

# **Moving On in Hull**

**A report on the views of learners taking  
Move On classes in Hull**

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## Introduction

The present government stresses the importance of basic skills and the need to tackle high levels of poor numeracy and literacy to maintain the country's economic competitiveness. The Basic Skills Agency was set up in 1995 with a 'cradle to grave' approach to developing basic skills. They are involved with helping children, young people, and adults improve their basic skills, which are defined as 'the ability to read, write, and speak in English, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general'. ([www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk))

Move On is a national project aimed at a particular group of adults who only need to brush-up their skills in order to gain the National Certificate in Literacy and Numeracy. Traditional basic skills provision focuses predominantly on entry level learners and their problems with reading, writing and/or maths, whereas the Move On project hopes to reach new learners who don't see themselves as needing help with their basic skills. ([www.move-on.org.uk](http://www.move-on.org.uk))

Move On offers learners:

- a free skills check or test taster
- a free brush up course that covers literacy and numeracy skills needed to pass the National Test and wider skills for individual needs
- entry to the National Test that results in the Certificate in Adult Literacy or Adult Numeracy, the new national qualification in English and maths
- advice on opportunities to build on their success and progress to other courses

## Background

The Learners' Forum was commissioned by the Move On project in Hull to conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of incentives in encouraging people to enrol on the programme. This report includes this information, but also delves deeper into the reasons behind people joining the Move On scheme, and their opinions of those classes. Move On classes in Hull are run by a partnership of organisations that jointly put on a number of community based classes as well as sessions at the Move On centre itself.

Move On classes were being run in 8 different locations when we conducted this research. Hull College, Wilberforce College and the Adult Education Service provided tutors for the different classes. The classes were run at lots of different locations across the city including community centres and Adult Education centres. Several of the classes were run together with Sure Start who provided crèche facilities for learners' children. Sure Start and Preston Road NDC, both of which focus on particular areas of the city, also hosted some of the classes and gave access to specific target groups of learners.

In order to gain a balanced picture of what was happening across the different groups we used semi-structured interviews to speak to a total of 23 learners from 6 different classes. By speaking to at least 20 learners we ensured that we reached at least 10% of the project's target number of learners for that funding period.

Over half of the participants were from Sure Start classes and as these classes were all made up of mothers with young children, this accounts for the greater number of women in the sample. The other classes contained a more even spread of male and female learners and so in total we spoke to 6 men and 17 women. There was a wide age range of learners from 16 to over 50 years old.

**Age and Gender of Learner Sample**

Age	No of learners	Male	Female
16-19	1	1	0
20-25	3	0	3
26-30	2	0	2
31-35	4	0	4
36-40	3	3	0
40-50	2	1	1
51-60	2	1	1
Unknown	6	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>17</b>

**Location of Learner Sample**

Venue	No of learners
Sure Start with crèche	13
Adult Ed Centre	3
NDC Site	4
Move On Centre	3

## **Choosing to Move On: How people started on their course**

### **What learning students had done before their Move On course**

In order to understand the context in which students arrived at enrolling onto a Move On class we asked students what learning they had done in the past. Five of the respondents had not done any formal learning since school:

**School... that was about 12 years - 12 years ago, yeah. Don't seem that long, but yeah, that was the last time I did anything like learning.**  
(Female, 27)

The age range of these respondents means their last experience of formal learning varied from between six to as much as 28 years ago. Not only were these experiences a long time ago, but many of them were quite negative. One person '**didn't like it at school neither, so never really took much notice to be honest**'. When asked what she didn't like about school she replied:

**It's too – you've got to get it done, you know, it's like you've gotta get everything where you want it, you know, like writing wise it's like you've got to be all done, [motions with hands as if everything ordered in front of her] I didn't like that. It won't me. But then, I mean, like now, I wanna do something now, you know what I mean but at the time you don't think of it do you? And I didn't know what I wanted to do when I left school anyway, so, but like, now I do!**  
[laughs]  
(Female, 34)

A negative experience of school was likely to be coupled with low achievement: one young lady (27) '**didn't leave school with no GCSE's or anything**'.

At the other end of the scale, three people had studied at a high level since school but felt that they needed to brush up on their maths or English for various reasons. One lady had completed a degree before joining a Move On course. She needed her maths qualification in order to become a teacher. Another person had been studying at degree level in her home country and as English was not her native language joined the course in order to improve her language skills.

**It is good for me to do English and not maths, because maths is more easy for me, I want to do this course because I want to improve my English. And perhaps maths is more difficult for others, but English is more difficult for me.**  
(Female)

Whilst some people were only there to do one subject other people felt they needed to improve both their maths and English skills:

**I know I needed to update my maths and English because my qualifications are obviously out of date; it's a long time since I left school...**

**(Female, 55)**

The majority of respondents had had some experience of formal learning since school either through their job or from community based learning. For example, many of the people in Sure Start classes had done other courses through Sure Start prior to the Move On class. Counselling and IT related courses were the most common courses that people had done. Four people had been on work-related training whilst in previous employment.

Respondents were also asked about their last informal learning experience. Learning through work and bringing up children were the most commonly mentioned experiences, followed by learning through hobbies such as computers, cooking, needlework, gardening and music. People also mentioned learning about themselves and in particular how to cope with illness.

