which learners can take to gain confidence and achieve substantial and measurable progress. *This finding comes from two medium-rated studies by Taylor (2002) and Tyers et al. (2003).*

4.4 Key issues emerging from the studies

This section identifies seven themes that appear to be important in the success of interventions to widen adult participation in learning. Each of the themes (listed below and examined further in the paragraphs that follow) is highlighted in at least two studies as being an important success factor. At least one of the studies on which the seven themes are based is rated as either high, medium high, or medium. The seven themes are as follows:

- sufficient, suitable resources including quality support services
- effective use of resources and good management of interventions
- suitable ways to measure learning gains
- listening to learners, responding to feedback, encouraging realistic expectations about what learning programmes offer
- steps that break down barriers to learning
- flexible and tailored delivery and support
- networking and partnership, including the use of intermediary organisations.

Four studies address the subject of **sufficient, suitable resources**: Field *et al*. (2001) and Squirrell (2001), which are both rated low, and Tyers *et al.* (2003) and Young *et al*. (1995), which are both medium-rated.

Insufficient or unsuitable resources and accommodation in organisations hosting the learning provision is found to act as a barrier to success in some pilots. Conversely, studies also note the importance of teachers and administrative staff having access to appropriate professional development, curriculum and technical support networks, equipment, facilities and venues. The importance of providing a range of high quality support services is raised in several studies. **Quality support** with a high staff:student ratio is needed. Additional support (in the form of one-to-one support from tutors, phone calls, letters, etc.) can be very important to the participants in distance learning programmes. Programmes should: have at least some full-time instructional and administrative staff; provide a range of other client support services; and give attention to helping clients continue beyond the initial month following their enrolment.

Five studies make recommendations for effective practice relating to the **use of resources and management of interventions**: Field *et al*. (2001) and Squirrell (2001), which are rated low, and Grief and Taylor (2002), Taylor (2002), and Tyers *et al*. (2003), which are medium-rated.

Examples include: careful planning of courses with clear targets; funding to cover specific additional costs, such as the costs of sustaining partnerships and the additional costs incurred by providers, particularly the costs of learner and learning support; the constant search for new ways to widen participation; continuous engagement with the community at all levels in colleges and in all parts of the community; a thoroughness in curriculum design and teaching and learning strategies (by colleges), ensuring that widening participation objectives

are reflected and reinforced throughout the organisation and the need for staff development and the recruitment of suitable staff.

Several in this group argue that it is important that those planning and implementing interventions have sufficient information about their target groups. If this knowledge is not already available in an organisation, it should either be hired in, or a feasibility study undertaken. In commissioning future programmes, greater attention should be paid by the managing agents to the specification of target groups and the subsequent collection of data on a range of participant characteristics, with a view to monitoring closely and systematically whether activities are contributing to the programme's objectives.

Variations on the issue of **suitable ways to measure learning gains** crop up in three studies: Taylor (2002), which is medium-rated, and Field *et al*. (2001) and Squirrell (2001), which are both rated low.

Projects need to be aware of the length of time that it may take to bring potential learners up to a starting point, before they are ready to embark on a programme that might lead to tangible outcomes. Moreover, projects and funders should recognise that investing time in a range of client-related tasks which do not obviously lead to a clear outcome can still be regarded as effective. For some learners, educational progression might be delayed rather than immediate, whilst for others it might be horizontal rather than vertical; therefore, the way in which, and the time period over which, learning gains are measured should be considered carefully.

In four studies, a willingness to **listen to learners** and flexibility to **respond to their feedback** are seen as essential ingredients for reaching and engaging the target group, as is involving learners in the planning of provision: BMRB (2001), which is rated high; Field *et al*. (2001), which is rated low; and Grief and Taylor (2002) and Tyers *et al*. (2003), which are rated medium.

It is, however, important to create **realistic expectations about what learning programmes offer**, as over-selling or misunderstanding may result in disengaged clients.

A list of **steps that break down barriers to learning** is cited frequently. Seven studies provide evidence on this: Paris (1992), which is rated medium-high; Grief and Taylor (2002), Tyers *et al*. (2003), and Young *et al.* (1995), which are rated medium; and Field *et al*. (2001), HA Associates (2002), and Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992), which are rated low.

Suitable steps include accessible, familiar venues; learner-centred approach by staff; innovative provision; additional support for travel or childcare; informal atmosphere; and links to existing activities. Outreach and word-of-mouth communication is regarded as being an important way of engaging new clients, particularly for those with a mistrust of authority. In the case of employees, company incentives, such as paying employees for attending, are shown to be a potential motivator for participation.

Flexible, tailored delivery and support are important to providing an effective service. Seven studies address this theme, indicating in various ways that client needs should be taken into account and provision adapted to meet their needs: Paris (1992), medium-high rated; Grief and Taylor (2002), Scheer (1993), and

Tyers *et al*. (2003), medium-rated; and Field *et al*. (2001), HA Associates (2002), Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992), low-rated.

Tailored, flexible provision which involves outreach can be expensive, but is necessary for targeting the right group; a 'one-size-fits all' approach can end up fitting no-one. Several studies recommend that basic skills provision should be **tailored to specific occupational needs**. Some studies indicate the value of embedding basic skills instruction in instruction specific to the workplace, such as through increased use of job skill requirement analyses. However, this approach to basic skills provision does not attract universal support: one study argues that 'basic skills by stealth' can lead to the loss of opportunities for effective basic skills teaching.

As well as developing specific basic skills provision for the workplace, several studies draw attention to the need to tailor work-based or job-related provision to the circumstances of learners. Arranging provision to suit shift workers, at times convenient for workers and in ways that fit with childcare and other responsibilities, is seen as important in addressing barriers to learning.

Studies highlight the value of flexible provision to widening participation. The operation of an **open entry/exit policy** can enable continual recruitment and re-engagement of learners within a basic skills programme. A balance between drop-in and more structured provision can also be useful in appealing to different learners. Building the curriculum on the basis of identified needs and of adopting flexible and adaptive teaching approaches can be effective, as can allowing staff flexibility for 'just-in-time' basic skills sessions.

Two different opinions occur on the potential value of **face-to-face services**. On the one hand, some client groups find face-to-face services preferable to telephone or email-based guidance. However, in the context of distance learning, maintenance of anonymity was important to participants. Therefore, participation in learning through tele-conferencing rather than face-to-face with a tutor was seen as a particular benefit of distance learning.

Six studies draw attention to the importance of **networking and partnership** in providing effective services: Grief and Taylor (2002), Shaw and Armistead (2002), Taylor (2002), Tyers *et al*. (2003), which are all medium-rated; and Field *et al*. (2001) and HA Associates (2002), which are low-rated.

Private sector partnership can be particularly important in attracting men to learning. Effective partnerships between providers and local organisations that have strong links with potential learners can be particularly important in helping to reach target groups. Engaging learners through small community-based organisations appears to be highly effective, both on educational and cost grounds, and further research and policy should reflect this. The following dimensions of partnership working can be particularly important: regular partner meetings; close working with shop stewards; securing full commitment from company; and a range of effective partnerships.

The involvement of two **intermediary bodies**, the BSA and the NIACE, was seen as being key to the success of the ACLF. The intermediary bodies had considerable standing and experience in the field and allowed ACLF to flower more quickly than it would otherwise have done, and to work systematically to support and nurture the work of a wide range of organisations whose applications were approved.

5. FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Summary of principal findings

The main questions for this review are as follows:

Which strategies have been reliably proven to raise, or not to raise, participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation?

Which strategies do, or do not, offer compelling evidence that they raise participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation?

With reference to strategies that provide evidence of raising participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation, how and why do these strategies work?

The weights of evidence for each of the 17 studies included in the in-depth review were as follows:

- Two studies received a high rating on WoE D.
- One study received a medium-high rating on WoE D.
- Seven studies received a medium rating on WoE D.
- One study received a medium-low rating on WoE D.
- Six studies received a low rating on WoE D.

No studies provide evidence of strategies that can be confidently described as 'reliably proven' to raise, or not to raise, participation in learning by adults. Thus, the review confirms the earlier finding by Hillage and Aston (2001) that there is a shortage of effective evaluation evidence in this field (see section 1.4).

The studies subjected to the in-depth review were also categorised as compelling, based on their WoE C (relevance) and WoE D (overall WoE) to different degrees in order to address the second of the three research questions posed in this review. (The specific criteria by which studies have been rated as compelling are provided in methods section 2.3.3.) The assessment of the degree to which a study was compelling was made by the reviewers of these studies:

- Twelve studies provide evidence that is compelling. Of these 12 studies, two studies (rated high on WoE D) show that the programmes they evaluated failed or provided outcomes that are inconclusive, or that the interventions were not of great help to participants (BMRB (2001); St Pierre *et al.* (1998)). One of the two points to factors that contributed to failure (BMRB, 2001).

- Ten studies (all scoring high on WoE C, but of which eight scored medium and two low on WoE D) provide compelling evidence on strategies to widen participation, but each is marred to some extent by methodological and reporting weaknesses: Grief and Taylor (2002), Paris (1992), Scheer (1993), Shaw and Armistead (2002), Taylor (2002), Tyers *et al*. (2003), Young *et al*. (1995), and Zandniapour and Conway (2001) – all rated medium; and Field *et al.* (2001) and Squirrell (2001), both rated low.

