Evaluation of the Foundation Learning Tier

LSC National Office

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

Submitted by GHK

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**Document Control**

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1 MAIN SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

This is the summary report of a programme of work to evaluate the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) undertaken by GHK between November 2006 and July 2007.

There were three key objectives of the evaluation.

- A baseline report on existing provision.
- An evaluation of the trial sites.
- Issues for a longer term evaluation.

This report summarises five earlier reports covering two stages of consultation with stakeholders, two stages of Trial site visits, and a baseline report of providing a summary and critique of existing provision below Level 2.

1.2 The Baseline Report

The purpose of the baseline report was to set out the scope, nature and quality of the existing offer for learners studying at Entry Level and Level 1. The baseline report concluded that:

- There has been an increase in provision in the three key strands of the FLT, however, the scope, quality and coherence of this varies.
- The availability and profile of SfL education has greatly increased as has embedding it and in making it accessible to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Vocational provision at Level 1 is increasingly being provided to 14-16 year olds. Vocational training for adults, however, remains focused on provision at Level 2 and above.
- The economic return to and availability of lower level qualifications raises questions about how valued these are by employers.
- Entry Level qualifications are available for school age pupils, however, there is little evidence that these act as a 'stepping stone' to higher level qualifications.
- A wide variety of Foundation Level personal and social development (PSD) is on offer.
- For the under-16s considerable progress has been made in developing a coherent subject-specific Foundation Level curriculum.
- The availability of work-based learning for adults has been important for engaging learners, particularly in the area of basic skills.
Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) has a strong track record in engaging learners but has been less successful in supporting learners and steering them towards higher levels of learning.

There is limited progression from Foundation Level learning to Level 2.

The attainment of Foundation Level qualifications is not clearly correlated with economic returns for learners, although it may increase their likelihood of gaining employment.

This analysis reinforces the need for the FLT to develop a more coherent strategic framework for provision below Level 2 in covering three core elements of learning, developing Validated Progression Pathways, provide support for a disparate group of learners, and effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).

1.3 The Trial Sites

Twenty of the 44 ‘live’ Trial sites were chosen to be included in GHK’s evaluation. They covered different types of learners, providers, provision and categories. There was a bias away from E2E provision with younger learners because many of the Trial sites covered such provision.

The first round of Trial site visits were undertaken between November 2006 and January 2007 and provided an overview of the provision the Trial sites were delivering, the number and types of learners involved, and their understanding of the aims and objectives of the FLT, the support they were receiving and any issues or challenges they were facing. The report on the first round of Trial visits concluded:

- There were important areas for development in terms of communicating the FLT overall and specific elements within it.
- There was uncertainty over what the FLT means overall and understanding of the main aims of the FLT was variable.
- There was a need for more support, examples of how the FLT operates; and links between Trial sites.
- Short timescales were also identified as an issue.
- There was an issue concerning the capacity of providers to deliver the FLT in the medium to longer term.
- There was also a lack of understanding of how parallel developments would impinge on the implementation of the FLT, for example, Specialised Diplomas.

Nonetheless, the first round of Trial visits demonstrated widespread acclaim and support for the introduction of the FLT. There was also general satisfaction with the support which Trial sites had received.

A second round of Trials visits was undertaken in June and July 2007 focusing on the main aims and objectives of the evaluation and distance travelled in understanding of the FLT and its key components. The report on the second round of Trial visits concluded:
- Understanding of the FLT remains an issue and its relationship with parallel developments.
- People were not clear about how Validated Progression Pathways would look like in practice.
- Trial sites had developed those strands they focused on, especially IAG and initial assessment, partnership working, and personalised learning. But many felt they had not informed and influenced the FLT programme of work.
- Most Trial sites were not clear about what would be happening during the phased implementation.
- Providers wanted more detail over what is going to happen in relation to the QCF, Validated Progression Pathways, funding and other key aspects.
- Most said that the support they’d received from the LSN Consultants had improved their understanding of the FLT but there had been a lack of information. Most did not feel that the LSC had been supportive and effective mostly because they still lacked important information.
- Many Trials would have liked an opportunity to network with other Trials but were unable to do so.
- Staff development and funding were key issues in taking the FLT forward.
- Trial sites were taking forward a number of key components underpinning the FLT including personalised learning, progression pathways collaborative provision and qualification unit and credit approaches but there were still aspects to be further developed and addressed.

1.4 Stakeholder Consultations
Two rounds of stakeholder interviews were undertaken; the first between November 2006 and January 2007, and the second between June and July 2007 covering about 25 interviewees.

The key conclusions drawn from the first round of stakeholder consultations were:
- There was widespread agreement that current provision below Level 2 is in need of reform and therefore, the concept of the FLT was widely welcomed.
- However few felt that they understood the development of the FLT. There was a perceived lack of understanding about the FLT as a whole, key elements within it, and how it related to other key developments.

