



**Evaluation Report**

**Lancashire Learning and Skills Council**

**ESF Objective 3 Co-Financed Project**

Project Title: Ufl Linked Basic Skills

Project Reference Number: ESF/0203/027

Lead Organisation: Lancashire College Consortium  
Skelmersdale College  
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## 1. Executive Summary

### 1.1. Report Context

This report forms an end of project evaluation of the ESF funded Ufl Linked Basic Skills project. It aims to evaluate the performance of the project over its lifetime and present key findings. The report is structured against the following headings:-

- Executive Summary
- Project Context and Objectives
- Methodology
- Project Results (qualitative and quantitative data)
- Prospects

The evaluation framework adheres to LSC evaluation guidance notes published last year and includes the minimum requirements. Separate appendices are also attached which include: project evaluation indicators, structured questionnaires (interim and final) and case studies. Good practice guides published by ICOM and the ESF national website have been referenced to develop the report.

### 1.2 Economic Context

The NWDA FRESA document points out that the proportion of the NW workforce with no qualifications is 5% above the English average and the RDP quotes that the region has the third lowest literacy and numeracy rates in the UK. It describes this combination as showing *“it is clear that skill deficiencies are a major constraint to the region’s economic competitiveness”*.

In East Lancs the LLP (1999-2002 East Lancs Learning Partnership) suggest that 106,000 adults in East Lancashire have poor levels of literacy of whom only 4,500 were in basic skills programmes in 1999. In North and Western Lancashire the LLP (2000) demonstrated that throughout the area the level of adults with no qualifications is particularly high, rising to 36.7% in Blackpool and 34.4% in Lancaster. Amongst the unemployed it is 39.3% and part time employees 38%.

Poor levels of basic skills bring increasing levels of disadvantage (and competitiveness) through changes in the labour market. The PIU ‘In Demand: Adult Skills’ report (2001) estimates that an individual with poor basic skills is 5 times more likely to be unemployed and if in work to be in low-paid, low-skilled jobs. Skillbase, in the 2001 forecast for the DfES, estimate that the number of jobs in the North West not requiring any qualification will have fallen to 8% by 2010.

Household Surveys carried out by LAWTEC and ELTEC confirmed that people with the lowest levels of qualifications are the least likely to have a positive attitude to learning. ELTEC’s survey highlighted a worrying gap between the percentage of employers seeing a need for higher-level skills and the perception of need for higher-level skills amongst the unemployed/economically-inactive.

### 1.3 Evaluation Approach

The approach taken in order to develop the end of project evaluation utilises both qualitative and quantitative data. It was formulated by building on the project's output data and softer information derived from interviews with Colleges and the Consortium, building in case studies from the project's participants. The process of project delivery is examined as well as its achievement of targets. Section 3 describes the project's methodology and evaluation processes.

#### 1.4 Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the evaluation processes:-

- Delivering provision in local community settings has enabled Colleges to engage client groups that would not normally access mainstream provision.
- This type of activity needs non-mainstream funding to offset tutorial and support costs and deliver customised provision in community venues.
- Accessing ESF funding has allowed tutors to test new methods of delivery and new provision that has proved to successfully engage hard to reach client groups
- That effort needs to be made by both colleges and Ufi to ensure that the potential uses of Ufi materials are fully understood but are only used on a free standing basis and are limited to circumstances.

## 2. Project Context and Objectives

The purpose of the project was to support new, increased basic skills learning through provision, which combines local, flexible delivery with proactive and positive mentoring, building on work with community, voluntary and trade union organisations to engage/motivate new learners. Project objectives included:-

- To capture the best practice in literacy/numeracy provision gained through prior ESF work, make this available via the web and identify key priorities for 2002/03.
- To organise a series of activities to bring people into learning, reaching those otherwise least likely to participate through taster activities, through working with learning advocates/champions and with employers.
- To deliver learning programmes on a rolling programme, basing flexible delivery on assessment of learners' needs using diagnostic tools, one-to-one review, and developing individual action plans
- To review the effectiveness of Learndirect materials utilised on a freestanding basis.

