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Leading learning and skills



Tracking London's learners – an FE research report

March 2007

Of interest to everyone involved in improving
skills and learning opportunities across London



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Note: the survey figures in this report have been weighted to represent all learners completing a full Level 2 or Level 3 course at the participating colleges. See the 'Technical Report' on the LSC website for more information.

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Introduction

In this document we summarise the key research findings from a study conducted by IFF Research Ltd on behalf of LSC London Region.

The results confirm what has long been believed: namely that FE study really does open doors to better job prospects, higher productivity in the workplace and progression to even higher skills.

Tracking learners in this way is an important part of evaluating the effectiveness of FE learning across our region. I hope you will find this, our first ever learner tracker survey report, an informative and interesting read.

The main aim of the Learner Tracker survey was to follow students after they had completed their studies in order to examine the impact further education (FE) had on their lives.

It focused on three main areas:

- 'hard' benefits, which relate directly to skills the learner has gained. These include improved numeracy, literacy, teamwork, communication and social skills, and skills for current or future employment
- 'soft' benefits, which are more general benefits the learner might have gained from completing their FE course, such as increased confidence in their abilities, enthusiasm about learning, job prospects and quality of life, as well as having a better idea of what they want to do in the future



- 'actual' benefits that the learner has gained, such as a promotion, increased job satisfaction, job security, a new job with a different employer at a higher level, moving out of unemployment, and progression onto a higher-level course.

The study involved 1,400 telephone interviews with learners aged 19 to 50 who completed a full Level 2 or Level 3 course at one of six London FE colleges in the academic year 2005/06. The vast majority (84 per cent of those interviewed) completed their course in June 2006. Fieldwork took place in December 2006 and January 2007.

David Hughes
LSC London Regional Director

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What is the impact of getting a Level 2 qualification?

In this section we look at the impact of FE learning specifically among those who have completed a Level 2 qualification. We examine their work status both before and after the learning experience, the benefits gained (even where there is no change in work status, for example unemployed people feeling that their prospects of getting a job have improved), and the proportion benefiting in skill terms (such as improvements in literacy, numeracy, teamworking and social skills).

Among Level 2 learners there has been a relatively large increase in employment outcomes, with 65 per cent working full time, part time or for themselves following the course, compared with 60 per cent before the course.

A large proportion have stayed on in learning (34 per cent, compared with 21 per cent who were in learning prior to the course). Among those Level 2 learners who are now engaged in further study:

- nearly all (86 per cent) are studying a higher-level course (equivalent to 29 per cent of all Level 2 learners)
- 13 per cent are now studying in higher education (equivalent to 4 per cent of all Level 2 learners).

The findings relating to Level 2 learners' circumstances are very positive.

Among those Level 2 learners who have stayed in employment, either with the same or a new employer (a base of 273 learners):

- a third are now working in a higher-level role
- around half are being paid more
- 63 per cent say that they are getting more job satisfaction
- a little under three-fifths each say that they are now doing more interesting work, that they have improved job security or that they believe their pay and promotion prospects have improved
- overall, 86 per cent report experiencing at least one of these benefits and 38 per cent of these say that at least one of the benefits was directly because of the course (78 per cent say the course had been directly or partly responsible for at least one of these benefits).

For Level 2 learners unemployed prior to the course (a base of 128 learners) a third are now working (full time, part time or on a self-employed basis) and the same proportion of learners are engaged in further study.

Of those currently looking for work (a base of 130 learners), 37 per cent feel they have significantly more chance of finding a job because they completed the course.

Key messages among Level 2 learners:

- marked increase in the proportion working following the course
- nine out of 10 learners feel their job prospects have improved
- two-thirds feel the course has improved their literacy and/or numeracy.

Benefits of completing an FE course (Level 2 learners)

The chart on the right illustrates the way Level 2 learners have benefited from attending and completing their FE course. It shows both overall levels (the full length of the bar) and those benefits mentioned without prompting (those which learners think of first).

Level 2 learners reported a range of improvements resulting from the course. The most common responses (increased self-confidence, improved job prospects, developed skills for future jobs, more enthusiasm for learning and a better idea about what they will do with their life) show a mix of 'hard' and 'soft' skills.

Though less commonly mentioned, around two-thirds of Level 2 learners feel their numeracy and literacy have improved. These two benefits are experienced by markedly higher proportions of younger Level 2 learners. Improvements in teamworking, communication and social skills are also more likely to be experienced by younger (88 per cent) rather than older (79 per cent) Level 2 learners. Those aged 19 to 24 are more likely to experience most of the benefits discussed.

The most commonly reported benefits among Level 2 learners aged 25 to 50 are improved job prospects (87 per cent) and improved confidence (88 per cent).

Improved your numeracy skills



Improved your literacy skills



Improved your quality of life



Learned and developed skills to change to a different type of work



Learned and developed skills that will be of benefit to current work



Improved your teamworking, communication and social skills



Got a better idea about what you want to do in your life



Became more enthusiastic about learning



Learned and developed skills for future jobs in the same type of work



Improved your job prospects



Became more confident about your abilities



Key

■ Benefits mentioned spontaneously

■ Overall levels (includes benefits mentioned spontaneously and after prompting)

3

What is the impact of getting a Level 3 qualification?