#### **How students found out about the course**

The majority of respondents already had some connection with one of the partners involved in delivering the Move On programme and there were three main ways in which they found out about their Move On class. Nine learners had seen the course advertised on leaflets and for those registered with Sure Start groups the leaflets were often delivered to their house:

**Sure Start sends out leaflets and magazines which sort of explains what Sure Start's doing at the moment and there's also advertisements in them for the courses ...**

**(Female)**

Learners from other non-Sure Start centres also reported finding out about the course from publicity material:

**Well actually I mean I look at the lists that they do on a regular basis about what courses are going on and so I see if there is anything on that I want to do**

**(Female, 55)**

Some people were already doing courses when they found out about the Move On class:

**They do write leaflets out, but because I was already doing courses she told me about them before I got the leaflet.**

**(Female, 35)**

People tended to go back to places where they had learnt before:

**Well I came here quite a few years ago and did a yoga course and then just sort of hearing things on the radio and I don't live too far**

**and I was walking by one day and I thought ‘oh I’ll pop in and see if they do anything related to maths’ so it was just basically knowledge of the area, that’s how I found about from it.**  
**(Female, 33)**

One person started on the Move On course because it was taught by a tutor he had had previously:

**I just wanted to carry on with [tutor]**  
**(Male, 36)**

Learners from Sure Start and NDC classes often reported having direct contact with a member of staff who recommended the course to them:

**...once I had the bairn, I had a Surestart worker come and see me... I weren’t, I didn’t think about, didn’t know how to go about getting on the courses, but I knew they did ‘em, my brother did a course so he took me. I said you know I want to do some courses and... They gave me an information pack and I picked what I wanted to do. And I’ve stuck with the maths and the English more than anything else.**  
**(Female, 22)**

In total 18 people found out about the Move On class through already being engaged with the centre or group holding the course in their community. This suggests that the community based nature of this course and the already established networks of people provided by the partner organisations in this project were key to the way people found out about the Move On programme.

However, for some people going to a Move On class was the first time they engaged with that particular centre or group; one person found out about his Move On class through Changes – The Learning Shop, another person was told about it by a friend who was already doing the course, and three people were directed to a Move On class by the Probation Service.

### **Why learners picked a particular centre to learn**

There were three main reasons why the respondents chose to learn at the place that they did. Firstly was the fact that it was convenient for people to learn somewhere close to home, secondly that people felt the community setting was more relaxed and friendly than, for example, college. Finally, for parents, free childcare was important.

Being nearby and easy to get to was important for people, especially those with caring responsibilities, or without their own transport:

**It is easier to come here because I only live down the road and my little boy is just starting playgroup which is literally the next street across, so I drop him off and came straight here.**  
**(Female)**

**I've had like a lot of other information on other courses but it means either getting the bus, coz I don't have the car when my husband's at work, so I like, it's within walking dist-, it's five minutes from my house.**

**(Female, 27)**

**Well because it's handy for me to get to from home because I live with a disabled daughter so it's only when she is out at college that I can do things and it means if I come here I don't have a lot of travel to get here and I can get home quicker.**

**(Female, 55)**

Location was not the only important factor, as shown by one man who used to live very close to the centre where he was doing a Move On course: **'it was only a case of 300 yards and I was here'**. However when he moved further away he still kept coming to the class despite living two and a half miles away:

**...But there isn't one near me, or not that I know of, not as friendly as this that I know of.**

**(Male, 38)**

He was prepared to travel to keep going to the same place which he considered to be friendly. Other people also felt that friendliness was an important factor. One person chose to do a Move On class because:

**I just thought it would be more friendly than going to college to do it.**

**(Female, 34)**

Several people recognised that the other people on the course were an important factor:

**I know most of the people and I think it's more relaxed atmosphere.**

**(Female, 25)**

**...it's really really nice, all the girls are nice so. We might have a bit of a laugh, but we get our work done [laughs]. It is really nice.**

**(Female, 27)**

**It's a lot more relaxed and I feel a bit more comfortable around the people because I presume it's because they are adults whereas when I was at college I was with 16 and over, sort of children...**

**(Female, 33)**

For learners on Sure Start courses the key reason why they chose to learn in the place they did was the childcare available. Significantly the crèche as well as the course was free:

**I generally stick with Sure Start because it's free and there's childcare.**

**(Female)**

**I think, yeah, they have a crèche downstairs which is, I stay home with my little boy and I don't work, so it was something that I could do and leave him downstairs. And that was it really, I think that was what swung it for me, yeah.**

**(Female)**

**It's so much easier being here, and it's great for the children coz they've got the same crèche workers as they've got if they go on other things, so it's more useful for them.**

**(Female, 27)**

**I like the fact that my little boy can mix with the other children of the other people who are doing the course I'm doing, but at the back of my mind is like, my little boy is getting the interaction with the other children.**

**(Female)**

In general people were not aware that there were other Move On courses running at other locations in the city as people tended to be engaged with the one nearest to their home. In this sense people did not choose one location over another, rather they chose to learn in their community rather than going to a more central location, perhaps the main college campus.

There was only one respondent who had no choice about where or what he was learning as he was obliged to attend the Move On class by his probation officer:

**Everything was decided for me. I was told to come here once a week for two hours.**

**(Male, 16)**

However not everyone doing a Move On course through the probation service was forced to attend:

**...it was just offered to me here. And then I just come the once and then I liked it so I just carried on coming, but yeah. Erm, I think our contract is we have to stay here now until we finish, I could leave now I have done the Level 1, but like I say I wanna carry on doing Level 2 and what have ya. So, I could leave at the moment, but I would rather stay.**

**(Female, 24)**

To sum up, when people had a choice, the key factors in picking a place to learn were location, friendliness of the centre and (for parents) the availability of childcare.

### **Why people chose a Move On course**

The two main reasons why people wanted to do a Move On course were related to jobs and children, and often the two interlinked. Work related reasons for

starting the Move On course were given by 17 of the respondents. Some people wanted the qualifications to help them get a job, in some cases when their children started school:

**when my other daughters starts school I want to get a job and I want to prove to those employers that I am capable of doing, you know, maths and English, and things like that.**  
(Female, 34)

Other people wanted to be able to get a better job and thought that having qualifications in maths and English would help:

**Because when I was at school I didn't study much and I've normally done caring stuff, but I'd like to look at doing different jobs and I thought it would help me.**  
(Female, 32)

Some learners were not yet sure what a 'better' job would be but were aware that having qualifications would mean more opportunities would be open to them:

**Because at school I only got a D so I wanted something that would ...so that if I apply for jobs where they are C's I can say 'well I've only got a D but I've got this which is equivalent'... and when you look at the jobs and they all say C's anyway I thought well I could do with my English and maths and then I can go for better jobs rather than just basic jobs.**  
(Female)

Over half of the people doing a Move On course for job related reasons did have a clear idea of the career path they wanted to take, and in order to be accepted on the appropriate course they needed maths and English qualifications. Of these eleven people, three wanted to go into nursing, three into teaching, and three into childcare, one person wanted to work in a supermarket and one person wanted to be an interpreter.

