

A study on the
perceived impacts
of ESF funded
learning on
employability in
London

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1 Introduction

1.1 This document reports on a survey of 1,799 learners in London who were funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the 2000-2006 ESF Objective 3 programme. The findings are part of a national study which interviewed 4,856 learners, commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to assess the impact, as reported by learners, of their ESF learning on employment outcomes and employability skills.

1.2 The LSC had spent £1.2bn ESF money by December 2007 (approximately £200m a year) which supplements and adds value to mainstream Government funding, increases the volume of learners on mainstream programmes, and is used to target hard to reach groups (in particular those not in employment, education or training aged 16-19 (NEET), the economically inactive, lone parents, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. Ex-offenders were also a key focus for the national study; however the regional base sizes for this group are too low for analysis purposes.

1.3 The overall aim of the research was to understand the impact of ESF funded provision on the employment outcomes and employability skills of individuals, for example measuring the proportion that say they have: moved into employment and/or off benefit since the course; progressed in their job role; progressed into further learning and/or achieved qualifications; and/or improved their employability skills. More specifically, the objectives of the research were to assess:

- How ESF funding can make a difference to the outcomes of learners compared with mainstream provision alone
- To assess differences between those on provision funded by ESF only and those funded by a mix of ESF and LSC funding
- Why learners want to participate in learning
- Reasons for non-completion
- From the learners' perspective the main benefits of participating in the ESF funded learning
- Whether the benefits of learning differ by demographic group.

- 1.4 *It is important to note, however, that the research investigates such issues as changes in employment levels and progression at work by examining the situation of a group of ESF funded learners before their course (which had an actual or planned completion date between 1st August 2006 and 31st July 2007) with their situation in early 2009. However we cannot definitely conclude that any actual gains have come about as a result of their undertaking the ESF funded course since the gains may have arisen anyway, without their undertaking the learning. To isolate the effects of participation in ESF funded provision on employment would require comparing outcomes among the learners interviewed with a control group of similar individuals not undertaking such provision. It should also be noted that the outcomes as reported by learners may differ from those recorded on Management Information such as the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). For these reasons this study is therefore limited to reporting the perception of the impact of ESF funded provision only.*

Methodology

- 1.5 Fieldwork was conducted from IFF's telephone centre at its offices in London from 27th January to 22nd March 2009. The sample was drawn from the Further Education and ESF Short Record data collections within the LSC's Individualised Learner Record (ILR). The following eligibility criteria were applied for learners to qualify for selection into the sample:
- Learners must have studied a purely ESF funded course or joint LSC and ESF funded provision with an actual or planned completion date between 1st August 2006 and 31st July 2007;
 - Learners must have been aged between 16 and 55 years old;
 - Learners must have completed 50% or more of their learning aim;
 - Learners must have been unemployed or working 16 hours per week or less, and/or having their fees remitted due to receiving Job Seeker's Allowance or income-based benefits at the start of their course;
 - Learners without telephone numbers on the ILR and those marked as indicating that they did not wish to be contacted for survey purposes were excluded;
- 1.6 At the analysis stage the data was weighted to ensure the achieved sample was representative of the population of ESF learners in London. Rim weighting was applied by age, gender, funding (ESF-only v. joint ESF and LSC funded learning) and guided learning hours (30 hours or under, 31-60 hours, 61-135 hours, 136 hours or more, or no information).
- 1.7 Throughout the report findings are compared with the national findings. It is worth noting, however, that the profile of ESF learners in London differs from that nationally; in London the profile has:

- A greater proportion of female learners (63% v. 58% nationally)
- A greater proportion of LSC & ESF co-financed learners (46% v. 30% nationally)
- A much lower proportion of White British learners (23% v. 60% nationally)

2 What is the profile of ESF learners in London?

Key messages on the profile of ESF learners in London:

- More than 9 in 10 ESF learners reported that they were not working at the time they started the course (93%), and half had never worked
- Half of all learners reported having been unemployed for more than a year prior to the course (48%)
- The majority of ESF learners reported being in receipt of benefits at the time of starting the course (82%)

Learner situation immediately before starting the course

- 2.1 Before discussing the reasons learners give as to why they undertook their ESF-funded learning we look briefly at the work and benefit status of learners prior to undertaking their course. The key characteristics of ESF learners at the time of starting the course, discussed more fully throughout the chapter, were that:
- The vast majority reported that they were not working (93%). To be eligible for the survey individuals could not be working 16 hours a week or more before the course, with the remainder (7%) working part-time
 - A significant proportion reported having been unemployed for more than a year (48% of all learners)
 - A large proportion had never worked (50% of all learners)
 - Most reported being in receipt of benefits before starting their course (82%), and over half of those in receipt of income or employment related benefits had been receiving them for over a year (61%)
- 2.2 The proportion reporting being in work immediately before the course in London (7%) was similar to that found nationally (8%). However, London learners were more likely to have never had paid employment (50%) than learners nationally (42%).
- 2.3 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic ESF learners were more likely to report that they had never worked before the course than White British learners (54% v. 36%).
- 2.4 Given the high proportion reporting that they had never worked it is not surprising that half of those not working when they started the course had been unemployed for more than a year (51%), while over a quarter (29%) had been unemployed for more than 5 years. This means that 48% of all London ESF learners were unemployed for over a year before starting their course and 27% had been unemployed for five years or more. This shows how the pool of ESF learners in London contains a high proportion of long-term unemployed; higher than that found nationally (43% and 24% respectively).

- 2.5 The majority of ESF learners reported being in receipt of benefits at the time they started the course (82%, slightly higher than the 79% found nationally) most commonly Job seeker's Allowance (32%) and Income Support (33% - this is much higher than the 25% found nationally). Considerably more joint funded learners (88%) were receiving benefits at the time of starting the course than ESF-only funded learners (76%), with the difference particularly marked for Income support.

Table 2.1: Benefits learners report receiving immediately before starting the course				
	<i>London</i>			<i>National</i>
<i>Base: all</i>	<i>All ESF (1,799)</i>	<i>ESF only funded (899)</i>	<i>Joint funded (900)</i>	<i>All ESF (4,856)</i>
Any benefits	82%	76%	88%	79%
Job Seeker's Allowance	32%	31%	35%	30%
Income Support	33%	23%	45%	25%
Incapacity benefit / Employment support Allowance	8%	8%	7%	10%
Education Maintenance Allowance	7%	9%	5%	9%
<i>'Any benefits' includes, as well as the specific benefits listed in the table, Disability Living Allowance, Child Benefit and Carer's Allowance</i>				

- 2.6 Learners on income or employment-related benefits at the time of starting the course (66% of all learners) were asked how long they had been in receipt of benefits: over three fifths (61%) stated that they had been in receipt of these benefits for a year or more.

