

# New Deal for Communities

## The National Evaluation

### Research Reports

#### **Skills for Employability: Interim Findings**

Research Report 41

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is currently sponsoring the 2002-2005 national evaluation of New Deal for Communities. This evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of organisations co-ordinated by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

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*Sheffield Hallam University*

# **Skills for Employability: Interim Findings**

Research Report 41

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## Executive Summary

Since the publication of the Moser report 'A Fresh Start' in 1999, reducing the number of people with poor literacy, numeracy and ICT skills has become a key priority for the government. In an attempt to respond to this problem the government has recently published a 'Skills White Paper' and a 'Skills for Life strategy', the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. These documents outline two key aims, to make sure that individuals have the skills they need to ensure their employability for life and that employers are able to recruit people with the skills the business needs.

This report is the second in a series which focuses on skills for employability. Skills for employability projects have been established in a number of New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas, as part of the worklessness theme programme. These projects are defined as initiatives that address the needs of adults with poor literacy and numeracy, improve employability skills and build relevant vocational skills required in the labour market to help people onto the first rung of employment. This report is based on three case study areas: Southwark (Aylesbury) NDC, Manchester (Beswick and Openshaw) and Derby (Derwent) NDCs. Each NDC operates a skills for employability (basic skills) project.

The report begins by updating the local context and conditions in each of the case study areas. It then reviews the nature of the intervention on offer in the NDCs highlighting recent changes in approach, interventions and partnership arrangements. Information is then presented on outcomes. The report concludes with what works and lessons for NDC Partnerships.

This report has identified a number of key issues concerning the delivery of basic skills, outcomes and details some key lessons for NDC Partnerships.

### Nature of the intervention

- there has been a greater movement towards embedding basic skills throughout the entire worklessness programme area. In all of the case study areas basic skills has been included in projects as diverse as job brokerage, intermediate labour markets and conflict resolution courses
- many learners particularly those from vulnerable groups suffer multiple barriers and face numerous life problems. It is therefore important that the support they receive from these projects are viewed as the first step in the process, in helping individuals move towards employment
- there was a general acknowledgement across all three case study areas that a wide range of interventions are necessary to promote the take up of courses. The use of local volunteers to support learners was regarded as the most important intervention a course could provide. The provision of careers advice and general guidance was considered to be the second most important intervention
- the one-to-one outreach approach is crucially important if target groups are going to be reached. Evidence from the focus groups suggests that most learners commenced the course with a low level of confidence and without the encouragement from neighbours and friends would not have enrolled at all

### Outcomes and impact

- it is apparent that the work undertaken in all of the case study areas is primarily concerned with the acquisition of life skills. These projects therefore provide a foundation on which learners can build before going on to gain further vocational skills and qualifications or in a minority of cases gain employment

- the small number of participants enrolling on courses does mean that these projects are resource intensive and costly. It is questionable as to whether other funding providers would be able to support this level of provision. It is clear however that any provision that does not cater for child care needs, outreach workers or mentors is unlikely to engage with this client group

### **Key lessons for NDC Partnerships**

- NDC Partnerships must assess how and where skills for employability could be incorporated into the worklessness programme area. Basic skills provision can no longer be regarded as a separate or independent area of NDC activity
- a key lesson for NDC Partnerships must be, where possible, to involve local residents and or local voluntary groups in the outreach and delivery aspect of such courses
- reviewing the role and contribution partners are expected to make to the implementation and delivery of projects, at the outset, may avoid key partners perceiving that they do not need to contribute to the delivery of basic skills courses
- recognition that many skills for employability projects represent a starting point, in moving individuals towards employment, rather than an end one, is a key lesson for NDC Partnerships

## 1. Introduction

Since the publication of the Moser report 'A Fresh Start' in 1999, reducing the number of people with poor literacy, numeracy and ICT skills has become a key priority for the government. This report identified that up to 7 million adults in England cannot read or write at the level we would expect of an 11 year old and that even more adults have difficulties with numbers. The move in the UK to become a knowledge driven economy has accentuated the need for more adults in the workforce to be highly educated. In spite of recent improvements in the UK economy such as the record low level of unemployment, low inflation and higher levels of investment; the UK still lags behind its main competitors in terms of productivity and competitiveness. This has in part been attributed to the skills gap that persists in the UK. In an attempt to respond to this problem the government has recently published a 'Skills White Paper' and a 'Skills for Life strategy' the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills.

