Learner Journeys Research – Discretionary Learner Support (20+ Childcare)

March 2010

Of interest to staff and stakeholders with an interest in Learner Support
Further information

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LSC Learner Journeys Research – Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Background

This survey was commissioned to determine the impact of the financial assistance available to learners on participation, retention, achievement and progression. 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, 1,348 interviews (out of a total of 10,688 across all Learner Support schemes) were conducted amongst learners receiving Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare.

1.2 Engagement

20+ Childcare funding has a positive impact on engagement in learning. Nearly two-thirds of learners (65%) who knew about the funding before deciding to do their original course may not have done the course if the funding had not been available.

Most learners (74%) found it easy to find out about 20+ Childcare funding.

Learners supported by the funding have other financial concerns, which are not remedied through the funding. Whilst childcare costs are a particular issue, learners also have significant levels of concern about other costs, including general living expenses.

Only around a third 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 for 20+ Childcare recipients was estimated by the survey to be 88%. (The retention rate is the proportion of learners who complete their course whether they achieve the qualification or not.) An overall National Further Education retention rate of 87% (achieved in both 2005/06 and 2006/07) forms a reasonable benchmark for the rate amongst recipients of 20+ Childcare. Given the relatively difficult circumstances of these learners, we can conclude that these Funds have a positive impact on retention.

20+ Childcare funding has a positive impact on retention. Nearly two-thirds of completers (62%) feel that they could not have finished their course without the funding. The same proportion of those who are still on the course (62%) say that they would be at risk of dropping out without the funding.

The main reason for early leaving is a change in personal circumstances. However, financial issues are a significant factor and nearly half (45%) the early leavers report that financial issues influenced their decision to leave their course.

Amongst those who left the course before completion, childcare and general living costs are the most frequent cause of financial problems whilst in learning. Overall, fewer than 2% of learners receiving 20+ Childcare funding left early because of childcare costs.
1.4 Achievement

The success rate amongst 20+ Childcare recipients was estimated by the survey to be 78%. (The success rate is the number achieving the qualification as a percentage of those starting the course.). An overall National Further Education success rate of around 77% (based on rates of 76% in 2005/06 and of 77% in 2006/07) forms a reasonable benchmark for the figure relating to 20+ Childcare recipients. Again, given the circumstances in which learners receiving 20+ Childcare funding learn, we can conclude that these Funds have a positive impact on achievement.

Nearly all those completing their original course (88%) achieved a qualification. A large majority agreed that the funding helped them to achieve a qualification.

The proportion of learners with an NVQ equivalent qualification increased significantly following their funded course. Furthermore, the proportion of learners having a Level 3 qualification or above is significantly greater after completing the course for which learners received 20+ Childcare funding.

1.5 Learning progression

Around half the learners who are no longer on their original course have progressed into, or registered for, further learning and of these, most (81%) are learning at a higher level.

Of those who failed to complete their original learning and have not progressed, 89% said they would have considered more learning if more financial support had been available.

Around half of those who are either still on or have completed their further learning have received some financial assistance. Thus, around half have continued learning without financial support.

Financial support received for further learning is most likely to have been other grants such as student loans and bursaries.

Most learners who did receive further financial support for learning and achieved a qualification report that the financial support has helped them to achieve more qualifications.

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

1.6 Employment progression

The great majority (91%) of learners believe that the funding they received helped them progress in their work/career. Of these a high proportion (60% overall) feel it helped a great deal.

Following learning, learners are more likely to be in employment or to be in full-time learning but the gains are modest in scale. Much new employment is part-time, inactivity has not reduced greatly, and the proportion of those who are unemployed has risen slightly.

1.7 Personal and social benefits

The perceived benefits of undertaking learning supported by 20+ Childcare funding are wide-ranging and encompass a number of personal and social gains (including, for example, greater purpose in life, improved generic and social skills, increased interest in work and greater self-confidence).

1.8 Conclusions

The research provides evidence of the positive impact of 20+ Childcare funding.
Executive Summary

- 20+ Childcare funding has a significant positive effect on engagement, retention, attainment and learning progression.

- Information on 20+ Childcare funding was easily available to its recipients. (However, the survey was, of course, only of 20+ Childcare funding recipients. We did not survey people who are eligible for 20+ Childcare funding but did not receive funding, but further research has been commissioned by the LSC to explore the needs of more disadvantaged learners and non-learners and will cover issues around access to IAG amongst those not in learning.)

- The 20+ Childcare Funding retention and success rates exceed the corresponding national FE rates in each case and, given the relatively difficult circumstances of the client group, this must be regarded as a strength.