- Five studies cannot be confidently described as offering compelling evidence: Coats (1999), HA Associates (2002), Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992), McRoberts and Leitch (1998), Robinson and Hughes (1999) – all rated low on WoE D, and medium or lower on WoE C.

Hillage and Aston recommended drawing together existing evaluation evidence: the review has accomplished this goal. Based on the analysis in section 4.4, the most promising strategies to raise participation in learning by adults with traditionally low participation appear to involve the following:

- a substantial degree of flexibility in learning provision and support services, tailored to learners' needs

- programmes tailored to the needs of employees and the workplace, including occupationally-specific learning

These findings echo the results of previous studies that call for 'appropriate, targeted provision' (Macleod, 2003, p 16). It is also in tune with the learner-centred approach advocated by the LSC's widening adult participation strategy *Successful Participation for All* (Learning and Skills Council, 2003a), which proposes action to support learner interests, promote demand for learning opportunities, develop the supply of diverse learning opportunities and create 'a learning environment for adults'. The strategy acknowledges the following:

> Learners have varying needs and interests. The LSC must be proactive in understanding and meeting those needs whether in further education, in workforce development, in vocational skills or in non-accredited adult learning. (Learning and Skills Council, 2003b, p 20)

The findings of this review may help the LSC refine and develop action under each of these themes.

Supporting learner interests

The LSC strategy emphasises the importance of understanding and meeting learner needs, and assuring learners of support to make appropriate choices. There is considerable support within the EPPI-Centre review for these broad approaches. For example, one of the findings of the review is that a sound understanding of the needs of the target group and clarity about what the provider can offer can pre-empt disengagement. Also important is the development of a shared understanding between learners, providers and employers about what motivates them and what the key barriers are and how to overcome them.

Promoting demand for learning opportunities

Under this theme, the LSC strategy discusses the need to be creative about the nature of learning opportunities available by, for example, developing transition arrangements between informal learning and more structured provision through collaboration between local providers. The EPPI-Centre review offers support for the role of intermediary bodies in supporting and developing partnerships and networks committed to the promotion of learning. It also draws attention to the importance of the presence of staff working through outreach methods within the community and for some minority communities of using person-to-person recruitment methods.

Developing the supply of diverse learning opportunities

The LSC strategy recognises the diversity in the provider base and encourages the development of providers particularly from the voluntary and community sectors. Key strategies include proactively developing and/or maintaining appropriate partnerships and networks committed to diversity in delivery.

The review finds that tailored, flexible support and provision created through networking and partnerships between key organisations, which is responsive to individual learner needs, is more likely to engage 'hard-to-reach' groups. The review also highlights the value of accessible, familiar venues open at convenient hours for workers, and the adoption of learner-centred approaches by staff.

Creating a learning environment for adults

Under this theme, the LSC strategy focuses on developing a learning environment suitable for adults by developing an appropriate range of flexible learning opportunities.

The review draws attention to the importance of designing and delivering a learning programme in ways suitable for the adult target group, including consideration of the types of learning support needed. A particularly relevant finding for this theme is that sustained attendance in a learning programme appears to depend upon the appropriate level of support available, in accordance with learners' needs – particularly during the early stages after enrolment – and the efforts made by the providers to link the learning programme to the outcomes desired by learners.

As one might expect, the outcomes of interventions to widen participation are rarely clear-cut. Success or failure can be the product of interaction between many different factors: for example, the funding, resourcing and effective management of interventions repeatedly come to the fore in the literature as factors that contribute to success or failure, regardless of the nature of the intervention.

5.2 Strengths and limitations of this systematic review

Strengths

These can be summarised as follows:

- a rigorous search strategy and systematic methodology for assessing the value of studies, using procedures developed by the EPPI-Centre

- the high volume of references identified and keyworded

- a review that is informed by the LSC widening adult participation strategy, providing a clear context

- confirmation that there are few sound evaluations available in the English language in this field

Limitations

It is worth noting that the limitations listed below arise out of the literature available for this review:

- lack of studies that evaluate the impact of interventions by comparison with a baseline or control group

- lack of testing of recommended practice

- extent to which lessons are transferable to the UK context

- weaknesses in the reporting of method and evidence

- only references and studies in the English language, thereby overlooking effective strategies reported in other languages

Lack of studies that evaluate the impact of interventions

A key issue identified by reviewers is the extent to which the studies can be accurately described as evaluations. A significant issue for the reviewers is the extent to which the studies attempt to measure the effect of the practice or approach that is being examined. The use of control and treatment groups for comparative purposes is rare; St Pierre *et al.* (1998) is one example that does adopt this approach. There are examples of the use of process evaluation rather than outcome evaluation (e.g. Squirrell, 2001) and, regarding Zandniapour and Conway (2001), the reviewers argue that 'what purports to be an evaluation is more of a correlation study'.

In some cases, evaluation was not the primary purpose of the study. For example, the purpose of the Taylor (2002) study is described as being to identify the barriers and problems associated with learning pathways to illustrate broader problems relating to progression.

These constraints mean that the review is in no sense a comprehensive review of strategies that work. It is limited to reviewing strategies that have been the subject of evaluations. The lack of strong evaluations has important implications for attempts to develop evidence-based policy and planning. It is worth noting the benefits of studies in which the evaluation of outcomes is an integral part of government-funded interventions and is conducted using large samples (such as the ES study from the USA by St. Pierre *et al.,* 1998).

Lack of testing of recommended practice

In relation to the Taylor (2002) study of learning pathways for adults, the reviewers are not confident that the study 'tests' progression routes or strength of support and hence does not allow robust conclusions to be drawn about what widens participation. Responding to Field *et al.* (2001), a study that makes recommendations about practice and is considered to be an evaluation, the reviewers give the report a low rating with regard to answering the review questions. Again, the reviewers argue that the key issue is a lack of measurement of impact.

Extent to which lessons are transferable to the UK context

In the case of the study by Young *et al*. (1995), the reviewers note that the weight of evidence rating has been reduced partly because the findings relate to an intervention in another country. We tried to overcome this by only including studies that were carried out in 'developed' countries, but the extent to which studies can be transferable from one country to another remains debatable, particularly when looking at effective strategies to widen participation that often has to take in consideration the economic, cultural and political context of learners.

Weaknesses in the reporting of methods and evidence

In some cases, weak or unsuitable methods may have led to the justifiable exclusion of studies (e.g. not including evaluations in the map or external evaluations in the in-depth review) and some studies will have been given a low weight of evidence based on methods criteria. This apparent 'downgrading' of studies due to weaknesses in the reporting of methods and evidence was often in part due to levels of reporting – for example, applied, near-market research that gives priority to the reporting of conclusions and implications for policy or practice, rather than the detailing of method, may not meet the reporting standards needed to judge accurately if the study was 'trustworthy' in its own right (WoE A). .

Reflection on the review process

This is the first systematic review of research evidence on effective strategies to widen participation. The review brings to light research evidence that was not previously in the mainstream body of knowledge, and it highlights areas of need in terms of future research, research method and quality. The Review Group made important decisions in the review process that balanced resources and time with the quality and focus of the review. For example, although a rigorous search strategy was employed on databases and websites, the time and resources have not been available to do any extensive handsearching of journals or use contacts to obtain policy documents that may not be easily available to the public. In addition, although there were a large number of studies included in the map, to ensure a coherent and manageable subset of studies were selected for the in-depth review strict exclusion criteria were applied to the method and topic of the studies.

It may be argued that the limitations raised mean there are concerns about the usefulness of the findings drawn from this review. However, their value lies in the fact that the features or common themes presented in the syntheses under each of the three key aspects of widening participation, and, indeed, in the section titled 'Key issues emerging from the studies', recur in more than one study, at least one of which is high, medium-high or medium-rated. The key issues drawn from the evidence selected for the in-depth review, that comprise the various syntheses and highlight some of the critical ingredients required to formulate strategies for successfully raising participation in learning by adults, have emerged from studies that are rated either high, medium-high or medium. These have often been corroborated by other high-rated or medium-rated studies.

5.3 Implications

This section considers possible implications for LSCs, providers and the research community, arising from the review.

5.3.1 Implications for LSCs

National and local LSCs may wish to consider the following interventions:

- work with providers to increase the flexibility and tailoring of provision and support

- steps to ensure adequate funding and resourcing of interventions to widen adult participation

- work with providers to ensure the effective management of such interventions

- incorporation of widening adult participation strategies into workforce development programmes

- piloting of interventions to widen adult participation, coupled with evaluation strategies that enable impact to be measured with confidence

5.3.2 Implications for learning providers

Learning providers may wish to consider the following:

- increasing flexibility and tailoring of provision and support, including provision tailored to workplace requirements

- ensuring the effective management of widening participation interventions.

- The research that is currently available and been reviewed is limited in its ability to provide the evidence necessary to fully answer policy and practice questions to benefit learning providers.