### 1.1. National policy context

The 'Skills White Paper' and the 'Skills for Life Strategy' outline two keys aims. These are to make sure that individuals have the skills they need to ensure their employability for life and that employers are able to recruit people with the skills the business needs. In tackling the basic skills problem the government will seek to boost demand for learning and capacity to respond, raise standards and learner achievement. Specifically, the government has set a target of reducing the number of people with basic skills needs by 750,000 by 2004 and to help 1.5 million achieve national certificates by 2007. Changes have already been made to the basic skills curriculum and qualifications with the introduction of National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. In reducing the number of people with basic skills needs the government has identified the following groups for targeting support. These include:

- unemployed people and benefit claimants
- ex-offenders and those supervised in the community
- employees - public sector, low-skilled, young people
- other groups at risk of exclusion, including speakers of other languages and those in disadvantaged communities

### 1.2. Report Structure

This report is the second in a series which focuses on skills for employability. Skills for employability projects have been established in a number of New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas, as part of the worklessness theme programme. These projects are defined as initiatives that address the needs of adults with poor literacy and numeracy, improve employability skills and build relevant vocational skills required in the labour market to help people onto the first rung of employment.

This report is based on three case study areas: Southwark (Aylesbury) NDC, Manchester (Beswick and Openshaw) and Derby (Derwent) NDCs. Each NDC operates a skills for employability (basic skills) project. These projects have been established for varying lengths of time and indeed one is imminently coming to an end. The purpose of this report was to investigate the extent to which basic skills provision has engaged those most at risk of exclusion; to review the engagement and role of employers in tackling basic skills; and to identify, where possible, outcomes obtained through basic skills provision.

The report begins by updating the local context and conditions in each of the case study areas. It then reviews the nature of the intervention on offer in the NDCs highlighting recent changes in approach, interventions and Partnership arrangements. Information is then presented on outcomes, the report concludes with what works and lessons for NDC Partnerships.

## 2. Context and Problem

Understanding the local context and the magnitude of basic skills needs in the case study areas is important in order for the effectiveness of basic skills provision to be assessed. This section of the report details, therefore, the level of educational attainment and basic skills need; the extent of worklessness and potential target groups in the locality; and where possible employers demands and needs in recruiting new employees.

### 2.1. Brief profile of areas

#### Derwent NDC

Derwent NDC is located just to the north of Derby city centre. Whilst the area is adjacent to a growing business and industrial centre, the NDC area remains physically isolated from employment opportunities. It is cut off from the city centre as a result of the major artery roads and rail links into Derby. The lack of pedestrian access combined with poor public transport has reportedly contributed to the NDCs dislocation from the centre and thus jobs. Subsequently, the level of (long term) unemployment in the NDC is significantly higher than for Derby overall and the area ranks 437 in the Index of Deprivation 2000.

A recent survey, undertaken by the NDCs Jobs, Skills and Social Economy Theme Group, of local employers (101) revealed that of all the known businesses in the area, few employed local people. Only 25% of all jobs in the community are filled by local residents. Approximately 33% of the surveyed employers employed people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds while 8% employed people with disabilities. Of the businesses responding to the survey, 14% indicated that they had hard-to-fill vacancies in the following occupations: vehicle technicians, rail engineers, sales reps, service reps, skilled sewing machinists, development workers, window fitters, counter assistances, insurance staff, senior managers and hairdressers.

When questioned as to the reason for these vacancies 58% of respondents cited the lack of applicants with the required qualifications and skills as a key reason. Table 2.1 shows the difficulties reported by employers in filling job vacancies.

