New Learners, New Learning: A Strategic Evaluation of Ufi

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Acknowledgements

This report is the product of the work of a lot of people, to whom the authors are extremely grateful. Emma Hart, Charlie Bass and others at IES provided invaluable support in preparing the report for publication. A number of IES researchers helped us with the case studies including: Sally Dench, Marije Van Gent, Máire Kerrin, Claire Tyers, Polly Kettley and Katherine Mann (who also helped with the compilation of the literature review). In each case, we are indebted to the Ufi personnel who provided and facilitated the range of interviews undertaken. The survey data we have used came from existing surveys conducted by BMG for Ufi, and they were very helpful in letting us add additional questions and giving us access to the data. Within Ufi, Sheila Kearney worked tirelessly and cheerfully to help facilitate access to the case studies and other material for the research. We are also grateful to others in Ufi, and the DfES, for giving up their time for background interviews and providing additional information. Finally, we were helped and guided throughout by a steering group of DfES and Ufi personnel, facilitated by Marion Lloyd, the DfES project manager. However, the report remains the responsibility of the authors, and any opinions and views do not necessarily represent those of the Department or Ufi.
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Executive Summary

Ufi, through the learndirect adviceline and network of learndirect provision, aims to improve individuals’ employability and organisations’ productivity and competitiveness by:

- ‘inspiring existing learners to develop their skills further
- winning over new and excluded learners
- transforming the accessibility of learning in everyday life and work.’ (Ufi, 2002)

The DfES’ intermediate objectives for Ufi also stress increasing the number of companies (particularly SMEs) providing learning opportunities to employees, and improving the quantity and quality of provision.

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the strategic learning, the provision of learning opportunities and the consequent outcomes of such changes for individuals, organisations and learning provision.

The five main messages to emerge from the study are that:

1. learndirect has so far had more of an impact on individuals than on organisations
2. learndirect contributes to lifelong learning by engaging new learners, and by widening participation by reaching out to traditionally disadvantaged groups
3. learndirect leads to further learning progression
4. learndirect is helping some learners enhance their employability
5. learndirect is contributing to the expansion and diversification of the learning market.

There are also some major challenges:

- Lifelong learning versus productivity; succeeding on one does not automatically mean success on the other.
- Stepping in versus stepping on; the emphasis on learning progression might pose some problems of reconciliation between the unique learning offer and a push to progress.
- Virtual versus supported learning; there are unresolved issues regarding support for virtual learning.
• The benefits and risks of specialisation; the pressure is on for greater specialisation of both delivery and content especially in the employer market.

Methodology

Our methodology was centred around four elements:

1. Developing an evaluation framework — based around a model of impact, and identifying the key indicators of individual and wider outcomes and the data sources we proposed to use.

2. Baseline research review — examining existing research and non-Ufi survey data to inform the process and the outcomes of the evaluation.

3. Ufi survey development and analysis — involving an examination of historic and contemporary data from existing surveys of the users of learndirect services, and the design of a new survey module to directly address the question of the impact on individuals.

4. Case studies — based around a range of nine Ufi hubs, and looking for evidence of both individual and, crucially, organisational outcomes. As part of the case studies, we also conducted a small-scale survey of providers to look at any impact of learndirect on provision more generally.

Through these four elements, we sought to explore three dimensions of impact — the impact of learndirect on individuals, on organisations, and on learning provision.

Impact on individuals

Our central dimension of impact is the effect of learndirect on individuals. Central because it is individuals who learn and individuals who, by working differently, apply that learning to organisations and make them more productive.

In our evaluation we have focused on understanding the contribution of learndirect to the journey of lifelong learning, which we likened to an ascent of a flight of steps. learndirect is charged with influencing this journey at three key stages:

1. Stepping in: entry into learning for new and disadvantaged learners

2. Stepping on: progressing to further learning and learning at a higher level

3. Stepping up: realising the benefits of learning, ie improved employability.
In achieving these aims and objectives, we have identified four key stages to the learning journey:

- **Awareness**: understanding what learning is available, and believing that it might be personally relevant and possible to do it
- **Entry**: making the commitment to learn and undertaking the learning experience
- **Learning**: acquiring new knowledge or skills
- **Outcomes**: the impact of learning on individuals’ ability to get, keep, change jobs, and progress careers.

### Stepping in

#### Awareness and usage rising

According to our analysis of the National Adult Learning Survey data (NALS) 2002 (Fitzgerald et al., 2003), over half the adult population were aware of **learndirect**, and five per cent had made use of the service (adviceline). Awareness has risen dramatically (from 26 per cent) over the previous year (La Valle et al., 2001). Usage had also risen (from three per cent). Awareness was strongest among active learners, younger people, employed people and women.

**Adviceline helps existing learners find work-related courses**

Most people call the adviceline for information on job-related courses and felt that they got a clear idea of what was available. Callers tend to be ‘warm’ rather than ‘cold’, in that they are already fairly committed to learning.

According to the **learndirect** surveys, around two-thirds of callers to the adviceline said that they were more interested in training and learning, and more likely to participate as a result of their call. For a significant minority of callers, the adviceline was influential in making the transition from awareness to entry and participation in a learning activity, but most were already on the path.

Around a quarter of adviceline callers who take up learning, do so with **learndirect**, and the other three-quarters use some other form of provision (partly because there were no suitable **learndirect** courses). Callers who go onto **learndirect** are more likely than others to be ‘non-learners’, ie have little recent experience of learning.

**learndirect learning appeals to new learners**

Compared with the overall population of learners, **learndirect** learners are more likely to be female, older and less qualified. A
quarter of learndirect learners were retired, and further 15 per cent were economically inactive.

Almost two-thirds of learndirect learners had not engaged in any training or learning during the last three years. We therefore draw the conclusion that learndirect is successfully having an impact in engaging those not actively involved in learning. This conclusion is further reinforced by the survey finding that over half the learndirect learners with no recent learning experience said that they would not have done any learning if they had not registered with learndirect, compared with 33 per cent of recent learners. Of those who said that they would have engaged in learning in any event, around half indicated that involvement with learndirect brought forward their decision to learn.

learndirect learners, particularly those outside working age and/or economically inactive, were mainly motivated by personal interest (as opposed to a work-based interest), and wanted to learn IT skills.

learndirect learning appeals because it is affordable, anonymous and accessible

The case studies provided further evidence of learndirect facilitating entry to learning, particularly for those with little recent learning experience. Our case study interviews further suggested that learndirect was important because it was:

- affordable
- it overcame psychological blocks — e-learning can be private, and learners do not have to reveal their ‘weaknesses’ to their peers
- it overcame physical blocks by providing a safe, non-threatening environment, eg in community learning centres, and allowing people to learn at their own pace.