5.3.3 Implications for the research community

The research community may wish to consider the following:

- what changes might be needed in research design, to ensure that the methods adopted are strong enough to yield evaluation evidence suitable for informing policy and practice

- steps to ensure adequate recording and reporting of research methodology, evidence and results, to ensure that useful findings and conclusions can be used with confidence by planners and policy-makers

- further use of the findings of this review, such as the tables in Chapter 3, which highlight potential gaps in research evidence and could help inform decisions on future research priorities in this field

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Appendix 1.1: Advisory Group membership

Tony Chandler	Careconnect Learning Ltd
Mick Fletcher	Research Manager, LSDA
Alison Fuller	Reader in the School of Education, University of Southampton
Jeremy Gass	Centre for Community and Lifelong Learning, University of Wales
Maggie Greenwood	Research Manager, LSDA
Chris Jude	National Health Service University (NHSU)
Phillip Lacey	Senior Research Officer, Analytical Services, Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
Deirdre Macleod	Policyworks
Veronica McGivney	Principal Research Officer, NIACE
Pauline Nashashibi	Development Adviser, Adult and Community Learning, LSDA
Diana Pudney	LSC, Lincolnshire and Rutland
Julian Clissold	Assistant Principal, Burnley College
Sonia Reynolds	LSDA in Wales (Dysg)
Sue Yeomans	Programme Manager, Community Learning and Adult Learning LSC
Michael Tedder	Convenor, SW Learning and Skills Research Network

International members

David Istance	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
Tom Karmel	Managing Director, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)

Appendix 2.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

This paper sets out the criteria to be used by reviewers in deciding whether studies are 'on topic'.

	Inclusion	Exclusion
	To be included, studies must be concerned with:	**The review will therefore exclude:**
1	Interventions, programmes or policies that are specifically aimed at widening participation in learning among adults (in target groups further specified below)	Interventions, programmes and policies aimed at adults who are: – already well-qualified (above NQF level 3 or equivalent) – not disadvantaged in terms of education and access to the labour market
2	Studies that demonstrate which interventions, programmes or policies that are successful, or appear to be successful, in widening participation in learning among adults	Studies that do not report on whether a strategy has been successful or unsuccessful in widening participation in learning by adults
3	Studies that demonstrate which interventions, programmes or policies are not successful or do not appear to be successful in widening participation in learning among adults	Studies that do not report an intervention, programme or policy about: – reaching and engaging reluctant learners and those who experience barriers to learning – helping and supporting learners to succeed – enabling progression to further study or employment
4	These interventions will focus on one or more of the following: – reaching and engaging reluctant learners and those who experience barriers to learning – helping and supporting learners to succeed – enabling progression to further study or employment	Studies that are not concerned with adults who are not in formal or informal learning
5	The interventions will focus on those adults who are educationally and economically disadvantaged and not engaged in formal or informal learning, particularly adults who: – have not yet achieved a full NQF level 2 qualification or equivalent – live in an economically disadvantaged area or neighbourhood (e.g. as classified by the Index of Deprivation; areas eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal funding; areas of high unemployment and low income)	Studies that do not report an intervention, programme or policy about: – adults who have not yet achieved a full NQF level 2 qualification or equivalent – adults who live in an economically disadvantaged area or neighbourhood (e.g. as classified by the Index of Deprivation; areas eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal funding; areas of high unemployment and low income) – adults who have not been involved in learning since leaving school

	Inclusion	Exclusion
	To be included, studies must be concerned with:	**The review will therefore exclude:**
	− have not been involved in learning since leaving school	− adults belonging to specific educationally and economically disadvantaged groups (see examples opposite)
6	In addition, the review will identify studies of interventions with adults who are educationally and economically disadvantaged as a result of belonging to specific groups, including for example: − homeless people and those living in hostels, refuges and other sheltered accommodation − (some) ethnic minority groups − those disadvantaged by a lack of appropriate local learning provision − labelled 'socially excluded' − on a low income − those with basic skills needs − people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities − unemployed adults, including, for example, older unskilled and low-skilled men − people living in isolated rural communities − lone parents − travellers − asylum-seekers and refugees − carers	Studies that are purely descriptive, that is, studies that exclude any analytical or evaluative component or exploration of relationships between variables, showing whether the interventions, programmes or policies are successful in widening participation in learning
7	Studies should include some level of analysis, evaluation or exploration of relationships between variables, to show whether or not the interventions, programmes or policies they describe have succeeded in raising participation in the target group.	Those interventions, programmes or policies that are not specifically aimed at widening participation in learning among educationally and economically disadvantaged adults, even if this is an incidental bi-product

Appendix 2.2: Databases and websites searched

Databases

BEI	British Education Index
ERIC	Educational Resources Information Centre
IBSS	International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
PsycINFO	
SSCI	Social Sciences Citation Index (ISI Web of Science)
Sociological Abstracts	

Websites

Name	URL
Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit	http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/
British Library online catalogue	http://blpc.bl.uk/
Campaign for Learning	http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/
Centre for Research in Lifelong Learning	http://crll.gcal.ac.uk
Department for Education and Skills	http://www.dfes.gov.uk/
European Centre for the development of Vocation Training (CEDEFOP)	http://www.cedefop.eu.int/
Further Education Funding Council for Wales	http://www.wfc.ac.uk/fefcw/
Institute of Education (University of London) online catalogue	http://144.82.31.12/uhtbin/cgisirsi/Thu+Sep+26+10:00:30+BST+2002/0/49
The Learning and Skills Council	http://www.lsc.gov.uk/
LSDA library catalogue search	Intranet
National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning	http://www.niace.org.uk/Organisation/advocacy/NAGCELL/NAGCELL.htm
National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Australia)	http://www.ncver.edu.au/
National Foundation for Educational Research	http://www.nfer.ac.uk/
National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education	http://www.niace.org.uk/
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	http://www.oecd.org/home/
Scottish Further Education Funding Council	http://www.sfefc.ac.uk/
Scottish Further Education Unit	http://www.sfeu.ac.uk/
United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation	http://www.unesco.org/

Appendix 2.3: EPPI-Centre keyword sheet, including review-specific keywords

V0.9.7 *Bibliographic details and/or unique identifier*

A1. Identification of report
Citation
Contact
Handsearch
Unknown
Electronic database
(Please specify.) ....
 	
A2. Status
Published
In press
Unpublished
 	
A3. Linked reports
Is this report linked to one or more other reports in such a way that they also report the same study?
 	
Not linked
Linked (Please provide bibliographical details and/or unique identifier.)
....
....
....
....
 	
A4. Language (Please specify.)
....
 	
A5. In which country/countries was the study carried out? (Please specify.)
....
....
....
	A6. What is/are the topic focus/foci of the study?
	Assessment
	Classroom management
	Curriculum*
	Equal opportunities
	Methodology
	Organisation and management
	Policy
	Teacher careers
	Teaching and learning
	Other (Please specify.)........................
	
	A7. Curriculum
	Art
	Business studies
	Citizenship
	Cross-curricular
	Design and technology
	Environment
	General
	Geography
	Hidden
	History
	ICT
	Literacy – first language
	Literacy further languages
	Literature
	Maths
	Music
	PSE
	Physical education
	Religious education
	Science
	Vocational
	Other (Please specify.)........................
		A8. Programme name (Please specify.)
		....
		
		A9. What is/are the population focus/foci of the study?
		Learners
		Senior management
		Teaching staff
		Non-teaching staff
		Other education practitioners
		Government
		Local education authority officers
		Parents
		Governors
		Other (Please specify.)...........................
		
		A10. Age of learners (years)
		0–4
		5–10
		11–16
		17–20
		21 and over
		
		A11. Sex of learners
		Female only
		Male only
		Mixed sex
			A12. What is/are the educational setting(s) of the study?
			Community centre
			Correctional institution
			Government department
			Higher education institution
			Home
			Independent school
			Local education authority
			Nursery school
			Post-compulsory education institution
			Primary school
			Pupil referral unit
			Residential school
			Secondary school
			Special needs school
			Workplace
			Other educational setting (Please specify.)...
			
			A13. Which type(s) of study does this report describe?
			A. Description
			B. Exploration of relationships
			C. Evaluation
			   a. naturally-occurring
			   b. researcher-manipulated
			D. Development of methodology
			E. Review
			   a. Systematic review
			   b. Other review

Review-specific Keywords

A.1 Study type (additional information) *This is IN ADDITION to data collected about study type on the generic sheet.* A.1.1 Action research *Trying out a new programme/initiative within a person or group's normal practice. This research takes a convenience sample and is not generalised to a larger population.* A.1.2 Self-evaluation *E.g. by provider* A.1.3 External evaluation *Evaluated by an agent external to the provider or programme* A.1.4 Case study of practice *A study that describes and analyses an example of practice*	**A.3 Topic focus of study** *This is in addition to a similar category in the generic keywords.* A.3.1 Widening adult participation *A process where education and training providers attract and engage adult learners and/or adapt their programmes and ways of working to meet the learning needs and aspirations of adult individuals and groups whose experiences or circumstances inhibit participation* A.3.2 Widening access *Enabling a wide range of adults, especially from groups that have not traditionally participated, to gain access to learning* A.3.3 Educational disadvantage *Adults disadvantaged in terms of access to/prior experience of learning, or low-skilled/non-specified, including adults living in poor areas with poor quality educational provision* A.3.4 Social exclusion/socially excluded groups *Those who belong to particular disadvantaged groups e.g. homeless people, asylum-seekers and refugees, travellers, ethnic minorities groups that fare less well in education and the labour market, those living in a disadvantaged area, unemployed adults, including, for example, older unskilled and low skilled men, etc. These are examples and not a definitive list – please use judgement and infer from the text.* A.3.5 Other *(Please specify.)*
A.2 Setting of intervention A.2.1 FE College A.2.2 Adult and community learning centre *Select if institution has a larger catchment area than a neighbourhood Learning Centre or Community Centre* A.2.3 Neighbourhood learning centre *Based in a neighbourhood (i.e. small area)* A.2.4 School *If working with adults.* A.2.5 Community centre *Used by the community for a variety of purposes (e.g. social, recreation), which may include learning* A.2.6 Home A.2.7 Prison A.2.8 Higher education institution A.2.9 Workplace A.2.10 Church/faith setting A.2.11 Other *(Please specify.)*	**A.4 Location of setting** A.4.1 Neighbourhood *(small area, e.g. can be just a few streets or an estate)* A.4.2 Rural area A.4.3 Urban area – suburb A.4.4 Urban area – inner city A.4.5 Urban area – small town A.4.6 Urban area – other *(Please specify.)*