- In addition to learning benefits, virtually all 20+ Childcare funded participants achieve and acknowledge social or personal benefits which may lead to future progression and development.

Issues to consider in the further development of Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare

- There may have been some historic weakness in the scope of provision of information, advice, and guidance on learning opportunities and on the funding available to support take-up of those opportunities. For example, before their courses, only a third of these learners had received general information, advice and guidance about the range of funding which might be available to them. Clearly there is scope for improvement in this area. Subsequently, though the 20+ Childcare funding clearly has positive impacts on retention, for a minority, there remains a need for continuing support and guidance if early leaving is to be reduced to a minimum. This may need to link the funding to other forms of financial support to cover wider ranging financial issues in order to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

- Learning supported by Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare is not very effective (at least in the short term) in greatly increasing the number of learners who subsequently got a job. In this respect the funding is on a par with other funding schemes aimed at supporting parents or child carers. Where increases did occur, they were exclusively in part-time work. However, this may reflect two extraneous factors. Firstly, the practical difficulties of simultaneously managing full-time work and caring for a child. Secondly, the financial considerations inherent in the balance of available wages, childcare costs, and benefits once learning ceases. It may not reflect anything inherent in the 20+ Childcare funded learning itself. Rather, these findings reinforce the importance of guidance, towards the end of courses, on employment options and on continuing support with childcare.
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, 1,348 interviews were conducted amongst *Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare* recipients. [Support from 20+ Childcare is available for adult students and is aimed at assisting with the cost of childcare. The care must be with a registered childcare provider e.g.](#)
Background

childminder, nursery or after school club. The 20+ Childcare Fund is an income-assessed non-repayable grant. More information about 20+ Childcare funding can be obtained via the following weblink: http://lsf.lsc.gov.uk/fundingguidance. Interviews were undertaken by telephone with recipients living across England.

The sample data for 20+ Childcare fund recipients was weighted to reflect LSC counts and gender and age profiles of all fund recipients for both academic years 2007/08 and 2006/07. This ensures that sample estimates are representative of the views of learners from both these years.

The following table shows the number of contacts and number of interviews achieved by year of funding. It also shows the number of interviews achieved and following weighting by age and gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006/07</th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>16-19</th>
<th>20-25</th>
<th>26-29</th>
<th>30+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of contacts</td>
<td>48,900</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>11,061</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved interviews (unweighted)</td>
<td>1,014</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1,307</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interviews (unweighted)</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieved interviews (weighted)</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interviews (weighted)</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>40.7</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 parents or carers of children and virtually all were female (only 39 of the 1,348 respondents were male).

More than three-fifths of 20+ Childcare fund recipients (63%) are aged 26 and over and most of the remainder (22% of all recipients) are aged between 22 and 25. One in eight is aged between 19 and 21 (13%).

The majority of respondents received funding in 2006/07 (74%). The remainder (26%) received funding in the most recent year (2007/08).

39% of 20+ Childcare fund recipients represented an ethnic minority group. This compares with 23% across all funding schemes and 11% amongst 16+ year olds in England¹.

11% of respondents have a long standing illness, disability or infirmity. This compares with 10% across all funding schemes.

¹ Annual Population Survey
Respondents are more likely to be single than married/living with a partner (45% and 42% respectively). Around one in twenty are separated (7%) and slightly fewer are divorced (5%) with the 1% widowed. More than half the sample (57%) are, therefore, ‘lone parents’.
3 Engagement

Key findings

Survey statistics on engagement with Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare suggest that the effect of the funding on encouraging people to participate in learning is very positive. Firstly, the funding appears to exert reasonable leverage in that nearly two-thirds (65%) of learners might not have done the course if the childcare funding offered by the funding hadn’t been available to them including more than 2 in 5 who would certainly not have done so.

Then, the survey shows that the funding broadly hit its target group – prospective learners who had concerns about the cost of childcare. Thus, though these parents not unexpectedly, had concerns about other financial costs of going on a course, concern about the cost of childcare was most frequent, affecting 2 out of 3 respondents.

Thirdly, information on the 20+ Childcare funding seems to be reasonably widely available. 57% of learners were aware of the funding before enrolment and three-quarters said they found it easy to find out about the funding.