Project activities included:

### **Stage 1**

Providing support for adults with low levels of literacy/numeracy to build their employability skills. Activities were delivered on a flexible basis, with the driver being the needs of the individual, recognising that for most adults' commitment to develop these skills is context related.

### **Stage 2**

Following initial guidance/participation in tasters, the start point for beneficiaries was an initial review to:

- identify why they wanted to develop their basic skills
- carried out diagnostic tests to assess needs (including any resulting from dyslexia)
- agreed the commitment they made and the support that was provided

This led to the development of an individual Action Plan, which brokered in further learning provision provided by Colleges and other learning providers where appropriate.

### 3. **Methodology**

The purpose of this evaluation report is twofold, firstly to satisfy LSC requirements and secondly to assist FE colleges and partner organisations to align current and future projects more closely with the changing needs of its target audiences. The following evaluation objectives were established and informed our evaluation methods and processes:-

- Document project's experiences and achievements for internal and external audiences
- Create a platform for future development
- Support dissemination activities

The following evaluation methods were adopted to analyse and present findings:-

- **Formative evaluation:** - producing interim evaluation findings as the basis for adjusting and improving activities as the project progressed.
- **Summative evaluation:** – producing final reports to draw lessons learnt from the project after results were captured and recorded.

Types of evaluation approaches adopted included:

- **process evaluation** – evaluating the design of the project to review if the provision was appropriate to the client group and to establish if College plans were appropriate to meeting project objectives
- **outcome evaluation** – reviewed results, progression routes and positive outcomes

#### **Structured Interviews**

Interviews were arranged with FE Colleges and partner organisations to gather qualitative data. A structured questionnaire was used to form the basis of these interviews to ensure a consistent approach was adopted and

that information was gathered and documented which had clear linkages with the project's evaluation indicators and evaluation objectives (e.g. process and outcome questions).

A copy of the questionnaire is attached to this report for information purposes (see Appendix 1).

#### Evaluation Indicators

The project was set a range of evaluation indicators to assess the success or failure of any particular aspects of the project. Quantitative and qualitative indicators were developed and formed part of a simple matrix of indicators (see Appendix 2).

#### Project Management process

The process of implementation and delivery had a number of elements that allowed for development and facilitated and supported project delivery. These elements consisted of the following steps: -

- Contract clarification between the Consortium and the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council. This process was somewhat protracted because the system was new to both sides
- A "Project definition workshop" with all the partners to develop an agreed understanding of the project, to discuss issues and to develop an overall implementation plan. This activity should have come after contracting with the LSC but because of the protracted nature of that process this took place early within the project life.
- The establishment of local "delivery" or "implementation" groups. The form of these groups varied from College to College but typically involved a project manager or leader, curriculum staff from vocational areas and in some cases representatives of local agencies and / or local employers.
- The formation of a local delivery plan giving volumes, proposed achievement dates and outcomes. When these were agreed with the Consortium they provided the basis of the formal contract entered into by the Consortium with each project partner.
- Regular project meetings between the Consortium and staff delivering projects within the Colleges. These meetings had a common format :
  - Overall review of progress against targets identifying any shortfalls in local delivery
  - Reports from each project member of activity and progress on delivery of targets – including inputs from specialist administrative staff and teaching staff
  - Discussion of issues and contingency management
  - Progress report (including on occasion the distribution of draft reports) on milestone activity.

These meetings provided an essential forum for the sharing of good practice amongst Consortium members, formulation of contingency plans, sharing of targets across the Consortium and reporting on difficulties encountered and how they were overcome.

- Local evaluation activities – including obtaining feedback from beneficiaries and employers
- Final project dissemination activity –the event facilitated the sharing of good practice, promotion of the impact of ESF and the role of the LSC in the projects.

#### Project Monitoring Procedures

During the operational life of this project the Consortium established a comprehensive process of reporting to ensure effective and timely delivery of project activities and to address any delivery difficulties. Management information was captured and recorded on a monthly basis centrally and quantitative data has been compiled from our management information returns to the LSC and included in this evaluation report (see Project Results Section 4.2).