A.5 Level of intervention	**A.7 Objective of intervention**
A.5.1 Individual learning provider A.5.2 Partnership of providers/agencies A.5.3 Local agency *(includes local authority)* A.5.4 Regional Agency – Regional Development Agency A.5.5 Regional Agency – local LSC A.5.6 Regional agency – regional government office *(National government, based in the regions)* A.5.7 Regional agency – federal state *(e.g. a German land, Swiss canton or one of the United States of America)* A.5.8 National Government or national government agency – England A.5.9 National Government or national government agency – Wales A.5.10 National Government or national government agency – Scotland A.5.11 National Government or national government agency – Northern Ireland A.5.12 National Government or national government agency – United Kingdom A.5.13 National Government or national government agency – Other Please specify	A.7.1 Outreach *To reach out to a community or group that has difficulty accessing mainstream learning* A.7.2 Targeting *Specifying the group for whom the intervention is designed (e.g. finding ways to reach them)* A.7.3 Stimulating demand to raise demand *i.e. encourage more people to want to learn* A.7.4 Information, advice and guidance *Information, advice and guidance about learning, learning opportunities, progression opportunities, etc.* A.7.5 Learner support *Learner support enables the learner to learn. This is practical support, in particular financial, but could be other practical support, such as child care.* A.7.6 Learning support *This supports the learner in doing the learning for example language support, study support, guidance, and help with using technology* A.7.7 Curriculum development
A.6 Type of intervention A.6.1 Practice *An intervention involving practice, e.g. teaching, learning, recruitment, learning support practice* A.6.2 Policy *A policy intervention e.g. by government, Learning Skills Centre, local education authority, either national or local level policy* A.6.3 Plan *A Plan, e.g. by Learning Skills Centre, Local Education Authority, school, that is not yet practice* A.6.4 Funding initiative A.6.5 Other *(Please specify.)*	*Includes, for example, Basic skills, IT skills, Personal and social development, Citizenship, Cultural/Arts programmes, Learning and skills for neighbourhood renewal etc.* A.7.8 Retention *Intervention which helps learners stay on course/not drop out* A.7.9 Achievement *To encourage learners to achieve success however defined (e.g. by getting a qualification, or achieving other goals, such that the intervention is about more than access and retention)* A.7.10 Qualification or assessment reform *e.g. APEL, credit system, OCN.* A.7.11 Progression *To further study, or employment (not necessarily at a higher level) for example, framework, guarantee, enhanced support.* A.7.12 Staff development/training (e.g. CPD, INSET) A.7.13 Organisational development *Developing/changing the way organisations (e.g. learning providers) work to enable them to widen participation* A.7.14 Other *(Please specify.)*

A.8 Population (review-specific)	**A.10 Mode of learning**
A.8.1 Ethnic minority *(Please specify.)* A.8.2 Unemployed A.8.3 Social class *(Please specify which, if named.)* A.8.4 Homeless A.8.5 Below level 2 *(in academic qualifications)* A.8.6 Not in education, employment or training *((NEET) Applies to YOUNG PEOPLE only)*	A.10.1 Fulltime *(Please use judgement and infer from the text.)* A.10.2 Part-time *(Please use judgement and infer from the text.)* A.10.3 Day release *(e.g. a day in college combined with four in work)* A.10.4 Other *(Please specify.)*
A.8.7 Industry sector please specify A.8.8 Travellers A.8.9 Poor basic skills A.8.10 Learning difficulties and/or disabilities A.8.11 By age *(If given, e.g. under 25, over 50)* A.8.12 Refugees and asylum applicants A.8.13 Disengaged learners *(who have dropped out or become disenchanted (could be ex-learners!))* A.8.14 Reluctant learners *Learners/people reluctant to participate, e.g. fearful of institutions/formal settings; in need of encouragement, lacking confidence* A.8.15 Staff responsible for interventions to widen adult participation *for example, Teachers, lecturers, information, advice and guidance workers, learning mentors, learning brokers, learning representatives* A.8.16 Older learners usually thought of as 50+	**A.11 Age of learners (review-specific)** *This is to be filled in AS WELL AS the category about age in the generic keywords.* A.11.1 19+ *(unless ONLY 19–24)* **A.11.2 19–24** A.11.3 25–54 A.11.4 55+
	A.12 Geographic location of study *E.g. Town(s), city/cities, etc. (Please specify.)* A.12.1 City, town, county, state, department, canton etc. (*Please state where.*)
A.9 Type of learning programme A.9.1 Formal *More structured, e.g. accredited course, with coursework/exams stipulations* A.9.2 Informal *Less structured, possible non-accredited course, modes of learning, if in doubt about definition, please use that of author(s)* A.9.3 Distance learning (e.g. e-learning) A.9.4 'Taster course' *Very short, just give introduction to a subject (e.g. bite size) courses* A.9.5 Short course *Less than one year* A.9.6 Long course *One year or longer* A.9.7 Other *(Please specify.)*	

Appendix 4.1: Details of studies included in the in-depth review

BMRB International Ltd (2001) Further Investigation of a Disadvantaged Group on Pre-Vocational Training
What is the intervention that was evaluated?
PVT, introduced in 1997–98, was designed to help participants aged 25 and over 'address their underlying skill needs, with the aim of equipping them with the occupational skills in demand in their local area; the main focus was to get jobs, not to move on to further training' (p 1).
What are the aims and objectives of the study?
To report on general characteristics of participants in a government-funded PVT programme. To find out why a minority group of participants fails to benefit from the programme and feels discontented with it.
Study design summary
The research consisted of two stages. The first was a retrospective, quantitative survey of a sample of those leaving PVT between September and December 1998. The second was of a 12% sample of the respondents to part one, identified as those respondents who expressed discontentment with PVT (this included both those respondents defined as 'discontented' and those that shared certain attitudes with this group. These were interviewed in greater depth.
Review-specific weight of evidence
High
Findings
Discontented learners had low expectations of the training from the outset and often participated because of a large element of pressure, or compulsion. Their previous experience of learning was negative and they remained negative about this programme. Particular problems they identified include an inflexible, standardised teaching style and course contents, and lack of progress-monitoring.
Conclusions
It is claimed that the discontented were expecting too much from the programme – in particular, that it would provide them with job skills, when, in fact, they lacked some very basic skills.

Coats M (1999) Lifelong learning policy and practice: the impact of accreditation on education and training provision for adult women in the UK

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The provision of courses for disadvantaged women and the potential impact of accreditation, particularly on 'threshold' provision designed to engage reluctant learners

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

The broad aim is to examine how accreditation affects education provision tailored specifically to the needs of women.

Study design summary

The study has two parts. The first is a survey of 'providers' to find out about courses for women and how this 'threshold' learning provision was affected by requirements for accreditation. The second is a case study of a women's training scheme in a rural mining area in the East Midlands.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Low

Findings

The main findings of the survey are as follows:
- Most of the women-only courses used OCN accreditation, with only explicitly vocational courses offering qualifications such as NVQ (47 out of 100).
- Providers 'mostly' retained their provision but made changes to length and content to fit funding and accreditation requirements.
- There is a tension between the need for accreditation and widening access.
- There is a need for 'pre-provision – informal, local, non-threatening, non-accredited'.
- The most common provision recorded in the survey was 'return to work'. However, the findings note that women's need for learning is not dependent on re-entry to the workforce.

The main findings of the case study are as follows:
- initial resistance to accreditation by the training scheme, when this was imposed by the funding body successful introduction of OCN accreditation 'with any potentially damaging effect on the delivery of the curriculum being mediated by the commitment and skills of the staff'
- opposition (by scheme staff) to the use of differential performance levels for learners, on the grounds that this would reinforce feelings of failure for some and undermine the collaborative nature of the learning group (this issue remained unresolved)
- decision by the local authority that the scheme was not cost-effective and that other disadvantaged groups should be given priority (inferred)
- shortcomings in the ability of decision-makers to evaluate this type of provision

Conclusions

The author claims that, at least in the initial stages, provision that is assessed and accredited may not be attractive to learners who have had previous unsuccessful experiences of learning. However, while accreditation can be a deterrent to some, it can also lead to an enhancement of confidence and a route to progression. 'The issue is not just whether it is always necessary, but also about what type of accreditation is used and how it is implemented'.

There is a need to reconsider threshold provision: 'that first step for women in groups that have previously been not just under-represented but almost un-represented in adult education and training'. At the same time, the author acknowledges that the emphasis (in women-only training) on training for employment 'is not an unwelcome development'. Experience of a local authority decision that the case study training scheme was not cost-effective suggests to the author that the link between public funding and mandatory accreditation could hinder efforts to widen participation.

