

Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn

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Foreword

For the lifetime of SRB6, the Learners' Forum was tasked to gather feedback from residents of Hull regarding learning, and to feed this information to providers and funders of learning so that the views of learners were considered whilst learning was being planned and delivered.

In the pilot year of the project, the aim was to talk to residents in Hull about learning in general, and their experiences

of it, in order to gain an insight into issues that prevented them from, or enabled them to, participate in learning, and to look at their motivations for learning.

This research is the outcome of the work carried out in the pilot year, and was carried out by a team at Volcom including Mary Irish, Kerry Robinson, Iain Springate and Isabelle Tracy.

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Since the present Government came into power in 1997, they have placed a high priority on education throughout all stages of life. This focus has been driven by a recognition that the UK needs a workforce with up to date skills and knowledge to compete in the global marketplace; and also the fact that learning is a route to a better quality of life for individuals, and a more cohesive society (DfEE, 1999). As Bottery (2000; 1) comments, education has been prioritised by the Government, but has therefore had to accept its "...subordination to policy imperatives." This focus on education is not exclusive to the UK, with the European Union also stressing the importance of lifelong learning.

In order to measure the effects of the changes that the Government has made relating to education, they have set in place National Learning Targets, relating mostly to qualification levels throughout the population (For more information www.dfes.gov.uk/nlt). Hull faces a challenge in meeting these targets, as performance historically has been below the target levels (Citylearning, 2001).

Hull has suffered over the past few decades from the trend towards deindustrialisation in the face of increased globalisation (City Regeneration Strategy, 1998). Traditionally, the city relied on its port for much employment, with jobs in the fishing industry, on the docks and in supporting industries. These jobs, however skilled, often did not rely on qualifications, but skills learnt on the job. However, the number of such jobs has diminished greatly, and Hull has been left with a tradition of not needing qualifications to get jobs. Arguably one outcome of this is that there is low educational achievement relative to national averages, in the face of a developing 'knowledge economy' that places great importance on qualifications and validated skills.

The city now has a relatively broad based economy, and yet the level of unemployment remains high, 7.7% compared with a national average of 4% and a regional average of 3.4% (Cityvision, 2002). There are two challenges. Firstly, to raise the skill level of Hull's workforce to enable Hull to compete with other cities, and ultimately to attract more inward investment. The second challenge, part of the first, is to tackle the issue of areas in the city where deprivation is high and levels of educational attainment and employment are very low.

Learning can be a major part of the solution to these issues. Hull's successful SRB6 bid recognised this, aiming to promote learning across the city, and in specified 'community target areas' (CTAs) which were identified as deprived areas as described above. Various projects have been commissioned from SRB6 with a focus on learning, with some aiming to find out about aspects of learning in the city, and others being more delivery-focused. Two projects that were very closely linked were the Learning Attitude Survey and the Learner's Forum.

The Learning Attitude Survey aimed to delve into people's attitudes towards learning in order to gain insight into the 'learning culture' of Hull. The Learners' Forum aims to capture the views of learners' during the lifetime of SRB6, and to channel their views to learning providers and other relevant bodies to ensure that commissioned projects are relevant and responsive to learners' expressed needs.

The aim of the Learners' Forum project in its pilot year was to carry out research to determine what factors influenced peoples' decision to participate in learning; what motivated them to get involved in learning; what things were barriers to participation in learning; and, what things were enablers to participation, in that they encouraged people to participate. These issues fell under the main aim for the research, which was to answer the question 'What would do it for you?' in relation to getting involved in learning.

Nationally there has been a fair amount of research into these issues (e.g. Hillage et al, 2001; La Valle et al, 2001). This research highlights attitudinal issues like motivation and negative attitudes to learning; material issues such as lack of finance and information; and, structural barriers like few learning opportunities or benefits problems.

Previous research in Hull (e.g. Humberside TEC, 1999) has given valuable insights into the issues above. However, the research has tended to state what people think and what they've done regarding learning rather than why they think or do what they do. The aim of the Forum in its pilot year was to delve a bit deeper into what people think and do and the reasons why, and suggest some ways forward in the city.



In order to ensure that the research was as useful as possible, the project adopted a specific definition of learning to focus the research. There are many ways people learn informally, but as the aim was to provide ways forward for structured learning in the city, the research defined learning as courses or classes, whatever the length or delivery mechanism. The essential element was that it was a structured programme delivered by an organisation.

The methods used to gather information were qualitative, specifically interviews and focus groups (more information is available in the appendix). These methods are time-intensive, meaning that samples are necessarily smaller, but provide much more detailed and rich data. This will enable the research to 'get behind' the statistics already known about learning in Hull, and begin to explain them and suggest areas for further investigation.

The sample was 148 residents of Hull aged over 16 (again more information is available in the appendix). There was a mix of employed and unemployed residents, and of different ages, albeit with a weighting towards younger residents. A third of the sample were residents from the 10 CTAs, with a relatively equal distribution across all 10 areas.

It was also important not only to speak to those already engaged in learning, but also to those who had done learning since school, but were not currently learning, and those who hadn't engaged in learning since school. The final sample comprised 60% current learners, 38% past

learners and 3% those who hadn't engaged with learning since school. Ideally, less of the sample would have been current learners, but the difficulty was that the sample gained through the community included more people engaged in learning than had been envisaged. This is not necessarily a cause for concern, as it could potentially be an effect of the moving of learning into the community, and the provision of shorter and more flexible courses.

The report and findings below are based on this research. However they also include other recent research carried out in Hull regarding learning. Where possible, findings from elsewhere have been cross-referenced to the research to add weight to the findings.

The following report is split into four main sections. The first examines peoples' views on learning, and draws tentative conclusions on whether Hull has a 'learning culture'. The second section focuses on the various motivations for learning. The third section covers barriers and enablers to learning, draws out those that people thought were the biggest issues, and covers any solutions offered by people. The final section draws together the rest of the report, looking at the question 'what will do it for you?', and suggesting ways forward in Hull, both in terms of possible solutions, and areas for further investigation.

A Learning Culture? What Hull residents think about learning

Introduction

One theory put forward to explain Hull's below average performance towards the National Learning Targets has been the idea that the city may not have a 'learning culture'. The precise meaning of a 'learning culture' is unclear, but the general reasoning is that there may be cultural reasons, relating to history and consequent attitudes, that mean people don't get involved in learning to the same degree as other areas. The Learners' Forum was not tasked to look into this specifically, as this was the role of the Learning Attitude Survey, which ran concurrently with this research. However, findings have arisen from this research that give an insight into the issues.

Agar (1996; 11) recognised the complexity of cultural issues when he wrote that "...studying culture today is like studying snow in the middle of an avalanche".

Understanding of culture has moved on from the 18th Century colonial view of one universal scale of progress that all people follow over time, to a realisation that cultures are unique and fluid entities, continually incorporating new ideas and influences (Rapport & Overing, 2000).

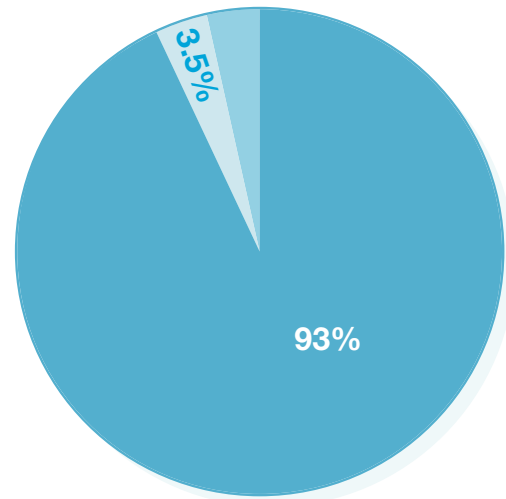
The idea of culture, then, suggests a set of embodied ideas and consequent practices that affect the behaviour of people. Bourdieu (1977) describes this in terms of a 'habitus', meaning the ideas people have about the world, and consequently the way they live their lives. The habitus is developed as a result of the structure of society around people, and the conditions that they live and grow up in. These ideas can imply that people have a lack of agency; meaning that their actions are determined by their culture. However, culture is not a strait-jacket that blindly determines people's actions, more a set of dispositions, and as cultures are fluid, they can be changed over time and therefore so can people's behaviour (Rapport & Overing, 2000).

In relation to Hull then, it could be argued that the city has a specific culture relating to its history, its geographic location and the nature of the influences that have acted upon it. This could be impacting on attitudes to learning, and therefore decisions about learning. The Learners' Forum asked residents if they thought learning was worthwhile and why, and whether they had any plans for the future in terms of learning. The responses can begin to give an insight into the nature of, or the lack of, some kind of 'learning culture' in Hull.

Is Learning Worthwhile?

Interviewees were asked whether they thought learning was worthwhile, and then their views were followed up to discover the reasons behind their opinion. The vast majority (93%) thought that learning was worthwhile and nobody thought that learning wasn't worthwhile at all. However a small number (4%) expressed a reservation alongside their

Is learning worthwhile?



- Yes
- Yes - with reservation
- Yes - But not sure why

assertion that learning was worthwhile, and a similar proportion, whilst saying learning was worthwhile, could not articulate a reason why. These results were cross-examined against whether interviewees were currently engaged in learning or not, and it emerged that this had no statistical bearing on their answers. Essentially, those who weren't currently engaged in learning had proportionately similar answers across the sample to those currently engaged in learning.

There were three main reasons that interviewees gave to explain that learning was worthwhile. These related to employment, their lives in general, and the way learning challenged them to think and exercise their brains.

Employment was the factor most commonly mentioned as the reason learning was worthwhile. There were several reasons behind this. The first was that people were aware that the job market is changing, that there are different kinds of jobs available, and that therefore new skills were needed to get these jobs. As one unemployed man said "...the job scene's changing all the time [from] manual, to kinda IT, stuff like that, communications." Learning was seen as a way to keep up with changes and attain new and relevant skills. However, no detailed awareness of the jobs market and changes taking place within it emerged. People's perceptions appear to be limited to a realisation that manual jobs are diminishing, and that new jobs need some form of IT skills.

The second employment-related reason learning was worthwhile was that people thought it would help them get a job, or a better job than they could without learning. As one young man explained, "...'cos [learning will] help you get a job, a decent job, a decent wage, stuff like that." There was a clear awareness that learning could lead to a better job and higher wages ultimately. The third reason was so that those who are employed can move on in their career. Those in work were aware of areas they needed to work on and increase their knowledge of so that they could move on in their careers.

There were two interesting issues that emerged from those talking about employment and learning. People clearly equated accredited learning as the type needed for employment. Comments tended to emphasise not the skills gained that would lead them into employment, but the fact that they could list qualifications on an application form or CV when applying for jobs. Some even talked of learning as a way to validate, or prove, their skills to employers, rather than a way to gain new skills. The second issue was that of choice, in that people recognised that learning would give them more of a choice in the jobs market, enabling them to secure jobs they enjoyed.

Following on from employment, the second reason why learning was seen as worthwhile was for reasons to do with people's lives in general. This was mentioned less often than employment reasons. People emphasised that learning built their skills and knowledge, and that this was useful in their everyday lives. As one woman commented, **"...I've been on courses meself and I've got to the stage where I am now, I can say, yes it's benefited me, it's been worthwhile for me..."**

Others talked of the way learning broadened their horizons in life, and helped them to think more about the world around them. Those who gave this reason why learning was worthwhile talked less of qualifications, emphasising the skills and knowledge as being the useful outcomes of the learning, rather than a qualification.

The third reason that people thought learning was worthwhile related to the way learning made them think and exercised their minds. Retired people especially emphasised that learning kept their brains active. One woman commented that learning "...keeps your mind tickin' over..." There was also the feeling that this added to health later in life, by keeping the mind active, by being a source of fun, and also a reason to get out and stay active. This echoes the findings of James (2001), who has carried out some research into learning and health. However, it was not just older people who thought learning was worthwhile for

this reason. Some younger people, whilst recognising the importance of learning for employment, also saw learning as a way to keep them thinking, and keep challenging themselves to move on.

As was noted previously, the vast majority of people thought learning was worthwhile, and explained why with one of the three reasons given above. However, some did not give an unqualified yes to the answer. There was a small group (4%) who expressed a reservation as to whether learning was worthwhile, and the reason they gave was the possibility of being overqualified for a job. They accepted that learning could help get a job, but argued that it could also have the opposite effect if an employer perceived that they were overqualified for a position. One interviewee had personal experience of this,

"I applied for an office job, data input, a few weeks ago, got a letter back saying 'you're too highly qualified for us because you won't stay'. 'With having a degree you will move on, you won't stay'....when I first started looking for work I was told 'well, you haven't got any qualifications'. So I got some admin qualifications, now I'm overqualified."

Others didn't have personal experience of this, but still saw it as an issue that had to be taken into account when considering doing learning.

Another small group (4%) said that they thought learning was worthwhile, but did not seem sure why when questioned further. These were all young men involved in employment schemes. The only conclusion to draw is that they'd been told that learning was worthwhile, but hadn't worked out its specific relevance to them. If this is the case it does not bode well for their ability to navigate their way effectively through learning and into work.