In addition regular evaluation review meetings were scheduled to review progress against the evaluation indicators and objectives. Quarterly Project Implementation Group (PIG) meetings and Consortium Steering Group meetings were also used as a vehicle to review evaluation activities, discuss key findings and raise any concerns or issues regarding the evaluation processes. Colleges found the PIG meetings to be an extremely useful and valuable forum enabling them to discuss operational issues and difficulties during both the development and delivery stages of the project.

Feedback from participants has also been included in this evaluation report by analysing and interpreting comments contained on FE Exit Questionnaires.

## 4. **Project Results**

### 4.1. **Project delivery**

This project was originally designed as one where the Lancashire North and West HUB could work with Blackpool and the Fylde College and Skelmersdale College both to deliver the project outputs and to test the effectiveness of interventions. Prior to project commencement and again during the project the HUB held information sessions for specialist Basic Skills tutors in Colleges designed to acquaint them with 'Skills for Life' materials and encourage a more integrated approach. Whilst some of the mainstream staff involved recognised that some of the materials had potential fears were expressed in relation to ALBSU Kite marking.

Initially the recruitment to the project went well but during 2002/2003 academic years Blackpool and the Fylde College decided to withdraw from Ufi provision. Although the commitment to the current learners was maintained no further recruitment was undertaken. When it became apparent that this secession of activity would lead to a short fall in recruitment the Consortium sought further partners in the Blackpool area to replace Blackpool and the Fylde College. The Blackpool Foyer agreed to join the project. The Foyer was already involved with both Learndirect and with UK Online and had been supported by the Consortium in acquiring both up to date computer equipment and facilities and adaptive devices etc for use by people with disabilities. The client group of the Foyer are a prime target for this type of intervention but because of the complex problems that the group experience

were not the most consistent of students. Overall the project shortfall in recruitment is related to these circumstances and to the exclusion of individuals who although signed onto the programme we cannot demonstrate took an active part.

#### 4.2. **Delivery Mechanisms**

##### Recruitment and selection processes

Recruitment and selection was carried out through an initial one to one interview and assessment process with project tutors. All participants were required to demonstrate a willingness to learn and a commitment to participate on the project.

##### Matching Need to Provision

A more detailed assessment was conducted once participants were confident and had demonstrated a commitment to learn. The purpose of the assessment was to understand their basic skills needs and skills issues (e.g. literacy and numeracy) prior to developing a customised programme of support. All participants produced an Action Plan setting goals and aspirations.

##### Project Adaptability

The provision was available in local community centres located in CED wards. Tutors alternated days and times across the local venues to accommodate participants.

Sessions were delivered on Monday and Wednesday mornings (9.00 am – 12.00 noon) and Tuesday and Thursday mornings (10.00 am to 11.00 am). These times were scheduled against crèche sessions for parents to remove childcare barriers. Vocational and pre-vocational training was delivered with participants gaining access to LearnDirect utilising the ICT facilities in the venues. Participants also used workbooks as their IT skills were poor. Intensive support, advice and guidance were also provided by tutors to ensure participants gained a positive outcome.

##### Publicity and Promotion

The project was promoted in local community venues and with local partnerships. Public places also displayed flyers (e.g. supermarkets, libraries, health centres and GP surgeries). Publicity materials declared that the project was supported by ESF and LSC funding.

##### Innovation

The nature of project innovation is how it has been delivered, utilising local community venues that are non-threatening familiar environments to the client groups. Often participants had not been in formal education since leaving school and had previously encountered bad experiences in schools.

##### Cross Cutting Theme Issues

The Lancashire College Consortium managed the project with all activities falling within the purview of their equal opportunities policy. Commitment to equal opportunities was apparent during delivery of the project with a commitment to equality of opportunity in staff and participants. For example, participation was not limited by disability, family responsibilities or ESOL with effective mechanisms being built into the project to overcome these discriminatory hurdles.