Learner support is important

The case studies also demonstrated the need to provide learner support, and there were strong suggestions of a positive relationship between the provision of support and course completion.

Stepping on

learndirect encourages learning

learndirect learners become more confident about further learning. Almost three-quarters agreed that they felt more confident about learning something new and intended to continue to develop what they had learnt on the course. learndirect learning can act as
an important stepping stone to other forms of learning, including qualification-based opportunities. Some 45 per cent of learners said that they felt they had gained the opportunity to progress onto qualifications.

More generally, **learndirect** made it easier to take up further learning and training. More than half of learners say they are likely to undertake some other learning in the next six months, and there are signs that the learning is addictive, with people feeling it more likely the more courses they do.

**learndirect** also helps people move on. Nearly half of those who had undertaken other forms of learning said that their **learndirect** study had acted as a stepping stone. Those from disadvantaged groups are more likely to want to carry on with **learndirect**.

**learndirect encourages progression within learning**

Approximately a quarter of all **learndirect** learners reported that their learning was related to a current or previous job, or one they might do in the future. This was more pronounced for those respondents who were of working age, economically active, employed or who had recent experience of learning (ie in the last three years). The more courses people do, the more likely they are to say they are learning for vocational reasons.

There is considerable evidence on the strength of **learndirect** in developing ICT skills. For instance, 90 per cent of participants in the learners survey had taken a course in information technology.

**The learning works**

Learners are highly satisfied with their learning. Over four in five survey participants who had completed a **learndirect** course said that they had achieved all the learning that they wanted. The proportion of satisfied respondents increases with the number of **learndirect** courses they have undertaken.

**Stepping up**

**learndirect** learners gain both soft and hard skills ...

There is a high level of satisfaction among **learndirect** learners with their experience, evident from the case studies, the surveys, and reported in the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspection reports. As a result of the engagement with **learndirect**, learners report that they not only gained technical skills, usually ICT related, but also softer benefits such as improved confidence and motivation, and improved personal and social skills. Some of these outcomes also rise with the level of engagement with **learndirect** (job-related skills, team working skills, problem
solving skills, the opportunity to progress onto qualifications, key skills, IT skills, self-confidence and personal/social skills).

The more learndirect learning they do, the more positive they become.

... which boosts their confidence and helps their employability

A key measure of impact is what happens to learners as a result of their involvement with learndirect. The learners survey indicates that, in terms of employment outcomes, most learndirect learners felt more confident about seeking or keeping their job as a result of their involvement. Of the few survey respondents who had changed job since registering with learndirect, around 40 per cent thought that their learndirect learning had helped. Half of those respondents reporting that they had received a promotion, also stated they believed that their learndirect learning had helped to bring it about.

The case studies provided a number of examples of individuals who had gained considerable benefits, both in terms of going on to further learning and in accessing new employment or better employment.

**Impact on organisations**

One of the strategic aims of Ufi is to increase productivity and competitiveness, and so evaluating the impact it is having (particularly on SMEs) is an important element of this evaluation. Ufi has recently developed a new segmented approach, including the development of Premier Business Centres targeting small and medium-sized employers and specific employer-focussed products.

**Increasing the quantity and quality of learning provision**

**Employer awareness growing in some areas**

We found little evidence about employers’ awareness of learndirect other than Ufi’s own research. This shows that most managers responsible for training had heard of learndirect, mainly through national TV advertising. While most of the learning centres we visited in the case studies concentrated on individuals, and had little direct connection with employers, those which were focussed on businesses reported growing awareness among the employer community. One argued that although initial awareness of what learndirect had to offer was low, once it was explained it was relatively easy to secure interest.
Employer engagement exists in pockets

Engagement with employers (as opposed to individuals who happened to be employed) appears to be variable, often quite low but highest in those few hubs and centres specifically targeting the employer market. Overall, around five per cent of employers say that they have built links with **learndirect** (a similar level to the penetration rate among individuals) which we suspect is mostly attributable to relatively few centres focusing on employer engagement. Involvement rises considerably with size of employer. In the case studies, we did find examples of extensive engagement, with demand potentially outstripping capacity to deliver, mainly for ICT-based courses, although the penetration of parts of the employer market (eg SMEs) by sector-based hubs appeared variable. While over ten per cent of employees in the organisational hub we visited had accessed the **learndirect** system, actual engagement was considered to be low. What we have seen suggests that the **learndirect** offer can work well in particular niche markets. The question for **learndirect** is whether this will ever mature into a more generally applicable model.

Demand centred on ICT

Demand for **learndirect** in the workplace is strongest for ICT courses. Evidence from the case studies suggest that the free or low-cost delivery was thought to be a considerable aid to engagement with employers.

Little evidence of organisational impact

Although there is evidence in the literature that investment in training can generally lead to improved organisational performance, we found little other than occasional, anecdotal evidence of such an impact for **learndirect**. This does not mean that the linkage does not exist, and there is certainly evidence of employees using **learndirect** courses to gain specific skills which are then applied in the workplace. However, most of the workplace training provided by **learndirect** could be seen as building a foundation for further skill development, from which attributable organisational outcomes could be attained.

Employers need more employees with intermediate skills, there are also difficulties at basic skill levels, but employers rarely see these as their responsibility. The lack of management skills has also been identified as an important element of the UK productivity gap. These may not be skills gaps that play to **learndirect**’s strengths.
Various issues impede employer engagement

Our discussions with hub and centre personnel, and others, threw up a number of issues relating to definitions and processes used to manage the *learndirect* infrastructure, which at best, cause ambiguities and confusion, and at worst, impede performance. These included definitional and eligibility issues and the overlap between sectoral and geographical hubs.