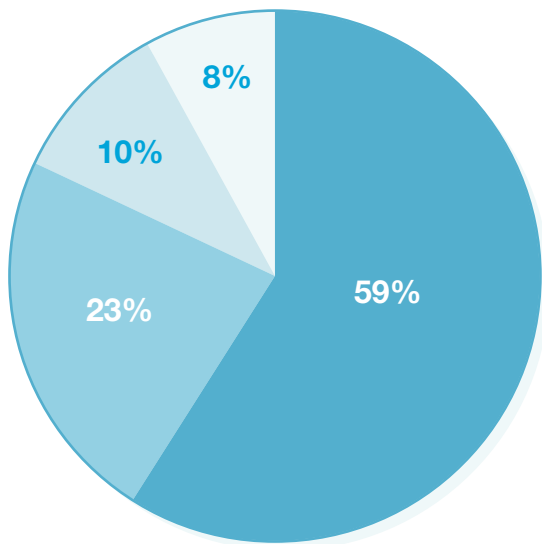
Overall, then, the majority of interviewees thought learning was worthwhile. The most common reason given to explain this related to employment, but a significant number also related to learning for life in general, and a smaller number emphasised that it kept their minds active.

Future Plans

Interviewees were also asked if they would like to do any learning in the future. The majority (59%) answered that they would, and indicated a specific course, or subject, that they were planning to do. The courses were diverse, ranging from career focused learning around for example nursing, to IT courses, to more leisure-focused courses. Just under a quarter (23%) also said they wanted to do learning in the future, but did not have a clear idea of what it was they wanted to do. So overall, 82% of interviewees wanted to do more learning in the future.

A small proportion (10%) said that they did not want to do any learning in the future. The vast majority of these people

Would you like to do any learning in the future?



- Yes (subject specified)
- Yes (subject not specified)
- No
- Possibly

were unemployed, and the rest were retired or on employment schemes. There were no clear trends that emerged regarding their reasons for this. Some didn't want to do any more learning as they just wanted a job. One person felt that after doing the training they were currently doing through an employment scheme they wouldn't need to do any more learning. Some also didn't want to move on from the learning they were currently doing. These were individuals who were engaged in learning through day centres for the elderly or those with mental health problems, and the reason for not moving on could have been one of only being confident to learn in their familiar surroundings.

Another 8% also said that they would possibly, but not definitely, do learning in the future, and this would depend what happened to them in the future, and whether they thought they needed to do more learning.

Cross-tabulation of the responses showed that whether interviewees were currently learning or not had no significant bearing on whether they said they had plans to do learning in the future or not. Both groups had similar proportions with either specific plans or a general plan to do more learning.

The Learning Attitude Survey asked a similar question, 'Is there anything you would like to learn over the next 12 months?' Clearly the results are not directly comparable, as the Learners' Forum did not set a specific time frame to the question but asked about learning people would like to do in the future. However, the results are relevant here. The results showed that those who had engaged in learning since school were more likely to want to learn in the next 12 months than those who hadn't. Similarly, those who were currently learning were more likely to want to learn something in the next 12 months than those who weren't currently learning. This squares with other research which suggests that involvement in learning triggers further involvement; a 'virtuous circle' of participation (e.g. Taylor & Cameron, 2002). The disparities in results are most likely due to the different questions, with the Learners' Forum question being much more open-ended.

Overall, then, the research showed that the majority of interviewees wanted to do more learning, regardless of their current learning status. However, the Learning Attitude Survey suggests that when people are asked about learning in the near future, they are more likely to be influenced by their current learning status.

A Learning Culture?

As discussed above, the issue of culture, and therefore of a 'learning culture' is very complex. Any study wishing to draw meaningful conclusions about a 'learning culture' in Hull would have to dig deeply into historical and social factors relating to the city, and would have to examine issues far wider than those immediately related to learning. That is clearly beyond the scope of the current work, and all that can be done here is offer indicators that have arisen through the research.

The research has shown that people do have a positive attitude to learning, and recognise its importance in their lives. Most people also have plans to do some learning in the future, following on from their positive view of learning. These plans and positive views could be taken as indicators that Hull has some kind of 'learning culture' as people value learning and want to learn in the future. However, to make any claims to a 'learning culture' based on a study narrowly focused on learning would clearly be misinformed. The results discussed above can only provide an indication of people's views on learning. Much more work of a different nature is needed to determine the existence, or not, and the nature of, any 'learning culture' in Hull.

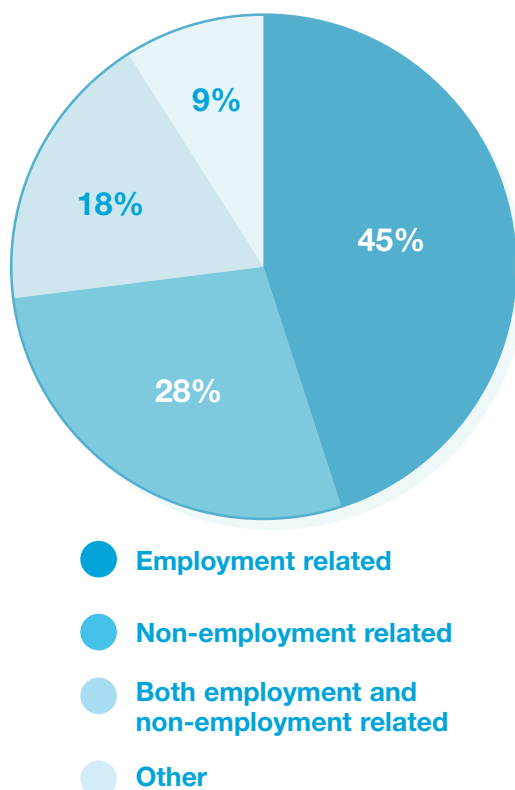
Why participate in Learning?

Following on from the discussion about people's views on learning, this section focuses on the reasons why people learn. There have been various attempts to categorise the different motives for learning (e.g. Tamkin & Hillage, 1997). However, what is clear through the literature is that at a basic level there is a key distinction in motivations relating to employment, and non-employment related motivations (La Valle & Blake, 2001). Employment motivations relate to getting a job, advancing careers, or improving skills in a current job, whilst non-employment motivations cover everything that falls outside this (ibid). Examples include doing something for fun, out of interest, or to get out and meet people.

The research showed that 45% of interviewees who had engaged in learning at some point since school had been mainly motivated by employment related reasons. A further 28% had been mainly motivated by non-employment reasons. 18% were equally motivated by both of these reasons, in that the learning was helpful for employment purposes, but was also something they wanted to do for interest. Just under 10% gave different reasons, for example having no choice about whether to do the learning or not.

This fits with data gathered elsewhere in Hull. Data from the Learning Attitude Survey shows that the majority of

Main motivation for participation in learning



respondents (63%) would be motivated by employment factors if they were going to learn over the next 12 months. Just under a third (31%) would not be motivated by these reasons. These data also suggest a relationship between people's answers to this question and their status and age. Those who are full time students, employed or unemployed appear to be more likely to be motivated by employment reasons than those who are fully or semi-retired. This follows on from national data (Hillage et al, 2000) suggesting a similar trend. The only point of note otherwise is that those who are self-employed were also less likely to be motivated by employment reasons than full-time students, employed or unemployed people, although the relationship does not appear as strong as those described above.

Age is also a factor in this decision, with those approaching or at retirement age being less likely to be motivated by employment factors than those under that age. The interesting factor for those of employment age is that their likelihood to be motivated by employment reasons increases as they move up to their mid thirties, and then begins to tail off, perhaps reflecting people's career patterns.

Primary data from the Learning Shop's enquiry database also confirms the importance of employment as a motivation to learn in Hull. Between August 2001 and February 2002, approximately 42% of enquiries were about work-related learning, and 34% were non-work related.

The section below uses the Learners' Forum data to examine in more detail the reasons people in Hull get involved in learning. Firstly, the main generic motivations are discussed, then the reasons why people chose to be in learning at a particular time are examined, followed by discussion of 'triggers' into learning. The main motivations for learning related to employment, interest, social reasons, children, personal development, and to move on in life. It's worth noting that these motivations are not mutually exclusive, and some interviewees referred to several motivations as part of their learning reasoning.

Employment

As discussed above, employment was the most common motivator for learning. There were two main parts to this. Firstly, there were people who were unemployed or on an employment programme, who were engaged in learning in order to get a job. They recognised that learning would help them get a job, by showing that they had been learning and using their time whilst unemployed usefully, but also because it evidenced useful skills they had to employers. As one unemployed man commented,

Employment is an important motivator for learning in Hull because on the whole people believe that learning does lead to better jobs, to better paid jobs, and can be a route into employment..

“...I’m going for different jobs, it’s a fact of life you need qualifications...”

People clearly identified learning as a route into work, and they were often very enthusiastic about their learning. For example, one unemployed man on an employment programme commented that,

“...that’s the way I look at it, I’ll go on as many courses as they put me on, ‘cos they’re all to your advantage at the end of the day.”

Those who were employed were also motivated to learn by employment-related reasons, but clearly, their reasons were different. Firstly, some people were in low skilled and monotonous jobs, and saw learning as a route out of those jobs into something better. As one woman commented,

“I was doing shop work and I wanted something better, and you got to be...when you go for a better job, more pay, more skills, you have to have the qualifications to back it up. So at that time, that was what I wanted to do...”

Others wanted to progress their career by moving into a better job, and were aware of the need to update their skills and gain qualifications to be attractive to employers. Some people were aiming for specific jobs, had done their research into the skills and qualifications needed, and were in learning to achieve these skills and move into their chosen career. Others saw learning as a way in which they could improve their skills relevant to their current job. One man commented that he engaged with learning “...to improve the quality of my work and do my job better...”

Then impetus behind this motivation was connected to quality of life. People saw that learning could get them better jobs, that they would earn more and that this would improve their quality of life. One person stated this clearly when he said that,

“...I’m gonna go to university, I’m gonna finish university, and get the job I want to do, earning the money I want to earn.”

The link between more learning and better earnings was clearly expressed by many people, but their motivation was not just about this, the benefits were seen to be much wider,

“...I thought I don’t wanna be doing this....people had worked at the same place as me for 10 years longer than me, I was looking at them and thinking ‘oh, am I getting like them?’...I don’t think I can stay. So I took a drop in money, but me lifestyle is better...I enjoy my job because it’s a challenge, something different everyday...”

This woman had done computer courses in her own time around shift work, and had eventually secured an administration job. She stressed quality of life, and the move to a more challenging job as the motivation behind her desire to learn.

Overall then, employment is an important motivator for learning in Hull because on the whole people believe that learning does lead to better jobs, to better paid jobs, and can be a route into employment. So the message that ‘learning pays’ and ‘learning works’ has clearly got through. However, there is more to getting jobs than that. People need to use learning in an effective targeted way for it to help them into employment, or better employment. Specifically, people need to know the state of the labour market and what the jobs are that will be needed when they’ve finished their training. It is also important that they have an awareness of other issues relating to employment, such as the necessary attitudinal or generic skills that are not quantifiable through a course.

The way people spoke about the transition through learning to work implied that they thought it was a simple matter of getting a qualification, and securing a job. The types of jobs spoken of often related to administration, and using computers in a basic way. There is an issue therefore of how effectively people can manage the transition through learning to work, and how they can be helped to do this more effectively. There is also the oft-quoted matter of aspirations (e.g. Citylearning, 2002), as the jobs people were talking about, and the consequent learning they were aiming for, involved generally low level skills.

These issues deserve further investigation to ensure firstly, that people are facilitated to use learning effectively to get jobs; and secondly to begin to raise aspirations, and consequently skills, within that process.

Interest

The second theme relating to motivation was interest. Some people cited interest in the learning as their primary motivation for engaging in learning. There were several facets to this. Some people chose to do some learning that was directly related to a hobby or interest. For example, one man explained that,

“My biggest hobby is I rebuild, restore old cars. And the one thing I could never do was weld. So I went and actually took on a welding course. So now I've got, through my own playing about and being taught, I can now do everything from strip an engine down, rebuild it, and now I can weld the bits and pieces back on my car and weld the rot holes up.”

This motivation was linked purely to his hobby, and many people were motivated in this way. Other people, though, were motivated by interest in a subject, but were also aware that the learning could help them in employment. As one man commented regarding some IT learning he'd been doing,

“...I've always had a great interest in computers and plus it was part of my daily working life anyway so the more I could take on board the better it could be.”

Some younger people had also chosen learning that was intended to lead them to employment, but had chosen the learning, and therefore the employment path, according to what interested them. One example of this was those who had chosen sports-related courses with a view to getting a job in sport.

Some people also engaged in learning for the love of learning itself, enjoyment of gaining knowledge, and learning new things. One woman summed this up when asked what motivated her to carry on learning in the future. She replied, “...’Cos I like it, I love it...”

People generally acknowledged that interest was a key part of a successful learning experience, but some also commented that interest became a more important factor as people got older, and learning wasn't vital for a job,

“...I think education has different purposes as you get older, where when you're younger its almost like imperative for a job...”

Social Reasons

Some people also were motivated to engage in learning in order to meet people and because they enjoyed the process of learning with a group of people. The social factor was the key motivator, and learning was a leisure activity, something to do and enjoy. In this case the process of learning was the end result, rather than what was learnt.