**Table 2.1: Main Difficulties in Filling Job Vacancies in Derwent by Local Employers**

Difficulty	Percentage of Respondents
Overall lack of applicants	11
Lack of applicants with required qualifications and skills	58
Lack of applicants with required working experience	32
Applicants lack basic ability to build on	11
Applicants have poor motivation/attitude	21
Reluctance to move due to market uncertainty	5
Short term contract	8
Higher wages offered elsewhere	11
Physical fitness	8

Source: The Business Report 2003: Inside the Boundary



The survey found that 58% of employers offered training and development opportunities to their employees in comparison to 76% of employers across Derby. A similar proportion identified that their workforce needed to improve their skills over the next two years. Of particular concern was the need to improve computer literacy, communication and practical skills, 5% of respondents highlighted the need for staff to improve literacy and numeracy skills.

A survey of individuals living in Derwent (584), undertaken by Derwent NDC, found that slightly more respondents whilst being fairly confident with the level of their basic skills did feel some support may be needed.

**Table 2.2: Shows Individuals responses to basic skills needs**

<b>How do you rate your:</b>					
	Confidence in talking to people	Your listening skills	Writing skills	Reading skills	Mathematical skills
Very confident	40.2	40.8	28.1	43.0	20.4
May need support	55.0	54.5	64.0	51.0	70.5
No experience	2.1	2.1	5.3	3.1	6.3
Did not respond	2.7	2.7	2.4	2.9	2.7

Source: Derwent New Deal for Communities: Jobs and skills Audit June 2003

### **Aylesbury NDC**

The Aylesbury estate is located in the borough of Southwark, in central London. The high level of unemployment, particularly long term unemployment, has contributed to considerable levels of worklessness in the area. Of those unemployed, 68% have been so for more than two years. Furthermore, 28% of unemployed people have not had a job since leaving school. It is reported that significant proportions of residents have adapted to living on welfare and as such have become dependent on benefits. Subsequently, the vast majority of unemployed people who took part in the NDC survey stated that they were not actively looking for work, citing health problems and the lack of affordable childcare and appropriate skills as the key reasons.

A survey undertaken as part of the New Deal for Communities National Evaluation in 2002 with 500 local Aylesbury estate residents found 31% of respondents had no qualifications at all. Whilst the NDC compared favourably with other NDC areas and the national average on NVQs Levels Four and Five, significantly fewer working age residents had obtained Level One or below, only 11% - approximately half the national average. Residents were also asked if they needed to improve their basic skills levels, their responses are detailed in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Shows Aylesbury respondents need to improve basic skills**

	<b>Aylesbury (%)</b>	<b>NDC Aggregate (%)</b>
Spelling	16	18
Reading	12	12
Writing	14	13
Maths	16	21
None of these	71	65
Don't know	2	1

Source: National Evaluation of New Deal for communities: Aylesbury Preliminary Results 2002

When questioned as to whether respondents had engaged in any education or training during the last 12 months 21% stated that they were currently or had recently completed some learning. Whilst 45% stated that they would like to take part in education and training which would help them get a job or get on in a current job.

### **East Manchester NDC**

The New East Manchester area covers Beswick and Clayton, Bradford and part of Central and Gorton north wards. All of the wards in the New East Manchester NDC area are contained within the 5% most deprived wards in England, according to the Index of Deprivation 2000. Whilst unemployment levels have fallen in recent years, in line with the national average, it remains stubbornly higher in New East Manchester than for the rest of Manchester. The demographics of the local area were also reported to be changing. In 1991, just over 5% of the population was reported to be from black and minority ethnic groups. Recent anecdotal information suggests that this figure is now significantly higher; the growth in the proportion of asylum seekers and people from ethnic minority backgrounds has increased the demand for basic skills and ESOL provision.

Research undertaken by New East Manchester during 2000 showed that skill levels in the area were quite low. It was reported that 68% of the working population have no qualifications or NVQ Level One equivalents. Previous surveys suggest that residents place little value on qualifications or learning. The Basic Skills Agency estimates that in the Beswick/Clayton and Bradford wards (plus parts of Gorton North and Central wards) 36% of the population has poor literacy and 42% poor numeracy skills. This equates to 8,280 residents with poor literacy and 9,660 residents with poor numeracy skills, aged over 16.