The main conclusions from the second round of interviews were:
- The FLT continues to enjoy very strong support because it offers the potential to benefit the learning and skills need of individuals and employers. Implementing the FLT is recognised as a complex task.
- Stakeholders were clearer about what a Validated Progression Pathway is in the context of the FLT. However, there were still outstanding questions about
how the FLT contributes to the development of performance review frameworks.

- There remains confusion about how the FLT relates to other key developments.
- Stakeholders are clear that the process of phased implementation but remain less clear about delivery mechanisms, and the roles and responsibilities.

Objective 3: Implications for a longer term evaluation

The final objective of GHK’s evaluation of the FLT to date was to assess the implications of the first two strands of work with stakeholders, and with the Trials, in terms of the implications for a longer term evaluation concerning the future direction and development of the FLT. The key issues going forward are:

- There are a number of very positive developments emerging from the work on the FLT to date as well as significant challenges.
- Support for the FLT remains very high because the FLT is considered to offer the potential to add coherence, quality and progression to provision at this level.
- However, the Trials to date have provided limited insight.

The research has identified a number of important areas that will need to be addressed as part of phased implementation of the FLT from September 2007. These are:

- It is clear that a major communications effort is needed. Developing a robust communication strategy for the FLT will be important to support both the strategic and operational direction of phased implementation.
- The consultations identified some concern about the use of the term ‘Foundation’ within the titling for the FLT. This concern related to managing perceptions and understanding across the sector.
- The relationship between the FLT and 14-19 developments remains less clear, for example, Specialised Diplomas.
- The relationship between the FLT and the QCF is becoming more apparent and is critical. For example, the process of validation and accreditation of units and qualifications into the QCF, and drawing units from the QCF to populate Validated Progression Pathways1.

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1 In November 2005, ministers agreed the establishment of the UK Vocational Qualification Reform Programme (UK VQRP) to oversee reform by bringing together key strands of work across the UK, the overall aim of which is to develop a jointly regulated framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The UK Programme Board for Vocational Qualifications Reform was established at the beginning of 2006 to take this forward and the QCA was asked to enter a two year period of trialling and testing a revised qualifications framework, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The QCF will be a unit-based qualification framework underpinned by a system of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT).
The phased implementation of the FLT acquires greater significance because key elements were not available for the Trial sites, for example, Validated Progression Pathways and units and qualifications within the QCF.

More support will need to be made available for the phased implementation of the FLT, although it is not clear from the consultations to date what the exact nature of this support should be.

Clear guidance is needed for stakeholders and providers in terms of moving from the NQF to the QCF and what this means in terms of operational logistics: There needs, therefore, to be coordination of the phased implementation of the FLT and the workforce development work that will be planned by the QIA.

Funding is an important issue going forward, especially the continuity of funding of E2E into the FLT and what will be funded within the FLT, pathways or units.

Understanding the implications for measuring provider performance within the FLT is critical, for example, 'ownership' of the learner.
2 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Introduction

This is the summary report of a programme of work to evaluate the Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) undertaken by GHK Consulting Limited (GHK) for the LSC National Office.

The evaluation work was undertaken between November 2006 and July 2007.

2.2 Objectives

There were three key objectives of the evaluation. These were:

- **Objective 1**: A baseline report on existing provision, building on work already undertaken by the LSC and the QCA.

- **Objective 2**: An evaluation of the trial sites. This work was to focus on:
  - The effectiveness of the trial sites in informing the development and phased implementation of the FLT.
  - The effectiveness of the range, focus and support offered to trial sites.
  - The extent to which the trial sites have assisted in the identification of good practice to inform the phased implementation of the FLT (drawing on the baseline report).
  - The identification of any gaps or support needs arising out of the trial sites along with actions to resolve these.
  - The roles and practices of different types of providers, including specialist providers, involved in the trial sites and how different organisational structures may impinge upon the development and delivery of the FLT, and specifically Progression Pathways.
  - The effectiveness of units and qualifications drawn from the proposed credit and qualification framework in the context of the FLT, and Progression Pathways in particular.
  - The effectiveness of the LSC and QCA in supporting and managing trial sites.

It is important to note that the Trial sites were based on existing provision and there was no additional funding associated with their involvement in the Trials.

- **Objective 3**: Issues for a longer term evaluation. This was broader in its reach than the evaluation of the trial sites, but informed by the latter. The purpose of the longer term evaluation was to examine how prepared the LSC and QCA are for the phased implementation of the FLT, and how far the necessary baselines and milestones are in place, to ensure that phased
implementation can successfully take place from September 2007 and build into complete implementation by 2010. This element of the work included:

- Identifying the minimum requirements for the phased implementation.
- Examining the relationship between the FLT and other initiatives, how these are being managed, as well as evaluating the FLT’s interdependency with the UK Vocational Qualification Reform Programme (UKVQRP) and 14-19 reform programme.