This was especially important for those who were lacking daily contact with others, for example due to unemployment, retirement, or health problems. These kinds of people tended to use learning as a social activity, a way to get out and interact with other people. The kinds of learning they were interested in, then, were different from those of people who wanted a learning outcome for work or pleasure. For these people the experience was the primary end result they had in mind.

Children

Those who had children of school age also said that the children were a motivation for them to learn. This was for two reasons, to inspire them, and to be able to help them with schoolwork. Some people explained that if children saw their parents engaged in learning then this encouraged them to get on with their own schooling and take it seriously. As one parent who was on a course said,

“...I feel also, do you know when you're thinking if the kids see me learning, see me doing homework, my kids do it automatically, my kids don't hesitate, they come in, sit at the table and do their homework because nine times out of ten I'm sat doing my homework, so if they can see me doing it, then they do it...”

Parents were aware that they were making learning normal to their children, and were setting an example that their children could follow. This, they found, encouraged their children to learn, and have a more positive view of it.

The other issue that motivated parents to engage in learning was when they were unable to help their children with homework because the homework was too advanced. This motivated parents as they wanted to be able to help their children, and to encourage them in their learning. As one mother explained,

“It's important to learn yourself so you can help the kids...I just wanna be able to help me kids, because at every stage now they have tests...I wanna be able to help them with spelling and that. I don't want to look in a dictionary to tell me kids how to spell summat. I've found it's a good way of learning as well...”

This was an important motivator for parents, and the way they talked about the learning they did emphasised the fact that once they started learning they began to be motivated by personal reasons as well as their children-related motivations.

Personal Development

People were also motivated to learn because learning helped them develop skills that were useful in their day-to-day lives. Some mentioned specific needs that they had which had motivated them to go on a course to fulfil that need. These skills were diverse, ranging from the need to manage money better, to struggling with using email at home. A trend within this was that IT, and technology generally, were areas that came out as important. People felt that technology was moving forward all the time and this was a key area to have up-to-date skills in, as it increasingly affected both work life and home life.

Others emphasised the need to keep learning just to ensure they were always on top of what was going on around them, and continuously updating their skills. As one woman commented,

“...I don’t want to be left behind. No. I need to be learning.”

Moving on in life

Learning was viewed by many as a catalyst for change in their lives, and so some were motivated to learn in order to change their lives. Some people, through redundancy, retirement or illness, had found themselves stuck at home more, and felt bored and stuck in a rut. Even those employed sometimes felt the same, if they had been doing the same job for years. These people were motivated to learn so that they could get out more, use their brains, and change the pattern of their lives. For some this meant just getting out more, for others it was a move towards doing something new with their lives. One man summed this up when he said of his motivation,

“...I think it was just a hunger to do something different. I can’t sit here and grow into a cabbage you know. I’ve got to do something with me life. I’ve got to do something for me...”

Volunteering

People who were involved in voluntary groups in their communities often made it clear that it was their commitment to their communities and voluntary activities that motivated them to learn. People engaged in learning in order to be able to carry out activities in their communities, run their community centres better, and to fulfil requirements linked to their activities. One example is of a man involved in a local football club,

“...the courses that I’ve done...I’ve done them because I had to do them but I’ve done them with a view to enjoying them, and I have enjoyed them. But we have, as part of the football club we have had to take the courses, because you can’t enter the league unless you take the courses.”

So the root motivation was their work in the community, but this often drew people into learning more, as they discovered the wider benefits they were getting out of learning.

The motivations listed above did not necessarily operate alone. People sometimes expressed a primary motivation, but also mentioned other factors that had motivated them alongside that. It is also worth noting that motivations sometimes changed as people progressed through learning. As people began to appreciate the other outcomes they got from learning that they hadn’t originally envisaged, these outcomes came into play in terms of motivating them. This was the case mostly with those people whose primary motivations weren’t employment related.

Another important point is that people’s motivations determined to a great extent what they wanted and expected from the learning. For some people the learning process itself was the end of their objective; the motivation was related to getting out and being involved in something. For others, the learning was a means to an end, with the qualification or skills gained being what they want in order to achieve something else. This affected what they wanted from the learning experience itself. Clearly, whilst all wanted a good experience, for some this was more important for others. This is an area for further investigation, looking at what motivates people, what kind of learning they want as a result, and how they progress once in learning.

Triggers to engaging with Learning

The other aspect of motivation is what actually triggers people to get involved in learning. People need to be motivated to participate in learning, but often there are sets of events that turn motivation or ideas into action. This can be through strengthening motivation, or releasing people to participate.

There were several findings that arose from the research. Firstly, some people engaged in a piece of learning as a direct progression from another. Sometimes this was as part of a programme of training towards a particular goal, and sometimes it was because they finished one course and were offered another one, or saw one advertised. Certainly, being involved in learning was a key way that people got involved in further learning.

Some interviewees indicated that they hadn't had a choice about when they engaged in learning. These tended to be those on employment programmes such as New Deal, where involvement in training was part of the package, and was compulsory. This did not necessarily mean they weren't happy or keen to do it, indeed some were happy that the programme had made them engage in learning, as they saw it as beneficial.

The most mentioned trigger into learning related to people's life-changes. These were things that changed in people's lives that enabled them, or encouraged them, to get involved in learning. For some older people the change was retirement, and the learning filled a space that had been filled before by work. It got people out of the house, and, as several retired people put it, 'kept their brains ticking over!'. For others the change related to work, for example being made redundant. This made people examine their lives and gave them a chance to move in a new direction. Another life change related to children growing up. As children grow up, and are more able to look after themselves, parents have more time, and feel freer to engage in other activities such as learning. As one mother explained,

"...it was a bit easier because me lad was grown and he fetches himself home from school and it made it easier for me. If I wasn't home for him comin' in I wasn't far behind him. So that was probably the reason mainly."

With children, their growing up provided a release for parents to engage in learning if they wanted to. It was not a trigger in the way other things are; more a releasing factor that enabled parents to do what they wanted to.

Some people could not put their finger on a specific reason why they'd started their learning when they did, and emphasised the fact that they'd motivated themselves and it was time to do something with their lives. One woman on an employment programme explained that,

"...I've had loads of jobs before...trying to find out which one's the right one for me, and I just thought, well, I was like 22, just turned, and I thought I've got to do something with my life, I can't just go from one job to another, I need, needed qualifications..."

This concept of triggers to learning is an area worth investigating through a more focused study, aiming to clearly determine the types of event that come together to lead a person to decide to do something with their lives, and to actually put that into action through learning.

Barriers and Enablers to Learning

One of the key aims of the research was to draw out, from a learner perspective, the barriers and enablers to learning that affected them, and to determine which were most important to learners. Barriers to learning are those factors that stop people from engaging with, or finishing some learning. Enablers to learning are those factors that do the opposite and encourage people to get involved in, or finish some learning. These issues were discussed with learners both in terms of their direct experience of these factors and how they affected their learning, and their perceptions of generally how these issues affected them.

There has been much national research on these issues. Hillage and Astor (2001) talk about three main types of barrier to learning. Firstly there are attitudinal barriers to learning, related to what individuals feel about themselves and about learning. Examples include a lack of confidence and a lack of motivation. Secondly, there are physical and material barriers, such as a lack of money to pay the costs of learning, and a lack of time to commit to learning. Thirdly, there are structural barriers relating to the way learning is provided. Examples of this could include a lack of relevant local learning opportunities, and benefit disincentives.

Less research has been done around enablers. However, research has been done that highlights factors that encourage people to get involved in learning (e.g. Field et al, 2001). Factors include the ways people find out about learning and are drawn into learning, the styles of teaching and the tutors, and the influence of others in a class.

What has emerged from the research are a number of issues, around which barriers and enablers operate. These follow below, with explanations of how they are barriers and/or enablers, and any solutions offered by interviewees. Following this those issues that were most important to interviewees, defined as those most likely to affect them in the future and those they'd like to be tackled first, are discussed.

Learning available in the city

The nature and extent of the learning available in Hull is clearly a key matter for learners and those considering learning. The greater the choice and availability, the greater the chance that people will be able to find and do the learning they want to at a time and place that suits them. However, people's responses have said much about their perception of learning available in the city, rather than the reality. Clearly there is a great deal of learning available in Hull, from community based 'taster' sessions through to degrees and higher.

Regardless of this reality, it is people's perceptions of what's there, what's accessible and whether it is good, that determines their actions regarding learning. Several positive

findings came out of the research. Firstly, there were no specific gaps in provision identified by people. Very few people had wanted to do some learning in Hull but not been able to do it, and most had been able to find what they wanted. Secondly, the consensus of opinion was that the nature and extent of the learning in Hull was broad and varied. However, there were other problems raised by people.

Some people said that weren't sure about what learning was available. This they put down to the fact that they hadn't looked into it in detail. A few hadn't looked for any learning in the recent past and so weren't sure of what was around. Some had been involved in specific courses and therefore knew about the range of courses in that subject, but didn't have a broader view.

Some also said that they thought there was a lot of learning available in Hull. These were mostly people who had been involved in learning, or were currently, and had looked into what was available. As one woman answered, **"I think its wonderful, you know, I think I'd like to do that, I'd like to do this, but you can't do everything, [unless] you had the time. But, yeah, there's something for everyone."**

However, there were some limitations expressed by people relating not to what learning was available, but to issues related to that available learning.

The main points raised related to information, and this will be discussed in more detail later. People were aware that there probably was information available, but often weren't sure where or how to find it. As one woman commented, the information "...is out there, you've just got to know where to find it." Others were aware of some information, but it didn't deliver all they wanted. Another woman said that,

"...you get leaflets, but they don't like...on most places they don't tell you what's on offer, what's offered to you, and you know stuff like that, you don't get to know things."

So there were two clear aspects to the information problem, that of finding it, and following that, of whether the information told you everything that you needed to know.

There were also other issues raised, although information was raised most often. People thought that although there might be much learning available, it was limited in terms of issues like timing and location. One interviewee summed this up when he said that,

"There's quite a wide range of learning, I think. I think having said that there are other limitations to it...you can probably do almost any subject, but then its limited in other ways...It would be difficult, particularly if you're working...to do something that you're interested in, and do it exactly as you want it done. So I think there's a lot of stuff available, but you maybe can't get to do it...in a sense it might as well not be available...'cos although they say you can do this course and that course and whatever it's still limited in terms of venue, or time or cost even..."

Overall, then, it does not appear that there are major structural barriers regarding the learning available to people; those who are aware of the learning available are aware that there is a great deal available for them, and there was very little experience of not finding a course that was required in the city. However, the limitations raised, relating primarily to information, represent barriers to learning, and these cropped up throughout many of the interviews. These will be discussed in more detail below.

Information

People saw the provision of information as important, as they have to know all about the courses available in order to get involved! The research looked at how in practice people had found out about courses they'd engaged in, and the findings are discussed first. Following this is what people said about information as a barrier and enabler.

Finding out about learning

The first task, then, is to look at how people had found out about learning they had engaged in. There were several ways that people had found out (see table below). The ways that people find out about learning are important, and are related clearly to information issues. If it is known how people find out about learning most effectively, and most often, promotional strategies can be targeted in that direction where possible.

How did people found out about learning opportunities?

Contacts in Learning	12%
Community Centre	9%
Community or other Group	12%
Employment Programme	15%
Advert or other publicity	14%
Friend or Family	13%
Employment	12%
Careers Service or similar	3%
Other	10%

The first way that people found out about learning was through 'contacts in learning' (12%). This referred to those who were already engaged in learning, and found out about a further course through that involvement. This happened in two ways. Firstly, there were some people that were engaged in who then started another course that was a direct follow-on of the previous course. Essentially, once they had started on a course, with a particular aim, they followed through on other courses until they'd reached their aim. An example of this was IT learning, where people followed through a series of Clait or IBT courses until they felt they were qualified enough for a job, or were competent enough to do what they wanted to do on a PC.

The second way involved people coming across other courses 'by chance' - by seeing them advertised or hearing about them through being in a learning environment. These courses were generally ones that sparked people's interest when they heard about them. One example was a man on a Basic Skills course, who took up an Archaeology course. He said,

"Well, [the tutor] come in the room, she just mentioned it, 'cos she knows I'm into history. And just got talking about it and I said I'd give it a go and see what its like. And it's been ok up to now."

He found out about the course through being in a learning environment already. This was a key way of finding out about, and then engaging in, further learning.

National research (e.g. La Valle & Blake, 2001) suggests that being involved in learning in the future depends greatly on past involvement; in other words, involvement in learning breeds more involvement. Clearly a part of this is due to the fact that once people have engaged in learning they've overcome some barriers, especially attitudinal ones, and therefore there are fewer factors stopping them from moving on to new learning. Also, once in learning, people discover that involvement in learning can be enjoyable and beneficial, and then are motivated to do more. But also, as indicated above, it puts people in an environment where it is easy to find out about further opportunities, and to take advantage of them.

Another way that people found out about learning was through employment programmes that they were involved in, such as New Deal or Intermediate Labour Markets (15%). These, generally younger people, said they'd found out about the learning available and chosen a course as a result of being on employment schemes which involve learning. As one woman commented,

"I didn't really know about opportunities in Hull 'til New Deal sent me for an interview, 'cos I'd never heard about them before."

Some participants, mainly older ones, clearly valued the learning opportunities they'd accessed through employment

programmes, and were very positive about the experience. Indeed, some had volunteered for these programmes, seeing them as a route through learning into employment.