There are approximately 1,000 businesses located within the NDC area providing 10,000 jobs. These businesses typically employ less than 10 employees providing low skilled employment with commensurate pay. It is reported that 40% of businesses do not recruit from the local area.

## **2.2. Summary of key points**

- a significant proportion of residents within the NDCs area have no qualifications at all
- in Derby and New East Manchester there were a sizeable proportion of local businesses that did not recruit locally
- in New East Manchester and Aylesbury NDC the vast majority of survey respondents did not recognise a need to improve their basic skills

### 3. Nature of the Intervention

The findings from the first report 'Skills for Employability: Early Findings - Research Report 6' revealed that each of the case study areas had adopted a slightly different approach in tackling local skills needs. The purpose of this section is to report on any changes or modifications to the projects. The section begins by reviewing the nature of courses; the key interventions offered by the projects and the role of partnership working.

#### 3.1. Progress in delivering basic skills course

The approach and delivery mechanism adopted by Aylesbury NDC to tackle basic skills needs was regarded as the most traditional of the three case study areas. The Learneasy project developed and delivered jointly by Southwark College in collaboration with Cambridge House and Talbot, a local voluntary organisation, funded by the NDC amongst others, is a stand alone course. The Learneasy project provides basic skills tuition for adults in the Aylesbury area. The aim of the course is to enable individuals to increase self confidence, skills and abilities, access education and employment opportunities and promote their full participation in community life. Specifically the project has identified the following objectives:

- to remove barriers to education and employment through the provision of basic skills and ESOL opportunities to adult learners
- to increase residents' awareness of education and employment opportunities
- to increase the language and literacy levels within the designated neighbourhoods and thereby inform national targets
- to provide childcare facilities as a means of reducing a barrier to training
- to deliver initiatives through a multi-agency/Partnership approach
- to increase social and economic inclusion through empowering residents
- to impact upon and contribute to the social and economic objectives of the funding programmes

The Learneasy course has not undergone significant changes during the last 12 months with regards to its aims or delivery mechanism. However, as of the end of March 2004, Southwark College and Cambridge and Talbot have decided to withdraw from the project. The client group for the course is residents from the local area particularly black and minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers, lone parents and long term unemployed people. The course is designed to take into account the diverse needs of this heterogeneous group. Classes are delivered five times a week operating on a school timetable to enable parents to drop off and pick up their children. All courses are delivered at Cambridge House, a small friendly environment, where crèche places are provided for participants alongside other services for the local community.

The course is delivered in a 12 week block; however, the college operates a roll on - roll off policy in order to provide a more flexible approach to learning. The Learneasy project includes two courses: ESOL and Skills for Life. The former course engages learners at the pre-elementary, elementary and pre-intermediate level. It focuses on improving the learner's confidence and motivation thus improving their competence in speaking and using the English language. The Skills for Life course builds on the ESOL course and provides an opportunity for learners, having improved their basic skills, to apply these skills in accessing further education or employment opportunities. In particular, the course focuses on providing the skills individuals need so that they can secure employment, such as CV preparation and letter writing. Promoting effective communication represents a key aspect of the course. Learning materials have been

developed which enables learners to raise issues around housing, immigration, speaking to employers and other life experiences.

The Skills for Life strategy in Manchester is a multifaceted programme equipping local residents with a wide range of skills. The strategy has numerous links with the wider NDC worklessness programme. In practice the Skills for Life element of the NDC programme seeks to ensure that as many local residents as possible are able to benefit from the economic and employment opportunities that are becoming increasingly available in the area. The aims and objectives of the programme have not changed during the last 12 months. These being to raise the literacy and numeracy achievement of adults in the area by:

- establishing a coordinated approach to the development of literacy and numeracy skills provision
- to develop and implement a promotion and marketing strategy
- to increase the amount, quality, diversity and accessibility of provision
- to develop and deliver training in literacy and numeracy skills to staff of training providers, employers, statutory and non statutory organisations and other groups
- to coordinate and maximize funding opportunities for literacy and numeracy skills

However, a few new elements have been added to the existing programme. An Employers Training pilot has recently been launched. The purpose of this project is to facilitate the delivery of work-based basic skills provision and includes the drawing up of a training needs analysis plan for the company. In addition, new courses have also been established on financial literacy and conflict resolution both of which incorporate basic skills. The programme is also developing links with the educational psychology service and local schools.

