Learner Journeys Research – Sixth Form College Childcare

March 2010

Of interest to staff and stakeholders with an interest in Learner Support
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LSC Learner Journeys Research – Sixth Form College Childcare

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Executive Summary

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. It's 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, 82 interviews (out of a total of 10,688 across all Learner Support schemes) were conducted amongst learners aged 20+ at Sixth Form level receiving childcare funding.

1.2 Engagement

Sixth Form College Childcare funding has a positive impact on engagement in learning. Four-fifths of learners (80%) who knew about Sixth Form College Childcare funding before deciding to do their funded learning may not have done the course if the funding had not been available.

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

Learners funded through the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund 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.

Fewer than 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 for Sixth Form College Childcare funded learners 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 Sixth Form College Childcare Fund rate.

Sixth Form College Childcare funding has a positive impact on retention. Nearly two-thirds of completers (64%) feel that they could not have finished their course without the funding. More than three-quarters of those who are still on the course (78%) 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 more than two-fifths (43%) of early leavers report that financial issues influenced their decision to leave their course.

1.4 Achievement

The success rate for Sixth Form College Childcare funded learners was estimated by the survey to be 83%. (The success rate is the number achieving the qualification as a percentage of those starting the course, not including those that are still in the learning.). 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 Sixth Form College Childcare Fund figure.
Nearly all those completing their original course (94%) achieved a qualification. A large majority agrees that Sixth Form College Childcare 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 Sixth Form College Childcare funding.

1.5 Learning progression

Three-fifths of learners who are no longer on their original course have progressed into, or registered for, further learning and, of these, most (86%) are learning at a higher level.

Two of the three learners who failed to complete their funded learning and have not progressed, said they would have definitely considered more learning if more financial support had been available.

Three-quarters of those who are either still on or have completed their further learning have received some financial assistance. Thus, very few learners have continued learning without financial support.

Financial support received for further learning is most likely to have been Sixth Form College Childcare funding again.

All of the 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.

Half of those achieving a qualification from their further learning achieved a Level 2 qualification or above for the first time.

1.6 Employment progression

The great majority (98%) of learners believe that the funding they received helped them progress in their work/career. Of these a high proportion (79% overall) feel it helped a great deal.

Following learning, learners are more likely to be in education, either full or part-time and less likely to be in employment or to be economically inactive. The financial gains are, therefore, modest in scale but there is a significant propensity to have progressed onto higher level learning, with, consequently, the potential for greater gains in terms of career and financial terms in the near future.

1.7 Personal and social benefits

The perceived benefits of undertaking learning supported by the 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 Sixth Form College Childcare funding.

- Sixth Form College Childcare funding has a significant positive effect on engagement, retention, attainment and learning progression.

- Information on Sixth Form College Childcare funding was easily available to its recipients. (However, the survey was, of course, only of recipients. We did not survey young people who are eligible 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 retention rate amongst recipients of the funding is similar to the national FE retention rate. This is positive given the relatively difficult circumstances of the client group.
- Furthermore, the success rate amongst funding recipients is higher than the corresponding national FE rate and this is a particular strength of the funding.
- In addition to learning benefits, virtually all Sixth Form College Childcare Fund participants achieve and acknowledge social or personal benefits which may lead to future progression and development.

**Issues to consider in the further development of Sixth Form College Childcare Funding**

- 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, fewer than two-fifths 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 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 including discretionary funding which is able to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

- Learning supported by the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund is not very effective (at least in the short term) in greatly increasing the number of learners who subsequently got a job. However, the propensity to move onto further learning and thus, the potential to gain in terms of careers and employment in the longer term is evident. Given the fact that recipients have childcare responsibilities, they may too be practical difficulties in simultaneously managing full-time work and caring for a child. Furthermore, there may be financial considerations inherent in the balance of available wages, childcare costs, and benefits once learning ceases. It may not reflect anything inherent in the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund-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.
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 Learner 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, 82 interviews were conducted amongst **Sixth Form College Childcare funding** recipients. [Income-assessed support for parents aged 20+ in learning at a sixth Form college or school sixth form, by contributing to the costs of their childcare while they learn. More
information about the funding can be obtained via the following weblink: http://www.payingforchildcare.org.uk/furthereducation.aspx. Interviews were undertaken by telephone with recipients living across England.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2005/06</th>
<th>2006/07</th>
<th>2007/08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contacts</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>3*</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Although no contacts were received from this year, during interviewing it became apparent that learners received funding during this period.