In this section we look at the impact of FE learning specifically among those undertaking a Level 3 qualification. We examine their work status before and after their course, the proportion of learners moving into higher education, the benefits learners gained from their course (even if there has been no change in work or learning status) and the proportion benefiting in skill terms, such as improved literacy, numeracy, teamworking and social skills.

As seen among learners as a whole, the overall number of Level 3 learners in paid work is little changed before (54 per cent) and after the course (52 per cent).

There is, however, a big shift in the proportion studying. A little over a third were studying before the course and as many as half are studying now.

Among those Level 3 learners who are now engaged in further study, nearly all (89 per cent) are studying a higher-level course, which is equivalent to 45 per cent of all Level 3 learners. Three in four learners are now studying in higher education (equivalent to 37 per cent of all Level 3 learners). When discussing benefits of attending and completing their FE course, 23 per cent mentioned access to higher education.

For 41 per cent of Level 3 learners now engaged in further study, this new course was in exactly the same field as their FE course; for a further 45 per cent the new course was in a related area. As many as two-thirds of Level 3 learners going on to further study said that their FE course was vital to being able to take their subsequent course.

There are very positive findings as to Level 3 learners' circumstances.

Among those Level 3 learners who have stayed in employment, whether with the same or a new employer (a base of 271 learners):

- 30 per cent are now working in a higher-level job role
- just over two-fifths (42 per cent) are now being paid more
- 57 per cent say that they are getting improved job satisfaction
- around half report better job security, more interesting work and/or improved pay and promotion prospects
- overall, 81 per cent report experiencing at least one of these benefits
- 29 per cent of these say that at least one of these benefits was directly because of the course; 74 per cent say the course had been directly or partly responsible for at least one of these benefits.

Key messages among Level 3 learners:

- almost two in five have moved on to higher education
- 80 per cent are working, on a course or on a training programme following the course
- the vast majority feel the course has improved their teamworking, communication and social skills, and job prospects.

Benefits of completing an FE course (Level 3 learners)

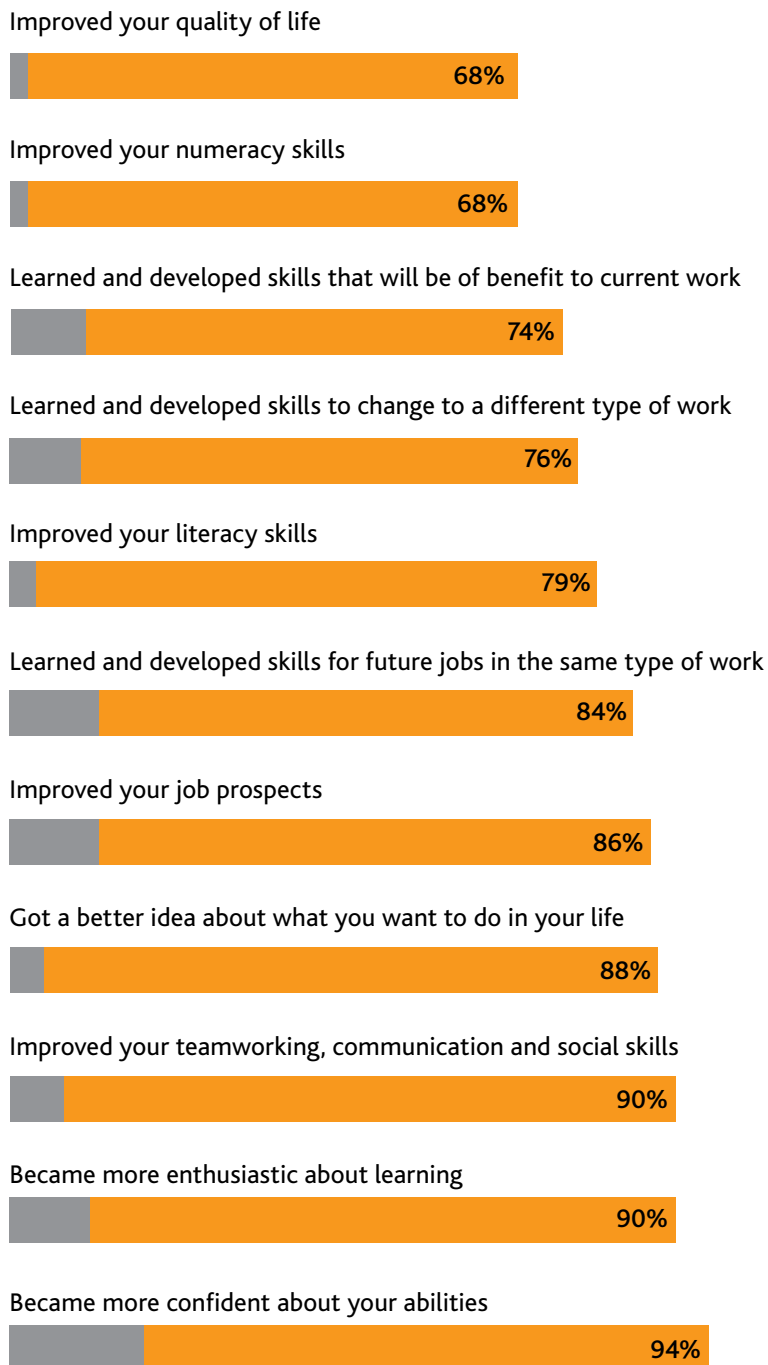
Of those unemployed prior to the course (a base of 141 learners) 28 per cent are now working (full time, part time or on a self-employed basis) and 53 per cent are engaged in further study.