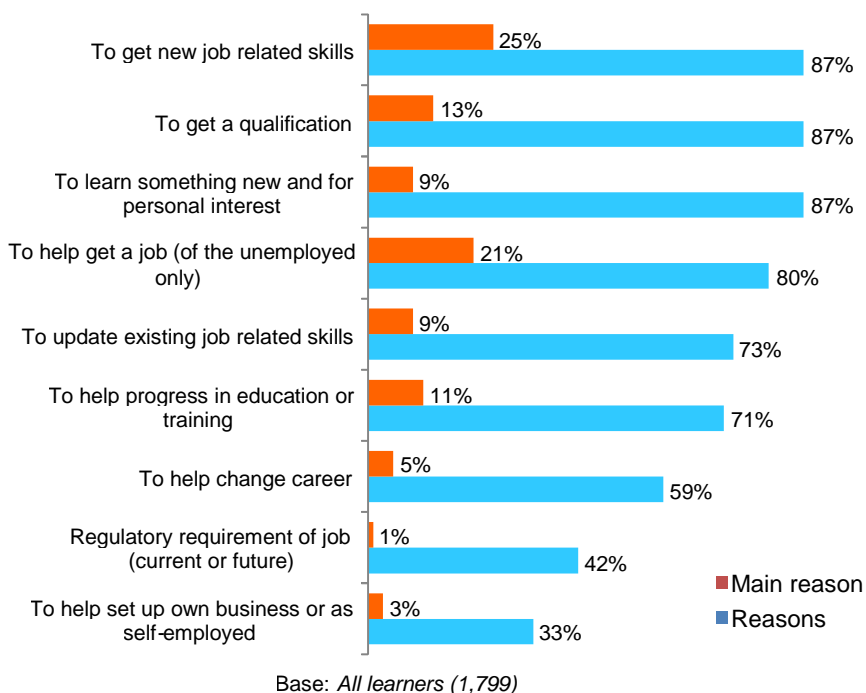
3 Why do learners in London choose to participate in ESF provision?

Key messages on learners' reasons for undertaking learning:

- Learners tend to have a number of reasons for undertaking ESF courses, combining personal interest / wanting to learn something new (87%), a desire for a (further) qualification (87%) and job-related aspects such as wanting to gain new job skills (87%) and to help get a job (80% of those not in paid work when starting)
- The importance of employment-related reasons for taking the course is emphasised when learners were asked for their *main* reason: gaining new job-related skills (25%) or to help get a job (21% of the unemployed) were the two most common main reasons given, and updating existing job skills (9%) and to help change career (5%) were also quite often key motivators

3.1 All learners were read a list of possible benefits from undertaking the course and asked which they had hoped to obtain, and which had been their main reason for taking the course. The most commonly cited reasons are shown below in Figure 3.1 – this was a prompted question, with possible reasons read out to respondents.

Figure 3.1: Reasons for taking the course (prompted)



- 3.2 When asked for their main reason, the two key responses were gaining job-related skills (25%) or to help get a job (21% of the unemployed), indicating a strong employment focus. In comparison personal interest (9%) and gaining qualifications (13%), although as likely to be mentioned as reasons for participating in learning, were far less often cited as the key reason.
- 3.3 There were some differences by sub-group in terms of their reasons for taking the course, as follows:
- A lower proportion of female learners took the course to help get a job (78% v. 84% of male learners) but a higher proportion took the course in order to help progress on to further learning or training (73% v. 67% of male learners).
 - A higher proportion of lone parents took the course to help progress in learning or training (78% v. 71% overall).
 - Learners aged 16-19 were particularly likely to have taken the course to get a qualification (92%), and 24% said this was their main reason.
- 3.4 London learners' reasons for taking the course were generally similar to those found nationally, although learners in London were more likely to have taken the course to help progress in education or training (71% v. 62% nationally).

4 What has been the change in reported employment levels since the course?

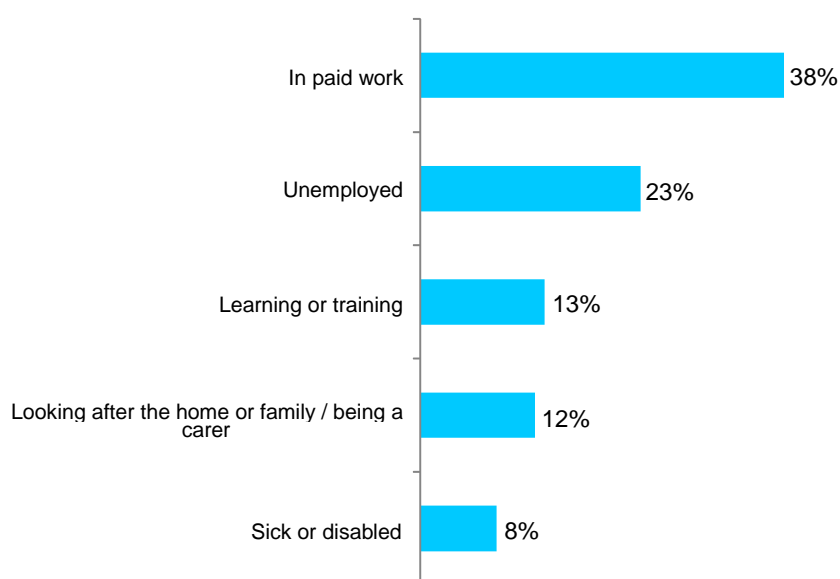
Key messages on the change in employment outcomes reported by learners since their ESF learning:

- In total 50% of learners had been in paid employment since the course, and almost two-fifths (38%) were working at the time of the interview. This compares with 7% that had been working immediately before the course
- The net increase in London in ESF learners in employment compared against the start of the course (31 percentage points) is slightly below that found nationally (34 percentage points)
- Most of those in new jobs (i.e. who were unemployed pre the course or who had changed jobs) have secured permanent positions (73%), and half are working 30 hours a week or more (48%)
- Of those working both before the course and when interviewed, almost nine in ten had experienced improvements at work, most often increased job satisfaction and or job security, and two thirds of these learners felt the course helped them achieve these improvements

What proportion of learners has moved into employment?

- 4.1 Immediately before starting the course, 7% of learners had been working. At the time of the interview, almost two in five of all learners were in paid employment (38%). Around one in eight (13%) were in learning or training – nearly all of these were in full education or learning (12%), with a small number on Apprenticeships or on a government funded scheme for employment training.

Figure 4.1: Main learner activity in early 2009



Base: All learners (1,799)

4.2 The increase in the proportion of London learners in employment since the time before the course is close to but slightly below that found nationally (31 v. 34 percentage points).

4.3 The following table shows changes in employment status by key sub-group.

Table 4.1: Employment status as reported by learners				
	<i>Base size</i>	Employed pre the course	Employed at time of interview	Net change
<i>Base: all</i>		%	%	
All ESF learners nationally	4,856	8	42	+34%
All ESF learners in London	1,799	7	38	+31%
ESF-only funded	899	7	43	+36% *
Joint ESF & LSC funded	900	6	32	+25%
White British	422	7	38	+31%
Black and Minority Ethnic	1,374	7	38	+31%
Male	557	8	39	+31%
Female	1,242	6	38	+31%
Disability / Long term illness	374	3	21	+18%
Lone parents	758	6	34	+29%
Born outside the UK	932	7	38	+31%
Unemployed <6 months pre course	340	-	48	+48% *
Unemployed 7-12 months	247	-	43	+43% *
Unemployed > 1 year	885	-	30	+30%
<i>Percentages marked with a * show those where the net change figure is statistically higher at the 95% confidence level than the all learner figure</i>				

4.4 A greater proportion of ESF-only funded learners and those unemployed before the course for less than a year (particularly those unemployed for 6 months or less) had experienced increases in employment levels.

