Learner Journeys
Research – Adult Learning Grant

March 2010

Of interest to staff and stakeholders with an interest in Learner Support
# Table of Contents

1 Executive Summary ............................................................................................................ 1
    1.1 Background ................................................................................................................ 1
    1.2 Engagement ............................................................................................................... 1
    1.3 Retention and persistence in learning ......................................................................... 1
    1.4 Achievement ............................................................................................................... 1
    1.5 Learning progression .................................................................................................. 2
    1.6 Employment progression ............................................................................................ 2
    1.7 Personal and social benefits ....................................................................................... 2
    1.8 Conclusions ................................................................................................................ 2

2 Background ......................................................................................................................... 4
    2.1 Background ................................................................................................................ 4
    2.2 Methodology ............................................................................................................... 4
    2.3 Sample profile ............................................................................................................. 5

3 Engagement ....................................................................................................................... 7
    Key findings ...................................................................................................................... 7
    3.1 Impact of funding on course take up ........................................................................... 7
    3.2 Reasons for taking up the course ............................................................................... 8
    3.3 Financial concerns before starting the course ............................................................. 9
    3.4 Information on funding ..............................................................................................10
    3.5 Information, advice or guidance on funding ..............................................................10

4 Retention and Persistence in Learning ..............................................................................12
    Key findings ......................................................................................................................12
    4.1 Value of funding to completing/staying on the course ...............................................12
    4.2 Early leaving ............................................................................................................. 13
    4.3 On-going or further financial assistance ....................................................................15

5 Achievement ..................................................................................................................... 16
    Key findings ......................................................................................................................16
    5.1 Achievement of qualifications ................................................................................... 16

6 Learning Progression ........................................................................................................19
    Key findings ......................................................................................................................19
    6.1 Learning progression ..................................................................................................19
LSC Learner Journeys Research – ALG

6.2 Level of further learning ................................................................. 20
6.3 Funding of further learning ................................................................. 21
6.4 Impact of ALG on learning progression .................................................. 22
6.5 Achievement from further learning ....................................................... 23
6.6 Take up of further learning by early leavers ............................................. 23

7 Employment Progression ........................................................................ 25
   Key findings .............................................................................................. 25
   7.1 Extent to which funded learning helped career progression ................. 25
   7.2 Employment status: before and after the original course ....................... 25
   7.3 Financial benefits ................................................................................. 26
   7.4 Career progression ............................................................................... 27

8 Personal and Social Benefits .................................................................... 29

9 Overview .................................................................................................... 30

10 Appendix .................................................................................................. 32
   10.1 Sample error ....................................................................................... 32
1 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

This survey was commissioned to determine the impact of the financial assistance available to learners on participation and achievement. Its main aim was to understand how well the funding provided by the LSC is helping learners with regard to the four stages of their learning, including finding out about the course and making the decision to take up a course; actually taking up a course and staying on it to the end; completion of a course and achieving qualifications; and moving on to further learning.

Overall, 2,005 interviews were conducted amongst learners receiving Adult Learning Grant (ALG).

1.2 Engagement

On the face of it ALG has only a minimal impact on engagement in learning. Just 15% of learners who had heard about the funding before deciding to do their funded course may not have done the course if the funding had not been available. However, three-quarters of all learners were concerned about having enough money whilst on the course. There were also significant levels of concern about other costs, including affording course materials and transport.

Most learners (83%) found it easy to find out about ALG.

Two-fifths of learners received general advice or guidance about financial support for learning. Clearly there is scope for wider access to advisory services.

1.3 Retention and persistence in learning

The retention rate (estimated by the survey) for learners supported by ALG is 93%. This is higher than the national average for all FE learners (88% in 2006/07).

ALG has a largely positive impact on retention. Most of those that have completed or still on the course (84%) feel that they could not have finished or stayed on their course or would have struggled financially without the funding.

The main reasons for early leaving are changes in personal circumstances and financial issues. Financial issues are a significant factor and more than half the early leavers (52%) reporting that financial issues influenced their decision to leave their course.

Amongst those who left the course before completion, general living costs are the most frequent cause of financial problems whilst in learning. Nearly half cite transport costs with far fewer citing the cost of course materials and books.

1.4 Achievement

The success rate (estimated by the survey) for learners supported by ALG is 90%. This is higher than the national average for all FE learners (78% in 2006/07).