In Derby there has been a greater movement towards embedding basic skills provision into all of the projects contained within the worklessness strand. For example, the job brokerage project incorporates basic skills as well as job searching and work experience. The Construction Intermediate Labour Market project also involves participants undertaking some basic skills work. The Valuing Experience project, the primary focus of this report, represents just one aspect of the approach adopted in Derby to provide skills for employability.

The Valuing Experience project is used as a tool for widening participation in that it aims to encourage individuals who may not have thought of themselves as learners to become learners. The key aim of the project is to raise confidence and self-esteem through recognising and valuing the skills and knowledge that individuals already have and to encourage further learning. Specifically the project seeks to:

- find new ways to engage residents in learning
- improve self-esteem

The Valuing Experience in the Community and Workplace project has not undergone significant changes during the last 12 months; the model of working has, however, slightly changed. The original aim of the project was to work with individuals in a small group situation but in order to facilitate the project it is now delivered alongside other more formal courses. The client group for the project includes, amongst others, women returners and the long-term unemployed. The Valuing Experience project seeks to equip individuals with a wide range of transferable skills. A key focus of the project is on developing a portfolio of evidence and training locally based learner advisors to work with and engage other local people.

### **3.2. Key interventions**

All of the case studies sought to provide a broad range of interventions to promote the take up of courses and support the learner through to the completion of the course. Each NDC provided: free child care facilities; contributed to transport costs, where necessary and appropriate; assigned a buddy or used local volunteers as a means of engaging and supporting learners; developed an individual learning plan; provided debt and financial management advice through engaging with credit unions and or benefit advisers; and provided general educational and careers advice. The full package of interventions was considered to be crucial to the take up of the course and ensuring that learners had the support they needed.

The rationale for these interventions were identical across the NDCs areas. In order to engage with local residents it was felt to be necessary to remove as many of the barriers to learning as possible. In some cases the take up of these services was limited. In Manchester, for example, learners made little use of the crèche facilities, preferring instead to make their own arrangements. In Aylesbury, there was little need for transport costs as the venue for all courses was in the local community, a few minutes walk from the Aylesbury estate.

Most of the projects have now been operating for one year or more and such it is becoming apparent which interventions are critical to the success of the projects and are working well. In all of the case study areas the use of buddies and or local volunteers to assist in outreach work and provide ongoing support to learners was crucial. In Derby the role of local volunteers was viewed not simply as a means of recruiting new learners or supporting them but as a means of engaging with the local community, helping the community to help itself. The Valuing Experience project clearly demonstrates how NDCs can engage with the community, empower residents to get involved in changing their own circumstances and those of their neighbours. The provision of careers and educational advice was also considered to be vitally important.

### **3.3. Partnership working**

The role and importance of effective Partnership working is clearly demonstrated in each of the case study areas. The progress the NDCs have made in implementing the projects have all, to some degree, been facilitated or impeded by Partnership working. In Aylesbury a broad range of partners and links to other projects have been established to support and facilitate Learneasy. The project has links with the careers and personnel department within Southwark College, which provides career advice and interview practice for students; Cambridge House Legal Centre and Volunteers project provides some administrative support, teaching volunteers and advice to students on accessing benefits. Links have also been made with Elephant Angels an advocacy project which assists learners obtain information from companies and organisations and Southwark Education Training Advice for Adults which supports learners once they have left Learneasy.

The extent of Partnership working between Aylesbury NDC and Southwark College/Cambridge House and Talbot has in contrast been limited. This in part may be attributed to the way in which the project was originally funded. When the project was first established it was funded solely by the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) managed by Southwark Council. The Council then decided to diversify its funding base and sought out multiple funding streams for Learneasy. Unbeknown to the project managers, the project was now in receipt of monies from three separate funding streams each requiring separate monitoring, financial claims and evaluation forms to be completed. This had a huge and disproportionate impact on the College in terms of managing and administrating the project, given its size. Thus when an additional

request was made by the NDC to differentiate beneficiaries between the different funding streams, a decision was made by Southwark College and Cambridge and Talbot to terminate the project.