Field J, Spencer D, Tight M, Blaxter L, Byrd P and Merrill B (2001) Evaluation of the Adult and Community Learning Fund

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The ACLF was launched by the Government in July 1998, as part of its strategy for widening participation in lifelong learning. Its stated aims included the following:

- engaging new adult learners into a range of opportunities
- improving basic skills
- developing capacity in community-based organisations to deliver learning opportunities
- building partnerships involving local people, community organisations, and voluntary agencies with education providers

Some £20 million were allocated to the Fund by DfEE. Funds were distributed through a programme of small and major grants to community-based organisations and training providers across England between 1998 and 2002. Overall management of the Fund at national level was devolved to two intermediary bodies: the BSA and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE).

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

The evaluation, had two key aims:

- to provide a summative evaluation of the Fund's effectiveness
- to provide formative feedback that could sharpen the focus of new projects, inform any further generation of funding, and provide examples of best practice

Study design summary

The study was a summative qualitative evaluation. Because of the diversity of the projects and learners, a common framework of measurability was not applied across projects. Fifteen case study projects were selected from projects funded in the period 1998–2000. From each case study, a range of different types of evidence was gathered from reviews of documentation and interviews with internal and external stakeholders, and learners. In addition, data was gathered from other sources, including interviews with ACLF management staff and board members. Qualitative analysis of the data was performed to inform the evaluation about the overall management of the Fund and the learning gain that it created.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Low

Findings

Researchers found that ACLF projects were effective in bringing about learning gains for client groups who are non-traditional learners. Learning gains were identified in the following areas: personal qualities, motivation, basic skills, confidence, social and citizenship skills, desire to continue learning. The Fund fostered a high level of capacity-building at local level, and projects were increasingly led by VCS organisations. There was consensus among project staff regarding effective ways to engage new learners, including person-to-person recruitment, the role of inspiration, tailoring the curriculum to individual needs, flexible teaching methods, availability of accreditation, embedding of basic skills, and building group cohesion. Barriers to success included changes to project staff or location, restructuring in partner bodies, and problems of sustainability.

Conclusions

Researchers conclude that the Fund has widened individual participation and contributed to new ways of improving basic skills. On an organisational level, it has engaged a wide range of organisations, leading to a 'rich harvest' of non-standard approaches to learning. Authors recommend better communication between learning providers and organisations responsible for community development, and better attention to information management by managing agent(s). The key lesson is that engaging new learners through the use of small organisations via intermediary bodies is effective, but requires time, credibility and expertise, and an ongoing commitment from policy-makers.

Grief S, Taylor C (2002) Final Report: Evaluation of the Basic Skills and ESOL in Local Communities Projects

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The evaluations reported in this study relate to FEFC-funded pilot projects and summer schools funded through the 'Basic Skills and ESOL in Local Communities Initiative' across England.

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

The study represents a synthesis of two evaluations. The aims of the evaluations, as set out by the FEFC were as follows:

- to support project management in the monitoring and evaluation of projects
- to highlight and disseminate good practice across and between projects with particular reference to innovative and effective ways of delivering basic skills and ESOL learning opportunities, recognising achievement and tracking and measuring progress within and beyond basic skills
- to analyse the data from projects to see whether, and how, they have encouraged adults with literacy and numeracy and ESOL needs to engage with basic skills provision
- to provide the FEFC with a view of the strategic issues which relate to all institutions within the learning and skills sector, with particular reference to developments relevant to adult basic skills and ESOL
- to analyse the opportunities for learners to contribute to the development and evaluation of the projects in which they have a part

Study design summary

The evaluation was formative; activities involved both evaluating and offering support. Evaluation of the pilot project drew evidence from final evaluation reports from each project, evaluation reports from partner organisations, reports of 24 visits to projects by a team, reports on telephone interviews with projects not visited, and contact with projects through seminars and summer workshops. Evaluation of the summer projects drew evidence from final evaluation reports from each project, learner evaluation forms, reports from 18 visits by a team, feedback from telephone contacts with projects by advisers, contact with project staff at regional workshops and a closed email group.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Medium high

Findings

The researchers found that over 12,500 learners were recruited to projects, the majority of whom were new learners. Half these learners indicated that they planned to progress to further basic skills or ESOL learning. The projects were effective in building the capacity of providers and partners to offer learning in local communities. Many projects met their targets, but some failed, revealing an increased risk of failure in community-based outreach provision compared with mainstream provision. The majority of learners felt they had made progress and increased their confidence. Some 1,100 learners received accreditation in literacy numeracy or ESOL. The availability to plan for, and fund, additional project and learner support costs (i.e. childcare, transport, rent of premises) was vital to the success of projects. The quality of teaching observed was variable, reflecting the difficulties in securing appropriately qualified tutors in this context. Success in assessment and tracking progress of learners was also patchy.

Conclusions

The researchers conclude that development time is essential. However, the tight timeframe of these projects made groundwork difficult. Many projects were not sustainable without funding for additional costs. Working with local communities requires skills additional to those required in mainstream provision. In addition, while embedding basic skills is effective in attracting new learners, it may not always be the best approach to effective basic skills provision. Community providers need guidance on recognising and recording non-accredited achievement. While asylum-seeker learners are motivated to learn, funding for appropriate provision needs to be flexible to meet their needs. Finally, the researchers conclude that the findings should be read in conjunction with other evaluations of community-based approaches to basic skills provision, as there are many shared lessons.

HA Associates (2002) Evaluation of Pioneer and Pathfinder UK Online Centres: Follow-up Study

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The aim of the UK online centres is to bridge the gap between those in society who have access to and are able to use ICT competently, and those who do not. The key success criteria are the extent to which the centres increase ICT awareness, ICT skills and people's participation in local communities. Six Pioneer projects received notification of funding in October 1999, and the 13 Pathfinder projects in early February 2000. The DfES was on course to complete the full roll-out of around 2,000 CMF-funded centres during 2002.

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

The research is a one-year, follow-up study of the Pilot and Pathfinder UK Online evaluation. The aims of this follow up study were as follows:

- to provide a more detailed insight into issues arising from the first evaluation
- to provide a longitudinal aspect to the original study to identify any new issues at future stages of projects' development
- to provide further insight into long-term impact of the programme as a whole

Study design summary

The study comprises of three strands: a follow-up survey of respondents to a survey undertaken in the formative Pioneer and Pathfinder evaluation (N=214), a survey of new users (N= 360) and a telephone survey of centre managers (N=8). The study is designed to measure change in the following: economic status, computer ownership and access, and demographic profile of new users from the original study to the follow-up. Level of satisfaction of new users, and provision and monitoring within new centres are also examined.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Low

Findings

The one-year, follow-up survey indicated that 58% of original users were still using centres. Computer ownership among respondents increased by 30%. The number of respondents who classified themselves as not working dropped by over 40%. Around 50% of respondents indicated that attending the centres helped them to secure a better job or to move into further training. 85% of respondents believed that going to a UK online centre had increased their confidence. The survey of the new users revealed a change in the profile of users at UK online centres. Those from ethnic minority groups now made up 13% of users compared with 2% in the original study. The percentage of users with a self-identified basic skills need rose from 2% to 8%. There are higher levels of computer ownership among new users (64% compared with 44%). Satisfaction levels for the centre remained high. The telephone survey of managers enabled researchers to estimate that there were around 14,500 UK online users in total. All UK Online centres have some monitoring systems in place, but the level of detail collected varies. The most common target groups for centres are: lone parents, older people, unemployed people and job-seekers. The survey of new users and the telephone survey revealed that word of mouth is the most effective form of marketing for UK online provision.

Conclusions

The researchers conclude that the main thrust of findings from the original evaluation remain the same. The proportion of individuals from socially and economically disadvantaged groups using the centre has increased, while at the same time there is an increase in those who own computers using the centres – thereby revealing a contradiction. Researchers concede that the study was biased against more excluded users, and they also experienced difficulties recruiting participants for the managers survey due to 'survey fatigue'. However, overall, they conclude that pilot UK online centres have indeed had some impact on the lives of their users. They do not believe the pilot users to be completely representative of users in the roll-out but conclude that early indicators of impact are positive and encouraging, particularly in terms of reaching target groups, improving economic status of users, and securing high levels of satisfaction.

Hawaii University and College of Manoa (1992) Skills Enhancement Literacy Project of Hawaii (II) Final Project Performance Report

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The Skills Enhancement Literacy Project of Hawaii aimed to meet the literacy needs of hotel employees from seven Sheraton Hotels in Hawaii, USA. The project took place in the period 1990–1992. The objectives of the intervention were as follows:

- to teach, upgrade and improve the job literacy skills needed by IT Sheraton employees to meet the literacy requirements of the actual jobs
- to provide literacy skills training to employees with inadequate skills in order to equip them with the skills necessary for new or continued employment, career advancement or increased productivity in the dynamic and people-oriented visitor industry teach, upgrade and improve the job literacy skills needed by IT Sheraton employees to meet the literacy requirements of the actual jobs
- to facilitate employee participation by providing support services to minimise barriers to learning
- to demonstrate the active commitment of all partners to accomplishing project goals
- to refine, modify and adapt the project's existing Workplace Literacy Skills model for 1988 by expanding it to include Makaha and the neighbouring island of Kauai
- to field test and refine the job-specific, literacy skills curriculum especially developed for the visitor industry

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

In terms of evaluation activities, the following main objectives were stated:
For projects involving direct services to individuals, identify the number and characteristics of project participants who completed planned project activities and those who did not, and the outcomes achieved by participants who completed project activities.
To compare actual accomplishments of the project to the project objectives (listed above).