4.5 Learners that at the time of the interview were working in a new job or as newly

self-employed were asked what role the course had played in achieving their employment status. Over half of this group (58%) felt that the course had been vital or helpful in achieving employment; this is slightly higher than that found nationally (55%).

- 4.6 Of those in a new job or who were newly self-employed, Black and Minority Ethnic learners (60%), those born outside the UK (61%) and those for whom English is not their first language (62%) were the most likely to state that the course had been vital or helpful in achieving this outcome.

What type of (new) employment have people gained?

- 4.7 Over a third (35%) of all learners were at the time of the interview working in a job that they did not have before starting the course (the vast majority of these had not been in work before the course, though some were working for a new employer). There was a spread in terms of how soon this (new) employment was gained: 23% acquired this job during or immediately after the course (23%), 18% said it was within 3 months of the course finishing, for 13% it was between 3 and 6 months, for 14% it was more than 6 months up to a year, and for almost three in ten (29%) they acquired the job more than a year after the course finished (29%).
- 4.8 A key area of interest is the type of work that people have gained. Most of those in new employment were in permanent positions (73%), and half were in full time positions working 30 hours or more a week (48%). The jobs that have been gained are spread across the broad occupational groupings; though with something of a focus in more manual, lower skilled positions; personal service roles (24%), sales and customer service positions (17%) and elementary occupations (16%).

Table 4.2: Job role of those in new employment	
<i>Base: Those working at the time of the interview but not in the same job as before the course (622)</i>	%
Personal service	24
Sales and customer service	17
Elementary occupations	16
Admin & secretarial	11
T Associate professional & technical occupations	8
Skilled trades	8
Professional occupations	5
Managers and senior officials	4
Plant process and machine operatives	3

Those who had worked since the course but were no longer working

- 4.9 In addition to those learners in employment at the time of interview, around one in seven learners (14%) had had paid employment since their course finished but were no longer working. These jobs (the first post-course job was discussed if they had had more than one) were particularly likely to have been in elementary positions (22%) and sales and customer service roles (22%).
- 4.10 Half of these learners who worked after the course but were no longer working described the jobs as having been temporary or seasonal (53%) and in addition around one in eight said it had been a job with a fixed term contract (12%); only a third (34%) had been in permanent positions.
- 4.11 Approaching half said the decision to leave the job was their own (42%) or was decided in agreement with the employer (5%), though this was much higher among women (58%) than men (38%). Where the decision was not completely theirs, by far the most common reason cited was that the job had been temporary (51%). However, redundancy (16%) and some other form of dismissal (9%) were also quite common reasons why the job had come to an end where the employer had made the decision.

How many learners have moved off benefits?

- 4.12 At the time of the interview just over half the learners (55%) were receiving benefits. This represents a reduction of 27 percentage points from the situation immediately before the course, the same as nationally.

Table 4.3: Benefits received pre-course and at the time of interview				
<i>Base: All learners</i>	<i>London (1,799)</i>		<i>National (4,856)</i>	
	<i>Pre the course</i>	<i>Time of interview</i>	<i>Pre the course</i>	<i>Time of interview</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Any benefits	82	55	79	52
Income Support	33	22	25	17
Job Seeker's Allowance	32	10	30	10
Incapacity benefit / Employment support Allowance	8	5	10	7

- 4.13 Reflecting the increased employment levels already discussed, the largest fall is in regard to Job Seeker's Allowance (10% from 32%).
- 4.14 ESF-only funded learners were less likely to be on any form of benefits (49%) than LSC & ESF joint funded learners (61%). However, fewer ESF-only funded learners were in receipt of benefits pre the course (76% v. 88% of those joint funded), and the percentage point decrease in those on benefit is the same for both groups.

What work-based improvements have been gained by those continuing in employment?

- 4.15 Learners that were employed before starting the course and were working at the time of the interview for either the same or a new employer (a base of 72 learners) were read a list of possible improvements and asked whether they had experienced any of these improvements at work since completing the course.
- 4.16 Almost nine in ten (88%) had experienced at least one of the improvements listed in Figure 4.2. Men (94% v. 85% of women), those doing entry level or level 1 courses (95%) and ESF-only funded learners (94% v. 78% among those joint

funded) were particularly positive.

- 4.17 As shown on the following chart, the improvements most likely to have been gained among those continuing in employment were increased job satisfaction (68%), better job security (67%) and increased opportunities to train (58%). Approximately half indicated that their pay had increased since the course, and two fifths had had a promotion or were in a higher level job.

Figure 4.2: Improvements seen since completing the course in current or new job (prompted)



Base: Those employed before the course and at the time of interview (72)

- 4.18 Those experiencing improvements were asked about the role of the course in bringing these about. A fifth of those citing improvements at work (20%) felt that these improvements had come about directly because of the course; a total of two thirds (67%) felt that it had been a direct result of the course or that the course helped.

5 What impacts did learners in London report that ESF courses had on their employability skills?

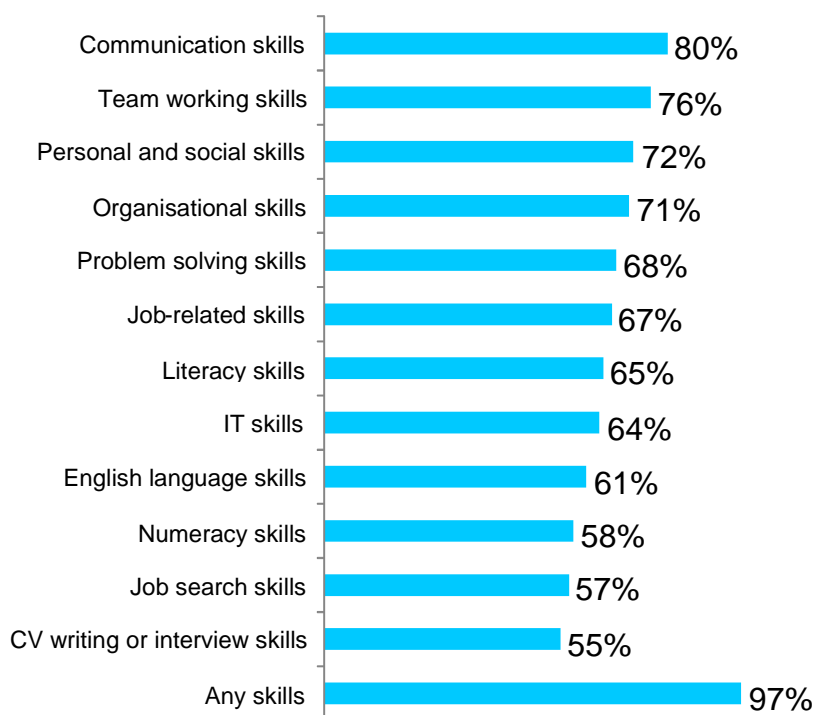
Key messages on the impact of ESF learning on employability skills:

- Almost all learners (97%) felt they had gained employability skills as a result of the course
- Almost three quarters (72%) of those not working at the time of the interview felt that the course had given them more chance of finding a job in the future
- Two-fifths (42%) had undertaken further learning since the course, and a quarter (24%) had achieved a qualification since the ESF learning

How many learners have improved their employability skills and what skills have they gained?