2.3 Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is two-fold:

- Firstly, to present a summary of the findings of the work undertaken to date, covering Objectives 1 and 2 of the evaluation.
- Secondly, to examine the implications of this for a longer term evaluation, including the broader issues raised concerning the relationship between the FLT and other initiatives as part of Objective 3 of the evaluation.

In so doing, this report draws on five earlier reports that have been submitted by GHK under Strands 1 and 2 of the evaluation to date. These are:

3 OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM BASELINE, AND FROM TRIAL SITES AND STAKEHOLDERS.

3.1 The Baseline Report

The purpose of the baseline report was to set out the scope, nature and quality of the existing offer for learners studying at Entry Level and Level 1. It was based on consultations with stakeholders but primarily on a review of published reports commissioned by the LSC and the QCA, together with other identified relevant research. The baseline report concluded that:

- In recent years, in association with an increased policy focus, there has been an increase in provision in the key strands of the FLT, namely, in Skills for Life (SfL), vocational and subject specific learning and in Personal and Social Development (PSD). However, the scope, quality and coherence of this provision vary considerably.

- The availability and profile of SfL education has greatly increased as a result of government target-setting, fees remission for adults, flexible access through e-learning and credit-based units of achievement, radio and press campaigns and workplace-based initiatives. Progress has also been made in embedding SfL learning in vocational and other courses and in making SfL provision accessible to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The offer is being further streamlined by merging key skills and basic skills into ‘functional skills’.

- Vocational provision at Level 1 is increasingly being provided to 14-16 year olds who are eligible for the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP), indicating that progress has been made towards individualised learning pathways for this cohort. Vocational training for adults, however, remains focused on provision at Level 2 and above, although just under half of the Level 1 awards in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) are vocationally related qualifications (VRQs).

- The economic return to lower level National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) raises questions about how valued these are by employers. Provision at Entry Level is particularly sporadic and units are not available in many sectors. However, the vocational route is most likely to lead to progression, and a number of programmes are attempting to secure employer buy-in to developing and valuing Foundation Level training.

- Entry Level qualifications are available for most GCSE subjects and are becoming increasingly popular with school age pupils. There is however little

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3 An initial analysis was also carried out of the LSC Learning Aims Database (LAD) together with Individual Leaner Record (ILR) to assess whether this could provide statistical information on the number and title of qualifications at these levels. However, because of methodological problems in interpreting the data this was not continued.
evidence that these act as a ‘stepping stone’ to higher level qualifications. Subject specific learning for adults is dominated by the arts and ICT, and is often taken by adults who already have Level 2 qualifications.

- A wide variety of Foundation Level PSD is on offer. Much of this is unaccredited, and detailed information about enrolment figures is hard to come by. The establishment of Entry to Employment (E2E) is a stimulus for the development of targeted PSD provision, although only a minority of participants actually complete any Individual Development Plan (IDP) objectives.

- For the under-16s considerable progress has been made in developing a coherent subject-specific Foundation Level curriculum and in directing young people who can benefit from it towards vocational subjects.

- The availability of work-based learning for adults has been important for engaging learners, particularly in the area of basic skills.

- Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) has a strong track record in engaging learners through outreach and designing courses building on their existing interests. PCDL has been less successful in supporting learners and steering them towards higher levels of learning.

- There is limited progression from Foundation Level learning to Level 2. This can be attributed partly to the absence of clear progression routes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Other factors that also contribute to learners’ failure to progress include: poor support, a lack of information and guidance, a lack of roll-on, roll-off provision in colleges, and the personal challenges that many multiple-disadvantaged learners face, which means gaining even a Foundation Level qualification is a major achievement.

- The attainment of Foundation Level qualifications is not clearly correlated with economic returns for learners, although it may increase their likelihood of gaining employment. There are a variety of other benefits both for the individual (increased self-esteem, propensity to participate in further learning and better communication skills) and for wider society, in terms of productivity gains for industry, improved participation, and intergenerational improvements in educational attainment.

- Hence, the analysis of existing research into provision below Level 2 provided in the baseline report reinforces the need for the LSC and QCA to work together to develop a more coherent strategic framework for provision below Level 2. In particular, the analysis emphasises the need to: cover the three core elements of learning together (SfL, vocational/subject and PSD); developing Validated Progression Pathways; provide support for a disparate group of learners, and; effective Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).
3.2 The Trial Sites

3.2.1 Introduction

Twenty ‘live’ Trial sites were chosen to be included in GHK’s evaluation. There were seven ‘categories’ of the FLT: progression pathways; the Qualification and Curriculum Framework (QCF); IAG/initial assessment/learner review; collaborative provision; personalised learning approaches; integrated curriculum, and; programmes below Entry Level 1. At least one Trial site covered each of these categories. Trial sites were chosen to cover all English regions, all seven categories, different types of providers (including Voluntary and Community Sector [VCS] providers and special schools) and as broad a range of learners as possible (such as, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, Black and Minority Ethnic learners, offenders, young people and adults). The selection of Trial sites to be included in this evaluation was skewed away from E2E type provision with young learners. This was because a lot of ‘live’ Trial sites included this provision and we did not want to be covering a number of sites which were delivering similar provision to a similar cohort. Therefore, the selection was biased more towards adult provision, and provision to particular disadvantaged and disaffected learner groups, for example, offenders, unemployed people, people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and care leavers.