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 female.

More than half the Sixth Form College Childcare funding recipients (53%) are currently aged 26+, a further third are aged between 22 and 25 and the remainder (16%) are aged between 19 and 21.

The majority of respondents received funding in 2007/08 (79%). A sixth (17%) received funding in the previous year (2006/07) and just 4% received funding in 2005/06.

5% of Sixth Form College Childcare funding recipients represented an ethnic minority group (all Black Caribbean). This compares with 23% across all funding schemes.

4% of recipients have a long standing illness, disability or infirmity. This compares with 10% across all funding schemes.

Nearly two-thirds of recipients (65%) are single, with a further 27% being married/living with partners. The majority of the sample (73%) are ‘lone parents’.
3 Engagement

Key findings

Survey statistics on engagement with the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund suggest that the effect of the funding on encouraging adults to participate in learning is very positive. Firstly, the funding appears to exert reasonable leverage in that four-fifths (80%) of learners might not have done the course if the childcare funding hadn’t been available to them including nearly half who would certainly not have done so.

Then, the survey shows that the funding broadly hit its target group – those parents who had concerns about the cost of childcare. Thus, though those parents not unexpectedly, had concerns about other financial costs of going on a course, concern about the cost of childcare was most frequent, affecting nearly 9 out of 10 of respondents.

Thirdly, information on Sixth Form College Childcare funding seems to be reasonably widely available. 56% of learners were aware of the funding before enrolment and over 9 out of 10 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 Sixth Form College Childcare Fund appears to have been reasonably accessible, fewer than two-fifths of learners (42%) report that they received more general information or advice (mostly from 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 on learners’ experiences over the last 3 or 4 years is, perhaps, simply consistent with government recognition that guidance services for 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, all those who did receive it found it to be helpful.

3.1 Impact of funding on course take-up

Four-fifths of learners (80%) who heard about Sixth Form College Childcare funding before deciding on their course feel they probably or definitely would have not done the learning without it:
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’ (98% of all learners). Only slightly fewer cite ‘to help you get a new/better job or improve your career prospects’ (95%) and/or ‘to gain new skills or improve your skills’ (93%), and/or ‘to help you get into work’ (90%). When respondents were asked to identify just one main reason, then ‘to gain a qualification’ was the reason most frequently given:
Those previously in work are more likely to be motivated by the desire to improve their job and career prospects (35% cite ‘to help you get a new/better job or improve your career prospects’, compared with 12% of other respondents), whilst those previously in learning or not in learning or work are more likely to be mainly concerned with gaining a qualification (33%, compared with 12% of those previously in work). It highlights the focus that those not yet in work have in gaining a qualification as a first step to finding work. Once in work, the findings suggest, the focus moves away from gaining or improving qualifications.

3.3 Financial concerns before starting the course

Given that these learners were registered for Sixth Form College Childcare funding, it is to be expected that childcare costs would be a particular concern for learners contemplating taking a course. However, general subsistence was a concern for three-fifths of learners, whilst a similar proportion was concerned about affording course materials or transport to and from the course:
3.4 Information on funding

More than half the recipients of Sixth Form College Childcare funding (56%) found out about it before starting the course.

The proportion is lower than average amongst learners that did not have any qualifications prior to the course for which they received funding (40%).

More than two-fifths of learners (44%) found out about the funding after deciding to do the course.

The majority of learners (83%) found it easy to find out about the funding. Only very small proportions found it fairly (6%) or very difficult (4%). (7% replied that they found it neither easy nor difficult.)

3.5 Information, advice or guidance on funding

Only a minority of learners (38%) 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 member of staff at college (45%).

One in six learners (16%) reported college (in general) as a source and one in eight (13%) reported Jobcentre Plus as a source:
The information, advice and guidance received is highly rated and all those receiving it rate it as useful, including 71% that rated it as very useful.
4 Retention and Persistence in Learning

Key findings

If the leverage of the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund in getting learners into learning is reasonably positive, the funding has an even more positive effect on helping people to stay on their course. Nearly two-thirds of those who completed say they would not have completed without it; and all the rest of those who completed say that they would have had to struggle without the support.