- 5.1 Nearly all ESF learners felt their course has had a positive impact on their employability skills. The vast majority (97%) believe that they have gained one or more work-related skills from the course. Testament to this, three quarters feel their employment and career prospects have improved as a result of the course (76%), and a similar proportion of those not working at the time of the interview felt they had more chance of finding a job in the future as a result of the course (72%).
- 5.2 The skills which learners felt they acquired by undertaking the course are listed on the following chart. This was a prompted question, with the list of skills read out to respondents.

Figure 5.1: Skills gained from undertaking the course (prompted)



Base: All learners (1,799)

- 5.3 Although at least half of learners felt they gained each individual skill area, ESF courses appear to have had particular success in regard to inter-personal skills: communication (80%), team working (76%) and personal and social skills (72%). In comparison around three fifths had benefited in regard to skills directly related to gaining work – job search skills (57%) and CV writing or interview skills (55%).
- 5.4 Predictably learners who completed the course were more likely to feel they had gained any of these skills than those who left early (98% v. 93% respectively), and approximately 7-14% fewer early leavers than completers mentioned improving communication, team working, organisational and problem solving skills.
- 5.5 Black and Minority Ethnic learners were more likely to have gained each of the individual skills listed in Figure 5.1 as a result of the course: in particular English language skills (68% v. 40% of White British learners) and literacy skills (71% v. 48% of White British learners). Similarly young learners aged 16-19 were more likely to say their skills improved in virtually every area.
- 5.6 NEET learners were more likely than average to have gained each skill area, with the difference particularly marked for team working skills (82% v. 76% overall) and CV writing or interview skills (63% v. 55%).
- 5.7 In comparison to learners nationally, ESF learners in London were generally more positive with regard to the skills they had gained as a result of taking the course, particularly in relation to communication, literacy and numeracy, IT skills, CV writing and interview skills and job search skills.

Table 5.1: Skills gained from undertaking the course ESF learners v. National		
<i>Base:</i>	<i>London (1,799)</i>	<i>National (4,856)</i>
Communication skills	80%	75%
Team working skills	76%	72%
Personal and social skills	72%	69%
Organisational skills	71%	67%
Problem solving skills	68%	66%
Job-related skills	67%	65%
Literacy skills	65%	60%
IT skills	64%	57%
English language skills	61%	54%
Numeracy skills	58%	53%
Job search skills	57%	52%
CV writing or interview skills	55%	50%

How many learners have achieved qualifications through ESF funded learning?

- 5.8 Over two thirds of learners in London (71%), and more than four in five completers (83%), achieved a qualification through their ESF funded learning. Achievement of a qualification is higher than that found nationally (66% of learners and 79% of completers). Joint ESF & LSC funded learners were much more likely to achieve a qualification (79%, equivalent to 85% of completers) than those funded through ESF only (64%, 80% of those completing).
- 5.9 Learners that took Level 2 (84%) and Level 3 courses (89%) were the most likely to have achieved a qualification.

How many learners have undertaken further training since the ESF course and what qualifications, if any, have been attained?

- 5.10 Two in five learners in London (42%) had started more education or training courses since the ESF course discussed with them. This is slightly higher than found nationally (39%). ESF & LSC co-financed learners were more likely than ESF-only funded learners to have gone on to take another course (47% v. 39%).

- 5.11 The following groups were all more likely to have participated in further courses: women (45%), lone parents (47%), Black learners (47%), those born outside the UK (46%) and those who had undertaken Level 2 (45%) or Level 3 (52%) courses through ESF.
- 5.12 Of the learners that had undertaken further learning, over half had taken one further course (54%) and a quarter had taken two courses (25%), though as many as 4% indicated that they had taken five or more (clearly short) courses since the ESF course discussed with them.
- 5.13 Overall, almost a quarter of all ESF learners had achieved a further qualification by the time of the interview (24%), higher among 16-19 year olds (30%) and women (26%).
- 5.14 Where those acquiring post-ESF course qualifications gave responses that enabled an assessment of level of these subsequent courses (just over half the cases), this was most often a Level 2 qualification (47%), followed by below Level 3 qualifications (26%) and those at Level 1 (23%).
- 5.15 A long list of qualification types had been achieved - where a qualification type was mentioned this was most often an NVQ (22% of all those acquiring a qualification). Other qualifications included 'certificates' (8%), BTEC/BEC (6%), City and Guilds (5%), European Computer Driving Licence (5%), GCSEs (5%), 'diplomas' (5%), A levels (4%) and Basic Skills including ESOL (3%).

6 What do learners in London feel are the main benefits of their ESF funded course?

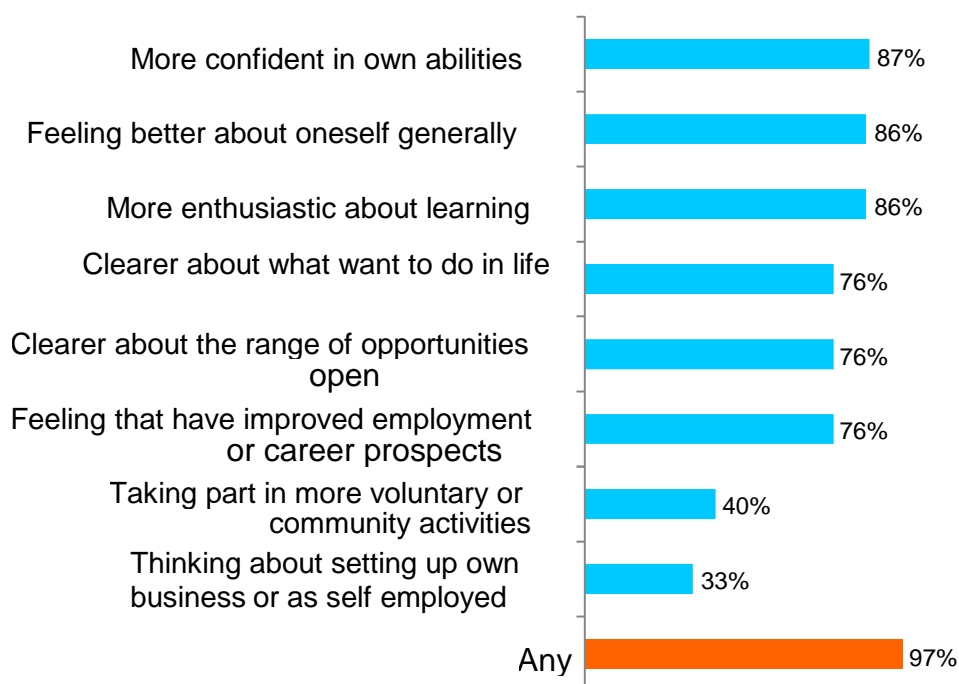
Key messages on the main perceived benefits of ESF funded courses:

- Nearly all learners (97%) feel that they benefited from the course
- The most common benefits were felt to be increased confidence in their abilities, feeling better about themselves and having more enthusiasm for learning (each mentioned by approaching nine in ten learners)

Perceived benefits of the ESF course

6.1 All learners were asked what benefits they felt they had experienced as a result of going on the course. This was a prompted question with the list of potential benefits (shown in Figure 6.1) read out to them.