More fundamentally:

1. Firstly, *learndirect* is far more involved with individuals than with organisations.
2. Secondly, the nature of the learning provided could be seen as largely of a foundation level.
3. Thirdly, it is very difficult to trace the links from any form of learning through to organisational performance. *learndirect* predominately acts at a fairly early point in the chain of impact, therefore any effect it does have is difficult to see.

Impact on provision

The third dimension in which *learndirect* could be having a strategic impact is on the nature of learning provision more generally, e.g. by increasing general awareness of the learning opportunities available, or contributing to the development of new forms of learning.

The wider impact of *learndirect* on the learning market

The adviceline contributes to development of the learning market

The survey evidence is that the *learndirect* adviceline makes an important contribution to the development of the overall learning market from the perspective of learners, although this was not echoed in the (limited) evidence from providers.

The network also contributes by providing new forms of learning

The volume of learners and the satisfaction amongst them, suggests that *learndirect* is influencing the nature of learning by providing a range of bite-sized opportunities, previously not generally available, and yet highly attractive, particularly to new learners.

Computer-based learning is growing, and *learndirect* contributes to its development both through helping people acquire ICT skills
and also by helping to create an online learning infrastructure. It does the latter by developing and sustaining individual learning centres (including new and non-college based) and providing computer-based learning materials and opportunities.

There is relatively little evidence that the range of courses developed by **learndirect** has added significantly to the range of materials and opportunities available, outside the area of ICT and perhaps the Skills for Life range of basic skills provision.

Evidence of impact on the overall learning infrastructure can be found in the enthusiasm that many providers show in seeking to become **learndirect** centres.

**An impact on virtual learning has yet to be seen**

The extent to which **learndirect** is assisting the development of a virtual learning infrastructure is less clear. Most **learndirect** learners visit physical learning centres rather than use the Internet, eg from home. The virtual learning route poses a range of technical and learner-based issues which have yet to be overcome for most **learndirect** learners.
1. Introduction

‘Ufi will be a new kind of organisation. It will exploit the opportunities created by information and communications technologies … It will create new markets for learning. It will help people learn more effectively.’
Rt Hon. David Blunkett

Ufi was launched as the government’s flagship for lifelong learning, intending to make a reality from the vision of a ‘university for industry’. Launched in Autumn 2000, Ufi delivers its services under the brand name learndirect and utilises Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to provide greater flexibility about how, where and at what speed individuals learn. Learndirect has two main products, there is an independent national learning information and advice service, which provides independent advice on over 550,000 courses via telephone and website facilities, and an e-learning network delivering over 400 online courses through branded learning centres, in the workplace or at home. A key element of Ufi’s delivery is to work with partners and stakeholders to achieve targets and objectives.

1.1 Aims and objectives

Ufi aims to improve individuals’ employability and organisations’ productivity and competitiveness by:

- ‘inspiring existing learners to develop their skills further
- winning over new and excluded learners, and
- transforming the accessibility of learning in everyday life and work.’ (Ufi, 2002)

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the strategic impact of public expenditure on Ufi, ie what difference Ufi has made directly to involvement in learning activities and the provision of learning opportunities, and the outcomes of any such changes. We therefore seek to assess the extent to which Ufi has contributed to individuals’ participation in learning and development activities that improve their skill base and their ability to deploy those skills and contribute to organisations’ business performance.
The evaluation has been specifically asked to assess the impact of Ufi on organisations through increasing productivity and competitiveness, and the impact on individuals by enhancing their employability through increasing knowledge and skills.

The Department has also set intermediate objectives for Ufi to:

- increase the number of people participating in lifelong learning
- widen participation by changing attitudes towards learning of those who would not otherwise have participated
- increase the number of companies (particularly SMEs) providing learning opportunities
- improve the quantity and quality of provision.

Our evaluation of Ufi is, therefore, of both the independent national learning advice service and the national e-learning service. In terms of structuring the evaluation, one of the first considerations was to clarify the potential contributions of the two operational functions to the strategic and interim objectives. We have conceptualised **learndirect** as having an impact on the learning process, as set out in Figure 1.1. We have represented this learning process as a chain of impact, that begins with awareness of the possible benefits of learning and of learning opportunities to the left of the model, continues to entry into learning by finding an appropriate learning event, on to progression through the learning experience, and finally to the outcomes and benefits of the learning to the right. The elements of the chain that the **learndirect** adviceline and the **learndirect** network impact on, are also shown.

## 1.2 Methodology

Our methodology was centred around the following elements:

- **Developing an evaluation framework** — based around a model of impact and identifying the key indicators of individual and wider impact and the data sources we proposed to use.

![Figure 1.1: Impact on learning actions](image-url)

*Source: IES, 2003*
Baseline research review — examining existing research and non-Ufi survey data to inform the process and the outcomes of the evaluation.

Ufi survey development and analysis — involving an examination of historic and contemporary data from existing surveys of the users of learndirect services, and the design of a new survey module to directly address the question of the impact on individuals.

Case studies — based around Ufi hubs, and looking for evidence of both individual and, crucially, organisational outcomes. As part of the case studies, we also conducted a small-scale survey of providers, to look at any impact of learndirect on provision more generally.

We have mapped the various data collection methods outlined above, against the research objectives and the learning chain (Table 1.2).

1.2.1 Evaluation framework

Our evaluation framework attempts to detail what we might expect to see if learndirect were having a positive impact on the chain. We describe the framework in detail in the next chapter.
1.2.2 Baseline research review

We undertook informal interviews with a broad range of Ufi personnel, and reviewed existing research and secondary data sources to identify any findings of relevance to this study. We were primarily seeking two sources of information:

- findings which could directly cast light on the impact of *learndirect* services
- data that would provide more general information about provision and participation in the learning market, and set a general context for the evaluation.

As part of this review, we have also analysed data from existing surveys *ie*, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS).

1.2.3 Survey development and analysis

We also examined data from three existing surveys conducted by Ufi to explore awareness and entry into learning, and reactions to their learning experience. We added questions to the existing adviceline users and *learndirect* learners surveys to give some additional information on learning and other employment outcomes for individuals. The three surveys are:

1. the first wave of a longitudinal survey of callers to the *learndirect* adviceline
2. the first wave of a longitudinal survey of *learndirect* learners
3. a *learndirect* learner survey (snapshot survey).