There may be a little more concern that, whilst specific information making learners aware of the 20+ Childcare funding appears to have been reasonably accessible, only a third of learners (32%) report that they received more general information or advice (mostly from teachers and staff at colleges) about the different types of funding available to support learning. There may be some under-reporting affecting this figure, because of elapsed time or because IAG was received but in a ‘light touch’ way which didn’t strongly register with learners. However, the figure, reflecting back on learners’ experiences over the last three or four years is, perhaps, simply consistent with government recognition that guidance services for young people have not been delivered to the best possible standards in recent history and that reform was necessary. More reassuringly, whilst the proportion recalling that they received information and advice may be lower than desirable, virtually all those who did receive it found it to be helpful.

3.1 Impact of funding on course take-up

Nearly two-thirds of recipients (65%) who heard about Discretionary funding – 20+ Childcare before deciding on their course feel they probably or definitely would have not done the learning without it:
Recipients aged between 20 and 25 are more likely to feel that they definitely/probably would not have done the course without the funding being available (71%). The proportion is also significantly higher amongst those previously not in work (69%).

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 new skills or improve your skills’ (94% of all learners). Only slightly fewer cite ‘to gain a qualification’ (92%), ‘for personal interest/enjoyment’ (85%) and/or ‘to help you get a new/better job or improve your career prospects’ (85%). When respondents were asked to identify just one main reason, then ‘to gain a qualification’ was the reason most frequently given, closely followed by ‘to gain new skills or improve your skills’.
Wanting to gain new skills or improve their skills becomes a more frequent reason for participation as learners get older, whilst gaining a qualification remains the main reason for learning take-up across all age groups.

3.3 Financial concerns before starting the course

Given that these learners were receiving 20+ Childcare funding, it is to be expected that childcare costs would be a particular concern for learners contemplating taking a course. However, general subsistence and being able to afford course materials were concerns for nearly as many learners, whilst around half were concerned about affording transport to and from the course:
3.4 Information on funding

More than half the learners (57%, 5% could not recall) found out about Discretionary 20+ Childcare funds before starting the course.

Nearly two-fifths of learners (39%) found out about the funding after deciding to do the course.

The majority of learners (74%) found it easy to find out about the funding. Only very small proportions found it fairly (8%) or very difficult (5%). (9% replied that they found it neither easy nor difficult and 1% could not give an answer.)

3.5 Information, advice or guidance on funding

Only a minority of learners (32%) reported receiving information, advice or guidance (IAG) about the different types of funding available.

The most frequently reported source of IAG was a teacher/staff at college/a local college (71%). Recipients that were not in work prior to taking up the learning are more likely than average to cite a careers adviser as a source (6%):
The information, advice and guidance received is highly rated, with 97% finding it useful (including 72% rating it as very useful).
4 Retention and Persistence in Learning

Key findings

If the leverage of Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare in getting learners into learning is reasonably positive, the funding has an even more positive effect on helping people to stay on their course. 6 out of 10 of those who completed say they would not have completed without it; and most of the rest of those who completed say that they would have had to struggle without the support. Only 8% said that the funding had made no difference to them.

20+ Childcare funding is estimated to generate a retention rate of 88% 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 88% retention rate for those supported by the funding. The fact that this rate is achieved by learners who face particular challenges in completing their courses suggests that it might be significantly lower if the funding was not available.

Of the 1 in 8 (12%) who left early, only 1 in 7 of these people spontaneously gave a financial reason for leaving their course early. However, on prompting, this proportion rose to nearly half (45%) and amongst those who gave a financial reason, childcare costs are the most significant.

When early leavers were asked what might have helped them to complete, almost as many mentioned more financial support as more time to study or more guidance and tutor support. Their responses suggest that some recipients of 20+ Childcare funding may also need further information and assistance in respect of the other costs of learning, mainly course materials, in order to minimise early leaving.

4.1 Value of funding to completing/staying on the course

Amongst both those who have completed their course and those who are still on it, the majority feel that 20+ Childcare funding has been essential or important to seeing the course through. 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 (88%). The remainder (12%) left their course early.

The main reasons for leaving the course before completion concern changes of circumstance and the difficulties some learners experienced in combining learning with family and work commitments. One in seven early leavers (14%) spontaneously stated that they could not afford to continue the course or that financial issues prevented them from continuing. However, when prompted, more than two-fifths of early leavers (45%) reported that money issues influenced their decision at least a fair amount:
Childcare costs are most likely to be reported as the cause of financial difficulties (42% of those citing financial concerns). More than a quarter (27%) reported general living costs, with fewer reporting course materials and books (21%) and/or transport costs (14%).