The Sixth Form College Childcare Fund 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 learners funded through the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund.

Furthermore, of the one in eight (12%) who left early, only one of these people spontaneously gave a financial reason for leaving their course early. Although, on prompting, this proportion rose to just over two in five (43%), financial issues were more likely to revolve around the cost of transport and course materials or books. Thus childcare costs have minimal impact as a factor leading to a failure to complete a course.

Consequently, when early leavers were asked what might have helped them to complete, more said more time or more guidance and tutor support than mentioned more money. However, a minority do mention childcare costs, as well as (to a lesser extent) the cost of course materials and transport as issues that need to be addressed 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 the childcare funding they have received 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, including house moves, illness, pregnancy or bereavement.

Just one early leaver spontaneously stated that they could not afford to continue the course or that financial issues prevented them from continuing. These financial issues concern both the cost of transport and course materials or books. However, when prompted, more than two-fifths of early leavers (43%) reported that money issues influenced their decision to a significant extent (caution is required in interpreting these findings as the sample base is very small):
In terms of what might have helped them to complete their course, more time to study was the most frequently selected option (by 57% of early leavers). The next most frequently selected option was that of receiving more individual guidance or support from the tutor (43% of early leavers).

The figure below is based on all early leavers (caution is required in interpreting these findings as the sample base is very small).
4.3 On-going or further financial assistance

Nearly a fifth of those learners still on a course (19%) have received further financial assistance. This is most likely to be support to meet transport costs (50% of those getting further financial assistance), whilst one in seven learners (14%; just 2 respondents) needed it for course materials and the same proportion needed it for childcare costs. One respondent received further financial assistance for daily living expenses and another for course costs.
5 Achievement

Key findings

98% of those achieving a qualification said that the Sixth Form College Childcare Funding helped them to achieve a qualification (including 78% for whom it was ‘a great help’).

Furthermore, achievement was significant. Overall, even including learners who left early, the proportion with Level 1 or no recognised qualifications fell from 49% to 14% and the proportion with ‘Level 2 and above qualifications’ rose from 45% to 80%.

Sixth Form College Childcare Funding is estimated by the survey to generate a success rate of 83%. (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 83% success rate for learners supported by the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund. The funding rate is somewhat higher than the national average rate, which is very positive given that it is achieved by learners in circumstances which are typically more difficult.

5.1 Achievement of qualifications

More than 9 in 10 (92%) of learners who completed their course were able to achieve a qualification. (Of those achieving a qualification: 12% achieved at Level 1, 35% at Level 2, 43% at Level 3, and 2% at Level 4. A further 8% received a qualification without an NVQ equivalence, that is, below Level 1.) The proportion of completers achieving a qualification is fairly constant over time (95% in 2007/08, 92% in 2006/07 and all 3 respondents in 2005/06).

Learners are overwhelmingly positive about the contribution that the funding made to their achievement of these qualifications. 78% feel the funding helped ‘a great deal’ and a further 20% consider that it helped ‘a fair amount’.

All those who would still have done the course without the funding feel the funding helped a great deal/a fair amount.

The qualifications which were achieved are set out in more detail in the following figure:
Figure 8: Qualifications achieved from the funded course (where achieved any qualifications)  Base = 49

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 16% to 0%. 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 12% to 45%):
Figure 9: NVQ equivalence before and after original course for which received funding (all respondents)  Base: 82

- **No equivalence**: Before starting course 16%, After course 0%
- **Level 1 equivalence**: Before starting course 14%, After course 33%
- **Level 2 equivalence**: Before starting course 33%, After course 35%
- **Level 3+ equivalence**: Before starting course 12%, After course 45%
6 Learning Progression

Key findings

There is clear evidence that participation in the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund supported learning also encourages progression to further learning beyond the original course:

In total, around three-fifths (59%) of the learners surveyed have either taken up further learning (14%) or are registered for a further course (46%). Of the remainder, more than two-fifths say that they definitely intend to progress on to a further course. This means that only 4% of all funding recipients interviewed have either not undertaken further learning or have no intention of doing so or desire to do so.