Of those currently looking for work (a base of 123 learners), 32 per cent feel they have significantly more chance of finding a job because they completed the course.

The chart on the right shows the way Level 3 learners have benefited from attending and completing their FE course.

Almost all Level 3 learners feel the course has increased their self-confidence. Around nine in 10 agree that they have become more enthusiastic about learning, improved their teamworking, communication and social skills, and their job prospects.

Large proportions of Level 3 learners feel their numeracy and literacy have improved. These hard skills, along with improved teamworking, communication and social skills, are more commonly reported by younger learners aged 19 to 24 rather than by those aged 25 to 50. Improved job prospects, and learning and developing skills of benefit in their current work, are more commonly reported as benefits by those aged 25 to 50.



Key

■ Benefits mentioned spontaneously

■ Overall levels (includes benefits mentioned spontaneously and after prompting)

4

What has been the impact on learners of achieving their first qualification at full Level 2 or above?

In this section we look at the impact of FE learning specifically among those for whom their Level 2 or Level 3 course represented their first qualification at full Level 2 or above. We also look at those learners who held only non-UK qualifications prior to their FE course.

In total, 38 per cent of learners surveyed had been studying for their first full Level 2 qualification or above when they took their FE course. This rose to 45 per cent among those studying at Level 2, while 32 per cent of those studying at Level 3 had no prior full Level 2 qualification or above. Older learners (those aged 25 to 50) are marginally more likely to have had no full Level 2 qualifications before starting their FE course (40 per cent) than those aged 19 to 24 (36 per cent).

Learners with prior qualifications from overseas but none from the UK form 15 per cent of our cohort of Level 2 and Level 3 learners. Roughly half studied at Level 2 and half at Level 3. They were predominantly older, with three-quarters aged 25 to 50 at the start of their course, and the majority were female (65 per cent).

As seen among learners as a whole, the overall number of first full Level 2 (or above) learners in work is little changed before (55 per cent) and after the course (53 per cent). However, the proportion engaged in a course of study is substantially increased from 22 per cent before the course, to 39 per cent after. The great majority of these (87 per cent) are studying at a higher level to that at which they were studying on their FE course; 44 per cent of those with no qualifications before their FE course are now studying in higher education. These figures are equivalent to 34 per cent of all first full Level 2 learners having moved on to higher-level study following their course, and 17 per cent now studying in higher education.

Among those learners whose only prior qualifications were from overseas, there was in fact a fall in employment rates following the FE course from 60 per cent working either as an employee or through self-employment before the course to 54 per cent after the course. Here too the number engaged in further learning or training has increased, from 26 per cent before the course to 42 per cent after the course, with 92 per cent of these now studying at a higher level and 48 per cent studying at a higher education institution. These figures are equivalent to 38 per cent of all learners with no previous UK qualification having moved on to higher-level study following their course, and 20 per cent studying in higher education.

Key messages among first full Level 2 learners:

- a third are now undertaking a higher level course
- the vast majority feel their confidence has increased as a result of the course and seven in 10 say their numeracy has improved
- over a third of those employed before the course are in a higher-level job role.

Learners with no prior full Level 2 qualifications or above

Among those learners for whom the FE course represented a first full Level 2 qualification and who have stayed in employment either with the same or a new employer (a base of 193 learners):

- 36 per cent are now working in a higher job role
- nearly half (47 per cent) are being paid more
- the most common change reported is increased job satisfaction, reported by 62 per cent of this group
- overall, 82 per cent of those remaining in employment report at least one positive change in their employment situation and 36 per cent attribute at least one of these improvements directly to their course. In total, 77 per cent say the improvements are due directly to their course or that the course helped.

Of those unemployed prior to the course (a base of 131 learners), 22 per cent are now working (full time, part time or on a self-employed basis) and 34 per cent are engaged in further study.

For those currently looking for work (a base of 122 learners), 32 per cent feel they have significantly more chance of finding a job because they completed the course.

Almost all learners for whom the course represented a first full Level 2 qualification feel that the course has increased their self-confidence (93 per cent). Almost as many agree that they have become more enthusiastic about learning (90 per cent) or that they have gained a better idea about what they want to do in their lives (87 per cent).

Improved quality of life is the least commonly mentioned benefit (68 per cent), along with improved numeracy (70 per cent), though even these benefits were experienced by a clear majority of learners for whom the course represented a first full Level 2.

Learners whose only prior qualifications are from overseas

Among those learners who previously held qualifications from overseas, but none from the UK, and who stayed in employment with the same or a new employer (a base of 211 learners):

- just over a third are now working in a higher-level job (35 per cent)
- a similar proportion of learners (35 per cent) are now being paid more
- the most commonly reported changes are increased job satisfaction, reported by 71 per cent, and being involved in more interesting work (65 per cent)
- 60 per cent report improved job security, but a smaller number of learners (44 per cent) report improved pay and promotion prospects
- overall, 87 per cent report experiencing at least one of these benefits
- 32 per cent of these say that at least one of these benefits is directly because of the course; 84 per cent say the course has been directly or partly responsible for at least one of these benefits.

Of those unemployed prior to the course (a base of 34 learners) 20 per cent are now working (full time, part time or on a self-employed basis) and 55 per cent are engaged in further study.