The Trial sites selected as part of the evaluation covered different types of learners, providers, provision and categories:

- Eight were working with young people (16-18 year olds), six were working with adults (19+) and six were working with both young people and adults. One provider included a small number of 14-16 learners as well.

- The largest groups of learners were from the E2E cohort (included in 7 Trial sites), learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (7), hard to reach (5), Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) (5), offenders (1) (although other Trial sites were also working with offenders, for example, through community based provision), ESOL (1), unemployed people (1), Black and Minority Ethnic people (1), low socio-economic groups (SEG) (1), at risk of dropping out of learning (1), and have dropped out of E2E (1). However, many providers were working with a range of different groups of learners. Three providers were not working with any learners as part of the Trials but planned to do so. These Trials had identified a group of learners but were exploring in more detail what the FLT meant for their learners, in what ways it could be provided, and the implications for organisational practice, resources and capacity. Three Trial sites were consortia and these covered VCS providers delivering to distinct cohorts (e.g. homeless people and lone parents), to more vocationally oriented FE based provision.

- The following vocational areas were covered; IT, business administration, leisure, sport and tourism, and construction were the most frequently offered. This was in addition to a range of PSD courses (e.g. money management, healthy eating), SfL, basic skills and key skills courses, short courses (such as, health and safety and first aid), and PCDL - type courses designed to ‘hook’ learners into learning.

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4 The Trial sites provided examples of possible models for the development of progression pathways.
All categories were covered.

3.2.2 First Round of Visits

The first round of Trial site visits were undertaken between November 2006 and January 2007 and focused on providing an overview of the provision the Trial sites were delivering including: recruitment; initial assessment; IAG; programme delivery; learner review; and the extent to which the three curriculum elements (vocational/subject, basic skills, and personal and social development) were integrated at each stage. We also asked Trial sites for an overview of the number and types of learners they were working with, and their understanding of the aims and objectives of the FLT, the support they were receiving and any issues or challenges they were facing.6

The report on the first round of Trial visits included a number of conclusions and recommendations. These were:

- There were important areas for development in terms of communicating the FLT overall and specific elements within it. The Trial sites were experienced in delivering provision below Level 2 and had already developed or wanted to develop programmes based around what the FLT is trying to achieve. However, Trials were generally lacking in confidence that what they were doing was consistent with what the FLT is and will become.

- There was uncertainty over what the FLT means overall and understanding of the main aims of the FLT was variable. There was also a lack of understanding of the operational detail of key components especially the QCF and Validated Progression Pathways and there was a widespread need to see concrete examples of what progression pathways are and what, in practice, the QCF will look like.

- The need for more support was also identified including: more guidance, examples and case studies of how the FLT operates; and greater links between the Trial sites to foster understanding and confidence of people developing and delivering the FLT.

- Timescales were also identified as an issue with concern over what the Trials would be able to produce in the short timescale, and what happens to the Trials and the FLT under the phased implementation beginning in September 2007.

- It was also concluded that there was an issue concerning the capacity of providers to deliver the FLT in the medium to longer term. The providers interviewed were already leading developments in provision below Level 2 and yet they were still having problems in understanding the FLT overall and key

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6 Wherever possible we arranged joint meetings with LSN Consultants commissioned by the QIA. This was in order to minimise the impact on providers.
mechanisms and principles within it. This lack of understanding is likely to be exacerbated across the large and diverse number of non-Trial providers who are more likely to have problems grappling with the concept and delivery of the FLT.

- The first round of consultations also identified a range of other developments occurring within the sector that were likely to impinge on the implementation of the FLT. These related to: the development of 14-19 provision as a whole; Specialised Diplomas; Mapping Information Across Providers (MIAP) project; the UKVQRP; the Framework for Excellence (FfE); Sector Qualification Strategies (SQSs); the role of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), and; employer defined and led provision post-Leitch. We therefore indicated the need to support providers’ understanding of each of these elements in relation to each other.

- Nonetheless, the first round of Trial visits demonstrated widespread acclaim and support for the introduction of the FLT. In particular, in terms of providing a better learning experience for a diverse, disaffected and disadvantaged cohort, and helping them to progress whether this be through to Level 2 or into independent living or supported employment.