The project also made significant use of ICT to engage participants in learning offering them access to initial tasters in IT training as part of the project's basic skills activities. In addition, part of the project's aftercare support was to offer participants access to on-line learning packages which required them to have ICT skills to source information on the Web (e.g. Learndirect products) Participants were able to use College ICT facilities and resources on a "drop in" basis (e.g. Local Learning Centres).

Colleges and the Consortium also utilised ICT facilities to effectively manage the project and monitor progression. ICT facilities were also effectively utilised as part of planned dissemination activities to exchange and share best practice with colleges.

All Colleges have a written environmental policy and a significant number of them are working towards achieving ISO1400.

Adherence to sustainability can be demonstrated by the project's ability to attract and support people who would otherwise be unlikely to access learning opportunities, thus ultimately increasing their attainment levels and employability skills.

#### 4.3 **Project Outputs and Outcomes**

	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual</b>
<b>Outputs</b>	Beneficiaries assisted	140	122
	Females assisted	59	102
	Working towards qualification	129	122
<b>Outcomes</b>	Positive outcomes	96	71
	Work on leaving	31	34
<b>Milestones</b>	Best practice on numeracy/ literacy on web	1	1
	Guidance for staff on IT materials	1	1
	Workshop for Basic Skills Tutors	1	1
	Dissemination event	1	1
	Evaluation report	1	1
	Online support	1	0

The project achieved 87% of target and overachieved against a number of targets including: number of female participants, and number in work post completion. In addition all participants were able to work towards gaining a qualification.

#### 5. **Prospects**

### Areas of Good Practice

The project has been able to deliver much needed basic provision and tested new curriculum such as English Games. This provision enabled tutors to discretely assess participants' skills levels without the fear of demoralising them.

One of the issues identified as part of the project's best practice activities was to examine the possibility of Learndirect products being a stand alone activity for this project or if a blended learning solution was more feasible for the client group. The majority of Learndirect materials for basic skills learners are electronic or media based which required participants to be able to read and understand the materials in order for them to complete a course.

This demonstrated a weakness in the delivery of materials and to overcome this problem Colleges suggested the appointment of dedicated learner champions able to offer discrete basic skills support.

One of the most interesting aspects to the project has been the 'stand alone' debate. As a project outcome a best practice guide was created which to an extent, is more a reflection of a contemporary debate than of a best practice in basic skills. That work raised a number of interesting questions and challenges both for traditional approaches and Learndirect approaches. Good practice will be developed as the organisations involved respond to these challenges. (Refer to dissemination event best practice guide).

### Lessons Learnt

Fair exhibitions should be organised to raise awareness of the project and explain to potential clients the benefits of participating on the project. Cold calling (e.g. knocking on doors) in local areas would also raise awareness and stimulate demand for the project however this would be resource intensive and would need to be financed.

Future provision should build in a budget for materials and consumables (e.g. workbooks, pens and paper).

Progression routes should be considered in order to offer participants continuing support in learning. Participants need small incremental steps back into learning (e.g. "bitesize" chunks).

Any future project should include tutorial training for ESOL and due to the demand for this type of provision should consider basic skills training for additional tutorial support.

### Added Value

The project has enabled Colleges to work with client groups they would not normally engage or attract into FE related provision. The project has provided customised provision in local community settings, building skills levels, increasing employability skills and enabling participants to progress into further education, training and/or employment.

### Mainstreaming

Non-mainstream funding is required to offer this type of provision in local community venues. This type of provision is costly in terms of tutorial support, access to childcare support and learner support costs (e.g. materials and consumables).

### Dissemination

All dissemination materials produced for this project were shared with members of the Consortium and the wider partnership. A dissemination event was arranged in January post completion to raise the profile of the project, share best practice, lessons learnt and discuss the project's heritage.

Key partner organisations were invited to attend including representatives from Business Links, Ufi Hub and the Learning and Skills Council. Copies of the materials produced for the event are attached as separate Appendices.