Partnership working has also proved to be difficult, at times, in Manchester. The NDC Partnership has recently been restructured and as a result the Skills for Life programme is now overseen by the economic task group, this has considerably improved Partnership arrangements. The group is better attended and participants are more involved in directing and overseeing the implementation of the programme. Engaging with mainstream training providers, however, remains problematic. The ill attendance of the two largest training providers has led to some problems ensuring the delivery of the programme, particularly in booking tutors to deliver classes. The lack of available basic skills tutors continues to be the most significant problem faced by Manchester in implementing the programme. In responding to this problem the Skills for Life team have at times had to resort to delivering training internally. This has contributed to incorrect perceptions being formed by some partners that the NDC is a deliverer of basic skills training and has been viewed more as a competitor than as a partner or a commissioner of training.

Establishing effective working relationships with other partners is proving to be more straightforward. The Skills for Life team are cementing new relationship with relocating and existing employers and organisations. Indeed a new member of staff has recently been appointed to assist in the process. The involvement of employers in the programme is threefold. Firstly, employers wishing to fill job vacancies are encouraged to work with the NDC to recruit local residents. Employers also work with the Skills for Life team to help identify and address the basic skills needs within their own workforces. Key participants include: Connexions, Groundwork, Primary Care Trust and the Prince's Trust. Finally employers are also actively involved in the NDC Partnership particularly the economic task group.

A crucial part of the work undertaken in Derby revolves around Partnership working, engaging with the local community and businesses. Each NDC programme area has a theme group which directs the development and implementation of projects. The Jobs, Skills and Social Economy theme group includes representatives from relevant agencies, community residents and local businesses. The team has invested considerable time and energy into engaging with the local community and businesses to encourage them to participate in this process. In order to thoroughly understand the needs of the NDC and to target projects appropriately, the Jobs, Skills and Social Economy team undertook a local employers and households Jobs and Skills Audit. This involved sending a questionnaire to all local businesses and over 500 local community residents. In gathering and collating information this frequently necessitated speaking to respondents on a one-to-one basis. Residents and local businesses were asked several questions concerning their skills needs and the availability of jobs in the area. The findings from these reports were published and widely circulated in the community. This served not only to raise awareness of the NDC but also encouraged those with an interest in this field to get involved through the theme groups. The survey in addition to the business grants offered by the NDC has provided an opening for engaging with local residents and businesses. At the project level close links have been established with the Access Department at the University of Derby, this provides a route for students to gain additional credits for their voluntary work. The project also maintains close links with Sure Start and a wide range of voluntary organisations through the Council for Voluntary Service.

### **3.4. Summary of key points**

Whilst there have not been significant changes to projects during the last 12 months there has been a greater movement towards embedded basic skills throughout the entire worklessness programme area. Therefore it is increasingly difficult to separate out the basic skills strands from the rest of the worklessness programme.

There was a general acknowledgement across all three case study areas that a wide range of interventions are necessary to promote the take up of courses. The use of local volunteers to support learners was regarded as the most important invention a course could provide.

The provision of careers advice and general guidance was considered to be the second most important intervention. Many learners particularly those from vulnerable groups suffer multiple barriers and face numerous life problems; it is therefore crucial that support is available on and off the course.

The Valuing Experience project clearly demonstrates how NDCs can promote the acquisition of vital skills through encouraging participants to get involved in mentoring and supporting new learners. In so doing empowering residents to change their circumstances and those of their community.

Effective Partnership working is a crucial ingredient for delivering successful skills for employability courses. It is important that residents, local businesses and organisations are able to feed into the design, structure and delivery of courses. This not only promotes a sense of ownership but will also facilitate the mainstreaming thus sustainability of the project.

## 4. Outcomes and Impact

This section of the report details project outcomes and impacts. It has not been possible to collect detailed monitoring information for all of the case study areas. Therefore anecdotal information has been used in some instances to provide feedback detailing who the beneficiaries are and their outcomes.