Of those currently looking for work (a base of 42 learners), 35 per cent feel they have significantly more chance of finding a job because they completed the course.

Almost all who had no prior UK qualifications feel the course has increased their self-confidence (97 per cent). A similarly high proportion of learners say that the course has improved their teamworking, communication and social skills (94 per cent), and almost as many agree that they have become more enthusiastic about learning (92 per cent). As many as 90 per cent say that their FE course improved their literacy.

Around three in four of these learners mention their quality of life improving (76 per cent), along with learning and developing skills to change to a different type of work (76 per cent).

Key messages among learners without any prior UK qualifications:

- nearly all have gained in confidence
- a third of those employed before the course are now being paid more
- almost all have improved their teamworking, communication and social skills as a result of the course.

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How does further education help those who are unemployed?

Immediately before their course a fifth of all learners were unemployed. Just under one in five of all learners (18 per cent) were unemployed and looking for work prior to the course, rising to almost one in four (24 per cent) among those aged 19 to 24. A slight majority of the unemployed (56 per cent) had been out of work for two years or less before engaging in learning. Those unemployed before the course were split roughly evenly by gender and by age range (19 to 24 and 25 to 50).

In this section we examine the impact that FE has on this particular group in terms of improved skills and employability.

The vast majority of previously unemployed learners gained confidence as a result of their FE course (93 per cent) and feel they developed useful work skills:

- three-quarters feel that their literacy has improved as a result of the course (77 per cent)

- more than two-thirds feel that their numeracy skills have improved (69 per cent).

In addition, nearly all (91 per cent) feel more willing to engage in further learning.

Furthermore, the majority of learners who were out of work before starting their course feel that the skills developed through FE have made them more employable. As many as 84 per cent say that their job prospects have improved as a result of the course. This was higher among those who had been unemployed for fewer than two years.

Tangible evidence for this increase in their employability is provided by analysing the situation of previously unemployed learners following the completion of the course. Less than half (47 per cent) of those individuals are still unemployed. This is slightly higher among those who had been long-term unemployed (51 per cent). In terms of outcomes of the unemployed:

- 31 per cent have found work or started up on a self-employed basis (21 per cent among those who had been long-term unemployed). Younger learners are far more likely to now be working (38 per cent compared to 23 per cent)
- 43 per cent are undertaking further study (43 per cent among the long-term unemployed). Again, younger learners are more likely to be engaged in further study
- 10 per cent are engaged in a government-supported training programme (11 per cent among the long-term unemployed).

In around half of cases where previously unemployed learners are now in work, the job role is related to the FE course of study completed, and in a third (36 per cent) of these cases, the course was reported as being directly relevant to the respondent's current work. Just under a quarter of those now working say that their FE course has been vital in them getting their new job (24 per cent) and a further 42 per cent say that the course helped.

Where previously unemployed learners have found employment, this appears in most cases to be stable work that fits in with their long-term aspirations. Almost three-fifths of those now in work are employed in permanent roles (57 per cent). Approximately half think it likely they will be in this role in two years' time. Interestingly, where the previously long-term unemployed have found work, this is significantly more likely to be on a permanent basis (73 per cent) than the work found by the short-term unemployed (56 per cent of which is on a permanent contract).

Previously unemployed female learners are particularly likely to be in permanent roles (69 per cent, compared to 44 per cent of male learners). Older workers who have found work are more likely to be in permanent roles (63 per cent) than their younger counterparts (54 per cent).

Those previously unemployed learners still seeking work after the course were asked directly whether they felt that acquiring the FE qualification had improved their chances of finding employment. The vast majority (84 per cent) feel that their chances of success in their search for employment have increased as a result of the FE learning, a third (31 per cent) significantly so. While slightly less optimistic, even among the long-term unemployed three in four (77 per cent) feel that their chances of finding work have improved, compared to 87 per cent of the short-term unemployed.

Key messages among those unemployed prior to the course:

- 31 per cent have found work (three fifths of these in permanent roles)
- two-thirds of those now working say the course helped them get their job
- two-thirds are either working or undertaking further study.

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What has been the impact of further education on self-employment?

Here we examine the impact of FE on self-employment, among those who were self-employed before starting the course (with a base size of 36 interviews) and those who are now self-employed (a base size of 52, of whom 29 were newly self-employed).

At an overall level, 3 per cent of learners were self-employed or running their own business prior to the course, and 4 per cent were doing so at the time of the interview. This small increase reflects the fact that as many as a fifth of all learners (20 per cent) said a key reason for going on the course was to help them set up their own business. And 7 per cent of those who cited help with setting up a business as a key reason for going on the course have succeeded in moving into self-employment.

Key messages regarding self-employment:

- most learners who became self-employed following completion believe that the skills gained through their FE study contributed to their ability to set up independently
- a third continuing in self-employment have experienced increased earnings and three-quarters have greater job security
- nearly all those who were self-employed before the course are either working or undertaking further study following the course.

Those self-employed prior to the course

Among those in this category:

- 59 per cent are still working on a self-employed basis
- 29 per cent have become employees
- 27 per cent have gone into further study
- just 3 per cent are neither working nor studying.