Another way that a small number of people found out about learning opportunities was through services that specialise in giving out learning information (3%). Interviewees mentioned the careers service mainly, but also job centres and the Learning Shop. In most cases they'd gone to these places to find out information specifically, and had found what they were looking for.

Employment was also an important way to find out about learning (12%). In some cases people found out about the learning because it was publicised to the workforce, and in some cases the learning was part of their jobs. In other cases they found out about learning through talking to colleagues who were involved in learning already. As one woman explained,

"...I was actually working with a girl who actually went to the [learning] centre, and she was telling me she was doing computers...she had all these qualifications...and [I] thought well if you can do it then I can...so me and [my friend] started going to [computer classes] on a Wednesday afternoon..."

So there were two clear ways of finding out through employment; networks through colleagues, and from the employers.

Another important way of finding out about learning was through adverts and other publicity (14%). The vast majority of people who found out this way said it was through the leaflets that come through the door with newspapers. People said that they'd looked at these, found courses they were interested in, followed up the information on the publicity, and then gone ahead with the learning. Indeed, throughout the research, whether people used the leaflets or not, many were aware of them as a potential source of information if needed. The local papers were also mentioned as a source of learning information in their own right, but less frequently.

Another way that some people found out about learning was through involvement in a centre, for example a day care centre or a community centre (9%). For some this was because the learning was publicised through the centre. For others the learning was part of the activities available at the centre, and they became involved as they were already at the centre.

This was similar to those people who found out about learning through involvement in a group, for example a community group or self-help group (12%). In these cases the learning tended to be carried out as part of, or in support of, the group's activities, and therefore the motivation for doing it tended to come from being part of that group.

The last way that people found out about learning was through friends or family (13%). In some cases a friend or relative was currently on a course, or had been on one, and had told interviewees about it who had then decided to do the course. Clearly, this happened when the friend or family member had had a good experience on the course. One man said he found out about his course,

“...through my sister, actually, ‘cos she was on New Deal a while ago and she knew I’d be heading towards one of my options soon and she said the one that’d probably suit me is [sports-focused], with me being active and that...”

Also, some friends and family had come across information about courses through their networks, or through publicity, and then had told interviewees about them. The interviewees had then followed up the information and gone on the course.

These are the main ways that learners in Hull have found out about their learning. The trend that emerges from this data is the importance of networks in finding out about learning. Local networks, incorporating groups, local centres and family/friends, account for just over a third (34%) of the ways people found out about learning. If employment is added to this it rises to just under half (46%), and if contacts through learning are added then the figure is 58%. These are all forms of network through which people found out about learning, and this clearly indicates the importance of networks in finding out about learning.

There has been much interest recently in the idea of ‘social capital’, meaning connections between people, the social networks and norms of reciprocity and trust that arise out of them. (Putnam, 2000). There are various perspectives on social capital (see for example, Fukayama, 1995; Putnam, 1993; Bourdieu, 1997), but what they all share is, **“...the links they postulate between successful social outcomes in education, employment, family relationships, health and so on and the presence of social capital.”**

(Gamarnikow & Green, 1999; 7)

There are two types of social capital (Putnam, 2000). ‘Bonding’ social capital is inward looking and exclusive, referring to ties between close knit groups that reinforce divisions between those who are part of the group and those that are not. Examples may include faith-based organisations. ‘Bridging’ social capital refers to outward looking networks that seek to include people across divisions. Examples could include civil rights groups, where different groups join together to fight a common cause. These networks of bridging social capital are more useful in finding out information and ‘getting on’ in life through work and learning because by their nature they incorporate a broader range of people and experience, and therefore

knowledge of different opportunities and contacts.

Another important facet of social capital is trust (Gamarnikow & Green, 1999). Networks are as effective as the trust within them, as people are willing to pass on information and take information from those they trust. There are several implications from the research in the light of this concept of social capital.

Firstly, there is the importance of using networks as a mechanism to get information to people, for example through community centres, groups, learning advocates in the community or local schools. Secondly there is the importance of trust, as people have more confidence in, and therefore are more likely to act on, information from a trusted source, which means that networks are likely to be a highly effective mechanism to pass on information. The third issue, a broader social goal, is to develop and encourage networks of people around bridging social capital, meaning involving people from different areas and different walks of life. This can lead to a greater flow of information and knowledge amongst people, and consequently make more people aware of opportunities that are available to them.

There is awareness of these issues in Hull, and these routes for information are being utilised, although perhaps not to their full potential. The findings here serve to emphasise the importance of maximising the usefulness of information disseminated in this way in order to widen participation in learning.

Having identified the ways in which people have accessed information about learning, and the implications of these, Hull residents’ views on information as a barrier and an enabler to learning can be examined. Information was one of the issues raised by people across the city.

Information as a barrier and enabler to learning

Information was an ‘invisible’ enabler to learning, in that it is a means to an end. People expect to find information that tells them all they need to know, and on which to base their decisions. Therefore it is not something that people talked about much if they’d been successful in finding out what they wanted when they wanted it. Information became an issue precisely when the necessary information was absent.

Having said that, there were some things that emerged from those who had found and used information effectively. Firstly, some people felt that you could get information and guidance if you needed it through agencies that specialise in information. One woman commented that,

“I think at that stage you get lots of help. I think that they are very eager to push you into it at these places.”

One place mentioned as an example was the Learning Shop. Another interviewee said that she wanted to do a computer course and,

'I didn't know where to look because like I say, it's so hard to find out where to go nowadays..'

"...I went in there and said are there any courses that are 'idiot-proof' and she gave me a batch of papers and I saw the course and did it, which I thought was very useful."

There were also other services mentioned, as noted above, such as the careers service. People generally felt that these services were useful.

The other useful information mentioned were the leaflets and fliers that are distributed through letterboxes, and the supplements in the local newspapers. Awareness of these was high, even if people didn't always use them. Some used them to find out about courses, and other went on a course because their interest was sparked when they saw one of these leaflets. As one man explained,

"I think you get a lot of leaflet drops nowadays. I think that's pushed me to do it [the learning]. You get a leaflet drop, you think, oh that looks ok, I'll go and find out more about that."

There were, however, far more negative comments regarding information than there were positive ones, and many people saw information as a barrier to their engaging in learning. There were several main themes running throughout what people said regarding information.

The first issue raised was a lack of availability of information. People were aware that there probably was the learning out there that they wanted to do, and information about it was probably available somewhere. However, their problem was finding that information. One man commented that, when he was looking for a course,

"...at the time as well, I didn't know where to look because like I say, it's so hard to find out where to go nowadays."

This was doubly frustrating for people, as they couldn't find what they knew must be out there somewhere. This is an important barrier, as if people don't know where to start looking for information in a structured way, it will be left to chance whether or not they see something that they want to do.

Some also emphasised the time that it took them to find the information they needed,

"You know you have to go to the central library and you get information about Hull, and I have phoned up the Open University, and you know, mousing about you look at posters, but...it's hard if you're just on your own and you're doing all this research."

This comment came from a single mother, having to do this research whilst looking after children. However, others also expressed concern at the lengths they had to go to find things out, and the time and effort this took. Those who were employed were, understandably, also very concerned about this,

"I don't get a paper, I work, I'm in full time employment so I don't get time to go to the schools when they're open, don't get time to go to the libraries really, or anything else."

Employed people had little time to do the necessary research, and often found that the places they wanted to go to find information or help weren't open outside of their working hours. It was suggested that information about learning should be available in other places, so people could get to it more easily in the course of their normal activities,

"I think they need more leaflets in places other than libraries and places like that, because that's like they are going for people that are going to be in the library kind of thing, whereas, if they were in, you know, pubs..."

Overall, then, some people didn't know where to look for information, and others who did complained at how spread out it was, and the consequent time it took to gather the relevant information.

The second, related, issue was that people thought learning was not advertised enough. One woman commented that,

"They [providers] don't advertise enough...You get the odd brochure through...You get that in your free paper, but that is it. You know, they don't advertise much, there's nothing on radio, or anything to actually open doors for you, as such."

People suggested that there should be more advertising through a variety of mechanisms. They suggested more leaflets, and to ensure they are delivered to all houses in the city, as some people suggested delivery was patchy in certain areas. Local radio stations, television and the buses were all ways that people thought information about learning should be advertised and passed on. The emphasis, as noted above, was on making the information available to people where they are, rather than having to search to find it. Some people also thought that information

should be passed on through word of mouth, as that was how they effectively received information. One man said that,

“...they don’t come out into the community, they just send these glossy leaflets out...I’m sure a lot of people don’t read them. I think if they were more accessible in the community, you know, come to speak to people and explain what courses they’re doing, rather than hit or miss, sending summat through with the Target on a Thursday...”

One facet of this inadequate advertising, or lack of penetration of advertising, is that people were very aware of the large providers in the city, like the colleges, but not much else. As one woman on a course with a small private training provider commented,

“...you only think of going to somewhere like [a large institution] for your courses, you don’t think of coming to little organisations like this and you don’t realise what they do. I think it’s all advertising really...”

Clearly, this links to that of public awareness of learning available in the city, suggesting that there will be a whole ‘layer’ of learning provision, characterised by smaller organisations, which are much less visible to learners or potential learners.

Again in relation to advertising, some of those people in their late 20s or older felt that the advertising about learning that they did see was sending out the wrong messages; in short that learning wasn’t for people like them. The main complaint was that the advertising seemed to all point to young people, and the impression given was that it was for them. As one woman commented about advertising,

“If you’ve noticed, it’s the age group...it stops at 24. It stops at 24. They must think you’re dopey after 24 and you haven’t got the ability to learn which is wrong....You’re past your sell-by date. After 24 you are past your sell-by date and it shouldn’t be like that really.”

This was a common complaint, that the advertising made people think that the learning was really for those between 16-24, and this therefore discouraged them from engaging in learning. People also said that advertising seemed to target those who were unemployed, and was therefore not aimed at those who were working. This again discouraged those who were working, as they felt the learning advertised wasn’t for them.

These messages or impressions were what was being picked up from the adverts that people were seeing. What people particularly identified was the fact that it seemed that

all advertising included pictures of young people, and this made them think that the learning was aimed at young people. So, some advertising was a barrier to learning, as it gave the message that the learning wasn’t for all those looking at it. People wanted to see advertising that made it clear that learning was for them.

Information was discussed at one of the focus groups, and two clear issues came out regarding the presentation of information. Firstly, people emphasised that the information, especially leaflets, had to be eye catching, and appear interesting, otherwise they wouldn’t be looked at and would end up in the bin. This was especially the case with information that just arrived through their letterbox.

They emphasised colour and graphics as things that made information look interesting. They also criticised those prospectuses that were large, and contained a great deal of information, as they said those were too imposing. As one woman commented, looking at a large prospectus,

“I think if they look real big and booky like that I think, well it’s going to take me ages to read through this, and I can’t be bothered...”

Although people were aware that they wouldn’t need to read a whole prospectus, they still said they probably wouldn’t use it because of the initial impression that it gave. It was suggested that the larger prospectuses should be split up into sections.

Overall, then, people wanted to see advertising and information that caught their eye, was a manageable size, and contained all the information they needed. However, not everyone had found that information provided all the details they needed to effectively make a decision about a course.

Firstly, some mentioned that it was difficult to find financial information for a course, noting that it often wasn’t on the original publicity. For those who had to pay for courses, this factor was often determinant in their decision to go on a course or not, and they needed an accurate cost for the whole of their participation, including fees and other costs they would incur, such as books or trips. Also, course descriptions were often not detailed enough to really know what the course was about, so some people had ended up on courses that weren’t what they wanted. This was especially the case when those going on the course didn’t know much about the subject, for example with basic IT courses.

The suggestions people made to deal with the issues above all revolved around the idea of having all the necessary information on every course in Hull in one place, available all of the time, with advisors to guide them. This, they argued, would mean one place to go to find out about

any learning, a phone number and a physical place, that could be well advertised. Then the information could be passed on in a relevant form, and they would be guided through the process of finding information.

Clearly, these kinds of services are available in the city, although they are not open all the time. However, when these services were mentioned at the focus group, none of the eight participants knew where or what the Learning Shop was, and only half would have known where to go to talk to the careers service. This is indicative of the lack of awareness of these kinds of services in the city, evidenced also by the fact that many of the total sample interviewed said they would not know where to go to find out about learning.

Overall, then, information was an important issue raised by people, and there were many specific issues raised. However, perhaps the most important issue is the lack of awareness of services that help people find and engage with learning opportunities.

Finance

Finance was another important issue to people. The issue was the cost of fees for courses that people went on, but also the other costs incurred during the learning. These might be textbooks, travel or equipment, depending on the nature of the course. People were enabled to engage in learning when they could afford these costs, or when these costs were taken care of in other ways. When courses were free, and equipment was provided, this support helped people to engage. However, this only tended to be the experience of some of the people on employment programmes. Other ways that were mentioned were student loans and grants, however, people were aware that these were scarce, and were afraid of getting into debt.

Most of the comments relating to finance identified it as a barrier to engaging with learning. Some people had made the choice not to engage in learning because they felt that they couldn't afford the expense involved. This was especially the case for those with low waged jobs, as they had to pay for courses because they were employed, but didn't have much spare money with which to pay for the learning. These are the people that have the most financial barriers to learning, and arguably the group who need the most support to engage with learning, as the unemployed receive targeted assistance into learning, and those in better-paid jobs tend to have more qualifications already,

and anyway, have more disposable income to put into paying for learning.