Figure 6.1 Benefits of going on the course (prompted)



Base: All learners (1,799)

6.2 Encouragingly, almost all learners (97%) had experienced at least one of these benefits as a result of going on the course. Learners were particularly likely to feel they had gained in confidence, that they felt better about themselves and were more enthusiastic about learning. Many also felt more clear about the opportunities open to them as well as what they wanted to do in their life.

6.3 The benefits perceived by target learner groups; Black and Minority Ethnic learners, women, NEETs and people with a disability are shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Benefits of going on the course – key learner groups					
	All learners	People with a disability	Black and Minority Ethnic	Women	NEET
<i>Base:</i>	(1,799)	(374)	(1,374)	(1,242)	(220)
	%	%	%	%	%
More confident about abilities	87	76	88	88	89
More enthusiastic about learning	86	82	88	89	81
Feeling better about oneself generally	86	75	87	87	82
Clearer about what want to do in life	77	63	80	78	78
Clearer about the range of opportunities open	76	61	77	77	75
Have improved employment or career prospects	76	60	77	75	73
Taking part in more voluntary and community activities	40	35	42	42	35
Think about setting up own business or as self-employed	33	27	36	28	39
Any	98	95	98	98	98

6.4 Women were more likely than men to feel they benefited from the course in a number of areas, particularly (statistically significantly) in terms of feeling better about themselves generally (87% v. 83% of male learners), becoming more enthusiastic about learning (89% v. 82%) and taking part in more voluntary or community activities (42% v. 37%).

- 6.5 Similarly, Black and Minority Ethnic learners were significantly more likely than White British learners to feel the course had brought benefits in terms of: being more enthusiastic about learning (88% v. 81%), feeling better about oneself generally (87% v. 80%), being clearer about what to do in life (80% v. 65%) and being interested in setting up their own business or as self-employed (36% v. 22%).
- 6.6 Lone parents were also broadly positive that they had benefited from the course (98% perceived any benefits); 81% of lone parents felt that they were clearer about what they wanted to do in life as a result of the course (v. 77% overall) and 92% were more enthusiastic about further learning or training (v. 86% overall).
- 6.7 There were groups of learners that were significantly less likely than average to perceive any of these benefits as a result of the course – though it should be noted that still the vast majority felt benefits had taken place:
- Learners with a disability or long-term illness were consistently less likely to feel that each of the benefits had occurred, particularly for feeling that they have improved their employment or career prospects (60% v. 76% overall)
 - Learners in the oldest age band of 40-59
 - Learners not currently in work or learning – 72% (v. 76% overall) feel that they have improved their employment or career prospects.
 - Non-completers – 7% perceived no benefits (v. 2% of those that did complete). Non-completers are examined in more detail in chapter 7.
- 6.8 Broadly speaking, learners in London were 2-9% more likely to have experienced each benefit than learners nationally with the difference most clear for improved employment or career prospects (76% v. 71% nationally), being clearer about what to do in life (77% v. 70%) and thinking about setting up as self employed (33% v. 24%).

7 What are the reasons for non-completion and does non-completion affect the perceived impacts and benefits of ESF learning?

Key messages on the reasons for and impact of non-completion:

- 14% of learners left the course early without completing - this is below the level found nationally (16%)
- The most common reasons for leaving early were not related to the course itself and included starting a job (21%), personal / family circumstances (20%) and ill health (15%)
- Some reasons related to the course not being what they expected (12%) or it being too hard (5%) or a lack of support (5%), suggesting more / better prior information and advice would reduce non-completion
- Early leavers were less somewhat likely than completers to report being in work or learning at the time of the interview (46% v 52%)

What are the characteristics of those not completing their ESF learning?

7.1 It is important to note that part of the selection criteria for inclusion in the survey was that learners had to have completed at least 50% of their learning aim, hence the survey results under-represent the proportion of those *starting* ESF funded learning that fail to complete their course. Noting this caveat, 14% of the sample did not complete their ESF course (significantly lower than found nationally – 16%). Non-completion rates by sub-group are shown in table 7.1, which shows base sizes in brackets.

7.2 In London, there were higher levels of non completion amongst the following learners (all the figures shown are statistically significant to the all learner London average):

- NEET (21%)
- ESF-only financed (20%)
- Male (18%)
- Aged 16-19 (16%)

And/or had:

- No prior qualifications (20%)

And/or took a course that was:

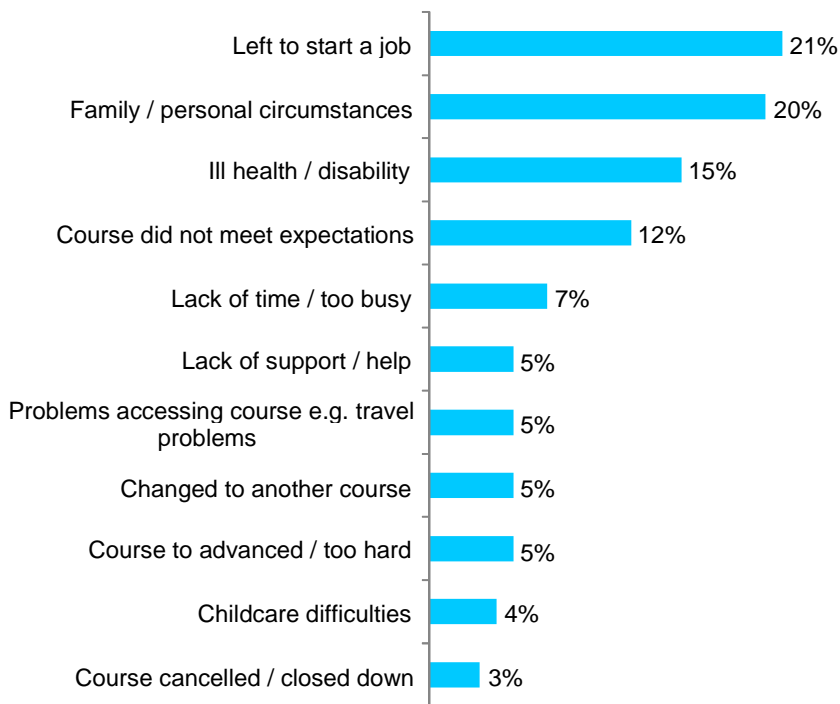
- Between 2-6 weeks in duration (29%)
- Had fewer than 30 guided learning hours (18%)