All those who have completed this further learning got a qualification.

86% 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 Sixth Form College 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, 75% have received financial support, with a second round of Sixth Form College Childcare funding being the key support for half of these. All of these people report that funding was critical to this further participation (25%) or that they would have struggled without it (75%).

Where Sixth Form College Childcare funding recipients 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 very substantial level of participation in further learning (mostly at a higher level). And, again, financial support to learning, particularly renewed access to Sixth Form College Childcare funding for these parents, is shown to be important to this further participation.

6.1 Learning progression

14% of those no longer in the learning for which they received funding for childcare report that they have taken up other learning since leaving the Sixth Form learning. Only those that have completed their Sixth Form learning have taken up further learning.

A further 46% of learners no longer undertaking the Sixth Form learning have registered for further learning but not yet begun it. This involves half of those that completed their Sixth Form learning and just one respondent that left their Sixth Form learning early.

Thus, around three-fifths of learners no longer on the original course (59%) have taken up or registered for further learning.

As with achievement of qualifications, the propensity to take-up or register for further learning increases over time. This is shown in the chart below, which shows progression by year of funding (caution is required in interpreting the findings as sample bases are very small):
6.2 Level of further learning

The great majority (86%) of the 59% of learners who have taken up or registered for further learning, undertake learning at a higher level than their Sixth Form learning.

The learner that left the Sixth Form learning early and has since registered for further learning has not progressed, although both of the learners that completed but failed to achieve a qualification from their Sixth Form learning have gone onto learning at a higher level.
6.3 Funding of further learning

Three-quarters (75%) of those that have taken up further learning have received further financial assistance. This is most likely to have involved further Sixth Form College Childcare funding:

Table 1: Schemes from which learners have received funding for further learning (where received further financial assistance) Base = 6  *Base = 8 (where taken up further learning and still on it/completed it)
Caution: small sample bases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Received funding for further learning*</th>
<th>75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not receive funding for further learning*</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixth Form College Childcare</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Learning Grant</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary funds – for childcare</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary funds – for transport, books and learning materials</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None have received financial assistance other than from one of the schemes in the previous table.

Although only a quarter (25%) 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 (i.e. one respondent). The remainder (75%) feel they could have completed the course but would have struggled financially.

Similarly, all of those still on the further course and receiving funding feel they would not still be on the course without it.

6.4 Impact of Sixth Form College Childcare funding on learning progression

Sixth Form College Childcare funding has a strong influence on progression into further learning. Most learners (92%) feel that the funding has helped them move on to further learning. This includes 83% who feel the funding helped them a great deal:
Of those not yet registered for a future new course, 44% definitely intend to go on to a further course, with a further 20% saying they probably will and 22% saying that they would like to do so.

### 6.5 Achievement from further learning

All learners *still in* further learning report that they are aiming to achieve qualifications from this further learning.

All learners who have *completed* a further course have achieved a qualification from it.

All the learners achieving qualifications from their further learning now have an NVQ equivalent qualification at level 2 or above. Thus, half the learners have progressed to this level as a result of the learning they have done whilst receiving funding.

All 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

Two of the three learners who dropped out early from their funded learning because of financial issues and who have not taken up or registered for another course, said that they would 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. The remaining learner was unsure what they would have done, saying they may or may not have considered further learning if more financial support had been available.
7 Employment Progression

Key findings
As the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund is designed to encourage individuals with children to participate in learning, and as half 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 the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund 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 a little (from 51% to 38%).

The level of employment has actually declined (from 21% to 17% with part-time employment increasing very slightly and full-time employment declining). The largest gain has been in terms of full-time learning (from 5% to 18%). The proportion that are unemployed and seeking work has not changed.

These findings should be set within the context that nearly all the learners feeling that the learning helped them progress in their career. However, they may indicate a need to provide 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, 98% of these learners feel it has helped them at least ‘a fair amount’, including 79% who feel it has helped ‘a great deal’.