### 4.1. Progress to date

Table 4.1 details outputs achieved in the first three quarters of 2003/4 for the Learneasy project. This provides some indication of the types of outputs being delivered. It is apparent that certain outputs have already been exceeded. These include the number of learners achieving qualifications and the number of child care places provided. It is also apparent that to date learners have not progressed into employment. Analysis of last year's monitoring data reveals that out of a total of 79 learners two learners gained employment<sup>1</sup>. However five learners went on to do further study within the college.

**Table 4.1: Learneasy outputs**

Outputs	Achieved	Target
Number of learners	54	79
Trained obtaining qualifications	41	32
Training weeks	144	270
Child care places	37	32
No. trained who obtain employment	0	0

Source: Southwark College 2004 (These statistics include targets for all funding streams)

A breakdown of the type of qualifications achieved provides further insight and thus potential explanation for this (see Table 4.2). Over 60% of learners have been working towards ESOL qualifications in comparison to 25% working towards the more difficult Building Employability Skills qualification. This suggests that significant proportions of learners are at the very preliminary stages of gaining employability skills and may require additional support before accessing the labour market. Indeed this assertion is supported by the College.

*“Many students are a long way down the road from gaining jobs. Some students have no English at all and have basic skills needs in their first language. The amount of work and assistance these students need is intensive. The vast majority of students start at the lowest level and have multiple needs.”* (College representative)

**Table 4.2: Type of qualifications obtained (2003/4)**

Qualifications obtained	Number of learners
ESOL	26
Building Employability Skills	10
Combination	4

Source: Southwark College

<sup>1</sup> Please note the destination of all leavers is not known



In Derby a total of 178 individuals<sup>2</sup> have participated in the project since it began. The vast majority of learners have achieved accreditation for their skills and have moved onto employment, further education and many have become Learner Advisors for the NDC.

## 4.2. Beneficiaries

Focus groups were undertaken in Derby and Manchester with learners to ascertain their views on the courses attended, the extent to which they were satisfied with the course and to gain some understanding of what works (or not).

In Derby the vast majority of focus group participants were already involved in the work of the NDC or had previously enrolled on other courses. For those participants that were not involved in training or the NDC, the CACTI Centre<sup>3</sup> had referred individuals to the NDC. A key motivation for several participants to enrol had been a desire to accredit their existing skills and thus raise their confidence levels, so they could pursue further training or employment upon completion. One participant stated that the ability to help others and give something back to the community had been a key reason for them enrolling. Several members of the group had received some additional support from the NDC to enable them to attend the course, without which enrolling and remaining on the course would have proved too difficult. Of those that had received some support, assistance with childcare was the most frequently cited. Only one participant had received some help with transport costs. The assistance with childcare arrangements were greatly appreciated by group members, not simply that places were made available but also the additional support provided by the project organisers in booking and confirming times. Participants felt able to concentrate on their studies knowing their children were being properly taken care of.

The overwhelming majority of participants stated that they felt a huge sense of personal achievement in undertaking the course. As a result individuals felt that they now have more confidence in applying for jobs and had thoroughly enjoyed the learning process, meeting new people and helping new learners negotiate the process. A few members felt the title of the course was a little off putting in that it was vague and did not really explain what the course was about, which may act as a barrier. However, a key barrier to participation was considered to be the 'confidence barrier' in that residents may perceive that it will be too difficult for them or that the course is not aimed at people like them. This point was reiterated by other group members when questioned as to the course content, structure and delivery. Several individuals stated that they felt the assessment criteria were complex and overly complicated. Many stated that they simply did not understand the academic language and that someone had had to explain it to them. However, once individuals had been on the course for awhile understanding what was required of them became easier.

All the participants felt that they had gained something as a direct result of attending the course. Their own experiences on the course had led several members to train to become learner advisors. Other members of the group on completing the course had immediately registered on vocational training course at the University and local college.