Each of these surveys was undertaken with individuals who have had some contact with *learndirect*, either through contacting the *learndirect* adviceline or as a result of taking part in *learndirect* learning, at some time during the last six to 12 months.

The key issues that we explored with individuals in these surveys include:

- their motivation for contacting *learndirect*/undertaking *learndirect* learning
- the immediate gains from their involvement with *learndirect* *eg* clearer idea of learning required, improved work-related skills, soft outcomes such as increased confidence or working with others, improved basic skills, new qualifications *etc.*
- general attitudes towards learning
- views on the role and impact of learning, *eg* on employability, social inclusion, health and well-being
- future learning intentions, including qualifications
• views on longer-term impact of intervention with **learndirect** on employability and earnings.

The key sources of primary data in this report come from the two longitudinal surveys of adviceline users, and **learndirect** learners surveys. These surveys were undertaken by BMG for Ufi in July and August 2002. For the **learndirect** learners survey, 2,031 telephone interviews were conducted with **learndirect** learners who had registered for a **learndirect** course in the latter part of 2001. For the adviceline users survey, 2,058 telephone interviews were conducted with **learndirect** adviceline enquirers who had called the **learndirect** adviceline in February or March of 2002.

### 1.2.4 Case studies

The case studies were a vital element of this research, as they enabled us to explore in much greater detail the issues of significance to the study, and to begin to understand the range of contributing factors that impact on outcomes. This is even more important in an evaluation of this degree of complexity, and is essential if our analysis of the effectiveness of **learndirect** is to be sensitive to the many other issues that can affect the impact of learning. Such issues include, for example: the support available within organisations to enable individuals to act on the training that they have had; the way other systems such as the appraisal system support a change in behaviour; the support offered by the culture of the organisation; and the behaviour and views of managers.

**Selection**

*Ufi* hubs are the base unit for the case studies. We attempted to ensure that we covered the full range of different ways in which *Ufi* delivers its services to different markets, to ensure we can fully and fairly answer the question as to the impact that **learndirect** has on both individual learners and organisations. In conjunction with the project steering group, we identified the following distribution of case studies:

- three geographic hubs — in contrasting areas to examine a range of learning environments
- three sectoral hubs — these are based in the sectoral hub network
- one within an organisation, *e.g.* large employers who have agreements with *Ufi* to provide **learndirect** services
- two centres identified as having particularly strong links with organisations — especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
Criteria

In choosing hubs for case studies, we applied a range of criteria agreed with DfES and Ufi. In order of priority, these were:

1. **Performance** — we concentrated on those hubs judged to be of above-average performance to help identify best practice elements and to maximise the possibility of encountering strategic impact.

2. **Depth of experience** — preferably, all the geographic case studies should have been functioning for some time (ie 18 months to two years) and therefore more likely to have had some impact. For other case study formats, depth of experience is still an important factor, but we are not able to be as prescriptive.

3. **Geographic distribution** — geographic hubs should show a geographic distribution around England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

4. **Location type** — case studies should also include a contrast between metropolitan, mixed and rural areas.

5. **Increasing participation** — to take account of equality issues, we would like to look at some geographic hubs that have been able to demonstrate that they have been particularly successful at increasing participation from disadvantaged groups.

6. **Sectoral distribution** — the sectoral hubs should pick up diverse sectors and different means of delivery.

Applying these criteria to the types of hubs that we would like to include identified some firm case studies. We visited:

- geographical hubs:
  - Lincolnshire and Rutland
  - City Pride and Stockport
  - Northern Ireland

We also anticipated visiting Hereford and Worcestershire, but this had to be cancelled due to pressure of work being experienced by the hub.

- sectoral hubs:
  - Lantra (Land Industries Training Agency)
  - ASSA (Automotive Sector Strategic Alliance)
  - EMTA (Engineering and Marine Training Agency)

- organisational hub case study:
  - Barclays

- centres with strong links to SMEs
It is important to recognise that the case studies were not typical of *learndirect* provision as a whole. The hubs and centres we visited tended to be seen as ‘best practice’ examples, particularly in terms of their engagement with SMEs.

**Issues explored**

The case studies sought to research the impact of *learndirect* services on the general provision of learning opportunities, and the wider impact on employer competitiveness. We developed discussion guides (see Appendix 3) which explore the following questions:

- Has *learndirect* provision improved the range of learning opportunities on offer? What gaps have been filled? Why did those gaps exist and what prevented them from being filled in the first place?
- Has *learndirect* provision improved access to learning opportunities? Has participation widened? Is it easier to access learning through information and computer-based technologies? If so, why? What skill requirements are best met by such provision? What has been the impact on the way people learn?
- What has been the result of engagement with *learndirect*? Have skill levels improved? In what way? How can this be measured? What would have happened without *learndirect*?
- What has been the result of individuals’ involvement with *learndirect*? If skill levels have risen, has this lead to improved productivity? What other benefits have resulted?

**Fieldwork**

In each case study, the detail of who was interviewed varied by the nature of the case study, but included:

- *learndirect* staff, including hub and centre staff
- learning providers — both in and out of the workplace
- employers — including training managers and line managers
- intermediaries able to provide an assessment of the relevant learning market, eg with local education authorities or Learning and Skills Councils or National Training Organisations (or Sector Skills Councils)
- users of *learndirect* services — *ie* learners
- recruitment and other agencies involved in placing individuals in employment and/or providing advice (eg Employment Service, Advice and Guidance Partnerships *etc.*).
Provider survey

We also developed and distributed a brief questionnaire to a sample of providers. The survey was designed to explore whether Ufi had an impact on provision more widely. Questionnaires were distributed by post (95) and electronically (25). We received 27 returns in all — a response rate of 22 per cent, which is creditable in the little time available, but does mean that any results reported need to be treated circumspectly.

1.3 Structure of the report

In the next chapter, we present our evaluation framework which underpins our methodology and resultant analysis. This framework spells out the questions we have asked and the evidence we have looked for in conducting this review.

Subsequent chapters then examine:

- the impact on individuals (Chapter 3)
- the impact on organisations (Chapter 4)
- the impact on provision (Chapter 5).

In each case, we report the main points of evidence drawn from the various methodological elements.

In the last chapter (Chapter 6), we examine the emerging themes and draw our conclusions on the strategic impact of Ufi.