It is encouraging that the vast majority of those who have continued with their business report having seen improvements in their situation since completing their FE course (81 per cent). Just under a quarter (22 per cent) have seen their hourly or weekly earnings increase, more than three in five (63 per cent) are enjoying greater job satisfaction and nearly three in four (73 per cent) feel that they now have greater job security and increased long-term earning potential. All those reporting improvements in their working lifestyle or situation feel that this was in some measure due to the FE learning that they had undertaken, one quarter directly so.

Those setting up on a self-employed basis following the course

While undertaking an FE course leads some self-employed learners to move into other work or further study, the overall effect of FE has been a 1 per cent increase in the number of individuals running their own business or working on a self-employed basis. Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of these newly self-employed individuals are working as skilled trades people, with a further one in eight (12 per cent) setting up as associate professionals and 5 per cent in personal service occupations. Among these individuals who are now self-employed but were not before starting their course, most had previously been working for someone else either full or part time (86 per cent), with the remainder usually either unemployed or doing voluntary work.

Most learners who have set up on a self-employed basis following completion of their course (2 per cent of all learners) believe that the skills gained through their FE study contributed to their ability to set up independently; 35 per cent of these individuals feel that the FE study was vital in facilitating their move to self-employment, while a similar proportion (37 per cent) say that it helped to some degree. The majority of those who have moved into self-employment (77 per cent) feel that the FE course has resulted in them becoming more confident in their abilities. A significantly lower proportion of these learners say that they have improved their numeracy and literacy as a result of the course: 35 per cent say that their numeracy skills have improved, compared to 65 per cent of all learners, and 38 per cent say that they have become more literate, compared to 73 per cent overall.

Looking at those who moved into self-employment following the course, three-quarters studied at Level 2, and for 35 per cent the FE course represented their first full Level 2 (or above) qualification.

Learners starting up as self-employed were predominantly male (82 per cent) and aged 25 to 50 at the start of their course (78 per cent, compared to 22 per cent aged 19 to 24). The largest proportion of those starting up as self-employed were White British (53 per cent), despite this group representing just 25 per cent of learners as a whole.

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What has been the impact of further education on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups?

In this chapter we examine Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners' work status before and after the learning experience. We also look at the benefits gained (even where there is no change in work status, for example unemployed people feeling their prospects of getting a job have improved) and the proportion benefiting in skill terms (such as improved literacy, numeracy, teamworking and social skills).

As among White British learners there has been little change in the overall level of employment for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners before and after their FE course, and similarly little change in the proportions unemployed.

However, a large proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners have stayed on in learning (44 per cent, compared to the 31 per cent who were in learning prior to the course). Among those Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners who are now engaged in further study:

- nearly all (89 per cent) are studying a higher-level course (equivalent to 39 per cent of all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners)
- 56 per cent are now studying in higher education (equivalent to 24 per cent of all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners).

Among Black or Black-British African learners (a base of 305 learners), 46 per cent are now studying (64 per cent of whom are studying in higher education). The proportion working has remained roughly the same (around half), although more are now working part time and fewer full time.

Among Black or Black-British Caribbean learners (a base of 167 learners), 45 per cent are now studying (49 per cent of whom are in higher education).

While there has been relatively little overall movement in learners' general situations other than for learning outcomes, the findings reveal significant improvements in people's circumstances.

Among those Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners who have stayed in employment either with the same or a new employer (a base of 365 learners):

- a third are now working in a higher-level role
- 43 per cent are being paid more
- 62 per cent say that they are getting more job satisfaction
- overall, 84 per cent report experiencing at least one of these benefits and 30 per cent of these say at least one of the benefits they experienced was directly because of the course (76 per cent say the course has been directly or partly responsible for at least one of these benefits).

For Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners unemployed prior to the course (a base of 213 learners), 31 per cent are now working (full time, part time or on a self-employed basis) and 45 per cent are engaged in further study.

Key messages for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners:

- almost two in five are now on a higher-level course and a quarter are studying in higher education
- more than three in four are working, on a course or on a training programme following their FE study
- the vast majority feel their job prospects have improved since the course. Most say their literacy or numeracy skills have improved.

Benefits of completing an FE course for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners

Of those currently looking for work (a base of 208 learners), 35 per cent feel they have significantly more chance of finding a job because they completed the course.

The chart on the right shows the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners benefiting in the ways listed from attending and completing their FE course.

Almost all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners report having become more confident in their abilities as a result of attending and completing their FE course. Improved teamworking, communication and social skills, and increased enthusiasm about learning, both 90 per cent, are the next most commonly mentioned benefits.

Improved literacy is identified by 80 per cent of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners, and improved numeracy by 69 per cent.

The most common benefits among Black or Black-British African learners are:

- improved teamworking, communication and social skills (98 per cent)
- increased enthusiasm about learning and increased confidence (both 97 per cent).

Among Black or Black-British Caribbean learners, the most commonly reported benefits are:

- increased confidence (94 per cent)
- improved job prospects and increased enthusiasm for learning (both 90 per cent).

Improved your numeracy skills



Improved your quality of life



Learned and developed skills to change to a different type of work



Learned and developed skills that will be of benefit to current work



Improved your literacy skills



Improved your job prospects



Learned and developed skills for future jobs in the same type of work



Got a better idea about what you want to do in your life



Became more enthusiastic about learning



Improved your teamworking, communication and social skills



Became more confident about your abilities



Key

■ Benefits mentioned spontaneously

■ Overall levels (includes benefits mentioned spontaneously and after prompting)

8

Why do learners want to do Level 2 and Level 3 courses?