- There was also general satisfaction with the support which Trial sites had received, and initial communication efforts, although there was still room for improvement.

3.2.3 Second Round of Visits

A second round of Trials visits was undertaken in June and July 2007. The second round of visits focused on the main aims and objectives of the evaluation. Some questions were repeated in the second round in order to measure the distance travelled by the Trial sites. In all, 97 interviews were undertaken across the 20 Trial sites, mostly face-to-face. These included the strategic lead(s) for each Trial, plus a range of operational staff who were more directly involved in delivering FLT provision. The strategic lead person included heads of consortium, principals, managing directors and heads of departments. Operational staff included a range of delivery staff (mostly tutors) as well as support staff. Support staff were only interviewed if their role was fundamental to the delivery of the learning programme (e.g. PAs).

The report on the second round of Trial visits included the following conclusions:

- Understanding of the FLT remains an issue. Whilst three quarters of those interviewed said they understood the objectives of the FLT, few were able to mention all of its key elements. The main areas of confusion concerned the relationship between the FLT and 14-19 developments, especially Specialised Diplomas, and the QCF. In addition, the great majority of those interviewed also expressed confusion about how the FLT will be funded and how the FLT is different to what is being delivered at the moment, especially E2E.

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7 A number of interviews were also carried out with learners initially but it was decided not to continue with this because no meaningful outcomes were possible; there was little that learners could be asked about that was specific to the FLT.
Most people’s understanding of Validated Progression Pathways was that they thought they understood it but were not clear what one would look like in practice. Respondents were unclear about what ‘validated’ meant and also about lateral or horizontal progression, the inclusion of pre-entry units, timescales and the input from SSCs. Many Trial sites still said that their experience of a Trial site has not improved their understanding of what a Validated Progression Pathway is.

However, it is also clear that involvement as a Trial site had enabled providers to develop the strands they were focusing on, especially IAG and initial assessment, partnership working, and personalised learning. When asked if they had, as a Trial site, informed and influenced the FLT programme of work half said ‘Yes’ but half said ‘No’. Those who felt they had impacted on the development of the FLT said they have been able to raise issues about the FLT generally, and in relation to specific learner groups, and others had used the Trial to consider their provision a lot more. For those Trials who felt that they have had no influence, the most common response was that they felt it has been a top down exercise.

Most Trial sites were not clear about what would be happening during the phased implementation, they felt that there had been no clear communication about what will happen, even though we were fast approaching July. However, this was not necessarily causing any major practical concerns as people assumed they would simply carry on.

When asked whether they would require any further support in preparing for or delivering Validated Progression Pathways as part of the phased implementation, many respondents could not answer. This was either because they did not know whether they would be chosen as part of the first stage of the national roll-out in September 2007 or the details of what would happen during the phased implementation.

The great majority of those consulted still indicated that they wanted more detail over what is going to happen in relation to the QCF, Validated Progression Pathways, resources, Unique Learner Numbers (ULNs), achievement sets, and pre-entry provision. Most Trial sites envisaged that they would need additional support if included in the first stage of the phased implementation but were unclear on the specifics of that support.

Most said that the support they’d received from the LSN Consultants had improved their understanding of the FLT, the activities they were focusing on as a Trial site, and had served as a critical friend. However, support was constrained by the lack of information about the FLT and its key elements. The majority of the Trial sites were also unsure as to the remit of the LSN Consultants and did not believe they had been receiving ‘support’ in the purest sense; rather that they had been helping consultants to write reports.

When asked about the involvement of the LSC - whether this had been supportive and effective - three Trial sites said ‘Yes’, eight said ‘Yes and No’, and nine said ‘No’. A key criticism, even from those who were satisfied with the LSC’s support, was that even if they have been supportive they still lacked important information.
Many Trials would have liked an opportunity to network with other Trials but were unable to do so, either because the time at conferences was limited or because they were unaware of what other Trial sites were focusing on. Some also criticised the events because they were unable to directly ask questions, having to write them on post-its instead, which the LSC representatives selected and responded to later.

In further developing and delivering the FLT most Trial sites did expect that there would be staff development issues around comprehending it and delivering new progression pathways and qualifications. Funding was also raised as an important issue going forward, especially the continuity of funding of E2E into the FLT and what will be funded within the FLT, pathways or units.

With regard to delivery, the report examined how key components underpinning the FLT, such as progression pathways, were currently delivered and what opportunities and challenges the FLT brought to these elements. The main conclusions were:

- Learning programmes tended to be personalised through an E2E type process i.e. initial assessments feeding into ILPs which were reviewed on a regular basis and where progress towards individual targets were measured. Provision tended to be in groups covering a range of learners but activities within these groups was geared towards an individual's ability.