We have also looked specifically at evidence of different views from Northern Ireland, as there had been some anecdotal evidence that learndirect in Northern Ireland was especially successful. Throughout our analysis of results, we have reported regional differences in findings where they exist.
2. The Framework

2.1 The impact chain

As we have seen, individuals participate in *learndirect* services either through the adviceline, or through accessing learning opportunities provided through the *learndirect* network. They may access either through the organisations in which they work, or independently. As a result of the advice or information received through the adviceline, individuals may go on to access learning provided through *learndirect* or elsewhere, which theoretically could lead to changes in behaviour (e.g., through the acquisition of new skills) with consequential hard or soft outcomes for themselves and for the organisations in which they work. These potential flows of engagement with the different aspects of *learndirect* are shown in Figure 2.1. We have also sought to make the ways in which *learndirect* can have an impact more explicit, by developing a chain of impact.

The rationale behind developing such a chain is that it enables us to look for intermediate as well as final outcomes. The evaluation may not be able to identify final outcomes, because it is reliant primarily on existing data, and there is limited tracking of what happens to individuals after their engagement with *learndirect*. The evaluation also seeks to identify ancillary effects of *learndirect* e.g., on the flexibility and nature of provision and the attitudes to training among employers. The resultant impact chain on key stakeholders is shown in Figure 2.2. The model

![Figure 2.1: Routes of participation](image_url)
acknowledges that the key impact of learndirect is on individuals and the changes learning brings about in them. It is these individual changes in behaviour that drive outcomes for organisations, such as enhanced productivity, better quality, better systems or increased profit.

2.2 Key indicators

This chain of impact can be used to explore how we might expect learndirect to have an effect on the key stakeholders at various key stages along the chain. Put simply, if learndirect is having a positive impact on individuals, organisations and other providers at four key stages in the chain; awareness, entry, learning and behaviour and outcomes, what might we expect to see and how might we measure it?

For example, if learndirect is having a positive impact on organisations' awareness of learning opportunities, we might expect more organisations to have heard of learndirect. We might also expect that if the impact continues along the chain (Figure 2.2), more organisations would be providing learndirect programmes, and because the programmes are easier to engage with, more learning might be taking place than would be the case without learndirect. If such learning is having positive effects on the individuals themselves, and changing their skills and knowledge, we might also expect that there would be positive benefits for the organisations, such as:

- reduced skill gaps
- increased morale and retention, and reduced absence
- greater innovation, better quality, improved customer care
- increased productivity
- increased profit.
Similarly, for individuals, we would expect that if **learndirect** was having an impact, individuals would be increasingly aware of **learndirect**, more likely to see learning as relevant to them and more likely to enter learning. In turn, this is likely to mean that a relatively high proportion of **learndirect** learners come from ‘hard-to-reach’ groups. As a consequence of undertaking a programme, we would expect learners to feel they had learnt something worthwhile and could apply the learning, that they may feel more positive about further learning opportunities. As a result, learners may find that their employability or work performance has improved.

Such benefits may not all be present or all apply in all circumstances, but they would be indicative of our chain of impact being present. Table 2.1 explores the effects that would be expected if **learndirect** is having positive impacts, and how we have sought to measure them through this research.

We have also thought carefully about where data can be sought that helps address these specific measures and the means by which they are best gathered. This is spelt out in Appendix Table 1, which maps the elements of the evaluation framework spelt out in Table 2.1 against the various aspects of our methodology.

Tables 2.1 and Appendix Table 1 provide the framework that has shaped the study and which we follow in presenting the findings of our research. In the next three chapters we detail our findings with regard to **learndirect**’s impact on individuals, organisations and providers. We begin with individuals as the central and key impact chain.
### Table 2.2.1: Key indicators of positive impact of learndirect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of impact</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Learning and behaviour</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on individuals ...</td>
<td>Individuals will be increasingly aware of <a href="#">learndirect</a> More individuals will see learning as relevant to them The <a href="#">learndirect</a> adviceline will make entry into learning easier — for those for whom it is an appropriate option The adviceline offers relevant learning</td>
<td>Individuals will engage with learning who would not otherwise have done so Relatively high proportion of <a href="#">learndirect</a> learners come from ‘hard-to-reach’ groups Those who learn through <a href="#">learndirect</a> will find it more accessible than other options</td>
<td>Engagement with <a href="#">learndirect</a> programmes will result in individual learning Participants will believe the learning to be relevant and feel it to be not too difficult, and appropriately paced Those who have participated will be more likely to consider future learning and more likely to learn to a qualification Learners will apply their learning vocationally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employability will improve: *improved job search skills more confident in their potential employability less likely to be unemployed periods of unemployment will be shorter Positive job changes will increase: better pay promotions/ increased responsibility Job performance will improve Attitudinal benefits will result: greater self-esteem increased job commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Individual measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness of <a href="#">learndirect</a> (where heard from?)</th>
<th>Sign-up rates to programmes</th>
<th>What did they learn?</th>
<th>Career/job impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive views on relevance/value of learning (view on why want to learn?)</td>
<td>Sign-up rates to other providers</td>
<td>Would they have learnt it anyway?</td>
<td>Improved performance in the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If sought other sources of information — compare</td>
<td>Engagement levels of new learners</td>
<td>What are they doing differently?</td>
<td>Job change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explored range of courses available — why <a href="#">learndirect</a>?</td>
<td>Engagement levels of disadvantaged groups</td>
<td>Views on difficulty/perceptions of usefulness/ motivation to learn/ goal-setting</td>
<td>Increased pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevance of learning to career/job</td>
<td>Intentions for future learning</td>
<td>Promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Views on course arrangements</td>
<td>Intentions on qualifications</td>
<td>Impact on job search/job application behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Views on impact of course on barriers to entry</td>
<td></td>
<td>End of unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact on self-esteem/commitment/attitudes/job satisfaction/relations with colleagues etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus of impact</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>Learning and behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Impact on organisation** | More organisations will be aware of *learndirect* (advice line/network) (we also know that organisations that have articulated their training needs will be more likely to realise positive benefits) | SMEs are more likely to provide *learndirect* programmes as they are easier to arrange and better mapped onto their needs for development | Engagement with *learndirect* will mean that specific SMEs will provide training that would not otherwise have done so (as measured by comparison with non-involved SMEs) | **Engagement with *learndirect***:  
- reduces experience of skill gaps  
- increases morale, retention and reduces absence  
- results in more innovation, better quality, improved customer care  
- increases productivity  
- increases profit  
- by reducing costs, increasing income or increasing effectiveness  
**NB: distant outcomes will be more difficult to measure** |