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 full-time learning and a smaller increase in the proportion in education on a part-time basis. Although there has been a small increase in the proportion that are employed part-time, there has been a decrease in the proportion of learners in employment overall. Fewer learners are now economically inactive and this is mainly in the category of looking after home or family.

More than two-thirds of all those in full or part-time employment after the course (69%) are in a permanent job. This represents a decline in the proportion of learners with a permanent job prior to the funded course (94%).

### 7.3 Financial benefits

A fifth of learners (20%) report that their annual personal income has increased since they started their funded course.

The average increase, based on just 3 learners that were in employment before beginning the funded learning and are in employment now is less than £1,000.

### 7.4 Career progression

The majority of learners (90%) 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 (caution should be exercised in interpreting these findings as the sample base is very small):
Figure 13: Career benefits experienced, prompted, multiple response (where completed any funded course and in work)  
Base = 10  
Caution: small sample base

- Obtained more responsibilities or prospects in an existing job: 40%
- Moved into a job with better pay: 40%
- Moved back into work after being out of work: 40%
- Found a permanent job for the first time: 30%
- Moved to a job with more responsibilities or prospects: 10%
- Obtained better pay in existing job: 10%
- Experienced any other career benefits: 0%
- None of these: 10%
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, 99% of learners recognised at least one benefit from their learning. Only one in a hundred said they gained none of the benefits in the figure:

Learners who failed to complete their original course are less likely to report some of these benefits. However, those who did not achieve a qualification were as likely as those who did to feel that they have developed job-skills, improved their teamworking, communications and social skills, become more enthusiastic about learning and to feel more interested in work.

Whatever impacts Sixth Form College Childcare funding has on achievement of qualifications (significant), and on employment progression (more modest), it is quite clear that the participation in the learning, largely possible as a result of 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 Sixth Form College Childcare Fund survey responses are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely/probably would not have done course without Sixth Form College Childcare Funding</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned about childcare costs before course</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to access information on Sixth Form College Childcare Funding</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received IAG on funding available</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where received, IAG was helpful</td>
<td>100%</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>100%</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>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of starters who achieved a qualification (Benchmark for all in FE in England = 77%)</td>
<td>83%</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progression</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion who had undertaken further learning or have registered to do so</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those who have undertaken further learning who have received financial assistance to support that learning</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those in employment following Sixth Form College Childcare funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>17% (-4% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those in learning following Sixth Form College Childcare funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>24% (+15% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of those unemployed or inactive following Sixth Form College Childcare funded learning (change from pre-learning in brackets)</td>
<td>57% (-13% points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion reporting a positive personal or social ('soft') benefit from Sixth Form College Childcare funded learning</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on these indicators, the research provides evidence of the positive impact of Sixth Form College Childcare funding.

- Sixth Form College Childcare funding has a significant positive effect on engagement, retention, attainment and learning progression.

- Information on Sixth Form College Childcare funding was easily available to its recipients. (However, the survey was, of course, only of recipients. We did not survey young people who are eligible but did not receive the 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 retention rate amongst recipients of the funding is similar to the national FE retention rate. This is positive given the relatively difficult circumstances of the client group.

- Furthermore, the success rate amongst funding recipients is higher than the corresponding national FE rate and this is a particular strength of the funding.

- In addition to learning benefits, virtually all Sixth Form College Childcare Fund participants achieve and acknowledge social or personal benefits which may lead to future progression and development.

**Issues to consider in the further development of the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund**

- 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, fewer than two-fifths 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 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 including discretionary funding which is able to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

- Learning supported by the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund is not very effective (at least in the short term) in greatly increasing the number of learners who subsequently got a job. However, the propensity to move onto further learning and thus, the potential to gain in terms of careers and employment in the longer term is evident. Given the fact that recipients have childcare responsibilities, they may too be practical difficulties in simultaneously managing full-time work and caring for a child. Furthermore, there may be financial considerations inherent in the balance of available wages, childcare costs, and benefits once learning ceases. It may not reflect anything inherent in the Sixth Form College Childcare Fund-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 82 interviews has a confidence interval of +/-10.8% 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 +/-10.8% (i.e. between 39.2% and 60.8%) 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 65 interviews in this study) statistical confidence is reduced further still (to around +/-12.2% 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.