Nearly all those completing their original course (97%) achieved a qualification. A large majority agrees that ALG funding helped them to achieve a qualification.
The proportion of learners with an NVQ equivalent qualification increased following their ALG funded course.

1.5 Learning progression

More than half the learners who are no longer on their funded course have progressed into, or registered for, further learning and, of these, most (93%) have progressed to a higher level.

Of those who failed to complete their original learning and have not progressed, 67% said they would have considered more learning if more financial support had been available.

More than three-fifths of those who are either still on or have completed their further learning have received some financial assistance. Thus, nearly two-fifths have continued learning without financial support.

Financial support received for further learning is most likely to have been from a range of other grants for learners including student loans and bursaries.

All the learners who achieved a qualification from their further learning and received funding for this learning, report that the financial support helped them to achieve more qualifications.

Nearly two-thirds of those achieving a qualification from their further learning achieved a Level 3 qualification for the first time; and around one in ten gained an NVQ equivalent qualification where before they had none.

1.6 Employment progression

The great majority (86%) of learners believe that the funding they received helped them progress in their work/career. Of these, half (43% overall) feel it helped a great deal.

Following learning, learners are more likely to be in employment or to be actively seeking employment, but the gains are largely due to the fact that half the learners were in full-time learning prior to taking up the funded course. Much new employment (about two-thirds) is part-time, the proportion of those who are unemployed, both actively seeking work and inactive has risen.

1.7 Personal and social benefits

The perceived benefits of undertaking learning supported by ALG are wide-ranging and encompass a number of personal and social gains. Just 1% of all respondents feel they have not gained any personal and social benefits from the funded learning.

1.8 Conclusions

Strengths

- ALG is able to generate a retention rate amongst its recipients which is higher than that of all students in further education.
- Although ALG-supported learners are unlikely to credit the funding with enabling them to take up learning, financial reasons are a relatively significant reason given for early leaving and more than half of early leavers cite money issues as an influencing factor.
Achivement of ALG-supported learners is significant. 97% of those who completed their courses achieved a qualification. Most of these qualifications were at levels which increase the probability of employment and learning progression. 83% were at level 2 or above and 53% were at level 3 or above.

Learning progression following ALG-funded learning is significant. 28% have taken up further learning and 27% have registered for further learning.

This further learning has already delivered further qualifications for 80% of learners who undertook it.

For those learners who were in employment before and after ALG-supported learning, significant increases in income have been experienced.

And those who are now employed, report a range of career benefits including greater responsibility, better pay and movement into a permanent position.

Issues to consider in the further development of ALG

Evidence that ALG exerts strong leverage on supported learners’ decisions to enter and remain on the course for which they are funded is not wholly convincing. 75% say they would definitely (44%) or probably (31%) have undertaken the course even if ALG had not been available. Only 15% say they would definitely or probably not have done it. Although two-thirds of supported learners said they would have struggled financially during the course if ALG had not been available, only 15% said that ALG funding was essential to their completing and 17% said that the funding made no difference to their staying on and completing the course.

Post-ALG outcomes probably reflect prevailing economic circumstances rather than anything concerned with ALG itself. However, these outcomes are not particularly positive: 27% of supported learners have continued in education; 44% are in work, but 64% of these are in part-time jobs and only 69% are in jobs (full- or part-time) which they regard as permanent; 29% are neither in education nor employment, including 18% who are unemployed and seeking work and 11% who are not working and not seeking work. These findings suggest that many people need assistance towards the end of their courses to help them find positive directions when those courses end.
2 Background

2.1 Background

In February 2008, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) commissioned BMG Research to undertake a survey to determine the impact of the financial support schemes available to learners.

The main aim of the research is to understand how well the funding provided by the LSC is helping learners on their courses, with the focus on four key stages of learning comprising:

- Finding out about a course, including making the decision to take up a course;
- Actually taking up a course and staying on it to the end;
- Completion of a course and achieving qualifications;
- Moving onto further learning; and the impact of funded learning on career and personal development.