- Respondents raised a number of barriers to greater personalised learning at the moment, including identifying 'true need', being able to cover a wide range of needs, working with learners whose attendance was enforced, the qualifications level of those doing IAG, and personalising work placements. However, most respondents were positive and optimistic about the opportunities for personalised learning under the FLT, especially being able to accredit a wider range of provision and smaller steps, credit accumulation and transfer, an increased learner focus, creating a level playing field between training providers, and creating a firmer footing for PSD.

- There was a general concern raised that Validated Progression Pathways might be too restrictive. However, it needs to be remembered that none of those consulted in the Trials had any real knowledge of what was being intended or of the development of a number of Validated Progression Pathways models underway by the QCA. They were therefore expressing a general concern, not one based on what was being proposed.

- Most Trial sites said that they already used qualification unit and credit approaches in at least some form at the moment (those delivering to

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8 Most of these responses came from staff more involved in the delivery of learning programmes, including those involved in the Trial.
younger people who felt that E2E was a unit and credit approach and those working with adults who generally used OCN units to accredit learner’s progress). Those who did not do so believed that this was an aspiration they had depending on funding and the QCF. The principal barriers of developing a unit and credit based approach that were identified included: the costs of registering with awarding bodies; the lack of appropriate units and qualifications which could be trialled (the expectation being that the QCF would be further advanced); and the brief time providers had with some learners.

- Most providers said that they did not use other training providers in delivering their current learning programmes below Level 2 and considered that it was not necessary. Some of the Trials were working as consortia and this had raised issues over collaborative provision, especially ownership of the learner (and of the targets and the success measures), the conservatism of learners in travelling, and data protection. Those who identified these issues did so within the umbrella of long established partnership, consortia or subcontracted arrangements. However, they also saw the FLT offering potential benefits in terms of enhanced partnership by broadening the offer and provision to learners, being able to offer more courses and progression pathways, tailoring provision to specific groups of learners, providing more varied experiences, and assisting with progression.

- All of the Trials consulted expected learners to progress within and beyond their learning programmes, usually into FE (ranging from E2E to Level 2 and apprenticeships) or into employment. There was clear agreement on the three main areas of opportunity afforded by Validated Progression Pathways - increased personalisation, enhanced progression and providing a clearer structure and framework.

### 3.3 Stakeholder Consultations

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

Two rounds of stakeholder interviews were undertaken; the first between November 2006 and January 2007, and the second between June and July 2007. In the first round 25 interviews were undertaken and in the second round 23. In some cases the named person to be interviewed changed between the first and second rounds due to organisational changes. Whereas the focus in the first round of consultations was on the rationale for and components of the FLT, in the second round this was broadened out to focus on how the issues they raised in the first round had changed, how the FLT had been supported and managed to date, and issues for the phased implementation.

#### 3.3.2 Initial discussions with stakeholders

The key conclusions drawn from the first round of stakeholder consultations were:

- There was widespread agreement that current provision below Level 2 is in need of reform and there is a need for a much clearer strategic framework in order to make it more beneficial to learners. Therefore, the concept of the FLT was widely welcomed across the range of stakeholders we spoke to, notwithstanding that there were concerns that developments have taken too long.
However, at that time, many of those consulted felt that they had a limited awareness of, and involvement in, the development of the FLT. There was a perceived lack of understanding about the FLT as a whole, and key elements within it, particularly Validated Progression Pathways. There was also confusion over how the FLT related to other key developments e.g. 14-19 Specialised Diplomas, SQSs and the QCF but it was acknowledged that this was because these were all in varying stages of development and had not yet reached concrete conclusions. The expectation was that the Trials would begin to answer some of these questions, although doubts were expressed about their coverage, timescales and lack of additional funding.

However, our report noted that some of these concerns could be explained by people's lack of involvement in the FLT's processes to date. For example, some people were new to their positions, there had been a large-scale reorganisation of the LSC, and some people were awaiting the outcome of the Leitch Review to clearly refine their remit.

3.3.3 Second round discussions with stakeholders
A second round of interviews with stakeholders was conducted in June and July 2007. Discussions focussed on whether issues that were raised six months ago had been clarified and had improved, as well as how the FLT had developed to date and what needed to happen next. The main conclusions were as follows:

- The FLT continues to enjoy very strong support across the range of stakeholders we spoke to, notwithstanding that there are concerns that developments have taken too long. It is felt that the FLT offers the potential to add coherence, quality and progression to Entry and Level 1 provision and therefore benefit the learning and skills need of individuals and employers.

- It is evident that a clearer understanding has developed across stakeholders about what a Validated Progression Pathway is in the context of the FLT. Progress with describing and populating Validated Progression Pathways is understood to be slow and until Validated Progression Pathways are populated by units taken from the QCF, stakeholders considered it is not possible to fully understand learner achievement and progression within the FLT. Many concerns were raised over the time taken to develop the concept of Validated Progression Pathways.