Table 7.1: The proportion of each sub-group not completing the course			
ESF & LSC Co-financed (900)	8%	Prior qualifications (1,537)	14%
ESF-only financed (899)	20%	No prior qualifications (262)	20%
		<i>Course level from ILR (where provided):</i>	
Male (557)	18%	Level 1 and entry (628)	16%
Female (1,242)	12%	Level 2 (522)	9%
		Level 3 (267)	6%
16-19 (370)	16%	Level 4+ (14)	-
20-24 (216)	13%	<i>Course length:</i>	
25-39 (685)	13%	Less than 1 week (85)	9%
40-59 (528)	14%	2-6 weeks (168)	29%
		2-6 months (590)	19%
<i>Potential labour market disadvantages:</i>		6-12 months (670)	7%
Disability / long term illness (374)	17%	1 year + (190)	7%
Lone parent (758)	12%	<i>Guided learning hours:</i>	
Economically inactive (1,452)	16%	Less than 30 hours (916)	18%
NEET (220)	21%	31-60 hours (178)	12%
		61-135 hours (180)	10%
		136 hours + (449)	4%

What are the reasons for non-completion?

7.3 Learners that left their course without completing were asked to give their reasons for leaving early. The main responses (given by at least 3%) to this spontaneous question are shown in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1: Reasons for not completing the course (spontaneous)



Base: Those that left the course early (239)

7.4 The most common reason for leaving a course early, given by around one in five, was starting a job. It is encouraging that at the time of interview, 66% of these learners were still in employment. Personal circumstances changing (20%) and ill health (15%) were also quite common reasons - both indicate reasons outside of the learners' or providers' ability to influence. However, 12% left early because the course did not meet their expectations, 5% because the course was too hard and 5% because of a lack of support.

7.5 Male early leavers were particularly likely to attribute this to starting a job (27% v. 16% of female learners), while women were more likely to say the reason for leaving early was family reasons or personal circumstances (24% v. 15% of male learners).

7.6 Other noticeable demographic variations in reasons for leaving early include:

- Lone parents were considerably less likely than average to have left the course early in order to start a job (13% v. 21% overall) and considerably more likely to have left due to family or personal circumstance (32% v. 20% overall) and/or childcare difficulties (8% v. 4% overall).

- Those with a disability or long term illness were more likely to cite health as a reason for leaving early (34%) and less likely to state that they did so to start a job (11%)
- ESF-only funded learners were far more likely than co-financed learners to state that they left the course early because it did not meet their expectations (14% v. 3%)

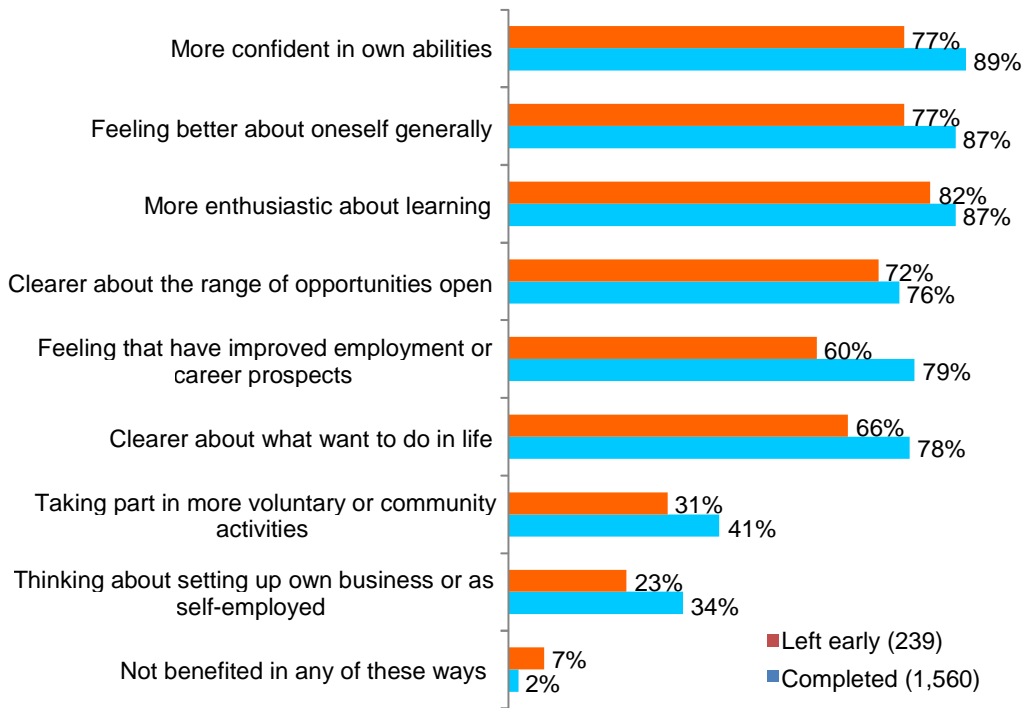
Are there differences in outcomes and perceived benefits between completers and non-completers?

7.7 Overall 7% of ESF learners reported being in work prior to the course compared with 38% at the time of the interview, a net increase of 31 percentage points. This net percentage increase was slightly higher for early leavers (34 percentage points) than for completers (31). However, more completers reported having gone on to further learning or training (14% v 4% among early leavers), hence non-completers are slightly more likely at the time of interview to be neither working or in learning or training (54% v 48% among completers).

Table 7.2: Prior and current work / learning status				
	Prior to course	At time of interview		
<i>Row percentages</i>	In work	In work	Learning or training	Neither in work nor learning or training
All ESF learners	7%	38%	13%	49%
Completers	7%	37%	14%	48%
Early leavers	8%	42%	4%	54%

7.8 As well as non-completers being slightly less likely to have achieved positive outcomes, particularly in regard to further learning, they are less likely to believe that they benefited from their learning activity. This is shown below in Figure 7.2 which shows differences in perceived benefits by completion status on this prompted question.

Figure 7.2: Benefits of going on the course by completion status (prompted)



Base: *All learners (799)*

- 7.9 For each measure assessed, learners that left the course early were less inclined to state that the course had benefited them, and overall 7% of early leavers had not benefited in any of the ways listed compared with 2% among completers – in particular they were much less likely to state that the course had improved their job or career prospects.
- 7.10 In spite of these differences between completers and early leavers, it does remain the case that the vast majority of early leavers did perceive that they had benefited in any of these ways (93%).

8 Does ESF learning in London benefit individual target groups?

Key messages on variation in the benefits of ESF learning by type of learner:

- All key groups experienced improved outcomes and experienced benefits as a result of the ESF course
- Positive impacts and benefits have been particularly marked for Black and Minority Ethnic learners

8.1 In this chapter we look at differences in outcomes and benefits between ESF key target audiences, namely women, lone parents, ex-offenders, those with a disability or long term illness and Black and Minority Ethnic learners.