More particularly, learners were asked a range of key questions relevant to each of the four key stages of learning and beyond:

- **Engagement/Participation:** Is the funding helping to raise interest in taking up learning? Is it encouraging people to take up learning, who might not have not been able to if the funding was not there to help them?
- **Retention:** Does the funding help learners to stay on a course until the end? Does it help prevent learners from dropping out, such as learners who might have had to stop learning to earn money if the funding was not there to support them?
- **Achievement:** Does the funding help learners complete their course and achieve a qualification, or achieve a higher qualification than they might have if the funding wasn’t there?
- **Progression:** Does the funding encourage learners to think about future courses, or has it encouraged them to try for a promotion, or take on more responsibility at work, or take up other learning for personal development/interest?

The survey methodology, which involved a complex sample structure based on funding scheme and year of funding, was tailor-made to serve the aims of the survey and provide an appropriate level of detail with regard to the findings. As a result of the specific approach undertaken, findings from the survey cannot be compared with any other research or evaluation undertaken in the past.

2.2 Methodology

10,688 interviews were conducted with learners in several of the LSC’s financial support schemes (including Education Maintenance Allowance, Adult Learning Grant, and others) over three academic years.

A stratified random sample was drawn by funding scheme, the year in which funding was received, and the gender and age of learners. Where the sample was relatively small by
year of funding, contacts were maximised. Where sufficient sample was provided to achieve minimum targets, quotas were set.

Within the overall total, 2,005 interviews were conducted amongst Adult Learning Grant recipients. [Adult Learning Grant supports people aged 19+ in full-time learning – defined as 450+ guided learning hours a year or equivalent - studying for their first full Level 2 or full Level 3 qualification by providing weekly payments based on the learner’s total household income). More information about the Adult Learning Grant can be obtained via the following weblink: http://alg.lsc.gov.uk. Interviews were undertaken by telephone with recipients living across England.

The data with regard to ALG learners was weighted to reflect LSC learner counts for each of the three academic years. This ensures that the total sample represents the views of learners from all years to an appropriate extent.

The following table shows the number of contacts and number of interviews achieved by year of funding:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005/06</th>
<th>2006/07</th>
<th>2007/08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of contacts</td>
<td>7,897</td>
<td>9,084</td>
<td>19,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved interviews (unweighted)</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interviews (unweighted)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved interviews (weighted)</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interviews (weighted)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note on figures: All percentages charted throughout this report are using data to one decimal place. However, data is presented as whole integers. Thus, rounding numbers which are added to or subtracted from each other may result in slight discrepancies. For example: 70% plus 27% equals 97% but the numbers used are actually, 69.8% (which rounds up to 70%) and 26.6% (which rounds up to 27%), which, when added together equal 96.4% (which rounds down to 96%). Furthermore, where there are two percentages presented side by side which look like they should be identical but the ‘bars’ are slightly different lengths the actual percentages differ by tenths of a percent. For example: 4% could be within the range 3.5% to 4.4%.

2.3 Sample profile

All interviewees were aged 19 or older, with the majority (75%) aged between 19 and 21. The profile by gender is slightly in favour of females (52% are female, 48% are male).

The sample includes just under half that have received funding in the year 2007/08 (46%). A third (31%) received funding in 2006/07 and the remainder in 2005/06 (23%).

22% of ALG recipients represented an ethnic minority group. This compares with 23% across all funding schemes.

One in eight respondents (13%) have a long standing illness, disability or infirmity. This compares with 10% across all funding schemes and 16% of 20-24 year olds across England.
Most respondents (84%) are single, with a further 14% who are married/living with a partner and less than 2% who are separated, divorced or widowed.

One in seven respondents (14%) are parents or carers of children.
3 Engagement

Key findings

The reasons for learning are mostly straightforward. ALG-supported learners want to get qualifications, gain new skills or improve existing skills with a view to improving their employment and career prospects. Moving onto higher level courses is also a significant reason for taking up the funded learning and this is more likely to be given as a main reason for learning over and above improving employment and career prospects.

Most learners who are supported by ALG had financial concerns before starting their learning. These included general concerns about money, and more specific ones about transport and course materials, books or equipment.

Just one in three learners were aware of ALG before they started their course and only two-fifths said they had received more general information, advice and guidance on the range of funding available. Where such information, advice and guidance had been received, it was rated as useful or very useful in nearly all cases.

However, ALG appears to have limited leverage on supported learners’ decisions to undertake the supported learning. A third (31%) say that they would probably have entered the supported learning without ALG and more than two-fifths (44%) say they would definitely have done so.