However, the decision to participate in learning, although in part a financial one, also reflects the rest of the individual's life. People who had children said that providing for the children was their priority. Others said that they had to ensure that the mortgage and other bills were paid before they could begin to think about spending money on learning. As one person commented, the idea of getting a better job or higher wages in the future through learning is no good if you're unable to support yourself through the learning in the present!

Others on benefits said they wanted to learn but they didn't want the learning that they did to disrupt their benefits. As one man commented,

“It can't affect me social, before when I was working and training...for two nights a week, it messed me social about and that's not right is it? I mean they don't give you any incentive to learn, do they?”

Those on some form of benefits emphasised that they just can't afford to take the risk of their benefits being changed, paused or stopped, as that is the income that they survive on.

Those people who were employed and considering spending their own money on learning were aware of the need to get the full value out of the course. They didn't want to miss anything, and wanted to be sure that they wouldn't get to the end and then fail the course, as it would all have been for nothing. As one shift worker commented,

“So when you've got to pay and when you're a shift worker you're only going to get half the benefits aren't you, 'cos you're gonna miss out the next week.”

The shift patterns meant that they could only attend one class in two, which did not represent good value for them, and meant that going ahead with the learning was unfeasible.

The solutions that interviewees suggested related to making courses free, or cheaper for those who couldn't afford much towards the cost of learning. People emphasised that cost was a major factor in whether they decided to do learning or not. In terms of the associated costs of learning, it was suggested that there should be a second-hand bookshop specialising in textbooks, to cut down the costs of the books. It was also suggested that there should be a lending library of books and equipment in the city, so that people could borrow things when they needed them, and access to materials without having to buy them.

Lastly, it must be noted that when people talked about the cost of learning, they were often talking about an impression

that they had of the costs involved. Some had found out about the actual costs and found them too expensive; others had not found out exactly what fees were, but had a general idea that learning was expensive. This can be a misconception, as the following woman explained,

“...I thought it would have cost me more. I thought I couldn’t afford to go to college because when you look in the paper it looks expensive. But when you go along to a meeting and they say how much it is, the...course only cost me a fiver!”

This is not to suggest that finance is not a real issue for people, and that their views are misconceived. However, in some cases, it could be that the costs are less than people think. Bearing in mind the importance of finance as a barrier, one way forward could be to look at the basis upon which people make these decisions, and to what extent their decisions are informed by accurate information.

Time

Time worked as a barrier and enabler to learning in two ways. Firstly there was the issue of how much time people had in their lives to pursue learning, and secondly there were issues around the scheduling of the learning. People saw the scheduling of courses as an enabler when they were timed in such a way that they fitted in with their lives. However, different people had different needs in terms of the scheduling of courses, which reflected the things they did on a day-to-day basis, like picking up children from school, or shift working.

Time, however, worked much more as a barrier to people engaging with learning than as an enabler. This was firstly because they had so many other things going on to take up their time. The main issue here related to employment, with people stating that it was difficult to fit in learning when employed, due to the time taken up by the working week.

This was especially a problem when employers weren’t supportive of their employees’ studies. As one woman explained about a previous job,

“When they [employers] knew I was doing the BTEC, that was fine while I was on days. Then they started changing the shift pattern so that it meant that every other week I couldn’t go because nobody would change shifts with us. But when they start to put an ultimatum, its either your job or college, you can’t have both.”

People often said that they’d be more likely to do learning

if they got some time off, and support from their employers. However, this was often not possible, again especially where jobs were lower paid.

The other issue was trying to do learning after a full day’s work. As one woman explained,

“...night-time courses are alright, but after you’ve been at work all day, its one of the last things you want to do, is to go out and start learning ‘cos your brain’s like mush anyway...Come five o’clock, I’m a zombie.”

Other people said similar things, and noted that in this situation, when a person is tired, if the course doesn’t go well, or is hard work, that person is then more likely to drop out than they would be if the classes weren’t after work. One suggestion was to run courses on a Saturday for people who worked in the week, so that they could go fresh to the learning. Indeed, some who have been to short Saturday courses have praised them as the timing of them is convenient.

However, employment was not the only thing that took up people’s time. One woman said that,

“I can’t allot myself too many nights a week [for learning] ‘cos you’ve got other things to do you know, you’ve got your home and your family, haven’t you?”

Some people had children to look after, or cared for older people, or just were involved in many activities in their lives. Consequently, the lack of spare time they had was a barrier to engaging in learning. These people emphasised that flexibility of the timings of the learning was important if they were to participate.

These issues, then, link in with other concerns about the scheduling of learning. In the midst of busy lives, with many commitments, people wanted learning to fit in with the rest of their lives. This meant different things to different people depending on their commitments. Some people had to fit in learning round their children, round their jobs, or round other commitments like community groups. They wanted maximum flexibility in course programmes to ensure that they would fit in with busy lives.

One mother suggested centres open morning to late night with classes going on continuously, which you joined when you were free, or that at least gave you a choice of times to turn up. Others said they appreciated courses where if you missed a session it was possible to catch up, and you weren’t penalised. Clearly, it is not possible to schedule courses to fit in with everybody’s lives, but people emphasised the need for flexibility and choice in terms of course timings.

When faced with a bad experience, people often just stopped. Bad experiences reinforced any other negative feelings they may have had, which made it more difficult for them to participate any further in learning.

Individual experiences and feelings

Individual experiences and feelings were both important factors in people's decision to engage with learning, continue with learning and progress to further learning. Their feelings about their own abilities, stemming from their educational experiences in the past, were sometimes barriers to participation in learning.

When people had had a bad experience in the past, it knocked their confidence and consequently they felt less able to engage in learning for fear of failure. One woman explained that,

"...when I was on me YTS...they did an assessment on me and me manager said to me 'oh, you've got the brain of an eight year old'. She didn't say IQ, she said the mind of an eight year old...that really knocked me confidence."

This woman has since participated in learning, but it was difficult for her to take the first step back into learning after being told, in her view, that she was stupid. Others had had experiences stretching back to school, or indeed later in life, where they felt they'd been put down by educators, and this made them reluctant to participate in learning.

Another issue was getting together the confidence to go back into learning after being out of it for a long time. Some people who had not been involved in learning since their schooldays were very nervous about doing learning again, as they weren't sure whether they'd be able to do it, regardless of their experiences at school. One man explained that when he started his course,

"I was afraid that I may flop in front of other people, afraid that I'd make a fool of myself, not knowing anything, people always looking over my shoulder and watching everything I did, making all my mistakes, that was at the back of my mind."

Some of this lack of confidence arose from not knowing what to expect: whether they were up to the work; what they might be expected to do, and; whether everyone else would know more than them. People talked of going into a room after a long time out of learning and not knowing where to sit, or what to do.

However, some people did overcome these issues to get involved with learning, and they emphasised the fact that

they were self-motivated and had decided to give it a go. As one woman said,

"It's for me now...All my children are leaving home. I'm 43 and if I don't do something now I never will. The other thing is I want to prove to myself more than anyone else that I'm not stupid. I think that leaving school at 15 you get classed as a no-hoper."

This motivation sprung from a range of different sources in their lives, and the decision was triggered by different factors (see discussion above). However, once people had motivated themselves and started learning, this first experience after a gap was a key one, as their confidence tended to be fragile, and their motivation was easily lost when the experience started to reinforce any negative feelings they had about themselves or their abilities.

The first learning experience after a long gap tended to lead into either a 'virtuous' or a 'vicious' circle, leading the individual into more learning, or reinforcing those things that had originally held them back. Those that had a good experience had their confidence raised, and felt like they could do more,

"I've learnt I can do it, and that's the main thing. When I first went [on the course] I thought I'll never be able to read all these books...but I did it and I really enjoyed it. So I know I can do it again."

As another woman explained, the course changed her mindset as her confidence grew,

"...I felt like I couldn't do anything...But how I feel like now, I feel like whatever it is I'll give it a go, I feel quite positive, I won't feel 'oh, no', I'd think 'oh well, give it your best shot you know', whereas before I'd have thought, 'no, I don't wanna try it.'"

This confidence meant that people were more likely to go on to further courses as they felt they could achieve more, once the fear factor had been removed from the equation. Good experiences further reinforced this, and bad experiences could then be coped with better as they had

good experiences to refer to, and to balance against the bad.

As well as affecting their engagement in learning in the first place, confidence was a major thing that people said they got out of all kinds of learning, and they emphasised that this made them more able to do lots of things. This included tasks at home and at work, as well as further learning. In a lot of cases, this was the most important thing people felt they had gained from a learning experience.

However, if the first experience wasn't a good one, then the individual tended to stop learning, either by dropping out, or by not being inclined to do anything further. Some fell victim to this even before the learning started,

"I went for an informal interview...I told them I was good at the practical side but had had no formal education for 16 years. She [the tutor] said 'I can teach monkeys to do the practical work, its academic people I need.' That completely put me off."

However most people who had a bad experience put it down to the learning itself, the way it was taught or the tutor,

"...it was just the way they taught it. They rushed it so- I don't know if it is because they have so little time to do it in, to get so much through sort of thing...That was it. I gave up after that, I thought 'oh, I'm not bothering again.'"

When faced with a bad experience, people often just stopped. Bad experiences reinforced any other negative feelings they may have had, which made it more difficult for them to participate any further in learning.

The key point here is the critical nature of the first course that people engage in after a gap from learning, which had a tendency to determine people's learning journeys in the future. The courses that people engaged in at this stage were not homogenous, but included a range of different subjects and levels, implying that this could be an issue for many courses, not just those courses which targeted learning-returnees.

Tutors and teaching were raised as a key part of the learning experience from the perspective of learners. This was a difficult section to analyse, as individuals have different learning styles, different subjects require diverse styles of teaching, and many individual unique factors influence a learner's relationship with a tutor. However, there were several themes that emerged across the data relating to tutors and teaching as barriers or enablers to learning.

In terms of tutors, there were several features of a 'good' tutor. The first was when they treated the learners as adults, and didn't patronise them. As one woman explained, it's important that they communicate, **"...on your level, they're not demeaning. That's really the main thing. And they don't treat you like a child."**

This was very important to people, as they didn't want to have to go into a learning environment and assume the role of 'child' to the teacher. Many had suspicions that learning would be similar to their experience of school in this way, and so this was something they were very wary of when they started learning.

The other mark of a 'good' tutor was that they had time for all those in the group. As one person noted of his course,

"...the tutors did have the time for you. It wasn't like being at school where it was like 'oh, wait your turn.' They did have the time for you."

It was important that the tutor had time for people, so that they could discuss any problems that they had with the work during the class, and people valued a tutor who could spend time with them in this way, as they felt this made the learning experience better. People also appreciated it when they could talk through external issues with the tutor that were affecting their learning. Essentially, people valued it when they developed a supportive relationship with the tutor, and felt the tutor was available to guide them through the learning.

Another important factor was the atmosphere, created by the tutor, the learners and the style of teaching. A friendly and supportive learning environment was valued. One man summed this up when he described his course,

"The teaching staff are brilliant, they've got the time to discuss what they want to do with you, or what you want to do, or you know, they'll put on a course what's suitable for you. There's no rush, give you your own time, your own space, and it's very enjoyable, it's really good...if one student can't do it, we'll go across and help if we can do...there's always someone there to give you advice and opportunities..."

These factors were important for all learning that

interviewees spoke about, but were critical for those with little confidence, who needed encouragement and a supportive environment in order to flourish and have a good experience.

In terms of the learning itself, flexibility of content and style was an issue. Learners appreciated it when the content of the course was relevant to their needs, and when there was flexibility within the programme to follow up things that interested them or that they wanted to know more about. For some this meant extra time available with the tutor, or the ability within a session to not have to rush through topics. To others it meant having the ability to input into the design of the course so that it was tailored to the group's needs. Clearly, there are some courses that by their nature, are more flexible than others, and learners valued flexibility as far as it was practical, which was different for different courses.

Clearly, when the good things mentioned above did not happen, for example tutors did not have time for people, or the atmosphere was not friendly and supportive, this constituted a barrier to further learning. However, there was also a distinct set of barriers that emerged regarding tutors and teaching.

The first barrier was when a tutor was 'bad' and didn't do what learners thought was good practice. The first way this happened was when a tutor did not seem to have the knowledge and crucially, experience in his field. As one man commented about a management course tutor, **"...yes he might have read about the concepts...that he taught, but I don't know that he had actual practical experience of them in a very small organisation, I don't know how he could have. So I questioned his expertise really."**

People were unhappy when a tutor didn't have the experience or knowledge that the learners felt they should have, and this caused them to question the legitimacy of the tutor. Some were especially critical of those who could talk about theories, but couldn't seem to back it up with practical experience. Others talked of tutors '...reading from a manual...' which did not inspire confidence. People were even more annoyed when tutors could not answer their questions. This is not to suggest that bad teaching is rife in Hull, indeed as noted above, many had nothing but praise for their tutors, but some did have this experience.

The other issue that emerged about tutors was a lack of continuity, with different tutors delivering the courses from week to week. Some mentioned that they were confused as one week they had to do something using one method, and the next week there was a different tutor making the class use a different method. This left people confused, disrupted the development of a relationship with a tutor, and impacted detrimentally on the issues discussed above.