Study design summary

Data for the evaluation was gathered in four different ways. Pre- and post-tests were administered on programme participants. Questionnaires were administered to managers and supervisors to evaluate the effect of training in employees job performances. A survey of participants was carried out to gain feedback from them about the programme, instructors, teaching methodologies, topics covered and materials used. Finally, attendance and other teaching records were examined.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Low

Findings

534 employees participated in the project, mostly from food and beverage departments. Participants were from various ethnic backgrounds, mostly non-native English speakers from Asian countries (the majority from the Philippines). Distribution of age and length of employment was even, showing that the programme attracted young new employees and older long-term employees. 62% of participants were female, and most were literate in their native language. Participation was encouraged through the provision of a combination of flexible individual tutorials, with an open entry/exit policy, and company-paid classes. These helped to overcome participation barriers, such as irregular work schedules, second jobs and childcare problems. Completion rates for classes and workshops were 71% and 91% respectively. The completion rate for tutorials was 58%. Outcomes from tutorials and classes included improvement in literacy skills, self-confidence and job performance. Due to the short training cycles and the job-specific nature of the classes, it was difficult to measure gain through pre- and post-testing. Instead, measurement focused on gain of knowledge and application of skills in the job. Gains in literacy were also indicated by external accomplishments such as achievement of high-school diplomas, progression onto community courses, and achievement of naturalisation and drivers' licences.

Conclusions

Detailed conclusions are not presented in this report. However, authors conclude overall that participants in the project improved their job-related literacy skills.

McRoberts R, Leitch R (1998) Targeting social need in a divided society: an evaluation of a community-based adult education initiative

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The community-based Adult Education Initiative was set up in Northern Ireland and funded by the European Union. T
his programme recruited adults with low educational attainment, and aimed to improve their 'personal and social skills'. Few details of the learning content are given; however, the teaching style was student-centred.

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

This is not stated; however, there is an unstated hypothesis that, by engaging in this programme, students will become empowered, gain confidence and engender improvements in their own community.

Study design summary

The study collected participants' views before they began the programme, at the end of the programme and six months after the end, using questionnaire and structured interviews. Baseline data were collected about participants' reactions to the training programme, their community affiliation, involvement and awareness, self-esteem, self confidence and personal skills, and social and interpersonal skills development.
The follow-up survey collected data about attitudes to, and status of, employment, further education and training, voluntary and community involvement, and any change in their attitudes to learning.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Low

Findings

The majority of students reported that they enjoyed the programme and that, as a result, they felt more confident about studying or training in the future. They also reported improvements in general levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. They also claimed to feel more at home, and ready to be engaged, in their communities. They also reported that they became more tolerant and to had improved their social skills, although tests revealed that their literacy skills did not improve. Six months later, 40.5% had completed or enrolled for formal learning (although there is no evidence this was as a result of the programme).

Conclusions

Disaffected adults respond positively to programmes which are enjoyable, informal and focus on their learning needs. Moreover, this can have important follow-on effects in the community. All the same, that this programme did not improve students' literacy is a worry.

Paris KA (1992) Evaluation of the Third Year of Implementation of the Wisconsin Workplace Partnership Training Program. March 1, 1991 through August 31, 1992
What is the intervention that was evaluated?
The Wisconsin Workplace Partnership Training Program was developed to provide job-specific basic skills education at worksites. During the period of this evaluation, the programme operated at 23 worksites in the state.
What are the aims and objectives of the study?
The study addressed the following four questions: 1. To what extent do programme participants achieve academic and job-related objectives?   2. To what extent do local partners agree that participants achieve academic and job-related objectives through participation in the programme?   3. Which programme objectives do participants and local partners view as most significant?   4. What are some of the 'best practices' exhibited by the programmes whose participants report the highest mean of improvement in academic skills and job performance?
Study design summary
The study involved verbally administering a survey questionnaire to employees at 10 randomly selected company sites and 197 local partners completing mail surveys from these same sites and other sites. The survey was administered to employees and also to local partners. The 'intervention' applies to only the employees, but both *employees and local partners beliefs are sought and compared.*
Review-specific weight of evidence
Medium-high
Findings
Research question 1: Participants solidly agreed that they had improved in the basic skills studied. Participants rated their improvement in mathematics, writing, reading, GED – the remaining academic areas – with scores over 4.00 (agree). In job-related measures, the same five-point scale showed participant responses ranging from 1.30 for becoming eligible for promotion to 4.16 for improving job skills.   **Research question 2:** Local partners solidly agreed that participants improved in mathematics, writing, reading, GED and computer skills. Speaking and ESL were considered lesser areas of improvement; however, these two subjects were not taught at most sites. In job-related measures, local partners solidly agreed that participants had increased self-image, but expressed weak agreement relative to enhanced job skills and problem-solving, and neutrality relative to getting along better with other employees and supervisors; enhanced quality, eligibility for promotion and job employment.   **Research question 3:** For participants, the top three goals selected were self-image, mathematics and reading skills.   **Research question 4:** The question could not be answered as proposed because there was no statistical significance found between the means for the 10 sites. The researcher identified one noteworthy practice observed at the sites, which was participant/peer advisory councils.
Conclusions
Each programme should focus on a limited number of objectives that meet the needs of that worksite rather than 16 participant outcomes in addition to process outcomes.   Instruction in basic skills should be increasingly imbedded in instruction specific to the worksite through increased use of job skill requirement analyses, called Workplace Educational Skills Analysis (WESA). Sites should identify and provide the optimal mix between totally individualised instruction and short-term, small-group classes.   Companies wishing greater participation of employees in educational upgrading should provide paid time during the work day for employee education.   Sites should use advisory groups of participants to help plan and evaluate programmes.   Federal administrative policies restricting computer instruction should be modified or eliminated to enable WPT to reach its intended constituent group more effectively.

Robinson C and Hughes P (1999) Creating a Sense of Place: Indigenous Peoples in Vocational Education and Training
What is the intervention that was evaluated?
Participation by indigenous peoples in VET provided by TAFE institutes
What are the aims and objectives of the study?
To document the developments made in the provision of VET to indigenous peoples and achievements of indigenous peoples in VET in order to provide a sound basis for developing future strategies
Study design summary
The study has two parts: the first is a statistical analysis of various existing data sets about indigenous people's participation; and the second is interviews with a purposive sample of staff and students.
Review-specific weight of evidence
Low
Findings
Indigenous students are under-represented in many VET course areas that are of particular relevance to them, such as 'business, administration and economics', and they continue to be over-represented in other areas such as 'general (multi-field) education' courses and in lower level Certificate II programmes. Indigenous students experience lower pass rates and higher withdrawal and fail rates than other VET students on average, even though the gap has narrowed very considerably in recent years. Most important of all, indigenous peoples experience lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates after participating in a VET programme than other VET students. Nevertheless, successful VET outcomes do improve the employment prospects of indigenous students, particularly in the overall conversion rate from part-time employment before and during the VET programme into full-time employment following graduation.
The special arrangements that TAFE institutes have put into place, through establishing indigenous education units, are very largely focused on providing specially designed indigenous courses or indigenous student support services. These arrangements mainly target a minority of the indigenous students in TAFE institutes; that is, the 38.5% of all indigenous students enrolled in a special indigenous course.
Little or no attention has been given to monitoring the performance of indigenous students across institute programmes, and to developing strategies to improve the outcomes achieved and to reduce rates of attrition. Similarly, the examples of trying to link VET delivery to employment outcomes in a direct way were few. Indigenous education units generally did not have clear plans to undertake these roles.
Conclusions
The authors claim there should be:
• greater representation by indigenous students or graduates on advisory bodies
• a higher proportion of staff from indigenous peoples
• a fundamental change in institutional ethos, to concentrate on employment outcomes for indigenous peoples

Scheer RL (1993) READS Program: National Workplace Literacy Program. Final report
What is the intervention that was evaluated?
'READS Program', a workplace literacy programme in the United States
What are the aims and objectives of the study?
The purpose of the evaluation is to report on the success of the 'READS program' with reference to the six specific goals of the programme grant, namely: • a 50% increase in successful collaborative relationships between companies forming the East of the River Alliance (ERA) and other agencies • 75% of instruction tailored to meet specific occupational needs • 100% of companies having cost savings and improved quality of life for the employee • 100% of manufacturers involved in ERA working together, and providing for and benefitting their workers and the local economy • 50% increase in awareness of the lack of workforce literacy skills and ramifications locally and at state level • 75% of 335 workers (251) successfully complete training, with success defined as increasing one level in mathematics and reading (as measured by a specific measure called TABE), enrolling in a GED class or post-secondary education, or promotion
Study design summary
An evaluation of a sample of 444 employees in four companies was executed, using 19 measurement tools, including tests and other measurements used pre-, during and post-intervention.
Review-specific weight of evidence
Medium
Findings
Seventy-seven per cent of participants who enrolled on 'READS programs' completed them. Evidence from views of employers and participants indicate the programme was successful. The programme helped to raise awareness of the lack of literacy skills in the workforce. A total of 59% scored greater than one level higher on post-test than pre-test, which was lower than the goal of 75% set down by the (USA) federal government – although 75% scored higher on post-test than pre-test in total.
Conclusions
The authors claim that the 'READS program' was a success and, if it received further funding, would continue 'to refine its workplace mode'. They argue that the following areas are in need of improvement: • senior management and supervisory support • refinement of the workplace curriculum model • refinement of competency-based skill assessment procedures • continuing staff and instructor development.