3.1 Impact of funding on course take up

One in seven learners (15%) who heard about ALG before deciding on their course feel they probably or definitely would have not done the learning without it.
Those previously not in work are more likely to feel that they *definitely or probably would not* have done the course without the funding being available (28%, compared with 15% of the total sample).

### 3.2 Reasons for taking up the course

Few learners give just one reason for taking up a course. When prompted with a list of possible reasons, the one most frequently selected is that of ‘to gain a qualification’ (97% of all learners). Only slightly fewer cite ‘to gain new skills or improve your skills’ (94%), ‘to help you get a new/better job or improve your career prospects’ (92%) and/or ‘to allow you to take up a higher level course’ (86%). When respondents were asked to identify just one *main* reason, then ‘to gain a qualification’ was the reason most frequently given (28%), but in terms of significance as a main reason, it is closely followed by ‘to allow you to take up a higher level course’ (25%):
Gaining a qualification is more important amongst younger learners, as only one in five 30+ year olds (20%, compared with 29% of younger learners) cite this as their main reason for taking up the course. Older learners are significantly more likely to cite helping them to get a new/better job or improve their career prospects (27% of 30+ year olds, compared with 14% of learners aged up to 25). Gaining a qualification is significantly more likely to be cited as a main reason for taking up the original course amongst those without qualifications prior to undertaking the learning (35%).

### 3.3 Financial concerns before starting the course

Learners receiving ALG are receiving payments to assist in living expenses whilst learning. Thus, they are most likely to be concerned about having enough money whilst on the course. However, nearly two-thirds of learners are concerned about affording materials, books or equipment they might need for the course and only slightly fewer are concerned about affording transport to and from the course:
3.4 Information on funding

Only a third of learners (33%) found out about ALG before starting the course.

The proportion is significantly higher amongst those previously in learning (36%, compared with 30% of those previously in work and 31% of those previously not in work).

Those learners previously in receipt of Jobseekers’ Allowance are also particularly likely to have found out about ALG before starting the course (48%).

The majority of learners (83%) found it easy to find out about the funding. Only very small proportions found it fairly (7%) or very difficult (3%). (8% replied that they found it neither easy nor difficult and 1% did not feel able to give an answer.)

3.5 Information, advice or guidance on funding

Around two-fifths of the learners (41%) reported receiving information, advice or guidance (IAG) about the different types of funding available.
The most frequently reported source of IAG was a teacher or other member of staff at school (76%). This proportion is lower amongst learners without qualifications prior to the original course (56%) who are more likely to cite their source as a teacher or member of staff at school (20%). The following figure presents responses by prior status. Although there are no significant differences by this variable, it is useful to acknowledge the sources cited by learners in different situations prior to the learning.

Figure 4: Most frequently cited sources of information, advice or guidance, by prior status (those receiving IAG)
Figures in parentheses are sample bases

The information, advice and guidance received is highly rated, with 96% finding it useful (including 60% rating it as very useful).
4 Retention and Persistence in Learning

Key findings

ALG is estimated to generate a retention rate of 93% for its supported learners. (The retention rate is the proportion of learners who complete their studies whether they are awarded the qualification or not.) The national retention rate for all students in Further Education was stable at 87%, in both 2005/06 and 2006/07 (Book of FE Facts, dcsf, 2008). This latter statistic seems a reasonable benchmark against which to consider the 93% retention rate for ALG-supported learners. Essentially, ALG enables supported learners, who, by definition, have financial disadvantages, to complete at a rate which is higher than for post-16 learners in general.

Where early leaving occurs, financial issues are a significant factor in a third of cases. Most early leavers left because of changes in circumstances or because of financial issues. Correspondingly, when early leavers were asked what would have helped them to complete their course, more than a third said that more financial support might have had this effect.

For learners who complete their studies, ALG is not a critical factor in most completions. Only 15% said they would definitely not have completed without it. However, around two-thirds said they would have struggled financially without it. For the remainder (17%), ALG made no difference to their completing or otherwise.

Overall, therefore, it appears that ALG has a persuasive or encouraging power in respect of staying on and completing courses of learning. It ensures that completion rates for financially disadvantaged learners are higher than those for all learners. It ensures that the incidence of early leaving is low and it assists those who would otherwise struggle financially during their studies.