People also complained when tutors were not able to be there, and replacements had to be called in. Clearly, this is unavoidable in some cases, but on the courses that were affected, it tended to be a problem throughout the whole course. One woman's experience of a course was, **"...three of the seven weeks [the tutor] wasn't there at all and there was like replacements who never knew where we was. You know it was like complete chaos. Half the class left. Nobody knew what they was doing. It just seemed like madness...I left in the end, I just felt like I was going backwards with it. And it was real hard to get back into it after loads of years, and I was just really put off the experience."**

This woman was not alone in her experience, and her example clearly shows the outcome of this problem.

Another problem with teaching was when groups who were at different stages in their learning were taught together in the same classroom with the same tutor, or tutors. As one man explained,

"...it was an intense like 12 week course because it was all computer engineering and that and of course again, we was all at different levels. So the tutor was again struggling a bit to keep up."

This situation, then, impacted on the time tutors could spend with each learner, and the tutors had less time for people, as their job had been complicated by the lack of consistency across the group. These problems were exacerbated when the group of learners was large because there was a higher ratio of learners to tutors, which meant even less time for individual learners. People were aware that this was not the fault of the tutors, and was a structural issue, but this awareness did not improve their experience. This issue did cause some people to drop out of learning.

There are a number of distinct issues which affect whether an experience is good or not, and as such is a barrier or enabler to either finishing that learning and/or progressing on to further learning. However, out of this discussion a clear trend emerged, suggesting that lower level IT courses across the city were especially prone to the problems described above, and that people weren't happy with the way they were taught. This in no way implicates any single individual provider in the city, as the trend emerged across most providers and IT courses.

There were several issues relating to IT learning provision

The tutors were great, when they could get to you, but you could sit for 5, 10 minutes, or you'd have to chase around 'look I've got a problem'...

in the city. Firstly, the classes tend to be large in relation to the number of tutors there. As one woman explained,

“There were too many of us, which was a bit frustrating if I'm honest. The tutors were great, when they could get to you, but you could sit for 5, 10 minutes, or you'd have to chase around 'look I've got a problem'...”

This was very frustrating for people, as the time passed by whilst they waited, and the session time was limited. Most people on the IT courses were beginners, or at least new to IT, and the nature of the learning seems to be to work through set processes to learn to do certain tasks. This means that if a person gets stuck, they can't move on until they've solved the problem, and they need the tutors to help them move on. This problem can have dire consequences for learners, as this beginner explained,

“...it was for learners, just to start off on computers. And when we got there there were others there and we were the only two that had just started that day, the others had been a few weeks and known how to do it. And there was one lady that was teaching everybody. And we came out of there two hours later not having a clue because she didn't have time for us.”

Another issue was that that people were put in sessions with other learners who were not only at different stages of the same course, but were actually doing different courses. This exacerbated the problems, making the tutor's job more difficult, as they had to teach the whole group. It also meant that learners could not necessarily ask the person next to them for help if they got stuck, as they could be doing something completely different.

Lastly, people questioned the expertise of many of the IT tutors they had experience of. Some commented that the tutors didn't know much more than they did, or just didn't have any depth of knowledge of IT, only the requirements for the specific course that they were teaching. As one man explained,

“I was in there and they just put you in front of a computer and say follow the on screen instructions. If you get stuck, there's no-one to ask...There is [a tutor] but he seems to know as much as we do...I

mean, I stopped going because I thought, well what's the point?”

Overall then, IT provision across the city was not something learners were happy with. This is an important issue as IT was a very popular subject with people, and also IT skills are important skills for employment. Therefore it is crucial that the IT teaching is effective both for the learner, and in view of the city economy.

Social Issues

Social issues, relating to the other learners involved in a course, were seen as important barriers or enablers to learning. Generally people preferred the idea of learning in a group, as opposed to doing learning on their own. As one woman explained,

“...I can study on my own quite easily, but to be cut off from teachers and fellow people...I think I'm more likely to drop out of a [correspondence] course where I would succeed much more in the half group, half learning at home, that situation.”

People saw learning not as merely a learning experience, but also as a social experience, and therefore it was important for them to be learning as part of a group. They also felt that they got encouragement and support through learning as part of a group.

The rest of the learners were an enabler to learning when they filled certain criteria. They had to get on well together, be friendly, and support each other. As one man commented,

“I've enjoyed everything about [the course]...the other people that are on the course 'cos we all throw ideas at each other and you know, have a laugh...”

Enjoyment was crucial to a good learning experience, and a key factor in this was getting on with, and having fun with, the rest of the group. A supportive and friendly environment was engendered through this interaction that enriched the social experience of learning, and therefore the learning itself.

An important element of this was that people were all equally committed to doing the course, and were on a similar level in terms of learning. As one man explained, learning is good when,

“...you've got people...that are equally enthusiastic as

you are and probably at a similar level in terms of ability and knowledge and stuff like that so you don't feel you're sitting round waiting while the tutor has to explain to them for the third time..."

Clearly, the members of a group are never going to be all at exactly the same level, but learners wanted this to be the case as far as possible. This should be achievable with effective pre-course assessments.

However, when these criteria weren't met, the other people on the course became a barrier to finishing the learning. As one man commented,

"I don't think anything discourages me [from learning], apart from being...I wouldn't like to take any kind of course with a class full of people that I didn't like..."

Clearly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict how a group will get on together. Individual factors affect relationship building in groups that are out of the control of the tutor. However, learners did give some concrete examples of factors that affected group dynamics, and consequently their experience.

The first problem is if people aren't equally committed to the learning, as one man explained,

"...90% of [the other learners] had been sent by employers, so they were forced to attend. The group dynamics were entirely different because of that, they weren't there for themselves, they were there because their employers said you will go. So that gave [the course] a completely different slant, I didn't enjoy attending, and I didn't learn a lot."

This could also be a problem if a group was of mixed age, as those who were older thought that younger people, especially teenagers, seemed to have less willingness to knuckle down and work than those who were a bit older on the course. As one woman explained,

"...I went to the drop-in centre in the daytime, on my day off, and it was all the younger students and it was just like being back in the classroom. Everybody throwing stuff and jumping over stuff and all that...I got myself out of there after about 10 minutes, I couldn't take no more!"

The same problem came up if learners felt that the other people were very different from them, with different needs. Some talked about attending courses where most of the other people had learning difficulties, and others about ending up with people who had been forced to be on the course and did nothing constructive, affecting the learning. So if people didn't get on with the rest of the group for some reason, it was a key barrier.

Another enabler to learning was when people were able to

go on a course with a friend. This gave them confidence to take the first step into learning, and gave them a familiar face to talk with in the class. Some people weren't confident enough to go without a friend, and some, whilst they started out needing that support, gained confidence, and progressed to further learning on their own. As one woman explained,

"I went to go with my friend, she wanted me to go with her 'cos she felt daft, it was to do CLAIT...So I went with her and really enjoyed it so then I started going back like on my own, I'd got the confidence to go on my own, 'cos before I always thought I need someone with me to sit with me..."

In a similar vein, those who'd had experience of some kind of mentoring had positive opinions about it, as it gave them someone they knew in the class, someone to ask questions without having to continually bother the tutor, and gave them confidence.

Overall, then, the other people on the course were an important factor in determining whether the experience was good or bad. Whilst there is only so much that can be done to try to make the experience as good as possible, there are some things, for example ensuring that groups are well matched in knowledge and experience, and this can be done through effective pre-course assessment.

Family and Friends

Family, and similarly friends, are important factors in an individual's learning, and can be enablers or barriers to learning. They are enablers as they provide information and support, and also represent a crucial social network through which information is passed on. So they are enablers to learning in the sense that they provide information about learning.

Family members are also enablers to learning when they support the individual in their learning. This support was described in two ways. Firstly the encouragement that they gave to the individual, typified by the following,

"...If it hadn't been my Mum encouraging me...I wouldn't have done half the amount [of learning] what I have done, because my Mum knows I can do it."

Secondly, the other way that family supported was through practical support, by looking after children, or doing jobs in the house, and generally doing those things that needed to be done whilst one of the family was involved in learning.

However, family also brought with it responsibilities, which often constituted a barrier to learning. As one woman commented,

“If me family need me, me family always come first, not just so much, just me son, but me Mam and Dad. That’s the only time I think I can’t carry on, I need time out.”

People had caring responsibilities for parents and children, and as well there were incidents, like illness in the family, which cropped up and needed to be dealt with. These things took up people’s time, were a priority for them, and therefore were a barrier to engaging with, or completing, learning. When children were small this was an important issue due to the time needed to look after them, and the need for childcare to enable parents to participate in learning. Some indicated that they’d had problems with childcare, and they wanted more available, but others said there was adequate provision. This was not, however, the only issue regarding children. Regardless of the issues above, parents were very aware of the need to spend time with their children, and wanted to ensure that they did this.

Overall, then, family and friends were an important source of barriers and enablers to learning, part of the lives of people and therefore an influence on their learning. However, the ways these barriers can be ameliorated is to ensure the availability of childcare alongside learning, and to be flexible within courses bearing in mind the busy lives of people. There is evidence that providers are aware of these issues, and deal with them as best as they are able.

Location

The issue of where a course was, and consequently, how people would get to it was important to some people, especially those who are older. Local courses were generally welcomed, but people did not say they wouldn’t travel and would only engage with locally run learning.

If courses were run locally, they were easier to get to and people did not have to travel for long periods of time. This was important to people because of the lack of time they had in their lives. As one woman explained,

“Top of the street would be ideal for me, but saying that, not necessarily I’ve got transport, it’s not that, it’s having the time for everything else in my life.”

So for some the issue was of travel time in the midst of busy lives. Others mentioned the cost of travel, even if courses are free, and that this was an issue if you were unemployed or on a low income. Travel also came to the fore more when the nights got dark and people perceived

that they were less safe during their travelling.

However, while people welcomed local courses, course location was not identified as a huge barrier or enabler, and most were prepared to travel. Some mentioned that travel was sorted out as part of their courses, which was a help. So, again, it suggests this is an issue that providers are aware of.

Priorities

The issues above are the main barriers and enablers to learning expressed by people in Hull through the Learners’ Forum. Part of the research involved asking people what could be done to make it easier for them to engage in learning, and asking those who wanted to do further learning what things they envisaged might stop them from going ahead with it. Through this, the main priorities for action were pinpointed out of the totality of issues discussed by interviewees.

Three issues came out as the most important; finances, time and information. These were the issues that were most crucial to people in terms of stopping them engaging with learning, and were the ones that they felt needed addressing most urgently, as they were the immediate practical barriers to learning. Essentially, people said that the cost of the courses was prohibitive, they struggled to find information, and it was difficult to find the time in busy lives to engage with learning, especially if course times and programs available weren’t sufficiently flexible.

The sections so far have discussed peoples' views on learning, their motivations for learning, and barriers and enablers to their learning. This final section seeks to bring all this together by drawing out some of the main points, and themes that have emerged across the data, and looking at their implications and possible ways forward for dealing with them.

Change in society

The society that we live and act within changes over time, and therefore, what individuals do, and need, changes alongside these broader shifts. As society changes learning activities are becoming more important for two main reasons, relating to the two main strands of motivations for learning; employment and leisure.

The labour market today is a very insecure place. There are more people than there are jobs available (e.g. Bauman, 2001), and contracts tend to be short term. The emphasis is on the individual to keep their skills up to date, and to effectively market themselves to employers (Ibid). With the rapid pace of technological change, skills need to be continually refreshed and built upon if an individual is to have a successful employment career. Learning, in different forms, is the way that skills are kept current and built upon, and therefore individuals need to keep on learning throughout their lives in order to continue to have relevant skills for employers.

However, learning is also important as a social activity. The way people relate to each other has changed, traditional forms of community activity are diminishing, and people are connected together in new ways, through different kinds of networks (Putnam, 2000). Those who aren't involved in these new networks, revolving around the internet, employment, and interest groups, rather than traditional locally based and geographically defined community, need ways to meet people and be involved in society. Learning can fulfil this need. Even those who were involved in these networks saw learning as having an important social function; to make friends and enjoy themselves.

So, learning is arguably increasing in importance both as a tool to keep individuals in work, and as a leisure activity. However, as it becomes more important, people's expectations of it become greater, as it needs to fulfil a more important role for them. Learning has also become a commodity, as funding and structures have changed, and the emphasis is on colleges selling it, and learners buying it (Longhurst, 1996). Because learning is now seen in those terms, people therefore expect the same from learning as

from any other service they engage with- that it should be available at a convenient time, in a convenient place, with all their needs catered for. They also expect good information and advertising, as that is what they expect from any other service; they shouldn't have to find out about it- it should be 'sold' to them. Therefore, people don't have the patience to spend hours searching for information, when for most other services it would be readily available.

Essentially, with this 'commodification' of learning, people are beginning to expect a demand-led system that is responsive to their needs. This has been recognised by the Government and so the LSC is tasked to implement a demand-led, rather than supply led system (DfEE, 1999). However, many people's experience is of a supply-led system; inflexible courses that don't quite do what they want, or don't address all their needs, and arguably, this is the root of some of peoples' expressed problems with learning which then act as barriers. In the current climate, the process of developing the system to be more responsive and demand led is a crucial one, as by bringing learning more in line with peoples' needs and expectations, it will begin to widen participation and retention across all learning provision.