To be able to help children with their learning was the second most popular reason for doing a Move On course; nine people mentioned this including one grandparent. People wanted to be able to help their children with homework:

**I've got a nine-year old and a six-year old and as they're getting older their homework's getting harder and I want to make sure that I can give them the best advice, you know.**  
(Female, 27)

**Well, the thing is, I'm nearly sixty and I've got two grandchildren, well, three grandchildren, and they're doing homework, and they're coming home to me, at a weekend, and they're asking me questions about maths and English and things, but where I was a navigator, my maths is pretty good, but my English is terrible. And er, I've just sort of caught up with it because when a child asks me about anything, it's**

**embarrassing, you sort of sit there and think oh-uh, I can't do that. So anyway, I came here and er, I've done the maths quite easy, I've done the literacy 1, easy.**

**(Male, 58)**

Some parents struggled themselves at school and didn't want the same thing to happen to their children:

**Because I struggled with maths at school, and it's a long way off with my little boy, he's 14 months old, but I wanted to have something to be able to teach him when he's coming home with homework and things like that.**

**(Female)**

There was a realisation that the learning wouldn't only benefit their children and people would themselves directly benefit from the Move On course:

**...like with me three kids, like two of me older ones, like one's 9 and one's 6 and they're at school, and I need like to help them as well so and I thought it'll push me up as well so, which is good!**

**(Female, 34)**

**Maths is good, English is good. And if you like to have a better future, for yourself and for your kids, to help your kids, it is good to do that. That is why I decided to do that.**

**(Female)**

Several people commented on how the course was improving their sense of self worth and self esteem, especially when they had not done well at school:

**I'm not doing it for anybody else, just for my own self worth really. At school I didn't really try, I sort of give up and now I want to do it, I think it makes a big difference when you want to do it.**

**(Female, 34)**

**... just for self-esteem really, you know and to get out and get away from the house and the depression...**

**(Male, 44)**

People wanted to improve skills that they felt were poor, often in order to get a job or to be able to help their children with homework, but a part of it was for its own sake - to help people feel better about themselves:

**..really I've just come here to better my maths and English because I am a bit with my reading and spelling, and I come here just to like better it a bit more...**

**(Female, 24)**

**I'm not a very good speller and hopefully with the other courses, it'll bring my spelling on a bit more as well...  
(Female, 34)**

Getting a qualification was an important motivation for some. It was not always clear whether this was to help get a job, or for the sense of achievement it accorded. One lady (22) wanted to do the Move On course **'because I've got no GCSE's and it's something'**.

**...the fact I get, if I get something, a qualification out of it, that's an incentive for me.  
(Female)**

**...I wanted to get my qualifications because I left school a long time ago and what I got don't count anymore...  
(Female, 55)**

Meeting people, getting out of the house and, for mothers in particular, the chance to have adult conversation were also reasons why people chose to come on the course. Learning was, for one carer, an important way of coping with his wife's illness:

**Well I look after me wife, I'm a carer for me wife. And the reason, what I'm doing now, it's like a respite, because my wife is a manic depressive and we're together 24/ 7, all the time so this is a respite, I learn something here, I take it home and...I'm into reading books now, Jeffrey Archer, things like that. Which I've never bothered really reading, the only books I've read in my life are instructional books, you know learning books, not novels or, I've never been interested in novels or anything like that. Now I am. I've picked a lot up here.  
(Male, 58)**

The main reasons why people chose to do a Move On course were related to getting a job, or helping children with homework. However other issues, such as self-esteem, meeting other people, respite and getting a qualification were also relevant.

### **Continuing with learning after Move On**

All of the respondents said that they did plan to do more learning in the future. Of these, the majority were working towards the qualifications they needed for the career they wanted to go into. Other reasons for continuing with learning were enjoying the learning for its own sake and the social aspect of learning, also the fact that learning was a break from people's normal routine.

Just over half of the respondents had their next step in learning planned, either by being booked onto another course to progress, or by deciding what that next step was. The remainder were keen to carry on with learning, but were not sure at this point exactly what they would be doing next.

Overall, the classes seem to be filled with motivated individuals, many of whom are engaged in learning to increase their employment prospects. The challenge for institutions is to provide appropriate access to quality and independent IAG to ensure that all the learners can pick what ever progression routes are appropriate to their situation.

## How are learners finding the Move On course?

Respondents were asked about how they were finding the course, in order to find out more about their learning experiences with Move On. Learners were simply asked an open question, so that they could answer on their own terms and talk about whatever aspect(s) of the course they wished to, which is an indication of their main feelings about the course.

Overall, the main feedback was positive. The vast majority of respondents (21) had something positive to say about the course, whilst only nine people made a negative comment.

### Positive aspects of the Move On course

Positive aspects of the Move On course cited by learners included:

- **Enjoyment of learning process**
- **Socialising**
- **“We’re all in the same boat!”**
- **Flexibility of the course**
- **Tutors**
- **Relaxed learning environment**
- **Learning in a small group**
- **Positive welcome**
- **Increased levels of confidence**

Each of these positive characteristics is looked at below in greater detail and on an individual basis.