4.1 Value of funding to completing/staying on the course

Whilst the funding is unlikely to be viewed as essential to completing or remaining on the course, the majority of learners feel that they would have struggled financially without it. Findings on this question are summarised in the figure below:
4.2 Early leaving

The majority of those no longer on the course for which they received funding completed the course (93%). The remainder (7%) left their course early.

The main reasons for leaving the course before completion concern changes of circumstance and financial issues.

Around one in five early leavers (19%) spontaneously stated that they could not afford to continue the course or that financial issues prevented them from continuing and one in nine (11%) left the course to get a job, perhaps implying financial need but it may be that the right job opportunity came up and it was not possible to combine working with learning. More than half the early leavers (52%) reported that money issues influenced their decision to a significant extent:
General living costs are most likely to be reported as the cause of financial difficulties (78% of those citing financial concerns). Nearly half (46%) reported transport costs, with far fewer reporting course materials and books (14%) and/or the cost of childcare (10%).

In terms of what might have helped them to complete their course, more individual guidance or support from the tutor was the most frequently selected option (by 44% of early leavers), particularly by those with pre-level 2 qualifications prior to the learning (52%, compared with 35% of better qualified learners). The next most frequently selected options, equally likely to be selected as a reason for early leaving were that of more time to study and better quality of teaching (each 40% of early leavers), but more than a third each cited more financial support for transport (38%) and/or course materials (36%):
4.3 On-going or further financial assistance

Only one in twenty learners still on or that have completed the course (7%) have received further financial assistance.

This is most likely to be support to meet the costs of transport (52% of those getting further financial assistance), while slightly fewer have received further financial assistance towards course materials (41%).
5 Achievement

Key findings
The great majority, 97%, of those who completed their ALG-supported course achieved one or more qualifications.
Two-thirds (67%) of those who achieved qualifications, achieved at Level 3 or above.
Nearly 9 out of 10 learners who achieved a qualification feel that ALG contributed substantially to that outcome.

5.1 Achievement of qualifications

More than 9 in 10 (97%) of learners who completed their course were able to achieve a qualification. (Of those achieving a qualification: 5% achieved at Level 1, 24% at Level 2, 65% at Level 3, and 2% at Level 4+; a further 4% received a qualification without an NVQ equivalence, that is, below Level 1.) The proportion of completers achieving a qualification is fairly constant over time (96% in 2007/08 and 97% in 2006/07 and 2005/06).

Learners are very positive about the contribution that the funding made to their achievement of these qualifications. Despite the fact that the majority do not feel the funding was essential to enabling them to undertake the learning, 43% feel the funding helped ‘a great deal’ and a further 45% consider that it helped ‘a fair amount’.

The proportion who feel that the funding helped a great deal/a fair amount is high even amongst those who would definitely still have done the course without the funding (87%) or for whom (in their view) the funding made no difference to the likelihood of completion (67%).

The qualifications which were achieved are set out in more detail in the following figure:
A comparison of the NVQ equivalence of learners’ qualifications before and after the original course for which they received funding shows a small increase in qualification levels. The proportion without a qualification with any NVQ equivalence fell from 16% to 6%. There was a small increase in the proportion with qualifications at each level:

**Figure 8: Qualifications achieved from the funded course (where achieved any qualifications)  Base = 1,450**

*denotes less than 0.5%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BTEC/TEC/EDEXCEL</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to higher education certificate</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A levels/vocational A levels or equivalent</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQs*</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Award/certificate/diploma</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ Level 2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS or A2 levels</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ Level 3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance award/certificate/diploma</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City and Guilds</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNVQs*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSEs*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key skills qualifications</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Skills communication and application of number</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry level certificate in adult numeracy</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 or 2 Adult numeracy</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National certificate in literacy and numeracy</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* NVQ attainment also specified in chart at Levels 2 and 3
Figure 9: NVQ equivalence before and after original course for which received funding (all respondents)  Base: 2,005

- No equivalence: Before starting funded course (16%), After funded course (6%)
- Level 1 equivalence: Before starting funded course (28%), After funded course (12%)
- Level 2 equivalence: Before starting funded course (48%), After funded course (30%)
- Level 3+ equivalence: Before starting funded course (7%), After funded course (53%)
6 Learning Progression

Key findings
There is clear evidence that participation in ALG-supported learning promotes significant further learning beyond the original course:

- 28% have taken up further learning.
- 80% of those who have completed this further learning got a qualification.
- A further 27% have registered for further learning.
- Of those not registered for a further course, 36% say that they definitely intend to progress on to a further course.