Shaw N, Armistead C (2002) Evaluation of the Union Learning Fund Year 4

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The ULF helps to promote innovative activity by trade unions to support the creation of a learning society. In the 2000 Spending Review, ULF was allocated funds to continue the work until 2004, with £7 million allocated for 2001–2002 including £1 million for basic skills work. There were 121 active projects in Year 4, run by 39 different trade unions. The Fund is managed by DfES who were preparing to hand management responsibility over to LSC at the time of the study.

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

The overall objectives of the ULF evaluation are to report on the progress and performance of projects; assess whether project activities are sustainable; and identify the longer-term impacts of ULF activities on unions, such as changes in union management and policy on lifelong learning and partnership building. The Year 4 evaluation had an additional objective of addressing how impact could be assessed for employers involved in the Fund.

Study design summary

The research was conducted in four stages. In stage 1, the ULF database was updated to include data on year 4 projects. For stage 2, project managers were sent a project questionnaire by post including questions on the following issues: achievements, barriers, impact on the union, additional funding, learners, data monitoring, employer details, union rep activity, and basic skills learners. In year 4, the questionnaire included an enhanced section on working with employers and asked for employer contact details. In stage 3, a sample of employers was obtained from year 2 and 3 projects. Employers were interviewed by telephone to find out the benefit and impact on business performance of union led learning activity supported through ULF. In stage 4, a feasibility study was carried out to determine scope and models for a possible employer impact assessment, based on appropriate 'hard' indicators in a future ULF evaluation.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Medium

Findings

The most common activities undertaken by projects were the development of learning representatives, ILAs, and basic skills. Year 4 project targets were achieved in the following areas: learners achieving qualifications (29% over target), number of learning centres established, and number of ILAs. Targets were not met in the number of employers involved, and learners starting courses.
The reported key outputs across all four years of ULF were as follows: approximately 28,000 people have taken part in learning (13,000 in year 4), approximately 4,500 learning representatives have been trained (1,500 in year 4), and approximately 560 accredited courses were developed (400 in year 4).
The employers surveyed (94) in year 4 wanted to be involved in union-led learning supported through ULF to try to foster relationships with workers and the unions, and to gain workforces that are more willing to participate in learning/training. 96% of the employers were interested and committed to remaining involved in ULF.
Analysis of the feasibility of measuring economic impact of the Fund was examined, and use of the Investors in People (IiP) econometric model was investigated (see http://www.investorsinpeople.co.uk/). While the model could be used, researchers decided it was not logically feasible to pose a causal relationship between ULF and employment change, as is the case with IiP.

Conclusions

Trade unions have shown they can make a contribution to lifelong learning in a wide range of areas. In year 4, the volume of provision rose and indicators of cost show increased efficiency. More qualitative indicators, such as distance travelled by individuals and changes in attitudes to learning, would measure future impact better. While projects appear to be exceeding their targets in many areas, reporting of targets through MI systems has become less reliable. There is a lack of clarity about the role of employers in Fund activity. Measuring the economic impact of the Fund would be difficult and unreliable. Overall, the Fund needs to evolve and refocus to stimulate continued development, and arrangements for measuring impact need to be reviewed.

St Pierre R, Swartz J, Gamse B, Murra, S, Dennis D and Nickel P (1995) National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program. Final Report.

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The USA federal government instituted the Even Start (ES) family literacy programme in 1989. It was intended to: 'improve educational opportunities of the nation's children and adults by integrating early childhood education and adult education for parents into a unified program' (p 1). It was intended that the programme should be implemented through co-operative projects that built on existing community resources to create a new range of services.

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

The study aimed to evaluate the 'Even Start Family Literacy Program'.
'The National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program was a four-year national effort designed to describe the types of ES projects that were funded, the services provided, the collaborative efforts undertaken, and the obstacles to program implementation that were encountered. The evaluation also describes the families that participated in ES, the services they received, and the effects of ES participation on children's school readiness; parent's literacy, parenting, and personal skills; and family stability and resources. Finally, the evaluation provided assistance to ES projects to conduct locally-designed evaluations, and to prepare and submit applications to the Department of Education for entry into the National Diffusion Network.' (p 1)

Study design summary

Pre- and post-test design. Data were collected before entry, at 9 and 18 months. For a more limited sample, participants were matched with a control group.

Review-specific weight of evidence

High

Findings

The programme appeared to be successful, on the basis of pre-and post-test data for participants. However, data from the control group showed the same changes, which means that the programme had no effect.

Conclusions

ES has positive short-term effects on children and adults, although these vary across projects. In fact, there is great variation between projects in all facets of ES programme planning and implementation, characteristics of families, participation and outcomes.
ES services resulted in gains for children and their parents, but, on average, the gains are not greater than those that similarly motivated families would gain for themselves using locally available services. In order for ES to have a larger effect, it must provide services more intensively.
ES families that were intensively engaged in core services did better than families with lower levels of participation. Further, there are indications that providing parenting education had a positive effect on children's vocabularies. This type of parent-to-child effect is encouraging in that it is exactly what ES hopes to produce.

Squirrell G (2001) Evaluation of DfEE Funded Pilots for Rough Sleepers: Off the Streets and into Work

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

The 'STEPS programme of occupational guidance and training for life peer mentoring' (p 24) was aimed at the homeless, or rough sleepers, helping them to find employment or training, and helping them back into mainstream society.

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

To provide an independent assessment of:
- the short-term impact and benefits of the employment-focused provision for rough sleepers over 25 pilot schemes
- elements of the schemes that work and those that do not
- longer-term effects of the schemes, in order to inform future provision

Study design summary

Data about the programme were collected by observation, document analysis and interviews with key staff and programme participants. The document analysis probably includes details of progress on the programme. The report tends to evaluate the process rather than the intervention.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Low

Findings

Resources and accommodation provided by the host were, at times, insufficient or unsuitable. The client group presented challenges to those organisations that had not worked with such groups before. These pilot programmes required rapid responses in terms of staffing them and undertaking development work. This was found difficult by some organisations.

Conclusions

Programmes need to be based on a clear assessment of the needs of intended beneficiaries.
Programmes should support clients to develop and progress away from the services and cultures of homelessness.
There should be overall tracking of clients' accessing of services, the goals set within each area of services accessed, and the clients' achievements against each goal.
The importance of lead-in time should be stressed and costed into budgets, with clear expectations that lead-in tasks are completed.
Tracking of client progress, and helping clients track their progress, remain weak areas. Alternative ways to assess such skill acquisition are needed.
Project management and project development skills cannot be assumed. Investment needs to be made in staff training in project management and in organisational awareness-raising about the demands of meeting the demands of specific and short-term projects.
The links between innovative work and the host organisation need to be made explicit, with the latter developing policies and finding the resources to support innovations.
Funding organisations need to appreciate the complexities of the client group and consider carefully how they might measure project success and development.
Projects should be sufficiently and effectively staffed.
The vision of the co-ordinator or manager is vital to ensure clarity in the purpose of the project, and the communication of clear aims to staff who deliver the project.

Taylor S (2002) Learning pathways for adults in Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire. Summary Report.
What is the intervention that was evaluated?
This study is chiefly concerned with progression, defined as vertical progress from a lower to higher qualification lateral progress to another course at the same level, progress in the same or a different subject diagonally (down), progress from informal to formal learning, progress from non vocational to vocational, or learning progress from learning to work or vice versa.
What are the aims and objectives of the study?
'To assess the extent of problems in a limited number of sectors/programme areas and use the findings to illustrate broader issues relating to progression.' (p 4)   The study aims to look at learning pathways for those with poor qualifications and skills who are in jobs that have low pay and poor prospects.
Study design summary
This study collected views by means of two focus groups, meetings, consultations and self-completed questionnaires. Fifty providers attended five different sector-based workshops. There were 18 telephone interviews with IAG workers, 10 telephone interviews with employers (one in construction, four in health/social care and five in the hotel/catering industry). The two focus groups collected views of 10 and 4 learners respectively. There were discussions with unemployed people: two from Oxford Unemployed Claimants Union and 12 from a course for unemployed women.
Review-specific weight of evidence
Medium
Findings
In all three sectors, there is a wide range of opportunities available and a variety of points of access for learners with different levels of qualification and experience.   There are however, weaknesses: • complexity: learning pathways are difficult and complex for learners to comprehend.   • shortcomings in the availability of good information sources, contributing to a lack of awareness of options available   • weaknesses in partnerships between providers and lack of a co-ordinated approach to lower level provision   In addition, the way in which courses are delivered presents barriers, such as a tendency to be supply rather than demand-led. Barriers to learning include: lack of formal accreditation of prior learning, cost of training, childcare costs and access, confusing NVQ structures, difficulties in finding the best options for learning, and the lack of a peer culture to support learning.   The study also found a range of different people who face barriers to progression: for example, older learners, ESOL learners, people on benefits etc. People with learning disabilities face a specific set of difficulties, including lack of self-confidence, low aspirations, lack of awareness of labour market, lack of flexibility of programmes. Unemployed people face many of the same issues, while lack of childcare is crucial for women.   Interviews with employers revealed an emphasis on in-house structures for training provision; employers felt colleges were not flexible; statutory employment requirements, which are important resources for training are limited; people with poor basic skills and asylum-seekers may not be recruited; and employers believe staff should be self-starters.
Conclusions
Priority recommendations: • action by learning providers to improve collaboration and joint working   • action by learning providers to improve information   • action by IAG workers to give feedback to employers and programme planners   • action by LLSC, local strategic organisations and partnerships to ensure good strategic oversight of learning pathways, and information for progression   • action by learning partnerships to increase and strengthen collaboration between providers, and by taking forward some of the actions listed above   Progression pathways might be most effectively documented when they are documented separately by each sector.