#### Enjoyment of learning process

It was clear by the way that some respondents spoke about the course that they found the learning process itself to be enjoyable. Several people simply commented that they were ‘**learning a lot**’, but others were more explicit in describing this significant aspect of the course:

**Interviewer: What are you enjoying about [the course]?**

**Respondent: It’s just everything really, it’s just learning again coz when I’m always at ho-I an’t worked in like six years, since I had my second son, and then like I’ve just had [my third son] he’s two, and I thought, I think your brain goes to mush, I thought oh, I don’t know how I’ll do, but I think when you come back your brain starts to work, so I’m really enjoying all aspects of it.  
(Female, 27)**

It was mainly mothers of young children who particularly enjoyed the learning process. From the above quotation, we see that an extensive break from learning and/or work to have children can lead to women feeling that they needed mental

stimulation and challenge. By re-engaging in learning, in effect these people are starting to challenge themselves afresh, and many seem to relish this. However, this is not to suggest that this process only happens amongst mothers; it could be the case for anyone who takes a long break from learning and/or work only to begin learning again at a later stage. It is simply due to the large number of Move On classes in Sure Start centres in Hull that our data includes many mothers of young children.

Some mothers felt that their own learning was having an effect on their children's learning too:

**Interviewer: How are you finding the course?**

**Respondent: Oh brilliant, yeah.**

**Interviewer: Yeah?**

**Respondent: Getting things down, you know, on paper, I mean I can look back on it so it's easier for me and like, I mean the bairns are looking at it as well so it's like helping them. But like the 9 year old, she knows more than what I do, so I mean it's helping me and it's helping the children as well, so which is a good thing.  
(Female, 34)**

As many of the mothers have embarked on Move On courses in order to help support their children's learning, it definitely ought to be seen as positive that this learner is looking over her work at home with her children, and indeed that her eldest daughter is able to help her.

Even those who struggled with the course and found it to be very challenging still felt that they were moving forwards in their learning and enjoying elements of it.

**Interviewer: How are you finding the course?**

**Respondent: Really good, I'm enjoying it. Sometimes I get a bit bored. You get a bit stuck on things, but once I've got over these hurdles, it's like anything. I think it's the fear of learning because things get harder and harder as you go along and I'm getting over that now because I have learnt a lot and it's helped me a real lot to get further and further.  
(Male, 44)**

It would appear that this learner has been getting to grips with being in a learning environment, and although he has struggled with some difficult bits, because of his perseverance, he has progressed further in his learning. His comments imply that through the experience of learning and his desire to succeed in it, he is learning to deal with the problems he has encountered and enjoy the learning.

There were also other respondents who acknowledged the level of challenge in the courses:

**Interviewer: How are you finding the course?**

**Respondent: Really good. I mean, some parts of it I find a little bit hard but that's what it's there for, to challenge you, to help you...  
(Female, 27)**

Similarly, another Move On student benefits from her sense of achievement when she has learned something new:

**Interviewer: What do you enjoy about [the course] most, would you say?**

**Respondent: The learning, actually. If there's a session where I've actually learnt something and I can go home and think right, that's how I do it, then that's good.  
(Female)**

One of the indications that people were genuinely enjoying their learning experience on the Move On courses was borne out by the way in which several of them really liked doing practice and real exam test papers!

**Interviewer: How are you finding the course?**

**Respondent: Very good yeah, I'm enjoying it yeah, I'm learning a lot, so yeah.**

**Interviewer: Yeah, and what are you enjoying about it?**

**Respondent: Erm, like doing just really to see how, coz I didn't think I was any good at either of 'em [maths and English], I knew I was worse at maths, but like the test papers that we've been doing, I enjoy doing them, to see like what marks I can get and I'm better than what I thought I was, so I enjoy doing like the test papers and chatting with everybody and to see how good they're doing and things like that.  
(Female, 32)**

From the learners' perspective, one of the key positive features of the courses appears to be the sense of mental challenge and stimulation, which for many has not been present in their lives in this way for some time. The Move On classes allow these learners the opportunity to test themselves in their own back yard whilst still studying towards nationally recognised qualifications, and it seems to be this opportunity which many learners are embracing with relish.

### **Socialising**

The social aspect of the Move On courses was considered to be important by a small number of respondents. Whilst this was not the primary reason for people to be involved in learning, socialising was viewed by some as a positive “side-effect” of learning. In particular, it was mothers of small children who found the social aspect of studying to be most valuable. The chance to mix with other adults for a couple of hours instead of their children was even seen to be akin to a good night out by one learner!

**Interviewer: How are you finding the course?**

**Respondent: I love it yeah, it’s brilliant...It’s like being back at school, feel real young.**

**Interviewer: What makes you feel young about it?**

**Respondent: I can remember the days when I had to go to college and it seems like forever ago but it in’t really, but it seems like ages ago, but you don’t think. And when you’ve got children, you just want that bit of – it’s like going on a night out, you just want a bit of a laugh, and a bit of a general adult conversation. I do enjoy it, I look forward to it.**

**(Female, 26)**

Along similar lines, another mother described her experience of doing a Move On course as being a route back into the adult world after having spent several years mainly in the company of children:

**...yeah I have enjoyed it, it’s been not as bad as I thought it was. You know, coz I thought ooh [screws face up and laughs] but I mean it’s worked out quite well, and I’m enjoying it. It’s getting back in with other adults as well really, you know, coz I mean three children, like, all children, children, children in’t it? It is nice to get back in with the adults as well [laughs].**

**(Female, 34)**

It would appear that the relaxed format of the community classes facilitates enjoyable conversation between the learners, meaning that as well as the actual studying, they are able to have fun and make new friends.

### **“We’re all in the same boat!”**

Related to learners’ own levels of confidence on the course was their perception of other learners. Several people spoke about how, when first starting the course, they had felt anxious that other students would be cleverer than them, but were reassured to find that they were learning alongside others who were working at a similar level to themselves.

The sense of being on a similar level to the other learners on the course worked to improve learners' self-esteem and motivation. This feeling of commonality amongst a class appears to have contributed to people's enjoyment of the course, and how relaxed they felt there.