In terms of what might have helped them to complete their course, more time to study was the most frequently selected option (by 49% of early leavers), particularly by those previously not in work (55%). The next most frequently selected option was that of more individual guidance or support from the tutor (48% of early leavers), which is significantly more likely to be cited by learners without qualifications prior to the course (58%).

The figure below is based on all early leavers.
4.3 On-going or further financial assistance

Just under a quarter of those learners still on a course (52%) have received further financial assistance.

This is most likely to meet childcare costs (55% of those getting further financial assistance), whilst more than two-fifths of learners (41%) needed it for course materials. Slightly fewer learners (36%) received further financial assistance for transport and just 9% received it to cover course costs and fees.
5 Achievement

Key findings
94% said that it helped them to achieve a qualification (including 74% for whom it was ‘a great help’).
And achievement was significant. Overall, even including learners who left early, the proportion with Level 1 or no recognised qualifications fell from 61% to 38% and the proportion with ‘Level 2 and above qualifications’ rose from 40% to 63%.

Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare is estimated by the survey to generate a success rate of 78%. (The success rate is the number achieving their learning aim as a percentage of those starting the course.) The overall national success rate for all students in Further Education was 76% in 2005/06 and 77% in 2006/07 (Book of FE Facts, dcsf, 2008). These latter figures seem reasonable benchmarks against which to compare the 78% success rate for learners supported by 20+ Childcare funding. As with the retention rate discussed earlier, it is achieved by learners in circumstances which are typically more difficult and the difference might have been significantly greater if the funding had not been available to them.

5.1 Achievement of qualifications

Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) of learners who completed their course were able to achieve a qualification. (Of those achieving a qualification: 23% achieved at Level 1, 32% at Level 2, 32% at Level 3, and 1% at Level 4. A further 12% received a qualification without an NVQ equivalence, that is, below Level 1.) The proportion of completers achieving a qualification is constant over time (89% in 2007/08 and 88% in 2006/07).

Learners are overwhelmingly positive about the contribution that the funding made to their achievement of these qualifications. 74% feel the funding helped ‘a great deal’ and a further 20% 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 still have done the course without the funding (89%) or for whom (in their view) the funding made no difference to the likelihood of completion (70%).

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 significant increase in qualification levels. The proportion without a qualification with any NVQ equivalence fell from 42% to 20%. There was a small increase in the proportion with Level 2 equivalent qualifications and a significant increase in the proportion of learners with Level 3+ equivalent qualifications (from 16% to 34%):
Figure 9: NVQ equivalence before and after original course for which received funding (all respondents) Base: 1,348

* denotes less than 0.5%

- **No equivalence**: Before starting course - 42%, After course - 20%
- **Level 1 equivalence**: Before starting course - 19%, After course - 18%
- **Level 2 equivalence**: Before starting course - 24%, After course - 29%
- **Level 3+ equivalence**: Before starting course - 16%, After course - 34%
6 Learning Progression

Key findings
There is clear evidence that participation in Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare supported learning also encourages progression to further learning beyond the original course.

In total, more than two-fifths (42%) of the learners surveyed have either taken up further learning (33%) or are registered for a further course (9%). Of the remainder, a third say that they definitely intend to progress on to a further course. This means that, overall, half (50%) of 20+ Childcare fund recipients report that they have learned or are now learning further, they are registered to learn, or they intend to register to learn. Of all recipients interviewed only 17% has either not undertaken further learning or has no intention of doing, or no wish to do, so.

89% of those who have completed this further learning got a qualification.

81% 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 20+ Childcare funded course was targeted.

There is clear evidence, too, that financial support is important to this progression. Of those who have undertaken further learning, 53% have received financial support, with other grants such as student loans/bursaries being the key support for slightly more than half of these and a second round of 20+ Childcare funding key for a third. Virtually all of these people report that funding was critical to this further participation (82%) or that they would have struggled without it (16%).

Where 20+ Childcare funded learners who left early have not gone into further learning, lack of access to financial support appears to have been a significant constraining factor.

The findings on learning progression are clearly positive. The learning which it originally supported has led or will lead to a fairly substantial level of participation in further learning (mostly at a higher level). And, again, financial support to learning is shown to be important to this further participation.

6.1 Learning progression

33% of those no longer on the original course for which they received 20+ Childcare funding report that they have taken up other learning since leaving the original course. Those who have completed their original course are more than twice as likely as early leavers to have gone on to further learning (36%, compared with 14%).

A further 9% of learners no longer on their original course have registered for further learning but not yet begun it. The proportion is similar between those who completed their original course and those that did not (9% and 8% respectively).