8.2 **Women** (of whom 1,242 were interviewed in London)

Overview:

- 38% of women were in work at the time of the interview – an increase of 31 percentage points on the pre-course figure (equal to that found among all London learners) and 59% felt that the course was vital or helpful in achieving or changing employment.
- Female learners were more likely to be on benefits at the time of interview (64% v. 39% of male learners), and the fall in the proportion on benefit is much lower among women (-20 percentage points) than men (-40 percentage points)
- Women were more positive about the impact of the course e.g.
 - Feeling better about themselves generally (87% v. 83% among men)
 - Clearer about what to do in their lives (78% v. 74% among men)
 - More enthusiastic about future learning (89% v. 82% among men), indeed over half (55%) think it is very likely that they will undertake further learning in the next two years compared with 49% of men

8.3 **Lone parents** (of whom 758 were interviewed in London)

Overview:

- 34% of lone parents were in work at the time of the interview – an increase of 29 percentage points on the pre-course figure (slightly below the 31 percentage points found London-wide) and 63% felt that the course was vital or helpful in achieving or changing employment.
- Lone parents were more likely than average to be receiving benefits at the time of the interview (79%). This is a fall from the percentage on benefit pre the course (91%), but the drop is lower than average. Over half (54%) of lone parents were receiving Child Benefit and a third (32%) Child Tax Credit (v. 26% & 15% among all learners), which pushes the 'on benefit' figure up for this cohort. However lone parents were also more likely to be in receipt of Income support (34% v. 22% overall)
- Lone parents were more likely than average to have undertaken further learning or training since the course (47% v. 42% among all learners)

8.4 **Learners with a disability or long term illness** (of whom 374 were interviewed in London)

Overview:

- 21% of learners with a disability or long term illness were in work at the time of the interview – an increase of 18 percentage points on the pre-course figure (well below the 31 point increase found London-wide) and 55% felt that the course was vital or helpful in achieving or changing employment.
- Learners with a disability or long term illness were more likely to have been on benefits at the time of interview (72% v. 55% overall) – although not surprisingly a large proportion (21% v. 5% overall) were receiving Incapacity Benefit / ESA

8.5 **Black and Minority Ethnic learners** (of whom 1,374 were interviewed in London)

Overview:

- 38% of Black and Minority Ethnic learners were in work at the time of the interview – an increase of 31 percentage points on the pre-course figure (equal to that found London-wide) and 60% felt that the course was vital or helpful in achieving or changing employment.
- More likely to perceive a range of benefits as a result of the course, as outlined in chapter 6; in particular: being more enthusiastic about learning (88% v. 81% of White British learners), feeling better about oneself generally (87% v. 80% of White British learners) and being clearer about what to do in life (80% v. 65% of White British learners)
- More likely to feel that have gained skills from the course than learners overall, with this particularly so among Black learners, as outlined in chapter 5
- Far more likely than average to think further learning is very likely in the next two years (57% v. 41% among White British learners), the figure being particularly high among Black learners (63%)

NEET learners aged 16-19 (of whom 220 were interviewed in London):

8.6 **Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) learners aged 16-19** (of whom 220 were interviewed in London)

- 40% of learners that had been NEET were in work at the time of the interview –52% felt that the course was vital or helpful in achieving or changing employment.
- NEET learners were less likely to have completed the course (21% left early v. 14% of all London ESF learners)
- Those not working at the time of the interview were less likely to feel that they have a better chance of finding a job as a result of the course (67% v. 72% overall)
- Much more likely to feel that they have gained a range of skills as a result of the course

9 What barriers to finding employment and progressing at work do ESF learners in London face?

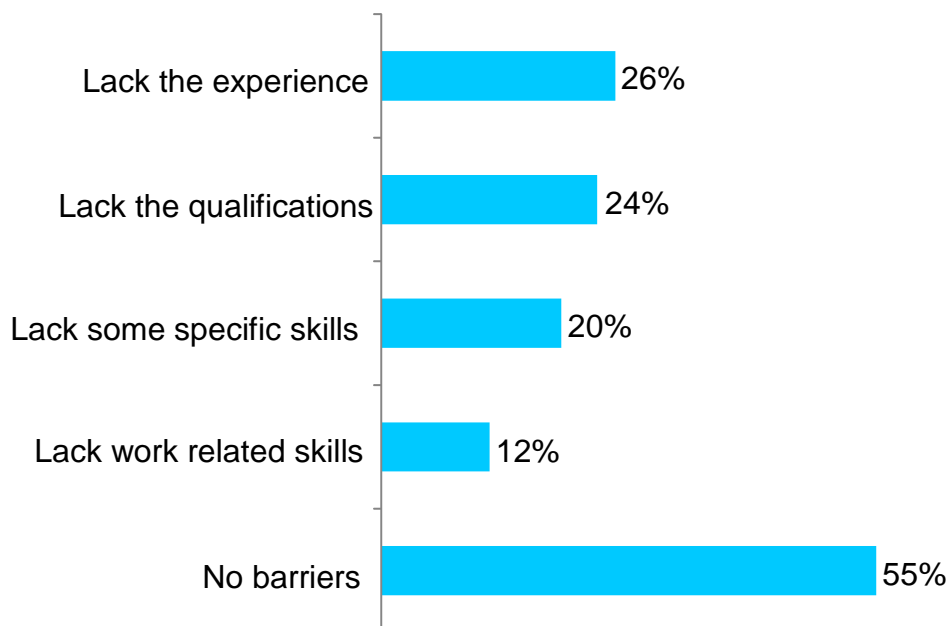
Key messages regarding barriers to work faced by learners:

- More than half of learners in work felt that they face no barriers to progressing in their job (55%). However, a quarter recognised that they needed to improve their qualifications (24%) and a fifth their skills (20%) in order to progress at work
- Nearly all those looking for work felt they faced barriers to getting a job (90%). While these were usually felt to be 'external' such as a lack of appropriate jobs (63%) and / or simply a lack of jobs where they live (48%), many recognised a lack of qualifications (41%) and a lack of skills (26%), indicating a recognition for continued learning and training

What barriers do learners in work face?

- 9.1 Just over half of learners in work felt that they faced no barriers to progression in their job (55%). The most commonly cited barriers are shown in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1: Barriers to progression at work (prompted)



Base: Those working at the time of the interview (669)

- 9.2 A quarter feels they lack qualifications to progress (24%) and a similar proportion feel they lack specific skills (20%). Those lacking skills most often mentioned transferable skills such as IT, communication, problem solving and team working.
- 9.3 White British learners were more likely to feel that they faced no barriers at work than Black and Minority Ethnic learners (68% v. 51% respectively).