The main reasons learners took their recent course were:

- for personal interest or development (a key factor for 63 per cent of respondents)
- to have a recognised UK qualification (key for 54 per cent)
- to gain new skills in order to change to a different type of work (key for 52 per cent)
- to help them progress to another course in the future (key for 48 per cent).

Other reasons, each mentioned as key factors by around a quarter to a third of learners, are helping them progress within their current area of work (31 per cent), refreshing skills or qualifications that are becoming out of date (25 per cent) and helping them set up their own business (20 per cent).

Differences in motivation by level of the course

Generally the key reasons learners embarked on their learning varied relatively little by the level of the course. The main area where there are differences in motivation relates to undertaking learning in order to help progress to another course, which was particularly likely to be mentioned as a key reason by Level 3 learners (59 per cent compared to 34 per cent among Level 2 learners). This was important for Level 3 learners aged 19 to 24 (67 per cent). Indeed, almost one in five Level 3 learners (18 per cent) spontaneously mentioned taking the course to enable them to go on to university, rising to over a quarter (29 per cent) among Level 3 learners aged 19 to 24.

One area relatively more critical for Level 2 learners is taking the course because this is a requirement of the job they are doing, something cited spontaneously as key by 17 per cent of Level 2 learners (though only 5 per cent of Level 3 learners).

The reasons given by those doing their first full Level 2 qualification were very similar to Level 2 learners in general, although they place more emphasis on progressing to further learning (45 per cent said this was a key motivator, compared to 36 per cent among all Level 2 learners).

Differences in motivation by age

While younger learners are more likely than average to be motivated by the wish to progress to another course, older learners (aged 25 or over) are more likely than younger learners to mention refreshing skills becoming out of date (26 per cent, compared to 18 per cent among those aged 19 to 24).

Key messages on motivations for learning:

- key motivations include personal interest, to have a UK qualification and to gain new skills to help change the type of work they are doing
- taking the course as a requirement of their job is a more likely motivation for Level 2 learners
- progression to another course was a particularly common motivation for those doing a Level 3 course.

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How has the course improved employability?

The impact on employability was assessed using a number of measures within the research:

- the extent to which learners are now more qualified. In other words, how many Level 2 learners were undertaking their first Level 2 qualification and how many Level 3 learners were undertaking their first qualification at this level
- learners' own perceptions of whether their FE course has helped them develop skills that make them more employable
- changes in employment outcome, for example how many who were unemployed before the course are now working, how many in work have been promoted since the course, and how often these changes are attributed to the course.

Increases in the qualification level of the labour force

As many as 45 per cent of Level 2 learners did not have a qualification at this level before they took their course. Almost two in three (65 per cent) Level 3 learners did not have a qualification at Level 3 before the course. These FE courses have therefore raised the qualification level of these learners rather than just giving them different skills at the same level.

Learners' views on their own increased employability

When learners were asked what the benefits of undertaking their FE learning had been, more than a quarter (28 per cent) mentioned learning or developing skills that would be of benefit in current or future employment, and one in seven said spontaneously that they feel their job prospects have improved as a result of completing their course (14 per cent). Once prompted, 87 per cent of all learners feel that their employment prospects have improved following completion, and 95 per cent believe that they have learned or developed skills useful for current or future employment.

These benefits are particularly likely to be mentioned by those learners who did not hold any qualifications before starting their course, and those completing a Level 2 qualification. Level 3 learners are more likely to say that they have improved specific skills likely to make them more employable: 68 per cent say that the course has improved their literacy skills (compared to 61 per cent of Level 2 learners), and 79 per cent say that they now have improved numeracy (compared to 66 per cent of those completing a Level 2 qualification).

Among those currently unemployed and looking for work, the vast majority feel their course has improved their chance of finding work: a third (35 per cent) feel their course has resulted in them having a significantly greater chance of finding work, and a further 46 per cent feel that they have slightly more chance now than before their study.

Changes in employment status

Learner confidence about their increased employability is mirrored in the changes to employment status following the course:

- almost a third (30 per cent) of those who were unemployed before starting the course are now employed either in a part-time or full-time role or on a self-employed basis. Just over half of these individuals (54 per cent) are working in jobs which are directly or broadly related to the course they completed, indicating the role played by their FE study
- of those working for the same employer as before the course, 20 per cent have had a promotion (a clear indicator of improved employability) and most say either that this was definitely a result of the learning (32 per cent) or that the course helped (46 per cent)
- overall, two-thirds of those in new jobs are in permanent roles, and as many as 69 per cent are in roles related to their course.

The level of the course undertaken has had little effect on immediate employment outcomes: 34 per cent of previously unemployed Level 2 learners are now in work, compared to 28 per cent of those who undertook a Level 3 course. However, Level 3 courses are particularly likely to encourage learners to undertake further training, with 53 per cent of those who were previously unemployed now engaged in further study (compared to 32 per cent of Level 2 learners). Of these new courses undertaken by previously unemployed Level 3 learners, 81 per cent are in higher education establishments (compared to 14 per cent of the courses undertaken by equivalent Level 2 learners).

Key messages regarding employability:

- a more highly qualified workforce – most Level 3 learners and nearly half of Level 2 learners did not have a qualification at this level before their course
- the vast majority of learners feel their employment prospects have improved and almost all believe they have learned skills that will be useful for current or future employment
- a third of the previously unemployed are now working, and a fifth of those staying with the same employer have been promoted.