In Manchester a key motivation for learners to enrol on the Conflict Resolution course had been a desire to help their children. Virtually all focus group participants had felt they needed to gain some new skills so that they could help their loved ones effectively manage conflict situations in school; assist them to effectively communicate with

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<sup>2</sup> This figure includes NDC and non NDC participants

<sup>3</sup> The CACTI Centre offers advice and information on a range of services and includes Citizens Advice Bureau and Jobcentre Plus

teachers and others in positions of authority and negotiate a way through problems with other parents. Most participants had found out about the course through neighbours and close friends. In a few cases, members were already enrolled on other courses and progressed onto the Conflict Resolution course. The courses are organised at times which are suitable for participants so child care arrangements were not particularly a pressing problem. The vast majority of learners felt that they had improved their confidence and communication skills as a result of attending the course. The ability to effectively communicate with their children was cited as being the most important outcome of attending the course. The confidence gained as a result of participating had assisted one respondent in taking up voluntary work which may lead to paid employment.

### **4.3. Adding Value**

The main way in which all of the projects were able to add value related to the delivery of the project, the fact that projects were tailored to the needs of local residents, are delivered to small groups and that learners are able to receive one-to-one support if needed from a learning advisor, buddy or teaching volunteer. It was felt that the intensity of the support provided by NDC projects is unsurpassed. Alternative funding streams such as the Learning and Skills Council are not able to financially support these types of projects due to the high costs involved in engaging with local residents, removing barriers to participation such as providing child care and supporting learners throughout the duration of the course.

### **4.4. Summary of key issues**

- it is apparent that the work undertaken in all of the case study areas is primarily concerned with the acquisition of life skills. These projects therefore provide a foundation on which learners can build before going on to gain further vocational skills and qualifications or in a minority of cases gain employment
- evidence from the focus groups suggests that most learners commenced the course with a low level of confidence and without the encouragement from neighbours and friends would not have enrolled at all. The one-to-one outreach approach is crucially important if target groups are going to be reached
- the small number of participants enrolling on courses does mean that these projects are resource intensive and costly. It is questionable as to whether other funding providers would be able to support this level of provision. It is clear however that any provision that does not cater for child care needs, outreach workers or mentors is unlikely to engage with this client group

## 5. What Works and Lessons

In Derby and Manchester there has been a greater movement towards embedding basic skills provision, throughout the worklessness programme. Indeed even in Southwark the new basic skills course to be delivered by the College independently will embed basic skills into a health and social care course.

- a key lesson for NDC Partnerships must be to assess how and where basic skills could be incorporated into the worklessness programme area. Basic skills provision can no longer be regarded as a separate or independent area of NDC activity

Engaging with those most at risk of social exclusion is a difficult and time consuming process. Developing links with the local community forms a crucial aspect of this work. The use of volunteers in engaging and supporting learners clearly represents an effective and sustainable practice. In all of the case study areas a key motivating factor for individuals in enrolling on courses was the encouragement from neighbours and close friends.

- a key lesson for NDC Partnerships must be, where possible, to involve local residents and or local voluntary groups in the outreach and delivery aspect of basic skills courses

Partnership working has impeded and facilitated the implementation and progress of the skills for employability projects, in all of the case study areas. Forming good Partnership at the NDC level as well as at the project level is vitally important. Understanding the nature of skills for employability projects and having a clearly defined role for partners' aids in the process.

- reviewing the role and contribution partners are expected to make to the implementation and delivery of projects, at the outset, may avoid key partners perceiving that they do not need to contribute to the delivery of basic skills courses

It is apparent that most of the skills for employability projects are concerned primarily with promoting life skills. In many instances learners have progressed onto further learning and in a minority of cases gained employment. These courses often represent a starting point for engaging with individuals. Therefore project funders need to avoid setting overly ambition targets, particularly in relation to employment.

- recognition that many skills for employability projects represent a starting point, in moving individuals towards employment, rather than an end one, is a key lesson for NDC Partnerships

## 6. Conclusions

To conclude the work undertaken by Manchester, Derby and Southwark NDCs has certainly made inroads to engaging with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. Ensuring that individuals continue to up-skill and gain new skills is dependent upon outreach work, the provision of a wide range of interventions, tailored to local circumstances and continuous support. This does, however, raise some issues concerning the sustainability and the ability to mainstream intensive skills for employability type projects. Further research should review how, if at all, this could be undertaken.

## 7. References

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