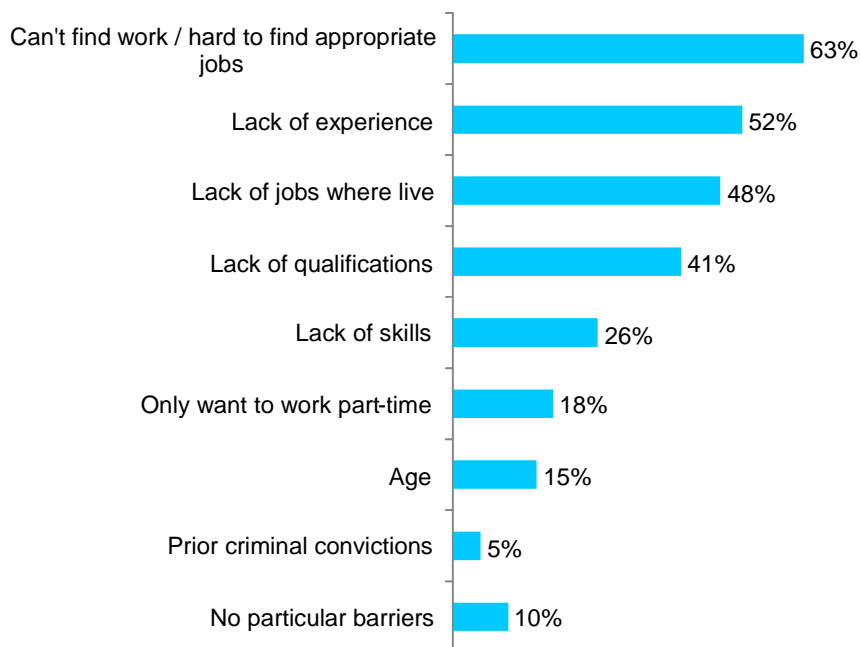
9.4 Others groups that were *more* likely to perceive barriers to progression at work were:

- Learners for whom English is not a first language – (52%)
- Learners born outside the UK – (51%)

9.5 Interestingly, learners that had been NEET pre the course who were now working were among the least likely to perceive any barriers to progressing at work (36%).

What barriers do those not in work face to getting a job?

Figure 9.2: Barriers to entering work



Base: Those unemployed and seeking work (400)

9.6 Only one in ten learners that were seeking work at the time of the interview felt that they faced no barriers to finding work (10%). Two of the most commonly cited barriers however, namely not being able to find work / appropriate jobs (63%) and a perceived lack of jobs where learners lived (48%) are more focused on the external rather than learners' capacity and ability for work.

9.7 A lack of qualifications and a lack of skills are quite frequently thought to be barriers to finding work (41% and 26%) respectively), and indicate that many of those seeking work appreciate that they need further training to help them enter the labour market. Learners that did not complete their ESF course were more likely to state that a lack of qualifications was a barrier to finding work (51%).

9.8 Barriers differ somewhat by sub-group. Male learners seeking work were more likely than women to cite not being able to find work / appropriate jobs (67% v. 60% among women). Women on the other hand were far more likely than men

to face the difficulty of wanting to work part time (25% v 12% of men) and / or childcare issues (21% v 4% of men), as were lone parents (27% and 30% respectively).

- 9.9 NEET learners were considerably more likely to state that there were issues with being able to find appropriate jobs – four fifths of the NEET group that are currently out of work, felt that this was a barrier to moving in to employment (compared with two thirds overall)
- 9.10 Age is a barrier for around one in six (15%) though this affects a third (35%) of those aged 40–59.

10 Conclusions

10.1 The survey has shown very positive changes in terms of ESF learners reporting moving into work and coming off benefit since their ESF course. In particular:

- Almost two-fifths (38%) were working at the time of the interview, compared with 7% that had been working immediately before the course. The net increase in the proportion in employment compared against the start of the course (+31 percentage points) is a little lower than found nationally (34 percentage points)
- Whereas 82% reported receiving benefits immediately before the course, at the time of the interview just over half (55%) reported that they were receiving benefits, a net decrease of 27 percentage points

10.2 In addition, there are encouraging findings relating to the nature of employment gained, improvements in skills, and employment prospects:

- Most of those in new jobs (i.e. who were unemployed pre the course or who had changed jobs) have secured permanent positions (73%), and half are working 30 hours a week or more (48%)
- Of those working both before the course and when interviewed, almost nine in ten had experienced improvements at work, most often increased job satisfaction and or job security, and two thirds of these learners felt the course helped them achieve these improvements
- Nearly all (97%) believe that they have gained one or more work-related skills from the course, most commonly improved communication skills (80%) and team working skills (76%)
- Three quarters felt their employment and career prospects have improved as a result of the course (76%)
- Approaching three-quarters of those not working at the time of the interview felt that the course had given them more chance of finding a job in the future (72%)
- Nearly all learners (97%) feel that they benefited from the course. The most common benefits were felt to be increased confidence in their abilities, feeling better about themselves and having more enthusiasm for learning (each mentioned by 86%-87%)

A note regarding interpretation of the findings

10.3 The research investigates issues such as changes in employment levels and progression at work by examining the situation of a group of ESF funded learners before their course (which had an actual or planned completion date between 1st August 2006 and 31st July 2007) with their situation in early 2009. *We cannot definitely conclude that any actual gains have come about as a result of their undertaking the ESF funded course since the gains may have arisen anyway,*

without their undertaking the learning. To isolate the effects of participation in ESF funded provision on employment would require comparing outcomes among the learners interviewed with a control group of similar individuals not undertaking such provision. It should also be noted that the outcomes as reported by learners may differ from those recorded on Management Information such as the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). *For these reasons this study is therefore limited to reporting the perception of the impact of ESF funded provision only.*

Annex A: Sample profile of learners

Demographics / Profile of Learners

	London (1,799 interviews)			National (4,856) weighted
	Number of interviews	Unweighted %	Weighted %	%
GENDER				
Male	557	31	37	42
Female	1,242	69	63	58
AGE				
16-19	370	21	19	23
20-24	216	12	15	15
25-39	685	38	40	37
40-59	528	29	27	25
ETHNICITY				
White - British	422	23	23	60
White - Irish	26	1	2	1
White - Other	176	10	10	5
Black or Black British - Caribbean	212	12	12	5
Black or Black British - African	345	19	19	8
Black or Black British – Other	68	4	4	2
Asian or Asian British - Indian	83	5	5	4
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	52	3	3	3
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	72	4	4	2
Chinese	12	1	1	*
Other ethnic background	214	12	12	6
Mixed	114	6	6	4
Refused	3	0	*	*
DISABILITY				
Yes	374	21	21	25
No	1,425	79	79	75
LONE PARENT				
Yes	758	42	40	32
No	1,041	58	60	68
BENEFITS PRE-COURSE				
None	294	16	17	20
JOB SEEKER'S ALLOWANCE	546	30	32	30
IB	142	8	8	10
IS	628	35	33	25
GUIDED LEARNING HOURS				
Not supplied on sample	76	4	1	2
< 30 hours	916	51	64	77
30.1-60 hours	178	10	8	5
60.1-135 hours	180	10	9	6
135.1 hours +	449	25	18	10

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