In total, nearly three-quarters (73%) of ex-ALG learners report that they have learned or are now learning further, that they are registered to learn, or that they intend to register to learn.

- 93% of people who have taken up or registered for further learning have learned, are learning, or will learn towards a higher qualification than that at which their ALG-supported course was targeted.

There is clear evidence that financial support is important to this progression. Of those who have undertaken further learning, 62% have received financial support, with other grants, including student loans and bursaries being the key support for around the majority. A large majority (80%) of these people report that funding was important to this further participation.

Where ALG-supported learners who left early have not gone into further learning, lack of access to support funding appears to have been a significant constraining factor.

Generally, therefore, statistics on learning progression are clearly supportive of ALG funding. The learning which it originally supported has led or will lead to a very substantial level of participation in further learning (mostly at a higher level). And, again, financial support for learning is shown to be important to this further participation.

6.1 Learning progression

28% of those no longer on the original course for which they received ALG funding report that they have taken up other learning since leaving the original course. Those who have completed their original course are significantly more likely than early leavers to have gone on to further learning (29%, compared with 18%).

A further 27% of learners no longer on their original course have registered for further learning but not yet begun it. Again, the proportion is twice as high amongst those who completed their original course, than amongst those who left early (28%, compared with 17%).

Thus, more than half the learners no longer on the original course (55%) have taken up or registered for further learning.
As with achievement of qualifications, the propensity to have taken up or registered for further learning increases over time. This is shown in the chart below, which shows progression by year of funding:

![Chart showing status of learners with regard to take up of further learning by year of funding (where no longer on the original course). Figures in parentheses are sample bases.]

### 6.2 Level of further learning

The great majority (93%) of the 55% of learners who have taken up or registered for further learning, undertake learning at a higher level than their ALG-supported course. The proportion is significantly higher amongst those who completed their original course than amongst those who left their course early (95%, compared with 42%).

Generally, those learners who left the original course early or who failed to achieve a qualification from their original course are less likely to have progressed, as shown in the following figure:
6.3 Funding of further learning

Three-fifths (62%) of those that have taken up further learning have received further financial assistance. This is most likely to have involved other grants for learners, including student loans/bursaries:

| Received funding for further learning* | 62% |
| Did not receive funding for further learning* | 38% |
| Other grants for learners including student loans/bursaries | 84% |
| Adult Learning Grant (ALG) | 10% |
| Residential support scheme | 5% |
| Discretionary funds – for transport, books and learning materials | 4% |
| Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) | 2% |
| Discretionary funds – for childcare | 2% |
| 6th Form Childcare scheme | 1% |
| Don’t know | 4% |
Just one in twenty learners (6%) who have received funding for further learning has also received other financial assistance, in addition to that from one of the schemes in the previous table.

Where further financial assistance (from any source) has been received, it is most likely to help with buying course materials (35%) and/or course costs/fees/student loan/grant/bursary/scholarship (24%).

One in four learners (26%) who have completed a further course of learning and received funding to support that further study feel they could not have completed the course without that funding. However, more than half (54%) feel they would have struggled financially without it.

A higher proportion of learners who are still on the further course and receive funding (55%) feel they would not still be on the course without it. Most of the remainder feel they would still be on the course without the funding but would struggle financially (38%).

### 6.4 Impact of ALG on learning progression

ALG has a strong influence on progression into further learning. Most learners (81%) feel that the funding has helped them move on to further learning. This includes 40% who feel the funding helped them a great deal:

**Figure 12:** Extent to which funding has helped learners to move on to further learning (all respondents)  
Base = 2,005

- A great deal: 40%
- A fair amount: 40%
- Not very much: -11%
- Not at all: -7%

Of those not yet registered for a future new course, 36% definitely intend to go on to a further course.
6.5 Achievement from further learning

Nearly all learners (98%) still in further learning report that they are aiming to achieve qualifications from this further learning.

The majority of learners (80%) who have completed a further course have achieved a qualification from it.