| Organisational measures | Awareness of *learndirect*  
Awareness of range of courses  
Appreciation of benefits of distance learning (plus contextual information such as articulation of training need through, *eg* TNA/appraisal, size, sector, occupational profile, previous training behaviour) | Provide *learndirect* programmes (instead of others)  
Increase in no. of SMEs providing training  
Provide training to a wider range of staff  
Provide more training  
Views on benefits of *learndirect* provision, *eg* believe training better suited to organisation’s needs  
Views on reason for engagement |  
Impact on experience of skill gaps  
Increased morale/retention/lower absence  
Changes in business practice, *ie* helping accreditation under IIP, adoption of quality standards, management practices  
Changes in innovation  
Improved quality  
Improved customer care  
Increased productivity  
Increased profit (reducing costs, increasing income or increasing effectiveness) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of impact</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Learning and behaviour</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on other providers</td>
<td>Other providers will have marketed their own programmes more extensively</td>
<td>More providers will be exploring and providing flexible delivery</td>
<td>Other providers will find increased referral of students from the adviceline</td>
<td>Referrals will be appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provider measures</td>
<td>Changes in advice and information provision? Views on impact of <strong>learndirect</strong> help line</td>
<td>Changes in course provision as a result of <strong>learndirect</strong></td>
<td>Growth in learning opportunities Distance learning offer/increased flexibility of learning Number of students coming from advice-line increased — can only be perceptual as we have no before measures Views on appropriateness of referral — can only be perceptual as we have no before measures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: IES 2003*
3. Impact on the Individual

In considering the impact of *learndirect* on individuals, we call on information from a range of sources: the literature; existing data sources such as NALS and LFS; the case studies; and the surveys of learners and adviceline users. In this chapter we use evidence from all sources to report against the framework.

3.1 Awareness

If *learndirect* is having an impact on individuals we would expect to see an increasing awareness of *learndirect*:

- more individuals will see learning as relevant to them
- the *learndirect* adviceline will make entry into learning easier — for those for whom it is an appropriate option
- the adviceline offers relevant learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of <em>learndirect</em> (source of information)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive views on relevance/value of learning (view on reasons for wanting to learn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If other sources of information sought — compare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explored range of courses available — why <em>learndirect</em>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on information/advice given (eg pertinence? Ease of access? Met need? Pursued learning? Overcame barriers?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.1 Learning awareness

The key question we are seeking to answer is does *learndirect* increase the awareness of learning, does it help more people access information on learning and see it as relevant to them? In effect there are two measures here — at the simplest the degree to which the adviceline is used, but a more complex measure is the degree to which it is used by those who would not otherwise have accessed learning.

Ufi data indicate that between April 2000 and March 2001, 1.44 million people used the *learndirect* information and advice
service, a figure that exceeded the DfEE target by 20 per cent. An early review of the profile of adviceline users had mixed messages as to whether learndirect was helping the learning disadvantaged to be more aware of learning and to be more positively disposed to consider learning. Bysshe and Parsons (1998) conducted a review of Learning Direct, the telephone adviceline which then came under the Ufi umbrella. The most notable findings were:

- Most users were not already highly qualified, with callers holding level 2 qualifications more than doubly outnumbering those with degrees. Yet those with no or very low levels of qualification formed only 7.8 per cent of the user population.
- Demand levels from older people, especially from ethnic minorities, were low, as were demands from women in part-time work.
- Nearly two-thirds of surveyed callers, however, were women, with younger women in particular being more likely to use the service than were men.
- Largely, the service was used by those with ‘high levels of economic activity’, for example, six out of ten users were employed or self-employed.
- There seemed to be relatively little demand from employers, with less than a quarter of employer-users calling on behalf of their employees.

More recently, evidence from the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2002\(^1\) suggest that some 51 per cent of adults had heard of learndirect, although only five per cent had actually used the service (the phrasing of the question would appear to suggest that it is the adviceline that is referred to). In the NALS 2001 survey, 26 per cent of adults had heard of, but not used, learndirect whilst a further three per cent had used the service (again, this probably refers to the adviceline). These figures indicate that awareness of learndirect has grown significantly in one year, although usage has been slower to increase.

Awareness of learndirect was strongest in NALS 2002 among:

- active learners
- younger people (for instance 83 per cent of respondents aged between 18 and 24 had heard of learndirect, compared with 67 per cent of 35 to 44 year olds and 37 per cent of 65 to 69 year olds
- employed people
- women.

\(^1\) NALS 2002 data refer to our own analysis of the dataset and not to the data published in the report (not published while we were doing our research), which may be based differently in some instances.
Respondents with no qualifications were least likely to have heard of **learndirect**.

The survey of adviceline users (September 2002) also shows a majority of respondents were female (63 per cent) and only five per cent were currently unemployed. The vast majority of callers were of working age (96 per cent), just over three-quarters were economically active, and had almost half had undertaken some learning in the last three years (referred to here as ‘learners’).

Women were more likely to be learners (51 per cent of female callers compared to 46 per cent of male) but less likely to be economically active (72 per cent of women versus 82 per cent of men). The reasons why callers contacted **learndirect** reflect the profile of high economic activity, with almost half seeking information on job-related courses, 24 per cent wanting information on qualifications, and 17 per cent wanting information on IT courses. This compares to only 15 per cent wanting information on leisure courses.

The reasons for calling **learndirect** varies little by whether respondents were learners or non-learners. There is little regional variation except some evidence that those from Northern Ireland were less likely to contact the adviceline for information on studying for qualifications (14 per cent compared to 24 per cent in the rest of the UK), or where to go for career guidance (four per cent versus 11 per cent in the rest of the UK). Variation by age and economic activity are presented in Figures 3.1 and 3.2.