**You think that you're the only one in the class, to begin with, we were all thinking we were thick, but you sort of learn as you go on that really we're all more or less at the same stage and it's just that 'coz the terminology has changed now, erm, and we all seem to be around the same age, [...] so we're all in the same boat, which is good.**  
(Female, 30s)

Another learner highlights the importance of other learners as well, talking about her struggle with maths, and the vital role played by the other learners on the course:

**Well, to be honest as I said before I've never been brilliant understanding in maths, I cannot understand it but in the first, the fact that I'm in a group, that I'm not standing on my own. I find it really nice, you know, I find it really important that there are other people to study as well.**  
(Female)

One consequence of students feeling that they are on a par with the other learners in their class is that they can learn in a relaxed manner, and not feel pressurised to perform. A woman describes her class as:

**A real good group of girls as well, it's like, you know, no nastiness or anything, there's no pressure, we're all the same, yeah it's good.**  
(Female, 26)

For these learners, it seems to be vital that they are learning amongst their peers, and that they are learning in a group. The feeling that they are in the same situation as each other serves to increase the learners' self-esteem and confidence to progress with their learning.

### **Flexibility of the course**

For several students, the flexibility of the course was important for the effectiveness of their learning. Whilst some people just mentioned in passing that learners were able to work at their own pace throughout the course, others highlighted aspects of the flexibility of the Move On scheme as being more vital factors in the success of the course.

**It's good because you can learn at your own pace and the tutor is supportive and everything. You don't have to, you know, if you don't want to be entered into your exams you don't have to do them. You do them in your own time...you can do it on the internet as well at home.**  
(Male, 38)

Although this student does not make use of the facility to use the internet at home to continue his studies, he acknowledges that it is a useful facet of the course. As the Move On course caters for many of those for whom school did not work particularly well, it is important that it is flexible enough to fit in with these adult learners' lives.

One example of this is someone who was intending to take his Level 2 exam after Easter, but had to postpone this because of moving house. For this learner to have the best opportunity to succeed, it was imperative that he was able to do this; to take his exam when he was ready to do it, rather than because it was the set point at the end of the course when he was required to sit the exam (as with the current GCSE's, for instance).

Another learner is currently studying English, and says,

**and then when I finish I'm gonna wait a few months before doing my maths to give me chance to be with the kids.  
(Female, 26)**

Again, the flexibility to be able to take a break in learning to devote time to family life and then recommence study is vital. Learners want to fit learning into their lifestyles, without having to sacrifice too much of their lives for the sake of the learning.

### **Tutors**

The tutors and other support staff in centres were seen as playing a very important role in the learning experience on these courses, and were praised by several students.

One male student (36) commented that '**the teachers are 100%**', whilst another spoke at great length about how supportive the staff in her centre were:

**...the people are really nice, I think, I aren't shy to ask them like silly little questions where you think sometimes 'oh I should know that really', but no, they are really helpful...  
(Female, 24)**

Undoubtedly, feeling confident enough to be able to ask questions when necessary is essential to be able to benefit fully from the learning process on the course.

The difference between learning at school and learning as an adult was marked by one respondent:

**[Tutor] she's really really nice, she's found out what levels we need to be on and she's real funny, so she's a really really nice lady. Don't seem like she's a teacher, you know, it's just real it's, you're not being**

**rundown not like being at school, you want to learn now rather than when you was at school, you didn't, some people anyway.**  
**(Female, 27)**

Whilst this learner recognises the significance of a friendly tutor, she also sees that it is different to school; the tutor is not a figure of authority in the same way as a teacher of children. The learners themselves have also changed – from reluctant children and teenagers in the classroom to adults who have more of a grasp on the value of education for their future prospects, and therefore want to learn.

### **Relaxed learning environment**

Tied in with respondents' positive attitudes towards their tutors was the relaxed learning environment fostered by those tutors. Learners are treated as adults, and some noticed that the class was distinctly different from school. Ways in which a relaxed atmosphere was created included providing cups of tea and coffee for learners, and tutors being understanding when circumstances meant that students were unable to attend sessions.

**Interviewer: What is it you like about the course?**

**Respondent: Erm, it's just so relaxed. It's er, I mean there's rules and regulations to coming to the course but it's the people that run the course that make it worth coming.**  
**(Female, 24)**

It would appear that tutors and support staff are vital to creating this comfortable atmosphere, as everyone who mentioned the relaxed nature of the course related this to the staff.

### **Learning in a small group**

For a small number of respondents, the fact that they were able to learn in a small group was thought of as being an advantage of the Move On course.

One student found the Move On community class to be really suited to her character:

**I find it brilliant coz like at college, I couldn't go to college because I don't mix with lots of people coz I'm quite shy.**  
**(Female, 22)**

This person has not actually been to college herself, but finds the idea of attending a large institution too daunting. In contrast to this, learning in a small group within her own community is considered to be ideal as it gives her the confidence to be able to learn and gain qualifications.

### **Positive welcome**

Some people find re-entering learning after a long break to be a huge challenge, and a somewhat scary prospect. For these people, it is vital that their initial welcome onto the course is a good one, so that they stick with the course and

persevere with the learning. No matter how good the tutor, how relaxed the atmosphere, and how relevant the content of the course, if that first class leaves people feeling alienated and confused, many will not return. The below respondent had a positive welcome onto the course, and so has remained a part of the class, but she implies that if her first experience there had been a negative one, she would not have remained a Move On learner.

**Respondent: I think the worst thing is actually getting up and getting through the door on the first day [...]**

**Interviewer: Ok. So on the first day what's hard about coming through the door on your first day?**

**Respondent: Erm, not knowing anybody and not knowing what to expect, if everybody's going to be cleverer than you. You all think that you are gonna be the worst one in the class, don't you, and then you get talking to everyone and you are all the same. So it's a good confidence boost as well. (Female, 34)**

### **Increased levels of confidence**

Although only a small number of respondents spoke explicitly about having gained confidence through doing the course, there was an underlying current from the way in which people spoke about their learning which strongly suggested that a large number of them had become more confident in using English and/or maths through studying with Move On.

One woman described the benefits of the course for her:

**I think I now have confidence in maths, because before I used to be very scared of doing maths, I thought that it was very very difficult for me but since I started coming here [to the class] I feel that it's not the way I think, and I feel that I can do it, so I am so happy. I feel that I have more confidence now than before. (Female)**

Other people had evidently increased in confidence, both in the subject(s) they were studying and more generally, but this seemed to be related to the other positive aspects of the course highlighted by learners.