As a result of qualifications achieved from their further course, the proportion of these learners (that is, those who have gone on to further learning and achieved a qualification from it) who are now without an NVQ equivalent qualification has fallen (from 9% to 0%) and two-thirds are now qualified at level 3 or above:

![Figure 13: NVQ equivalence before and after further learning (where achieved a qualification on further course)](Base = 69)

All the learners who achieved a qualification from their further learning and received funding whilst on the course believed that the funding helped them to gain the qualification.

6.6 Take up of further learning by early leavers

The majority (67%) of those who dropped out early from their original course because of financial issues and who have not taken up or registered for another course, said that they would probably or definitely have considered doing more learning had more financial support been available. This suggests that lack of financial support (or knowledge of its being available) has had a significant negative impact on the extent to which these learners were able to progress into further learning. Please note that these findings should be treated with caution as they are based on a small base of 38 learners.
Figure 14: Impact of further financial support on take up of further learning (where left original course early for financial reasons and have not taken up further learning)  

- Definitely would have considered further learning: 43%  
- Probably would have considered further learning: 24%  
- Might or might not: 22%  
- Probably not considered it: -11%
7 Employment Progression

Key findings
Subjectively, ALG-supported learners are positive that ALG has helped their careers. 86% feel that the learning supported by ALG has or will help them to progress.

Objectively, there is some evidence to support this perspective. More than four in ten recipients of ALG (44%) are now in work and a further 27% are in further learning. However, against these ‘positive destinations’, 18% of recipients are now unemployed and seeking work and a further 11% are not working and not seeking work. These latter figures suggest that more support was needed towards the end of ALG-supported learning to assist those recipients to move into work or further learning. Further, nearly two-thirds of those in work are in part-time rather than full-time jobs and just over two-thirds of those in work regard their jobs as permanent. It is clearly difficult in present conditions for people to find full-time, permanent positions and it may be some time before the full employment benefits of ALG support become evident.

However, where employment has been achieved it has brought significant increases in income and two-thirds of those in work report one or more specific benefits including greater responsibility, increased pay, or movement into a permanent position.

7.1 Extent to which funded learning helped career progression
Learners who completed a funded course are very positive about the contribution that the funding has made to progress in their career. Overall, 86% of these learners feel it has helped them at least ‘a fair amount’, including 43% who feel it has helped ‘a great deal’.

The proportion who feel that the funding has helped ‘a great deal’ to progress their career, either now or in the longer term, is particularly high amongst those who were previously not in work (48%).

7.2 Employment status: before and after the original course
The following figure compares the working status of learners before and after the original course for which they received funding:
There has been an increase in the proportion of learners now in employment. This increase is mainly accounted for by the proportion now in part-time work. However, there has also been an increase in the proportion not in work, both seeking and not seeking work. This is a result of the fact that a quarter of recipients have now left full-time learning.

Two-thirds of all those in full or part-time employment after their course (69%) are in a permanent job. One in seven of those now in employment work in managerial or professional occupations (15%), compared with one in ten (10%) of those in employment previously.

### 7.3 Financial benefits

A third of learners (31%) report that their annual personal income has increased since they started their original course.

More than four-fifths of learners (83%) who were in employment both before and after the learning and who report an increase in their personal income were able and willing to provide an estimate of the size of the increase. The average (mean) increase in income amongst those in employment both pre- and post-learning is nearly £5,000 per annum.
7.4 Career progression

The majority of learners (69%) who are now in work following completion of a funded course feel their career benefited in at least one way. These benefits are summarised in the figure below:
Figure 17: Career benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (where completed any funded course and in work) Base = 760

- Obtained more responsibilities or prospects in an existing job: 40%
- Moved to a job with more responsibilities or prospects: 38%
- Moved into a job with better pay: 36%
- Obtained better pay in existing job: 33%
- Found a permanent job for the first time: 26%
- Moved back into work after being out of work: 23%
- Experienced any other career benefits: 8%
- None of these: 31%
The majority of learners selected every item in a list of possible benefits which resulted from undertaking the course for which they received funding. This shows that benefits of learning are wide-ranging and widely perceived:

![Figure 18: Benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (all respondents) Base = 2,005](chart)

Learners who failed to complete their original course or who did not achieve a qualification from it are less likely to report some of these benefits. However, overall, there is very little difference between non-completers and completers and those that achieved a qualification versus those that did not in terms of the propensity to report at least one of the specified benefits.