Callers were also on the whole positively disposed towards learning. The vast majority of respondents see paying for learning as an investment (80 per cent), disagreed that they didn’t have the

![Figure 3.1: Reasons for calling learndirect, by age](image-url)

**Base: adviceline users, N=2,058**

*Source: IES, based on survey of **learndirect** adviceline users, BMG, 2002*
confident to learn new skills (just over 80 per cent), disagreed that learning was not for them (nearly 90 per cent) and felt that there were plenty of learning opportunities (79 per cent). Those from Northern Ireland were more positively disposed to learning than those from the remainder of the UK.

On many indicators, awareness and use of the adviceline is growing and highest amongst the younger, the economically active and women. There is also evidence that around half of those who contact the line are previous non-learners, which would suggest that the adviceline is facilitating awareness of learning.

### 3.1.2 Increased entry

We looked to see if we could find any evidence that **learndirect** increases learning activity — *ie* that it facilitates entry into learning especially for those who would not otherwise do so.

One of the more difficult questions to answer is counterfactual — what would have happened anyway in the absence of **learndirect**? One approach is to examine the entry into learning of those who are unaware of **learndirect**. From the NALS data we can identify different learning rates for those who have heard of **learndirect** and those who have not. Of those who had not heard of **learndirect**, around 56 per cent were learners, *ie* had undertaken some learning in the past three years (42 per cent of those had experienced taught learning), compared to nearly 80 per cent of those who had heard of **learndirect** (of whom 64 per cent had experienced taught learning). These participation rates compare with the 49 per cent of adviceline users who had learnt in the previous three years leading up to their call. This suggests that
learndirect is attracting a particular subset of the adult population whose participation in learning is lower than might be expected.

However, the learndirect ‘aware’ and the ‘unaware’ (from NALS) also differ on a number of variables — as we have seen, those who have heard of learndirect tend to be younger, more likely to be active learners and more likely to be employed, factors which are also associated with learning activity. To allow for these differences we conducted further analysis by sub-groups within the NALS data, of relatively learning advantaged (i.e. younger and economically active) and disadvantaged (older and economically inactive). These show that within the disadvantaged group, only 28 per cent of those who had not heard of learndirect had undertaken learning in the last three years, compared to 46 per cent of those who had heard of learndirect. For advantaged learners, the differences were much less marked, with over 80 per cent having undertaken previous learning regardless of whether they had or had not heard of learndirect. A simple comparison of learning rates over the previous three years would indicate that the adviceline is attracting those who are less likely to be learners than would be expected from analysis of the general population. However, our further analysis would appear to provide further evidence that learndirect is of especial significance for those demographic groups normally associated with learning disadvantage.

Contact with the adviceline does not necessarily result in learning activity. We cannot make a direct comparison with learning rates after contacting the adviceline, as we only have data on subsequent entry into learning for the period from the call to the adviceline to the survey (up to six months later). A further 36 per cent had taken up learning since making the call, but this varies according to whether they were previously learners (47 per cent of previous learners had gone on to learning, as had 27 per cent of non-learners). The 27 per cent is significant, in that this group had not learnt in the previous three years, and would seem to be a creditable result.

There is evidence from the survey that callers are generally satisfied with the service they receive and feel that it has helped them to undertake training. Just over 63 per cent of respondents felt that the information given increased their likelihood of participating in training and learning (58 per cent for Northern Ireland), and a slightly higher percentage (68 per cent) felt it had made them more interested in training and learning. Over half of all callers to the adviceline (57 per cent), had already decided to undertake some learning before calling (slightly higher in Northern Ireland at 63 per cent). However, one in twenty callers to the adviceline said that they were less interested in training and learning following their contact with the adviceline. The call to the learndirect adviceline had made no difference to interest in training and learning for almost one-quarter of all callers.
Respondents who had undertaken some form of learning in the last three years (‘learners’) were more likely to have already decided to undertake some learning prior to calling the adviceline than respondents who had not done any learning in the last three years (‘non-learners’) (62 per cent of learners already intended to take up learning when they phoned the adviceline compared to 52 per cent of non-learners).

We sought to understand some of these differences further, and therefore also explored the data using the attitude to learning clusters developed for Learndirect by TNS using discriminant analysis (personally disinterested; switched off; enthusiast; low priority; work motivated; independents; and conflicting priorities) to see if these clusters helped inform our understanding of gains from contacting the adviceline. Those described as disinterested in learning or switched off were less likely to have already made a decision about learning before calling the line, whereas learning enthusiasts and those for whom learning was a low priority, were more likely to have already decided. Contact with the line had a higher than average effect on increasing the likelihood of participating in learning for the disinterested, the enthusiasts, the work motivated and those for whom learning was a low priority. It had a less than average impact on the switched off and those with conflicting priorities. Enthusiasts and the work motivated were also consistently more likely to report that contact with the line had made learning easier, that they were more determined to train and more likely to train. Those with conflicting priorities were consistently less likely than average to report these gains. This might be taken to indicate that the adviceline can help to motivate some difficult groups and potentially facilitate their entry into learning.

More generally, there are indications in the survey that individuals are quite likely to make the transition from awareness to entry. We have seen that just over one-third (36 per cent) had already gone on to undertake some sort of training or learning by the time they were contacted. Some 40 per cent of the remainder felt they were extremely likely to learn in the next 12 months, and 26 per cent were quite likely to do so. The call to the adviceline was seen as highly significant in this decision by 15 per cent and had some influence for a further 26 per cent. Interestingly, 20 per cent felt it has no influence at all.

Analysis by the attitude to learning clusters show that enthusiasts were more likely to have undertaken training since contacting the line (51 per cent) and those who were disinterested or switched off less likely (22 and 29 per cent).

3.1.3 Views on the adviceline

We have looked at why people say they contacted the adviceline; did they get what they are looking for?
Bysshe and Parsons (1998) describe the telephone line as providing a ‘broadly satisfactory service’ with general user satisfaction rated between 4.00 and 4.53 on a five point scale. In addition, caller numbers were noted to have substantially exceeded targets: 405,000 calls were made to Learning Direct in its first year, against a target of 250,000.

The most common gains callers perceived as attributable to their calling the *learndirect* adviceline were:

- a clear idea of job-related courses (either a current or future job): almost half of all respondents (49 per cent) reported this to be the case. Not surprisingly, this was much less frequently reported as a gain for respondents who were not of working age.