## **Negative aspects of the Move On course**

As shown from the above, the majority of learners had positive feedback about their experiences on the course. However, a small number of negative comments were also made. As there was a smaller amount of these, they cannot be categorised as such, and predominantly relate to people's individual situations.

Two learners said that they found the Move On course was not challenging enough for them. One person felt that the format of the learning was not interesting enough for him:

**Interviewer: How are you finding [the course]?**

**Respondent: Boring.**

**Interviewer: Boring. What would you rather be doing?**

**Respondent: I would rather be doing something rather more challenging than they are giving me. They just give you a few pieces of paper and that's it, so I just do my work and that's it; nothing interesting.**

**Interviewer: And what would be interesting for you?**

**Respondent: Use the computers they give ya. Coz there's computers there but you never seem to go on them.  
(Male, 16)**

It is possible that if the learning were delivered in an alternative format, this learner may be more satisfied with the Move On course. However, it is also possible that this is not really a suitable mode of learning for this individual, as the scheme has been tailored to cater for those people who have left school and return to learning at a later stage, rather than those who are still of school age.

One person who was studying English level 2 stated:

**I think it's quite easy at the moment. I'm hoping it gets more difficult as it goes along.  
(Female, 55)**

It would appear that perhaps this person is already skilled in English, and so may be able to take her level 2 exam without too many weeks of study; the fact that she does not find it challenging enough is only a problem if she is required to stay on the course beyond what is necessary for her to achieve level 2.

Along similar lines, someone else was frustrated that they had felt ready to take their exam several weeks ago but had been unable to because the tutor had not had the relevant exam papers. This is probably an administrative issue, and is not discussed as a negative point about the course particularly, more a point of frustration for the learner involved:

**I've been itching to get on with my English exam because the last few weeks that we've done where she hasn't had the exams so it's been like no good for me because I know what I'm doing now; I need to get on with me exam and get it out the way!**  
**(Female, 25)**

A disabled student also aired his frustrations, this time about being unable to progress further in his learning because of having to wait to hear whether his tutor would be permitted to enlarge the text on exam papers for him. What appears to be a simple practical solution for a learner has been blown out of proportion to become a bureaucratic problem.

In addition to this, several learners talked about how the course was not being taught quite as they had expected. This ranged from thinking that there was too much chatter and not enough learning, to someone who felt that there was not enough communication within the group (and these were two students from the same class!).

Basically, these more negative comments about the course serve to show that it is impossible to accommodate everyone's desires and needs at the same time. The most important thing is that the course content is relevant to those wanting to gain level 1 and 2 qualifications in maths and English, and that the course helps support the learners to get to that stage. Features such as a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere, an approachable tutor and a feeling of commonality amongst the learners all contribute to enabling students to attain the qualifications they want or need in order to move on in life.

## **The Impact of Incentives**

### **Background**

One of the reasons for conducting this research was to evaluate the impact of incentives on people's participation in the course. In short, did they affect whether individuals enrolled on and completed the Move On courses? To this end, respondents were asked about their motivations for coming on the course, which were discussed earlier, and were then asked specifically about the idea of incentives and the actual incentives that they had been offered.

The Move On courses have always included incentives to encourage individuals onto the courses. In the past the incentive consisted of W H Smith vouchers, with some given on enrolment on the course, and some again on completion, with a further incentive if students progressed. However, for the period of funding being discussed here, the incentives consisted of a starter pack and entry in a free prize draw.

The starter pack was made of a Move On branded folder which could be used to keep work in, as well as a pen, pencil, rubber, ruler, calculator and pocket dictionary. Learners were also entered into a prize draw to win a short holiday to Bruges. Those who were interviewed were asked about each of the incentives in turn.

### **The Move On Folder**

Of the 23 respondents, 15 had received a folder. Those that hadn't were in two Move On classes that were held at different locations, but had the same tutor. Those that received them had got them in the first couple of weeks of their course, and most remembered what was in them.

Most of the respondents who received the folder (ten people) thought that the folder was useful, and described how they had actually been using it. For example one woman said that the folder was useful as,

**...it keeps all your work tidy, and it keeps your pens and that so you don't forget your pens, you keep them in the zip bit at the back.  
(Female, 32)**

Another left her folder at the course venue and said that it was useful because,

**...you have always got all your equipment ready for you when you come to a class, instead of making sure you are like bringing it all, and I think that is a really good idea anyway. I mean not everyone's got good memories to bring all the pens and what have ya.  
(Female, 24)**

Some tutors suggested that students leave their folders at the venue, and in those classes, students echoed the sentiment above that the folder was useful as it ensured that all they needed was already there when they arrived.

It was clear that most respondents appreciated the folders. For example one man (aged 44) said that '**...it's been a real good help**' as the folder contained the basic things that you needed for the course. Another woman commented that when she was given the folder,

**...I was quite shocked really. It was a good little package to get.  
(Female, 26)**

Of the five who had received the folder but had not made use of it, only one said it was not useful and did not give a reason why. In his case, it is worth noting that his participation on the course was not voluntary and that this may have affected his view of the folder and the course in general. Another individual gave no clear answer. The remaining three thought that the folder was useful, but had not actually used it for various reasons. For example one woman explained that,

**I must admit I've hardly used it. But that's just for ease, because to carry it around with two kids and all the baby stuff is ...I end up just bringing like one of the little books; we've got like a English book, and blank paper and a pen.  
(Female)**

Whilst the folder and its contents were appreciated, individuals were keen to stress that the dictionary was particularly useful. People talked of taking this home and using it there as well as in the class. It was clear that this was especially appreciated by individuals.

Overall, then, the folder, and especially the dictionary, were seen as useful by the respondents, and were appreciated.

### **Prize Draw**

Only 11 of the respondents said that they had been entered for the prize draw. The same number thought that they hadn't been entered for it, and one person did not know.