⇒ Recommendation- That demand led provision be developed as far as is practical at both the macro level through the local LSC, and the micro level through tutors and providers running individual courses flexibly.

Employment

Employment was an important motivator for learning. People were broadly aware of the fact that learning increases their chances of getting a job, or getting a better job, and that those who were better qualified would get jobs and be better paid. However, the path through learning into work or a better job is not an easy one, especially for those completely outside the labour market. The way people discussed this process in relation to themselves suggested a linear approach of 'learning- qualification- job'. For some, the process had been that simple, but clearly it is often far more complicated.

Firstly there are other factors besides qualifications that affect employability, for example attitudes and expectations of employment, and generic skills like communication and team working. These were not issues that people raised when talking about their learning for employment. Secondly there is the issue of getting the right qualification for the right job, and of individuals knowing that those kinds of jobs will be available locally when they enter the labour market. There was no real mention of these issues from interviewees.

Those out of work tended to talk of getting IT based

qualifications in order to do generic office or admin work. This seemed to be the most common approach, although there were some who had researched the skills they needed for a specific job, were sure the job would be there, and were pursuing that particular goal. The issue, then, is how effectively do people, especially the unemployed, currently negotiate the path through learning into work, and how can they be facilitated to do this more effectively. This is of crucial importance to individuals, but also to the economy of the city, which needs workers with the right skills for local business, and in order to attract inward investment.

This is an area worthy of further research, looking into the ways in which we can most effectively bring together people, labour market information and guidance so that they can effectively negotiate the path through learning into work.

⇒ **Recommendation- That the ways people negotiate their way through learning into work be investigated further to determine how effective their strategies are, and how they can be facilitated to do this better.**

Learning as a means or an end?

Some people see learning as a means to an end, for example a process by which they get a qualification that will help them get a job. Others see the learning as the end result, a mechanism for them to go out, have fun and meet people. These aims are not mutually exclusive, as even those focused on a qualification appreciated the learning, and often said they got more out of it, if they enjoyed the whole social experience.

However, this distinction does have important implications for what people want and expect out of their learning experience. For those to whom learning was a means to an end, their priority was getting the qualification, or the skills, and they could cope with not getting on so well socially with everyone in the group, or having to work hard. For those who saw learning as the end result, their emphasis was on the actual experience, and therefore they were more discouraged if the teaching did not allow for a good social experience, or if the group didn't get on.

The onus, then, is on tutors to be aware of the needs and motivations of the group they're working with, and seeking as far as possible to meet those needs. This is especially important for those engaged in learning as a social activity, as a good experience may encourage them to progress into further learning, and to use learning for progression in their lives rather than just leisure.

⇒ **Recommendation- That through effective initial assessment, tutors and providers are aware of the motivations of learners, and where possible seek to meet their needs.**

Triggers into Learning

The notion of a 'trigger into learning' was discussed earlier, referring to an event, or sequence of events, that led an individual to actually turn up on a course and participate. Throughout the research people have talked about their motivations and reasons for learning, but these alone are not necessarily enough to get them on a course. People's ideas and beliefs about something, real as they are, do not necessarily translate into action, and sometimes something else has to happen that will activate those beliefs. This can either release people to do something, or release the latent motivation that leads to action.

The research has suggested that life-changes are important triggers, as they can either release people through changed circumstances, like retirement, or they can spur them to action, for example through redundancy. Another possible trigger could simply be talking about learning in an open-ended way, without any active promotion of either courses, or learning as a concept. This emerged anecdotally throughout the project as people had the opportunity to think and talk about their learning through the research process. Some interviewees then enrolled on courses after the interviews, after reflecting on what they'd discussed. So discussion of learning, even without promotion, could possibly be a trigger.

Further research would be worthwhile to examine what these events or sequences of events are so that promotion of learning can be targeted, as far as possible, to tie in with these events. For example, if a trigger is small children starting school, thus releasing the caring parent's day time, then it could be appropriate to target promotion through schools, at the parents of those enrolling their children.

⇒ **Recommendation- That there is further investigation into patterns of 'trigger' events into learning, and that if appropriate, this information is used to target information more effectively to widen participation.**

Critical nature of first learning experience after a break

For those who had done no learning since school, or for a period of years, the first piece of learning they did was critical in determining their future path. They often had to build up confidence to go on a course, worried about whether they could do the work, what the tutor would be like, and what the rest of the group would be like. Those that had a good experience tended to fall into a virtuous circle of more learning as they gained confidence. However,

those that had a bad experience tended to be put off further learning.

So the first course after a break is critical. Also, the first course that people engaged or re-engaged with was not necessarily a 'beginner's' course, but varied depending on the individual. So on any given course, there may be somebody re-entering learning, and again the onus is on providers and tutors to pick out these people, through assessment before the course, and pay special attention to their needs until they have gained confidence.

⇒ **Recommendation- That tutors and providers should be aware of learner-returnees on their courses, and ensure far as possible that they have a good experience and are well supported.**

Taster Courses

Those who had been on taster courses or other short courses were very positive about them, seeing them as a good stepping stone to further learning, and a way of judging for themselves whether they could cope with further learning. These courses were set up for those who were re-engaging with learning, and who had low confidence and skills, and the tutors were very aware of the issues. The courses were often held locally. All these things were appreciated by the people who attended these courses, and the positive experience made them more likely to do more learning. (For more information, see the first Learners' Forum report on the Adult and Community learning Fund.)

⇒ **Recommendation- That there should be more locally run taster courses and short courses across the city.**

Finances

The cost of courses was a big barrier for people. For those whose jobs paid relatively well, the decision was whether the learning was enough of a priority to pay for it; for those who were unemployed, as long as their benefits weren't troubled, they were aware that courses were often free and accessible, and that they could access help through employment programmes. It was those on low wages that tended to struggle, as they have to pay for courses, but don't earn enough to live and pay for the learning. Also, being on low wages, the idea of getting into debt to learn was not appealing, even if it was possible. It was these people for whom finance tended to be the biggest barrier.

However, there was another issue relating to the perception of cost. Across the board, some people did not have an awareness of the actual costs of learning, and so their assertions of finance as a barrier were not always based on fact, but rather on perception and hearsay. There is a need for further research to find out what people's

perception of the cost of learning is, how it affects their decisions about learning, and whether it is realistic.

However, there is a more pressing issue, which relates to information, and ensuring that the costs of learning are plainly provided with information about learning so that people can make a fully informed decision about actual cost.

⇒ **Recommendation- That there should be a bursary scheme, or learning fund, to assist those who can't afford the costs of learning, especially those low waged individuals.**

Domination of Large Providers in people's perceptions of learning

One issue that emerged whilst discussing learning in the city with people was the domination of the large providers in their thinking. Some people said if they wanted to do any kind of learning, they'd go to one of the large providers as their first port of call, rather than anywhere else. The many smaller providers were not so visible to people, and they often did not therefore think of looking for them and what they offered.

This situation is to a degree unavoidable, as through economies of scale, budget and sheer size, these providers can produce more publicity and have a higher profile presence in the community. However, the smaller providers provide a range of learning opportunities, and often people prefer the smaller venues and organisations. Therefore, these organisations need to be more visible to learners as the learners need them, and they need the learners!

IT Courses in Hull

Basic IT courses were criticised by many learners, across the different qualifications and providers. People were unhappy with the method of teaching, which often involved large groups of people at different stages, or even different courses. They said that there weren't enough tutors for the numbers of people, and if someone got stuck they tended to be waiting a long time. This made some people drop out of the courses, and made it a frustrating and unrewarding experience for others. This is an important issue, firstly because so many people are interested in the basic IT qualifications, but also because the skills gained are important not just for employment, but increasingly for life in general.

Bearing in mind the importance of the issue, some further research could be carried out with current and past learners of IT to determine in more detail the positive and negative aspects of their experience, with a view to proposing how

learners would prefer to learn IT. This will have wider implications than just IT, considering the present movement towards teaching other courses in a similar manner online.

⇒ **Recommendation- That further investigation is carried out into what people think of current IT provision, to determine how it could be improved from a learner perspective.**

Online learning is another linked and important issue. Several of the key barriers mentioned by people, time and cost, could to some degree be solved through online learning. This is because they could either learn at home, given the facilities, or at a drop-in computer suite at a time that suited them. Also, there would be fewer travel costs to a local centre or to home (although there are capital and phone costs), and possibly the courses would be cheaper online.

However, not many people had experience of online learning, and many were wary of or unskilled with computers, which put them off. Another factor is, given the importance to people of the social element of learning, and the tutor's input, how could online learning best fulfil their needs? Some further work could be done on this issue to determine how, and if, online learning can be made to work best for Hull. This is a key issue, bearing in mind the growing number of courses running online, and the input of the BBC that will come into the city.

⇒ **Recommendation- That work is carried out looking at how online learning in Hull is working, and how it could work most effectively for learners in Hull.**

Information

Information was perhaps the critical issue to emerge from the research. As stressed above, information needs to flow through trusted networks in order to reach more people in a way that leads them to action. The information itself also needs to provide all the details people need to know in a way that they can understand and respond to. These are issues that the city is aware of; it is a matter of further refining the approaches that the city is taking to widen participation.

However, in a sense, information is the hub around which the rest of the barriers, enablers and motivators operate. If people don't know about something, they can't act upon it: what is worse, they may think it isn't actually there, and therefore think they can't do anything about their needs and wants. Guidance services are a case in point, with many

people stressing the need for services that already exist. So it's vital that information works well in the city, especially information about those places and people that offer information, guidance and advice, as that is where people need, and want, to start.

⇒ **Recommendation- That information is seen as the key factor upon which the success of any other solutions rest.**

⇒ **Recommendation- That there is a publicity drive to let people know about those service that can give them information and advice about learning.**

Conclusions

Overall, then, there are many factors that have an influence on people's participation in learning. Some of these revolve around the individual, such as their motivation, their family responsibilities and their work. Others are structural issues, relating to issues like information and cost of learning. Then there are issues relating to the experience of learning, where the tutor plays an important role.

There are two cross-cutting themes that stand out from the research, from which the rest of the findings and recommendations spring. Firstly, decisions about learning are not taken in isolation and in regard to just learning. They are holistic decisions, made in the context of everything else going on in an individual's life. This must be taken into account when setting up, advertising and providing learning opportunities for people.

Secondly, many of the barriers boil down to the need for an effective demand-led learning system that is responsive to people's needs. Clearly such a system can only be demand-led and responsive to a certain degree at a certain scale, and all the needs of every individual cannot conceivably be met. However, every step in this direction will work towards the breaking down of the barriers expressed by learners. Indeed, learners are coming to expect a demand-led and responsive system as learning becomes seen as a commodity like any other service. As people see this expectation fulfilled, what they have said throughout the research suggests that they will be more able to be involved, and therefore participation will begin to be widened in the city.

The Project

For the lifetime of SRB6, the Learners' Forum was tasked to gather feedback from residents of Hull regarding learning, and to feed this information to providers and funders of learning so that the views of learners were considered whilst learning was being planned and delivered.

In the pilot year of the project, the aim was to talk to residents in Hull about learning in general, and their experiences of it, in order to gain an insight into issues that prevented them from, or enabled them to, participate in learning, and to look at their motivations for learning.

There has been previous research in Hull that has looked into these issues. However, it has tended to be quantitative, and so the idea here was to look at the issues qualitatively, in more depth, and therefore begin to get more detail about the possible reasons behind the statistics about involvement and achievement in Hull.

The methods used were mainly individual interviews, followed by focus groups to explore issues arising from the interviews. Individual interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour, and focus groups of up to 10 people lasted an hour. Overall, the project spoke to 148 residents of Hull. These were individuals from across the city, and a third of the sample were from the SRB6 Community Target Areas (CTAs).

A mass of mainly qualitative data was gained and analysed, and the main findings are laid out below.

A Learning Culture? What Hull residents think about learning

People were asked whether they thought learning was worthwhile. The vast majority (93%) thought that learning was worthwhile, and nobody said that learning wasn't worthwhile at all. A small number (4%) expressed reservations about learning as they were afraid of becoming overqualified for available jobs.

People were also asked why they thought learning was worthwhile. The main reason related to employment, with learning being seen as a way to a job, a better job, or just to increase skills generally in the workplace. Others saw learning as worthwhile as it provided skills that were useful in everyday life. A third group stressed the importance of learning as it kept them thinking, and exercised their minds.

Most people wanted to do some learning in the future. The majority (59%) indicated a specific course or subject they wanted to do, and a further 23% wanted to do some learning, but did not have a clear idea of what. Overall, then 72% of respondents expressed a desire to do more learning in the future.

A small number (10%) didn't want to do any more learning in the future. There was no clear trend across the group in

terms of their reason why, however, this entire group was either retired or unemployed. A further 8% said they would possibly do some learning in the future depending on if they felt they needed it.

These results show that people see learning as worthwhile and want to participate in learning in the future. A 'learning culture' is far more complicated than these two issues, but these issues do indicate positive attitudes to learning in Hull.

Why participate in learning?

There were two main strands of motivation to learning, relating to employment and non-employment reasons. The most popular of these two strands were employment related motivations, with 45% of those who had engaged in learning since school being motivated by employment related reasons.