10

How do employers benefit?

In this section we look at what benefits FE learning has for employers in terms of providing a more highly skilled and motivated workforce. Our findings are based on information gained from the learners, rather than from employers themselves.

If qualifications are a proxy for skills then London employers gain in terms of access to a more highly skilled workforce. More than two in five (45 per cent) of those undertaking a Level 2 course had no prior qualification at Level 2, and two-thirds (65 per cent) of those completing a Level 3 course had no prior Level 3 qualification. So FE is contributing to a significant improvement in the skills base, an area frequently cited as a barrier to growth by employers.

Employers gain not just in having access to a pool of more highly skilled workers when recruiting but also, for those whose staff complete Level 2 and Level 3 courses, a more highly qualified current workforce. Among those learners who continued to work for their same employer after their course, 49 per cent had completed a course at a higher level than they had previously achieved (the figure is particularly high, at 60 per cent among those still working for the same employer who undertook a Level 3 course). This indicates that there is a successful culture of employers supporting their employees in becoming more highly skilled and productive, and being able to retain these employees following participation in FE.

In addition to improved qualification levels:

- three-quarters of all learners (76 per cent) feel that they have developed skills relevant to their current job role, rising to 82 per cent among those still working for the same employer as before the course. This indicates that employees consider themselves to be performing better in their role than before they undertook the course
- almost three in four learners think that their literacy has improved (73 per cent)
- two-thirds feel that the course has benefited their numeracy (65 per cent)
- well over four in five (86 per cent) feel the course taught them teamworking and communication skills.

These findings are very similar when looking only at those learners who are still with their original employer, suggesting again the direct and immediate benefits that employers will experience.

One in five learners who have continued in employment with the same employer have been promoted following the course, and most (three-quarters) put this down at least in part to their having undertaken the course. Furthermore, 40 per cent of all those working for the same employer are being paid more now than before the course, a likely indication of their increased value to the employer.

It is also notable that among those learners who have stayed with the same employer they were with before starting their FE course, 53 per cent reported increased job satisfaction. On the reasonable assumption that increased job satisfaction has a beneficial effect on staff retention, this must be seen as another employer benefit of FE learning.

Key messages on how employers benefit:

- access to a pool of more highly skilled recruits
- more highly skilled staff
- likely improvement in staff retention as a result of increased job satisfaction.

11

Are learners willing to pay for further learning and training?

Reflecting positive views on the benefits gained by completing their FE course, three-quarters of learners (75 per cent) say they would be likely to be willing to pay for further training in the future. Although the amount they would be willing to pay was not discussed, the principle of paying for learning is clearly accepted by most of these learners.

The likelihood of being willing to pay varied very little by their situation following the course, whether they completed a Level 2 or a Level 3 course, whether they had a prior Level 2 qualification before their course or not, or by demographic variables such as age or gender.

For example the proportion of those unemployed or caring for children or family at the time of the interview, who said they would be likely to be willing to pay for further training in the future (73 per cent), was only a little lower than found among those working as employees or on a self-employed basis (76 per cent) or those who had progressed to a higher-level course (74 per cent).

There were some differences, however, in the proportion of learners saying they would be very likely to be willing to pay more for further learning in the future. Overall, a third (31 per cent) gave this response, higher among those in paid work (35 per cent) and older learners (33 per cent among those aged 25 to 50 compared to 29 per cent among those aged 19 to 24).

Key messages on learners' willingness to pay for further learning and training:

- three-quarters would be willing to pay
- little variation by type of learner.

12

Summary findings among all learners

Here we compare the situation of the learners before undertaking their Level 2 or Level 3 course with their current situation. We also highlight progression routes and the benefits gained.

Just over half of learners were working as employees prior to the course (54 per cent), mostly full time (32 per cent), with a small number also self-employed or running their own business (3 per cent). Around a quarter (28 per cent) entered their Level 2 or Level 3 learning straight from another course. A very similar proportion had been unemployed (19 per cent – most of these looking for work), or were looking after children or family members (6 per cent).

The proportion of learners in work or unemployed following the FE course is little changed. However, a very large proportion stayed on in learning (43 per cent, compared to 28 per cent who had been studying before the course).

Smaller changes are to be found in the slight increase in the proportion who are self-employed or running their own business, and the slight decrease in the proportion who are unemployed but not looking for work.

Nearly all of those now studying are on a higher-level course (88 per cent), with half of those in higher education (51 per cent).

While there has been relatively little overall movement other than for learning outcomes in learners' general situations, there are very positive findings within this overall context.

Among those who have stayed in employment either with the same or a new employer (a base of 544 learners):

- almost a third (31 per cent) are now working in a higher-level job (higher, at 57 per cent, among those now working for a new employer)
- nearly half (46 per cent) are being paid more (again this is much higher, at 58 per cent, for those who have changed employer)
- three in five are getting more job satisfaction (60 per cent)
- around 55 per cent say that they are now doing more interesting work, that they now have better job security, and that their pay and promotion prospects are improved
- overall, 84 per cent report experiencing at least one of the benefits listed above. Over a third (34 per cent) of these say at least one of the benefits is directly because of the course and three-quarters (76 per cent) say the course has been directly or partly responsible
- learners aged 25 to 50 are particularly likely to say that the course has been directly or partly responsible for at least one of the benefits they experienced (82 per cent, compared to 66 per cent of those aged 19 to 24).