Again respondents who thought that they had been entered said that they'd been entered in the first couple of weeks of the course. However, the response was markedly different to the reaction to the folder. Those who had been entered into the prize draw couldn't necessarily remember what the prize was, and the tone of their answers suggested that they weren't too interested. For example one woman said,

**...I think it was for, was it a cruise or summat, I don't know. I can't even remember, summat like that. I didn't give it too much thought, coz I never win owt anyway.  
(Female, 32)**

Another woman (aged 27) said that '**I didn't pay much attention**'. People's responses suggested that it wasn't important to them. The low level of importance it was given, and the fact that people couldn't remember much may mean that some who said they hadn't been entered for the draw actually have,

but can't remember. Either way, the importance of the prize draw to learners appears low.

### **Impact of the Incentives on participation in the course**

As has been explained above, respondents appreciated the folder, and thought it useful, but did not seem so interested in the prize draw. As these things were incentives, those who received them were asked about whether they had made an impact on participation in the course. None of the respondents thought that they had, and stressed that they were there because they wanted to be, not because they were getting something extra alongside the course. For example one woman explained that,

**...it's nice to get it because you've got your folder, you've got your pen and you don't need to go out and buy it, but I'd have come anyway.  
(Female)**

One of the male respondents commented that,

**I had already decided that I wanted to do it anyway before I received the folder and the prize draw form.  
(Male, 44)**

The folder was seen as an '**added bonus**' and a '**nice gesture**' (Female, 26), and as useful whilst doing the course, but was not seen as central in a decision to participate in, or finish, the course. Individuals stressed the other reasons, discussed earlier, to explain their participation in the course. Unlike the folder, which was seen as helpful, the prize draw did not seem to be a factor at all in the experience. One woman (aged 27) mentioned that before she enrolled she'd seen that she'd have a chance of winning the holiday, but explained that '**...that didn't bother me!**'

Several of the respondents were aware that the incentives previously on the course had been the vouchers, and the comments of a couple suggested that these could have worked better as incentives than the folder and prize draw. One explained that this was because they could have used them to buy books that would have been useful for the course; the other that they'd enrolled near Christmas, and the vouchers could have been useful for Christmas shopping.

However, overall the consensus was that people have important reasons for enrolling on and completing the courses, and incentives are not a significant part of that.

### **Incentives in general**

Having been asked about the incentives they had been offered as part of the Move On course, respondents were asked whether, in general, incentives would encourage them to participate in a course. The vast majority of respondents indicated that it would not, saying that the important factor was wanting to do the course,

**If I wanted to do it, I'd do it, it wouldn't matter what come with it...**  
(Female, 32)

**It's just if you wanna learn, to go, in't it really? It don't matter what they're offering you.**  
(Female, 27)

**I think if you want to do something you'll go ahead and do it anyway, depending you know, which way you wanna go.**  
(Female, 34)

**...Not really because I'm here because I wanna be here. I mean, I don't need incentives, you know.**  
(Male, 58)

No respondents suggested that an incentive would be an important factor in deciding to do a course. However, a couple, like the women below, indicated that an incentive would be an added bonus,

**... some kind of reward at the end would be really nice...Yeah, if they said that you'll get a voucher at the end to pamper yourself or something like that, d'you know, just quite often you don't get the chance to pamper yourself when you've got little ones and everything, but something like that.**  
(Female)

**...Yeah, they're like added bonuses aren't they? Like erm, I would still do the course if I wanted to but that'd be just like a bonus to it. I'd go to it if I wanted to do it, I would still do a course if I wanted to.**  
(Female, 46)

However, another couple of individuals' comments suggested that incentives had played a role when they signed up for the course. One woman explained that,

**Well originally when we started this course they were giving vouchers away and I thought 'oh that would be great just before Christmas!' but they stopped that just as I started.**  
(Female, 25)

However, although this may have been part of the attraction of the course at the beginning, the fact that the incentives had changed did not put her off enrolling and continuing with the course. Another man suggested that initially he'd been attracted by financial incentives offered by the Probation Service, but that now he wasn't bothered as the learning itself was value enough,

**Respondent: I think at first the probation said I would receive £50 in vouchers from them and £50 in vouchers from the Move On course when I completed the first level and I did think about it at first.**

**Interviewer:** Is that what made you come?

**Respondent:** Yeah 'I'll give that a go – I'll get something out of it' but I'm not too bothered now. I've passed the first one, I haven't received it yet, but I aren't bothered whether I do or I don't really. I wouldn't be bothered.  
(Male, 44)

What is potentially interesting here, though, is that the individual could be characterised as more 'hard-to-reach' than other respondents, having been out of education of any form for almost 30 years, been in care as a child, and having described himself as struggling with the course. It may be an indication that those who are more 'hard-to-reach', due to greater disconnection from learning, may well be influenced more by similar kinds of incentives than the respondents mostly represented here.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, then, the incentives do not seem to have had a big impact on individuals starting the course, as they mostly became aware of them after they signed up. However, the folder was well received, seen as useful and used by the learners in the main. Arguably, it is lots of seemingly small interventions such as these within the life of a course that help learners to enjoy it, feel valued, and therefore be more likely to continue with the course, and with learning in the future.

So these incentives are not without value, and there are indications that they may influence a minority to some degree when they are thinking of starting a course. However, there is no evidence that these incentives, or any others, will make the difference in participation. The strongest message to emerge from the interviews regarding incentives was that individuals would participate in a course if they wanted to or needed to, not because of some extra thing that they were offered.

## Summary

Respondents started the Move On course from a variety of learning backgrounds. Some learners had had a negative experience of school and had not done any formal learning since. Others had done a variety of short courses in the community since leaving school, and a few of the respondents had previously studied to degree level.

The majority of Move On learners found out about the course because they were already involved with the centre or group running it. The three main ways they found out about the course were through personal recommendation from a member of staff, publicity material advertising courses, and from already being on a course at the centre. A few people had no previous contact with the centre/group before coming on a Move On course; they found out about the course either through the probation service, Changes – The Learning Shop, and one person was told about the course by a friend.