A smaller number (28%) had been motivated by reasons not relating to employment. These motivations included interest in the subject, social reasons, children, volunteering, personal development and using learning as a catalyst to move on in life. These motivations were often not mutually exclusive, and a further 18% were motivated by reasons from both categories. Often they were doing learning to get a job, but the job they sought also related to their interest or hobby.

Also the research showed that there were often 'trigger' events that either released individuals to participate in learning, or encouraged them to actually do it. The most important of these related to life-changes. For example, redundancy could spur people into action so they were better qualified to get a job. Also children growing up, and needing less care often released parents to get involved in learning.

Barriers and Enablers to Learning

There were several issues raised that constituted barriers or enablers to learning for people. These issues were; the learning available in the city; availability and form of information; the costs involved in participating in learning; the time needed to do learning; people's past experiences and feelings about themselves and learning; tutors and style of teaching; the other learners on a course; family issues; and, location of courses.

People felt that there were key barriers that needed to be dealt with; that these were the ones most likely to stop them learning in the near future, and therefore the ones that, if dealt with, would be most effective in enabling them to participate in learning. These were information, finance and

time. People said information was hard to find and didn't always tell them what they needed to know. They also cited costs of course fees and other costs as reasons they couldn't participate in learning. Finally, they said that it was hard to find time to commit to learning in the midst of busy lives, and this was made easier with time off from work and employer support, as well as flexibility in course programs.

Emerging themes and recommendations

Some themes emerged across the data, and have led to recommendations for action or further investigation:

Learning is becoming more important for people- for leisure and employment. It has also become a commodity, and is thus beginning to be viewed in that way by learners. Therefore they expect it to be as responsive to their needs as any other service that they use.

⇒ **Recommendation- That demand-led provision be developed as far as is practical at both the macro level through the local LSC, and the micro level through tutors and providers running individual courses flexibly.**

Employment was an important motivator to learn. People were aware that learning could help them get a job, or a better job, and that those who were better qualified tended to be in better paid jobs. However, it was not clear how effectively people could negotiate the path through learning into work or a better job, as they seemed to oversimplify the process and relationship between learning and work.

⇒ **Recommendation- That the ways people negotiate their way through learning into work be investigated further to determine how effective their strategies are, and how they can be facilitated to do this better.**

Certain events, or sequences of events either release people or encourage them to participate in learning. Knowing more about these patterns may provide opportunities for targeting marketing and information about learning more effectively.

⇒ **Recommendation- That there is further investigation into patterns of 'trigger' events into learning, and that if appropriate, this information is used to target information more effectively to widen participation.**

The first experience of learning after a break, or since school, is often critical in determining future learning paths. A good experience here will lead to more learning, and a bad one will make people less like to engage again. People

do not always choose beginner's courses at this stage.

⇒ **Recommendation- That tutors and providers should be aware of learner-returners on their courses, and ensure far as possible that they have a good experience.**

Some people saw learning as a means to an end, such as a qualification. Others saw the learning experience as the end in itself, for example if their aim was to meet people and have fun. This affected what they wanted out of the course, and how they wanted it to be run. These different motivations cut across those studying different subjects at different levels.

⇒ **Recommendation- That through effective initial assessment, tutors and providers are aware of the motivations of learners, and where possible seek to meet their needs.**

Taster courses were praised, especially by those who had been out of learning for a long time, and/or were not very confident.

⇒ **Recommendation- That there should be more locally run taster courses and short courses across the city.**

Cost was an important barrier to learning, especially those on a low wage who weren't eligible for free courses.

⇒ **Recommendation- That there should be a bursary scheme, or learning fund, to assist those who can't afford the costs of learning, especially those low waged individuals.**

Basic IT courses in the city were very popular, and people felt they provided important skills for employment and leisure. However, the way these courses were provided was frequently criticised, and this dissatisfaction with courses had adversely affected people's learning.

⇒ **Recommendation- That further investigation is carried out into what people think of current IT provision, to determine how it could be improved from a learner perspective.**

Online learning is potentially a solution to issues of time, flexibility and, to a degree, cost. Not many people had experience of it. However, bearing in mind people's problems with the IT courses, further work may be needed to determine how it would work most effectively in Hull.

⇒ **Recommendation- That work is carried out looking at how online learning in Hull is working, and how it could work most effectively for learners in Hull.**

Information, and people's problems with it, were a key finding of the research, and its importance as a barrier cannot be overestimated.

- ⇒ **Recommendation- That information is seen as the key factor upon which the success of any other solutions rest.**
- ⇒ **Recommendation- That there is a publicity drive to let people know about those services that can give them information and advice about learning.**

The purpose of this appendix is to go into more detail about how the research was carried out and how the results were achieved. This will allow the findings to be situated within the full context of the research and analysis process.

As noted above most of the research carried out into learning in Hull has been quantitative. It has involved large samples, which is one of the advantages of a quantitative approach, but has arguably lacked the depth necessary to fully understand and therefore act on what people have said. For example, the Household Survey (Humber-side TEC, 1999) indicated that the location of courses was a barrier to learning. However, there was no further information to explain whether the problem was an issue with transport, or learning activities taking place away from bus routes, or dislike of certain locations, or the fear of travelling to a different part of town, or even the amount of time needed to travel to a course. These are very different issues represented under the heading of course location that would each need to be tackled in different ways. This is not to dismiss this work done in the city; indeed it provides the background to this project.

Consequently, the approach taken to the research has been a qualitative one. This has meant that the sample has necessarily been much smaller than a quantitative study, as it is more time intensive per respondent. However, the advantage has been the depth of answers that have been gained. The aim behind the methodology was to facilitate respondents to talk about their learning experiences and the barriers, enablers and motivators for learning on their own terms and within their own frame of reference. In short, to allow them as far as possible to talk about the issues in their own style, rather than having to fit their experiences into a limited framework constructed by the researcher (May, 1997).

The main methods used in the research were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The interviews formed the main body of the fieldwork, and focus groups were held mid-way through the fieldwork to investigate further issues raised in the interviews. Towards the end of the fieldwork, once the main issues arising from the fieldwork had been established, a questionnaire was developed out of those findings to potentially widen the sample. However, due to time constraints, and the fact that getting interviews was the priority, only a small number of these were completed by people who couldn't be interviewed.

Semi-structured interviews

There are three main types of individual interviews (Fielding, 1993). A structured interview is one in which the interviewer has a script with set questions that must be adhered to. At

the other end of the scale an unstructured interview is one where the interviewer has a topic which they want to explore with the interviewee, but no specific questions or structure that must be followed. A semi-structured interview sits in the middle of these approaches. The interviewer has a set of questions that must be asked, but can deviate from that to follow up tangential points or clarify issues, as long as by the end of the interview they have covered all the questions. The advantages of this as May (1997) writes, are that the interviewer can follow up potentially interesting leads, and can ask follow up questions to ensure they fully understand the interviewee's answers. The interviewee can also answer with greater freedom, as the order of questions is not important and the method gives them the chance to describe their experiences on their own terms.

The interview topic guide developed for the research asked people about their learning experiences, their plans regarding learning in the future, their motivations for learning, and about the factors that enabled or hindered their participation in learning. The guide ensured triangulation of responses, with interviewees giving their opinions in different ways in response to different questions. It also brought out what people thought were the most important issues from all those that affected them.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure an accurate record of what the interviewee said. Another advantage of this approach was that it allowed the interviewer to concentrate fully on the interviewee and what they were saying, rather than trying to take notes and capture the whole interview whilst at the same time facilitating it. It also allowed them to note anything the interviewee did, in terms of body language or voice inflection, which may have had a bearing on the meaning of what they were saying.

Focus Groups

Focus groups comprise groups of up to ten people brought together who participate in a discussion led by a researcher (May, 1997). As Fielding (1993) writes, they are different from individual interviews due to the group dynamic, and can therefore generate different views on similar topics. As with the semi-structured interview, the researcher has a set of questions to ask, but can follow up on what the group is saying, and respond to their answers to dig deeper into what they are saying.

For the Learners' Forum research, there were eight focus groups based around issues that arose from the individual interviews. There were five topics- barriers, enablers and motivators for learning; support for learning; the learning

experience; learning and work, and; information about learning. Each topic was discussed by one focus group, except 'barriers, enablers and motivators', which was discussed by three groups.

Again, the sessions were recorded and transcribed for accuracy, and to enable the researcher to concentrate on the interviewing, rather than on note taking.

Questionnaire

This was not a large part of the research and accounts for only a small proportion of the total sample. It was developed out of the qualitative work described above to widen the sample if time allowed. This is a logical progression in research; allowing qualitative, more open-ended methodologies to establish the issues, and then to test these across a larger sample with more focused quantitative methods (May, 1997). However, time did not allow for this before production of this report, as the questionnaire was developed well into the research process as data began to come out.

Analysis

The various pieces of data were drawn together and collated into the themes reflected in this report's chapters. Where possible statistical data has been drawn from the interviews, in those cases where responses to a question were clear enough across the data to be categorized into a set of all-encompassing responses. This has been amalgamated with the responses from the questionnaires.

However, most of the data gained is not easily quantifiable. The open questions have meant that interviewees have talked in detail about issues in their own ways, and from their own perspectives. In this detail, it is clear that people do not think exactly the same thing about issues, although their views may tend in the same direction. Therefore this data has been left qualitative and categorized into themes, rather than being quantified into figures, in order to preserve the detail. This kind of data makes up the bulk of the report.

Qualitative data is analysed in a different way from quantitative data, and there are clear processes in the analysis to ensure its epistemological validity (May, 1997). This epistemological validity comes from two processes; the way the interview schedule is set up, and the way that the data is analysed.

The interview schedule was set up to ensure that interviewees went over the same issues several times. This allowed for verification of their views, but also highlighted any inconsistency in their answers (May, 1997). This inconsistency could then be challenged or questioned. The

semi-structured interview method also allowed interviewees to situate their answers in the framework of their life experience, which aided understanding of their opinions. In addition, the method allowed for follow up questions to allow the interviewer to ensure they had understood what the interviewee was saying. These processes ensured that the information gained was complete and well understood.

Once the data had been collected, transcribed and inputted into computer, a qualitative research program (N5) was used to code the information by topic. (Fielding & Lee, 1998). This involved going through the interviews and groups and allocating comments, or sections of text, into categories relating to various issues. As the process develops, the coding becomes more fine-grained and detailed, and eventually the researcher is able to build up a picture of the main issues and themes arising from the data. The method also allows the researcher to go back and rework categories if they come across data that does not fit with the categorization so far, or if they realize they've missed something. The process of coding and recoding continues until all the data fits within the framework and is internally coherent. Essentially, this process allows the themes and results to emerge from the data, rather than them being predetermined at the start of the research.

Sample

The sample consisted of 148 residents of Hull aged 16 or over. Of these, 55% were male and 45% female, close to the aim of achieving an equal balance. As can be seen from the table below, just under half (42%) were employed, around a third (32%) were unemployed and a further 16% were on an employment scheme such as New Deal. The rest were retired or students.

Employment Status

Employed part time	10%
Unemployed	32%
Employment scheme participant	16%
Retired	9%
Full-time student	1%

In terms of age, as can be seen from the table below, just under a third (28%) were 25 years old or less, and at the other end of the scale, 16% were close to, or at, retirement age, regardless of whether they had actually retired.

Age

26 to 35 years	28%
36 to 45 years	19%
46 to 55 years	9%
56 to 65 years	10%
66 to 75 years	5%
Over 75 years	1%

It had been intended to use the first outputs from the 2001 census to ensure that the sample was representative of the city population. However, it was not possible as this information will not be published until the end of September 2002. Population estimates from the ONS (ONS, 2001) for 2001 suggest that the proportion of the population in Hull of retirement age or above is around 22% of all 16s and over. The figures suggest that the sample achieved here is over-represented for younger people up to 35, and this should be kept in mind when reading the results.

The aim was also to represent several types of resident in the sample:

- ⇒ **Current learners- Those engaged in a course or other learning as defined above.**
- ⇒ **Past learners- Those who had been engaged in learning since school, but were not currently doing any.**
- ⇒ **Non learners- Those who had not engaged in any learning activity since school.**

In the final sample 60% were current learners, 38% were past learners and just fewer than 3% were non-learners. Current learners are over represented, and this was due to the fact that when people were targeted in the community, more were engaged in learning than had been envisaged during planning. Very few people had done no learning since school, as most had engaged in some way through employment or through employment programmes whilst unemployed, or more recently through community based learning, especially short courses and taster sessions.

Lastly, it was important to ensure CTA representation in the sample, and as such 33% of the sample are from one of the 10 CTAs, and were targeted through their local area. There is a fairly equal distribution across the 10 CTAs, with each CTA having between 8% and 14% of the total sample targeted through the CTAs (See table on next page).

CTA

Boothferry	12%
Bricknell	8%
Orchard Park	8%
North Bransholme	8%
South Bransholme	8%
Ings	14%
New Bilton Grange	10%
Greatfield	10%
Spring Bank/Sculcoates	12%
Longhill	8%

The sample was gathered through various organizations. Current learners were targeted through providers across the sector, from HE to voluntary and community. Then people were targeted through the community, using other agencies and projects, as well as community centres.

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