Whatever impacts ALG has on achievement of qualifications and on employment progression, it is quite clear that ALG participation significantly improved learners’ skills, morale and sense of direction, which may have a positive impact upon their future employment prospects.
9 Overview

Key indicators based on ALG survey responses are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely/probably would not have done course without ALG</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned about having enough money whilst on the course</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to access information on ALG</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received IAG on funding available</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where received, IAG was helpful</td>
<td>96%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Retention</th>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion who completed (Benchmark for all in FE in England = 87%)</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding important or essential to completion</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding important or very important to achievement of a qualification</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of starters who achieved a qualification (Benchmark for all in FE in England = 78%)</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Progression</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion who had undertaken further learning or have registered to do so</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those who have undertaken further learning who have received financial assistance to support that learning</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those in employment following ALG funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>45% (+10% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those in learning following ALG funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>27% (-26% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those unemployed or inactive following ALG funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>28% (+16% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion reporting a positive personal or social (‘soft’) benefit from ALG funded learning</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using these indicators suggests some strengths and limitations of ALG funding and of the learning participation it supports:

**Strengths**

- ALG is able to generate a retention rate amongst its recipients which is higher than that of all students in further education.

- Although ALG-supported learners are unlikely to credit the funding with enabling them to take up learning, financial reasons are a relatively significant reason given for early leaving and more than half of early leavers cite money issues as an influencing factor.

- Achievement of ALG-supported learners is significant. 97% of those who completed their courses achieved a qualification. Most of these qualifications were at levels which increase the probability of employment and learning progression. 83% were at level 2 or above and 53% were at level 3 or above.

- Learning progression following ALG-funded learning is significant. 28% have taken up further learning and 27% have registered for further learning.

- This further learning has already delivered further qualifications for 80% of learners who undertook it.

- For those learners who were in employment before and after ALG-supported learning, significant increases in income have been experienced.

- And those who are now employed, report a range of career benefits including greater responsibility, better pay and movement into a permanent position.

**Issues to consider in the further development of ALG**

- Evidence that ALG exerts strong leverage on supported learners’ decisions to enter and remain on the course for which they are funded is not wholly convincing. 75% say they would definitely (44%) or probably (31%) have undertaken the course even if ALG had not been available. Only 15% say they would definitely or probably not have done it. Although two-thirds of supported learners said they would have struggled financially during the course if ALG had not been available, only 15% said that ALG funding was essential to their completing and 17% said that the funding made no difference to their staying on and completing the course.

- Post-ALG outcomes probably reflect prevailing economic circumstances rather than anything concerned with ALG itself. However, these outcomes are not particularly positive. 27% of supported learners have continued in education. 44% are in work, but 64% of these are in part-time jobs and only 69% are in jobs (full- or part-time) which they regard as permanent. 29% are neither in education nor employment, including 18% who are unemployed and seeking work and 11% who are not working and not seeking work. These findings suggest that many people need assistance towards the end of their courses to help them find positive directions when those courses end.
10 Appendix

10.1 Sample error

As with all quantitative research, the sample size is subject to a level of statistical reliability at various levels.

To give an indication, a finding of 50% on a base size of 2,005 interviews has a confidence interval of +/-2.2% at the 95% level. That is to say that if the survey returns a finding of 50% for a particular question there is a 95% probability that the “true” figure (amongst all those learners in the population, not just those interviewed) will lie within +/-2.2% (i.e. between 47.8% and 52.2%) of that finding.

When looking at sub-groups within a sample this confidence interval increases. So for example, when looking at a sub group like those that registered for a course in 2006/07 (with a base size of 202 interviews in this study) statistical confidence is reduced further still (to around +/-6.9% in this case, ignoring the small population correction).

To give an indication of the effect of sample size on statistical reliability:

- A sample size of 100 would have a confidence interval of +/-9.8%
- A sample size of 500 would have a confidence interval of +/-4.4%
- A sample size of 1,000 would have a confidence interval of +/-3.1%

Note that where a small population (relative to sample size) is sampled, as in the case of the present study (where around a quarter of all eligible learners were interviewed) statistical reliability is increased. Given this, and the relatively limited availability of sample, a larger sample size for the population surveyed for this project would be impractical and unnecessary but should be considered if the scope of the survey were to be increased.