There were three main reasons why people chose to learn at a particular centre. These were its location, which was generally close to home and convenient to get to, the friendliness of the centre and (for parents) the availability of free childcare on site.

There were two main reasons why people chose to do a Move On course. One of these was related to children. Parents and grandparents wanted to be able to help their children with homework which became more challenging as they grew older. Some parents struggled themselves at school and didn't want the same thing to happen to their children.

Secondly respondents recognised improving their maths and English skills would help their job prospects. Over half of the respondents did have a clear idea of the career path they wanted to take and knew that they needed maths and English qualifications to be accepted onto the appropriate course.

Other reasons people mentioned for doing the course were to do with self-esteem, meeting other people, respite from caring responsibilities and getting a qualification.

All respondents were planning to do more learning in the future. The majority wanted to do so for job-related reasons, and the rest for the enjoyment and social aspects of doing a course. Most of the respondents had already planned the next step in their learning.

Most respondents had positive experiences of their Move On course. The vast majority enjoyed the learning process especially when they had had a break from learning as they appreciated the opportunity to stretch themselves.

The chance to mix with other adults was enjoyed by many learners, especially mothers who spent the majority of their time with young children.

Several learners felt that they were on a similar level to other people in their class and this helped them to be comfortable and confident in their learning.

The flexibility of the Move On scheme contributed to the success of the course. People commented on how they liked being able to learn at their own pace and also take exams when they were ready rather than at fixed points throughout the course.

Tutors played a very important role in learners' experiences. They were seen as approachable and supportive and different from people's experiences of school teachers. Several respondents highlighted how tutors sought to create a relaxed learning environment for the learners.

Other positive aspects of the course that were mentioned included the benefits of learning in a small group for a shy learner and the importance of having a positive welcome to the course when returning to learning after a break.

Some less positive aspects of the course were mentioned by a few respondents. Two people, one of whom was not attending the course out of choice, felt that the course wasn't challenging enough for them. A small number felt that the style of teaching and learning could have been more suited to them. A couple of practical issues meant that one person was not able to take an exam when she wanted to and another person with poor eyesight had trouble reading the exam questions. These illustrate the difficulties of catering for all individual needs and preferred learning styles.

Of the 23 respondents, 15 had received a Move On folder. They received these within the first couple of weeks of the course. Most people remembered the contents of the folder and found the contents, especially the dictionary, useful.

Only eleven respondents remembered having been entered into the prize draw. Those who had were entered in the first couple of weeks of the course. People couldn't necessarily remember the details of the prize and the tone of their answers suggested that they didn't consider it to be very important or interesting.

The folder was appreciated by the majority of respondents who described it as an added bonus or nice gesture and found it useful whilst doing the course, however it was not central in their decision to enrol on or complete the course. The prize draw did not seem to be a factor at all for any of the respondents.

Several respondents were aware of the vouchers which had been incentives on previous Move On courses and a couple commented that this may have worked better as incentives than the folder and prize draw. However, overall people had important reasons of their own for enrolling on and completing the course and incentives were not a significant part of that.

The vast majority of respondents said that no incentive at all would encourage them to participate on a course, and that the desire to do the course itself was the most important factor in them deciding to do a course. However, a couple of people did say that an incentive would be an added bonus.

## **Conclusions**

There are several lessons that can be drawn from the research regarding those learners who attend Move On courses or similar. The issues discussed below were those that emerged most strongly, as they were raised and agreed on by the majority of the respondents.

### **Motivations**

The main motivations for engaging with the courses related to improving skills to gain employment, and increasing skills to be able to help children with their learning. The obvious implication of this is that if such courses are marketed with these motivations in mind, they may attract more people. This could be done in a targeted manner by marketing the courses as generic skills for work in Jobcentres and other places where the unemployed are likely to come, and aiming them at those who are currently unhappily employed and would like to get a better or different job. The courses could also be related to parenting at locations such as schools and Sure Start centres. Marketing in these ways may also help overcome some of the stigma of going on a basic skills course, as going to a course in order to get a job or to help your children is not the same as going to a course because you cannot read and write well.

### **Localism**

The majority of respondents went to local and familiar venues to do their courses. Most found out about the course through already being involved at a centre (e.g. Sure Start or community centre), and many specifically wanted to do their learning at that place as it was local and convenient, and because the centre itself was familiar to them, where they often knew tutors and other people. The model of having local centres, attracting individuals in through activities, building relationships and then offering courses in this way, then, clearly works for this group of learners. This is likely to be more successful than doing citywide advertising and expecting individuals to travel to a central, less familiar location like a college, for example.

This approach, then, needs to continue. However, it is important that these centres encourage individuals and give them opportunities to look further afield so that if it is appropriate they can move onto learning elsewhere.

### **Impact of small interventions**

The issues discussed by learners when they talked about how they were getting on with their course suggest that lots of seemingly small interventions within the life of a course help learners to enjoy it, feel valued, and therefore be more likely to continue with the course, and more learning, in the future. Things that may appear insignificant- like the welcome people received; how well they got on with the tutor; how they related to others in the class; the fact that someone had thought to provide a folder that contained all they needed for the course; the fact that others were at the same ability level as them; and the way in which they could take exams when they felt they were ready- had a positive impact. Some of these issues could be taken account of when running and setting up a course, and could potentially make a difference.

### **Impact of incentives**

Incentives were not seen by any respondents as a reason why they would enrol on a course, and as such this research suggests that they cannot be seen as being effective in widening participation. However, it is worth noting that one of the respondents, who could be characterised as more 'hard-to-reach' than the others, had enrolled on the course as he had been offered vouchers by the Probation Service. On starting the course he found the learning itself enough to make the course worthwhile and claimed that the vouchers were now unimportant. However, the fact that the vouchers had been important for him at the start may indicate that those from more 'hard-to-reach' groups may be more likely to see incentives such as vouchers as a reason to enrol on a course.