Thus, more than two-fifths of learners no longer on the original course (42%) have taken up or registered for further learning.

Learners without qualifications prior to the course for which they received funding are significantly less likely to have already taken up or registered to take-up further learning (30% have done so, compared with 50% of learners that had an NVQ equivalent qualification at the outset).
6.2 Level of further learning

The great majority (81%) of the 34% of all learners who have taken up or registered for further learning undertake learning at a higher level than their funded course. The proportion is significantly higher amongst those who completed their original course than amongst those who left their course early (84%, compared with 45%).

Figure 10: Level of further learning (where taken up/registered for further learning)  Figures in parentheses are sample bases

6.3 Funding of further learning

More than half (53%) of those that have taken up further learning have received further financial assistance. This is most likely to have involved other grants for learners, such as student loans or bursaries (other than Discretionary Funding – Hardship):
Table 1: Schemes from which learners have received funding for further learning (where received further financial assistance) *Base = 178  **Base = 343 (where taken up further learning and still on it/completed it)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Received funding for further learning*</th>
<th>53%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not receive funding for further learning*</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other grants for learners including student loans/bursaries</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary funds – 20+ childcare</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary funds – for transport, books and learning materials</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Learning Grant</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Maintenance Allowance</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Form College Childcare</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential bursary or grant</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Support Scheme</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care to Learn</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just over one in twenty learners (7%) 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 childcare (52%), course materials (45%), daily living expenses (22%) and/or transport (18%).

The majority (82%) of those 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. A further 16% feel they could have completed the course but would have struggled financially.

Similarly, the majority of those who are still on the further course and receive funding (78%) feel they would not still be on the course without it. This proportion is higher amongst those who were without qualifications prior to their original course (87%, compared with 75% of those who were better qualified). Most of the remainder feel they would still be on the course without the funding but would struggle financially (18%).

6.4 Impact of 20+ Childcare funding on learning progression

Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare has a strong influence on progression into further learning. Most learners (86%) feel that the funding has helped them move on to further learning. This includes 59% who feel the funding helped them a great deal:
Of those not yet registered for a future new course, 35% definitely intend to go on to a further course, including 39% of those without qualifications prior to the original course for which they received funding. This is a significantly higher proportion than amongst better qualified learners and these are learners that are less likely to have progressed so far.

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 (89%) 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 24% to 14%) and nearly two in five are now qualified at level 3 or above:
Nearly all learners who achieved a qualification from their further learning (98%) 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 (89%) 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 48 learners.
Figure 13: 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) Base = 48 Caution: small sample base

- Definitely would have considered further learning: 62%
- Probably would have considered further learning: 27%
- Might or might not: 9%
- Definitely not considered it: 2%
7 Employment Progression

Key findings

As Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare is designed to encourage parents and carers to participate in learning, and as the majority of those surveyed did not have a Level 2 qualification before they started their original course, we would not expect to see a significant proportion of recipients entering into full-time employment after finishing their course.

However, there are some positive findings relating to the effect of 20+ Childcare funding on employment progression.

Comparing the status of learners pre- and post-learning, we can see that the level of economic inactivity (i.e. not seeking work or looking after family) has fallen (from 51% to 38%).

The level of employment has risen only slightly (from 18% to 24% with all the increase coming from increased part-time employment) and more people are unemployed (up from 7% prior to course, to 11% after the course), which cancels out the increase in employment.

These findings indicate that, where 20+ Childcare fund recipients are able to enter employment, they feel that the funding helped. However, these learners will need further support if more of them are to realise the benefits of their learning and the qualifications gained and progress into employment.

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, 91% of these learners feel it has helped them at least ‘a fair amount’, including 60% 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 received funding in 2007/08 (94%), perhaps reflecting the fact that they are more likely to link more recent learning to career progression in their own minds. This view is held regardless of qualification achievement (91% of those that achieved a qualification and 90% of those that did not feel it helped) and is a view held by the majority of learners who said they would have definitely still done the course even without the funding (88%).

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 a modest increase in the proportion of learners now in employment. This increase is all accounted for by the proportion now in part-time work. There has been an increase in the proportion that are now in full-time learning and, whilst there has also been a slight increase in the proportion of learners not in work but seeking work, overall, fewer learners are now economically inactive.

Four-fifths of all those in full or part-time employment after the course (80%) are in a permanent job. This is a statistically similar proportion to that of learners with a permanent job prior to the original course (83%).

### 7.3 Financial benefits

One in six learners (18%) report that their annual personal income has increased since they started their original course.