- Outstanding questions about Validated Progression Pathways underpin confusion about how the FLT contributes to the development of performance review frameworks. Most people agreed that the FLT should contribute to performance review frameworks, but a great deal of care was needed in determining how, and who is involved in that performance review. For those already involved in it, there are concerns over the future role of RARPA within the FLT.

- There remains confusion about how the FLT relates to other key developments such as the 14-19 Specialised Diplomas, and the extended learner entitlement. However, the majority of stakeholders are very clear now as to the importance of the strategic link with the QCF, although few understand the detail of this relationship.

- There is a high degree of support for the concept of the FLT and its potential to improve progression opportunities for learners below Level 2. Implementing the
FLT is, however, recognised as a complex task and all of those consulted were sympathetic to the technical difficulties involved with this.

- Stakeholders are clear that the process of phased implementation will commence from September 2007 and that this will be undertaken in two phases. What is less clear are the delivery mechanisms that will support this implementation, and the roles and responsibilities of the key staff involved.
4 OBJECTIVE 3: IMPLICATIONS FOR A LONGER TERM EVALUATION

The final objective of GHK’s evaluation of the FLT to date was to assess the implications of the first two strands of work with stakeholders, and with the Trials, in terms of the implications for a longer term evaluation concerning the future direction and development of the FLT.

This includes consideration of how prepared both the LSC and QCA are, and how far the necessary baselines and milestones are in place, to ensure that phased implementation can successfully take place from September 2007 and build into complete implementation by 2010. In short, the longer-term evaluation must identify the minimum requirements for the phased implementation. The longer-term evaluation will also need to take into account a broader picture of the relationship between the FLT and other initiatives, and how these are being managed, as well as evaluating the FLT’s interdependency with the UKVQRP and 14-19 reform.

4.1 Key issues

Our assessment of the key issues going forward is as follows:

- **It is evident from the research undertaken that there are a number of very positive developments emerging from the work on the FLT to date. Equally, there are a number of less positive outcomes, as well as significant challenges, in terms of the phased implementation of the FLT for completion by 2010.**

- **Support for the FLT remains very high.** There is widespread agreement that current provision below Level 2 is in need of reform and there is a need for a much clearer strategic framework in order to make it more beneficial to learners. The FLT is considered to offer the potential to add coherence, quality and progression to Entry and Level 1 provision and, therefore, benefit the learning and skills need of individuals and employers. Going forward, therefore, there is a high level of motivation for the FLT to succeed.

- **However, the Trials to date have provided limited insight.** There was an expectation that the Trial sites would provide the opportunity to test a number of key elements within the FLT. Given the complexity and technical difficulties associated with developing some of these different elements, and particularly as they relate to the QCF and Validated Progression Pathways, it has not been possible to do this fully within the timescales for the Trials. A number of questions therefore remain unanswered going forward into the phased implementation.

4.2 Important considerations for phased implementation of the FLT

The research has identified a number of important areas that will need to be addressed as part of phased implementation of the FLT from September 2007. These are:
1. It is clear that a major communications effort is needed. Developing a robust communication strategy for the FLT will be important to support both the strategic and operational direction of phased implementation in order to:

- Raise the profile of the FLT within the wider FE sector to reinforce the FLT is something that is in the mainstream and here to stay.
- Communicate what the FLT is, what it is hoping to achieve, what are the strategic and operational definitions and implications of its core elements.
- Make clear how the FLT relates to other important ongoing 14-19 developments and qualification reform.
- Undertake more consultation with training providers, and schools in particular, to understand the implications and impact of the FLT in terms of the: capacity to respond to changes; professional development needs; and the impact on curriculum planning.
- Provide further details about the process for phased implementation in terms of the:
  - Timescales, key milestones and deliverables.
  - Individual roles, responsibilities as they relate to: managing phased implementation, and; supporting delivery within the FLT from September 2007.
  - Expectations on local and regional LSC partnership teams.
  - Which providers will be involved in the phased implementation of the FLT from September, and what will be the purpose and scope of the initial stage of the phased implementation.
- Marketing Validate Progression Pathways as a single brand across the ability range and across the full age range.

2. The consultations identified some concern about the use of the term ‘Foundation’ within the titling for the FLT. This concern related to managing perceptions and understanding across the sector. On the basis of the work undertaken to date with the Trials and with stakeholders, it is evident that the FLT describes a number of measures that have been developed in recognition of the special needs of all learners trying to achieve qualifications below Level 2 within the QCF. These measures are designed to improve and enhance:

- Achievement;
- Progression, and;
- Effectiveness of the QCF below Level 2.