Tyers C, Aston J, Barkworth R, Willison R, Taylor J (2003) Evaluation of Adult Guidance Pilots

What is the intervention that was evaluated?

Adult Guidance Pilots (AGPs) were launched by the DfES in November 2001. The aim of the initiative was to explore the potential additional value of in-depth guidance in ways that complement existing IAG provision. The pilots were across the UK and had a range of target groups; however, the key focus of the work was on helping disadvantaged individuals. There were 17 pilot projects selected and these were funded by DfES for 15 months. The AGPs aimed to provide seamless IAG to disadvantaged people, and explore holistic services to targeted disadvantaged groups. The pilots were selected on basis that: AGPs were innovative and testing out new approaches; the approach was additional to what was already being provided; priority groups were identified based on local need; work aimed to reach groups through non-traditional methods; disadvantaged areas were targeted; and there were links to other initiatives.

What are the aims and objectives of the study?

The objective of this evaluation was to consider the range of barriers faced by clients using the AGPs, the impact of the services in helping clients to overcome these barriers, and the wider social and economic impact of the services.

Study design summary

The study was conducted in three phases. Firstly, an analysis of AGP management information on clients, their use of the service over time, and barriers that users face was conducted. Secondly, researchers carried out telephone interviews with AGP users (544) on their use and perceptions of the service. Finally, case-study work was conducted with 10 of the 17 AGPs to gain more in-depth information. A control group and a follow-up survey were planned for this study, but neither was deemed practical or possible.

Review-specific weight of evidence

Medium

Findings

13,132 clients used the AGPs, which were particularly successful in attracting men, minority ethnic groups, those not in paid work and those with low qualifications.
A presence in the community was key to attracting individuals from BME groups. 50% of users visited the service more than once, and 10% four or more times.
90% of sessions were delivered face to face, and outreach was at the heart of service delivery. 9% of clients have improved their qualification level since first contact.
Of those users who had been unemployed for more than six months, 17% have found a job since first contact. The main reason clients used the service was to improve job prospects; however, the main topic in sessions was training. 80% of users were satisfied with the service they received.

Conclusions

AGPs were successful in engaging 'hard to reach' groups. Outreach and word of mouth were the most common way to engage new clients, and this was important in terms of the fact that many from this group have a mistrust of authority. Tailored support, networking and partnerships were important ways to provide an effective service. Client needs could be communicated via the pilots, which meant that local provision could be changed to meet client needs. The client group made significant changes to their lives, even within the short evaluation period, suggesting that further gains would follow. The main lessons learnt were that the needs of the target group should be understood; families and communities of clients should be considered as well as the individual; advisers need to be clear about what they are offering; and the provision should be flexible and tailored to need.

Young MB, Fleischman H, Fitgerald N, Morgan MA (1995) National Evaluation of the Adult Education Programs. Executive Summary.
What is the intervention that was evaluated?
The Adult Education Act (1966) in the United States is intended to assist adults who lack the literacy skills needed for effective citizenship and productive employment. The basic grants section of the Act provides funds to states to support instructional programmes for eligible adults. The funds have led to a national network of local adult education providers. Provider services fall into three main categories: grades 1–8 (ABE), grades 9–12 (ASE) and ESL.
What are the aims and objectives of the study?
The broad aim is to conduct a national evaluation of the basic grants section of the Adult Education Act regarding their potential for significantly reducing deficits in the adult population with respect to literacy, English proficiency, and secondary education.
Study design summary
This four-year external evaluation study consists of a universe survey of data from all projects (N=2,619; 93% of projects), a longitudinal study of a sample of projects and their learners concerned with programme structure, instructional schedules and approaches, learners, recruitment and placement methods, staff qualifications, co-ordination with other agencies, and programme finances (N=131 projects); and a telephone follow-up survey of clients (N=5,401 learners). The evaluation collected information on five measures of educational gain: reading achievement test scores, advancement in instructional placement, client self-reported gains, completion of secondary school, and continuation of education after leaving the adult education programme. Analysis was largely quantitative.
Review-specific weight of evidence
Medium
Findings
Researchers gathered data on a sample of 22,548 learners from the universe survey. Of these learners 51% were ESL learners, 56% were female, 42% were employed, and 67% did not have a high-school diploma. Clients were young, and the majority of all learners were under 31 years. Most clients were enrolled in ESOL, but most programmes served ABE learners. ESL accounted for 76% of instruction received. The ASE target population was almost twice the size of either of the other two groups. Federal funds accounted for less than one-third of the resources used to run the programmes. Most clients stayed in the programme a short time. ASE participants received a median of 28 hours, ABE 35 hours and ESL 113 hours. Except for ESL, no direct relationship was found between retention and achievement. Many who participated in the programmes benefited, but many more left before they had the chance to benefit. This was usually due to external reasons (e.g. employment, health). 17% of learners were still participating in learning after leaving the programme. Higher costs per student hour were positively related to learning gains.
Conclusions
The programme is not keeping up with the growth in its target population, and researchers conclude that there is a continuing need for adult education services in the US. The high proportion of ESL clients compared with the clients the programmes are designed to serve suggests a gap between language and culture of programme, and the changing nature of the clients it serves. Researchers also conclude that there may be a tendency to serve those clients who are easiest to reach (i.e. highly motivated ESL clients). The crucial time for programmes to work with clients to sustain their attendance is in the first month. Researchers conclude that client outcomes (in terms of retention and achievement) were likely to improve if programmes have at least some fulltime instructional and administrative staff, provide at least four or five client support services, and identify and encourage the use of the most appropriate instructional structures and designs.

Zandniapour L, Conway M (2002) Gaining Ground: The Labor Market Progress of Participants of Sectoral Employment Development Programs
What is the intervention that was evaluated?
The study examines six sectoral employment programmes from across the USA. Sectoral employment programmes seek to improve job opportunities for low-income individuals within a specific industry sector. The programmes employ a set of strategies that address issues on the supply and demand side of the labour market within a specific sector. All programmes train participants as part of their sectoral strategy. Sector programmes are characterised by their knowledge of the sector and their roots in the low-income communities they serve. In addition, a sectoral programme's activities should result in sustained changes in the way the industry's labour market functions.
What are the aims and objectives of the study?
The core objective of the evaluation is to measure employment and earnings outcomes of trained programme participants on one of six sectoral development learning projects against their situations prior to training.
Study design summary
The study is a three-year, longitudinal study of programme participants enrolled on one of the six interventions. Information about participants, their perceptions of the interventions, and the training and employment outcomes after participation in the programmes was collected via telephone interviews. Data were collected soon after enrolment (within about a month) on one of the programmes, at completion, one year and then two years after completion. There were 732 participants at baseline, 543 at one year, and 371 at two years. In addition, after completion of the programme, the participant's training record was sent to the researchers.
Review-specific weight of evidence
Medium
Findings
Earnings: There was an increase of around 107% in earnings among participants during the course of the survey. Two years after training, 39% of respondents had moved out of poverty line. There was a 31% increase in the average hourly wage. **Employment and the job market:** 94% of respondents were employed for at least some portion of the year during the second year of the study. At the end of year 2, participants worked an average of 722 more hours per year than they had at baseline, and at least 73% held at least one job in the sector for which they were trained (compared with 87% after one year). **Job satisfaction:** At the end of year 2, 82% of respondents were satisfied with their main jobs, 78% of jobs held included health insurance (compared with 50% at baseline), 77% had paid leave (44% at baseline), and 59% had pensions (27% at baseline). **Training experience:** At the end of year 2, 82% believed their job and career prospects were improved as a result of the intervention, 78% had used technical and communication skills they had learnt on the programme, 29% had received follow-up assistance from the programme after they left, 32% had enrolled in further training, and 75% planned to. Overall, 81% were satisfied with the intervention two years after.
Conclusions
Industry-based workforce development programmes hold great potential to helping the working poor and unemployed access and maintain employment, and move up the economic ladder. Findings prove that at least part of the participant's labour market success can be attributed to the training. However, industry based workforce development is not a panacea. One-quarter of the sample was still without health insurance after two years, the same as at baseline, and health issues are reported as a major cause for unemployment. Researchers recommend initiatives addressing health insurance and healthcare issues to complement workforce development programmes. Researchers also conclude that two years is not enough time to measure movement above the poverty line.