Four-fifths of learners (81%) 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 £6,000 per annum.
Employment Progression

Figure 15: Approximate increase in annual personal income (where in work before and after learning, report that their annual personal income has increased and provided a response)  Base = 45

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to £500</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£501 - £1,000</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£1,001 - £2,000</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£2,001 - £3,000</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£3,001 - £5,000</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£5,001 - £10,000</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£10,001 - £20,000</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>£20,001 - £30,000</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean increase in personal annual income (based on 45 responses) = £5,616

7.4 Career progression

The majority of learners (75%) 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 16: Career benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (where completed any funded course and in work)  
Base = 287

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moved to a job with more responsibilities or prospects</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved back into work after being out of work</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained more responsibilities or prospects in an existing job</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved into a job with better pay</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained better pay in existing job</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found a permanent job for the first time</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced any other career benefits</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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. As can be seen in the figure below, 98% of learners recognised at least one benefit from their learning. Only two in a hundred said they gained none of the benefits:

Learners who failed to complete their original course or who did not achieve a qualification from it are slightly less likely to report some of these benefits. However, it remains the case that the majority of these learners that have not achieved from the learning recognise they have benefited in many ways.

Whatever impacts 20+ Childcare funding has on achievement of qualifications (significant), and on employment progression (more modest), it is quite clear that the funding has significantly improved learners’ morale and sense of direction, which may then have a positive impact upon their future employment prospects.
### Overview

Key indicators based on Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare survey responses are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely/probably would not have done course without 20+ Childcare funding</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned about childcare costs before course</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to access information on 20+ Childcare funding</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received IAG on funding available</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where received, IAG was helpful</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion who completed (Benchmark for all in FE in England = 87%)</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding important or essential to completion</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding important or very important to achievement of a qualification</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of starters who achieved a qualification (Benchmark for all in FE in England = 77%)</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progression</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion who had undertaken further learning or have registered to do so</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those who have undertaken further learning who have received financial assistance to support that learning</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those in employment following 20+ Childcare funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>24%  (+6% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those in learning following 20+ Childcare funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>26%  (+7% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those unemployed or inactive following Discretionary Childcare funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>48%  (-10% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion reporting a positive personal or social (‘soft’) benefit from 20+ Childcare funded learning</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on these indicators, the research provides evidence of the positive impact of 20+ Childcare funding.

- 20+ Childcare funding has a significant positive effect on engagement, retention, attainment and learning progression.

- Information on 20+ Childcare funding was easily available to its recipients. (However, the survey was, of course, only of 20+ Childcare funding recipients. We did not survey people who are eligible for 20+ Childcare funding but did not receive funding, but further research has been commissioned by the LSC to explore the needs of more disadvantaged learners and non-learners and will cover issues around access to IAG amongst those not in learning. )

- The 20+ Childcare funding retention and success rates exceed the corresponding national FE rates in each case and, given the relatively difficult circumstances of the client group, this must be regarded as a strength.

- In addition to learning benefits, virtually all 20+ Childcare funded participants achieve and acknowledge social or personal benefits which may lead to future progression and development.

Issues to consider in the further development of Discretionary Funding – 20+ Childcare

- There may have been some historic weakness in the scope of provision of information, advice, and guidance on learning opportunities and on the funding available to support take-up of those opportunities. For example, before their courses, only a third of these learners had received general information, advice and guidance about the range of funding which might be available to them. Clearly there is scope for improvement in this area. Subsequently, though the 20+ Childcare Funding clearly has positive impacts on retention, for a minority, there remains a need for continuing support and guidance if early leaving is to be reduced to a minimum. This may need to link the funding to other forms of financial support to cover wider ranging financial issues in order to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

- Learning supported by the 20+ Childcare Funding is not very effective (at least in the short term) in greatly increasing the number of learners who subsequently got a job. Where increases did occur, they were exclusively in part-time work. However, this may reflect two extraneous factors. Firstly, the practical difficulties of simultaneously managing full-time work and caring for a child. Secondly, the financial considerations inherent in the balance of available wages, childcare costs, and benefits once learning ceases. It may not reflect anything inherent in the 20+ Childcare supported learning itself. Rather, these findings reinforce the importance of guidance, towards the end of courses, on employment options and on continuing support with childcare.
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 1,348 interviews has a confidence interval of +/-2.7% 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 +/-2.7% (i.e. between 47.3% and 52.7%) 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 2007/08 (with a base size of 334 interviews in this study) statistical confidence is reduced further still (to +/-5.4% 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.