For those unemployed before the course (a base of 269 learners), 31 per cent are now working (full time, part time or on a self-employed basis) and 43 per cent are engaged in further study.

Key messages among all learners:

- more than two in five have continued onto a further course of study, with this nearly always a higher-level course
- more than four in five of those who have continued in employment have experienced some benefit in their work situation, including a half having increased pay and a third working in a higher-level job
- almost a third of those unemployed before the course are now working.

Benefits of completing an FE course (all learners)

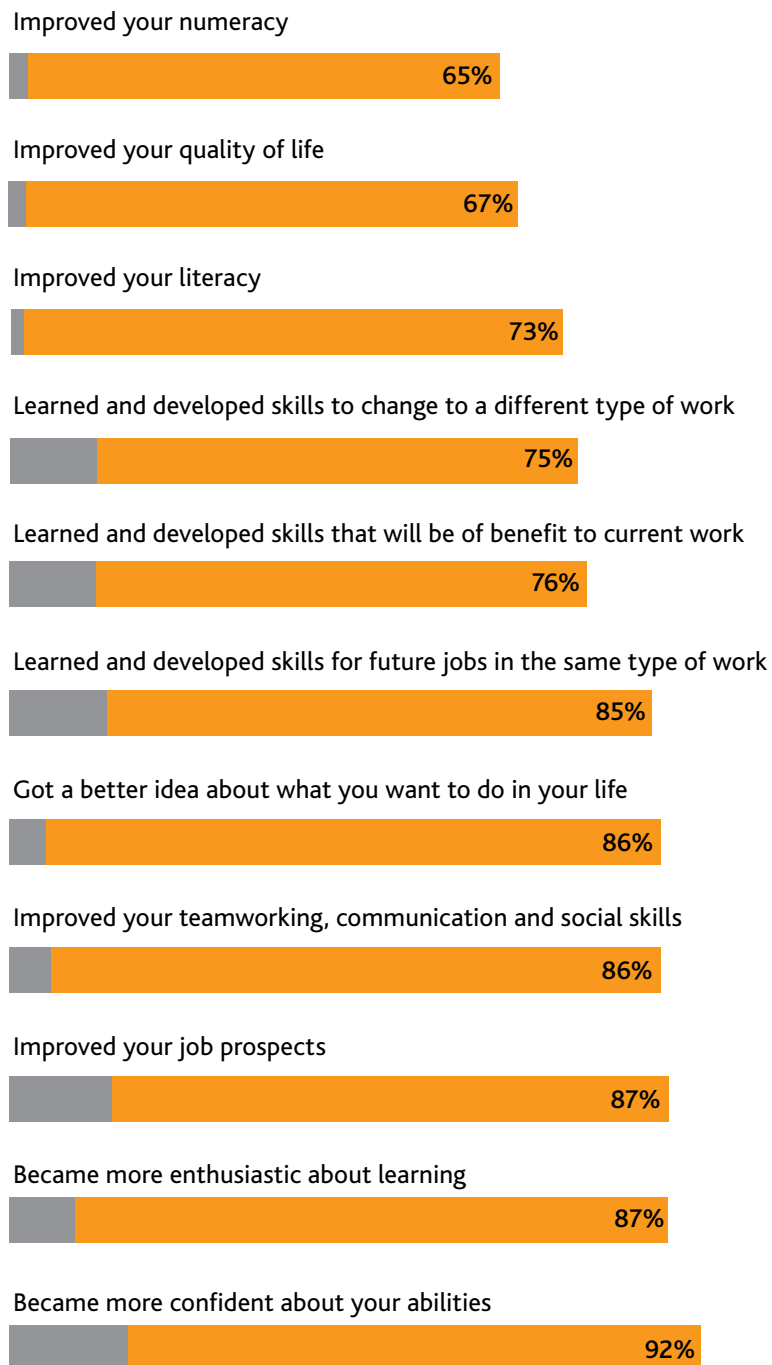
For those who are currently looking for work (a base of 253 learners), 35 per cent feel they have significantly more chance of finding a job because of the course.

There are notable variations by learners' age in spontaneously mentioned benefits, with younger learners (aged 19 to 24) more likely to report getting into higher education as a benefit (21 per cent, compared to 9 per cent of those aged 25 to 50). Older learners, on the other hand, are more likely than younger learners to mention having learned and developed skills to change to a different type of work, or to help them in their current work. They are also more likely to report more benefits.

Female learners report a higher number of individual benefits and are particularly likely to spontaneously report increased confidence and entry into higher education as benefits of the course; male learners are more likely than female learners to report gaining a recognised qualification as a benefit.

As can be seen in the chart on the right, when prompted with benefits, learners are very positive in their assessment of their course. The most common 'hard' benefits of FE are improved teamworking, communication and social skills. Overall, the most common benefits are increased confidence, improved job prospects and becoming more enthusiastic about learning. As many as 86 per cent agree that the course has helped give them a better idea about what they want to do with their life. Responses show a mix of both 'hard' and 'soft' benefits.

A total of 99 per cent of learners have experienced at least one of the 'hard' benefits; and 98 per cent have experienced at least one of the 'soft' benefits.



Key

■ Benefits mentioned spontaneously

■ Overall levels (includes benefits mentioned spontaneously and after prompting)

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