These measures include:
3. The relationship between the FLT and 14-19 developments remains less clear. There remains confusion about how the FLT relates to 14-19 Specialised Diplomas, the new 14-19 Diploma which is available from September 2008 at Levels 1-3, and the extended learner entitlement. SfL provision is in the process of being phased out and replaced by functional skills\(^9\) and while the first core strand of the FLT offer in the QCF reflects this, the links between the FLT and the timelines for this work are yet to be fully understood.\(^10\)

4. The relationship between the FLT and the QCF is becoming more apparent and is critical. The reason for this is that the units and qualifications that will populate a Validated Progression Pathway will need to be drawn from the QCF. Therefore, the provision made available within Validated Progression Pathways will be dependent on the provision below Level 2 included in the QCF, and as such, so will the following:

- The coherence and coverage of units and qualifications on offer.
- The consistency and quality of units and qualifications on offer (as such, meeting the validated criterion).
- The mechanics of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT).

5. There are other issues that have been raised in the evaluation work on the FLT to date that also relate to the QCF and, in particular, to the process of validation and accreditation of units and qualifications into the QCF. These include:

- The government’s response to Leitch, and the proposals set out for delivering a demand led system (in which the role of SQS is given prominence in identifying priority qualifications) raise issues about the way in which this will work below Level 2. For example, if SQSs do not deal effectively with provision below Level 2, how and who will identify and approve the units and qualifications that are needed for the FLT and Validated Progression Pathways?

- If it is likely sector bodies will focus on qualifications above Level 2, and that the economic returns to qualifications below this level are small, who will determine priority qualifications below Level 2? This is important for the LSC

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\(^9\) The last date of registration of basic and key skills is 2010. By 2012 all reaccredited units will be known as functional skills and will meet the functional skills standards.

\(^10\) The QCA publication *Functional Skills: essential for life, learning and work* outlines the timelines for a three-year pilot programme, which will begin in September 2007 with the aim of full qualifications being introduced for first teaching in 2010.
in determining priority qualifications for funding going forward in its Annual Statement of Priorities.

- There is also a range of issues emerging from the interim evaluation of the QCF Tests and Trials that will also impact on the FLT. These include:
  
  - In general, how will the rationalisation of units and qualifications below Level 2 (that will populate the QCF) be achieved, in order to realise one of the overriding objectives of the FLT i.e. to provide a more coherent and strategic offer?
  
  - The ownership of units and qualifications below Level 2 and therefore their availability to populate Validated Progression Pathways.
  
  - The potential going forward to increase the range of bodies given status to develop both units and qualifications within the QCF, including those below Level 2.

6. The **phased implementation of the FLT acquires greater significance because of the lack of evidence to date**. Therefore there is a need to ensure that the phased implementation:

   - Provides the opportunities to examine Validated Progression Pathways in appropriate contexts and provide the necessary coverage.
   
   - Has access to units and qualifications within the QCF. This work is currently being fast-tracked by the QCA and is crucial for the credibility of the phased implementation.
   
   - Help to provide examples and case studies as soon as possible that can help the sector better understand what the FLT will mean for them in practice as phased implementation moves forward.

7. **More support will need to be made available for the phased implementation of the FLT**, although it is not clear from the consultations to date what the exact nature of this support should be. This therefore needs to be established with each provider engaged in the first part of the phased implementation at an early stage. Providers consulted through the research indicated that there should be more supported opportunities for those participating to share experience and exchange information on issues arising from the FLT, particularly in utilising the models that have been developed for Validated Progression Pathways.

8. **Clear guidance is needed for stakeholders and providers in terms of moving from the NQF to the QCF and what this means in terms of operational logistics** for:

   - How to combine units, qualification and credits within Validate Progression Pathways; and
   
   - How providers understand this from an IAG point of view.
9. There needs, therefore, to be coordination of the phased implementation of the FLT and the workforce development work that will be planned by the QIA since the experience from the Trials suggests that there will be challenges in developing the capacity of the sector, in particular, for those providers who have had little or no prior experience in the use of units and credit.

10. Funding is an important issue going forward, especially the continuity of funding of E2E into the FLT and what will be funded within the FLT, pathways or units. This has several components:

   - To what extent is a funding model for the FLT required that is different to that to be developed for the QCF?
   - How are additional measures that are included in the FLT over and above the QCF to be funded and in particular:
     - Would it be possible to fund progression pathways as opposed to volumes of units and qualifications?
     - If not, how will the costs of additional learner support be funded?

11. Understanding the implications for measuring provider performance is critical. There will clearly be implications going forward for measuring provider performance and how this relates to Validate Progression Pathways. At the same time, the FLT offers potential benefits in terms of enhanced partnership by broadening the offer and provision to learners, being able to offer more courses and progression pathways, tailoring provision to specific groups of learners, providing more varied experiences, and assisting with progression. However, issues such as the ‘ownership’ of the learner will need to be clarified under FLT arrangements, particularly as they relate to targets and success measures. Included within this is the need to ensure that all providers delivering Validate Progression Pathways in 2007/08 have the capacity and capability to use the ULN and the LAR systems for all learners on QCF provision.