- a clear idea of qualifications that could be pursued: 43 per cent of callers to the adviceline reported this as a gain from contacting the adviceline, although this was much less so for male respondents (34 per cent) and those who were not of working age (32 per cent) and higher for those in Northern Ireland (52 per cent).

- a clear idea of where respondents could go for careers advice and guidance; 30 per cent of callers to the adviceline reported this as a gain. Once more though, fewer male callers and those of non-working age reported that they had gained this information from the adviceline.

Figure 3.3: Gains from contacting adviceline, by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gain</th>
<th>Non-working age</th>
<th>Working age</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idea of job-related courses</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea of quals can study for</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea of where to get career guidance</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea of courses related to hobbies</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea of funding to help learning</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea of IT training</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info. on future career opps</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No gains-other reasons</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: adviceline users, N=2,058

Source: IES, based on survey of *learndirect* adviceline users, BMG, 2002
a clear idea of courses related to hobbies and leisure activities; 23 per cent of adviceline callers reported that they had received this as a result of calling learn-direct. This was lower in Northern Ireland (14 per cent). Many more respondents of non-working age had received this sort of information from the adviceline (44 per cent).

While again there was some variation in responses by the age and economic activity of respondents (Figures 3.3 and 3.4), learners and non-learners saw similar gains.

Overall, we conclude that people are likely to find the adviceline helpful and feel it makes them more interested in learning and more likely to learn. However, it would also seem to be the case that many are warm rather than cold callers and already quite committed to entry. Our regional analysis showed that there is some evidence that those from Northern Ireland are more enthusiastic about learning and keen to move on to qualifications rather than leisure learning, and in line with the profile of enthusiastic callers across all regions, more likely to have already decided to undertake learning.

3.2 Entry

In assessing whether learn-direct is effective in engaging with those who would not otherwise become involved in learning, we have looked for evidence on four points:
1. Individuals will engage with learning who would not otherwise have done so.

2. Relatively high proportions of **learndirect** learners come from ‘hard-to-reach’ groups.

3. Those who learn through **learndirect** will find it more accessible than other options.

4. In terms of the effect of learning on employability and organisational outcomes, we would also like to see increasing numbers of individuals learning for job-related reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign-up rates to programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign-up rates to other providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement levels of new learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement levels of disadvantaged groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear objectives for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of learning to career/job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on course arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View on impact of course on barriers to entry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.1 Engaging new and hard-to-reach learners

The adviceline survey gives some analysis of progression into learning. In the main, most people who went on to take up some sort of training or learning (73 per cent, excluding ‘don’t knows’) participated in learning with a provider other than **learndirect**, which means that just over a quarter of people taking up training and learning after calling the adviceline actually went on to learn with **learndirect**. However, approximately one-third of people of non-working age, and those who had not done any learning in the three years prior to calling the **learndirect** adviceline, were likely to have gone into **learndirect** learning. Although these are low numbers, this may be an indication that **learndirect** is attracting new learners. Further evidence comes from the fact that 63 per cent had not engaged in any training or learning during the last three years. NALS data tell us that 69 per cent of people generally *had* engaged in some kind of learning in the last three years and 55 per cent had participated in ‘taught learning’. Analysis of NALS data also indicates that 54 per cent of current ‘taught’ learners had not been involved in any other taught learning over the past three years. Although there may be different understanding of the terms used to describe engagement in learning between the two surveys, this evidence does lead us to suggest that **learndirect** is successfully having an impact in engaging those not actively involved in learning. This conclusion is further reinforced by the survey finding that 45 per cent of **learndirect** learners said that they would not have done any learning if they had not registered.
with *learndirect* — indicating that the service is of particular relevance to them.

In trying to determine if *learndirect* reaches those who traditionally do not engage with learning, it is important to establish what the characteristics of the learning population are. A number of studies and reviews have examined the characteristics of those engaged in various types of learning (eg Dench and Regan (2000), Tuckett and Sargant (1999), Hillage *et al.* (2000)). The general conclusion is that learners are typically:

- younger than non-learners — particularly those engaged in vocational learning
- in employment, or slightly less likely to be those seeking employment, and engaged in managerial professional or associate professional occupations
- qualified to at least level 2 — NALS surveys show that the higher the level of qualification on leaving full-time education, the more likely the respondent is to be defined as a learner.

In most cases, gender and, to lesser extent, ethnicity do not seem to be important differentiating factors explaining engagement with learning activity.

The main source of information on the characteristics of *learndirect* learners is the learners survey. This suggests that they are:

- **mainly female** — 61 per cent of respondents were women, compared with 39 per cent men. By contrast, men are slightly more likely than women to be involved in any type of learning, according to NALS 2001. This is consistent with the profile of adviceline users.
- **older than average** — 35 per cent of *learndirect* learners in the learners survey were aged over 55 and only 21 per cent aged between 16 and 34. NALS suggest that learning participation declines with age — particularly those engaged in ‘taught learning’ — the definition of which seems to correspond well with participation in a *learndirect* course. However, the (relatively few) respondents in NALS who had used *learndirect* had a similar (young) profile to those who had heard of the service — but this may simply reflect users of the adviceline rather than *learndirect* learners, who may not have been adequately covered by the NALS 2002 survey.
- **less qualified than average learners** — one-quarter of *learndirect* learners were qualified to at least level 4 (*ie* first degree or above), whilst just under one-third had a qualification at level 2 (GCSE grade A-C) or below. A similar proportion of *learndirect* learners had no qualifications at all. Although the qualification thresholds are not directly comparable, NALS and other data suggest that the average
participant in learning is likely to be better qualified than learndirect learners.

- **most often employed** — 31 per cent were engaged in full-time employment or self-employment and a further 17 per cent worked part time. However, a quarter of learndirect learners were retired from paid work and a further 15 per cent were either economically inactive, looking after a home or family, or unable to work due to ill-health or disability.

This examination of the profile of learndirect learners therefore suggests that the service is penetrating the harder to reach edges of the learning market.

Learners are on the whole well-disposed towards learning, agreeing with statements that learning is important in finding or changing a job, staying in a job, improving potential for promotion, improving self-esteem (all means of 4.3 or 4.4 on a 1 to 5 scale, where five means strongly agree). Less strong agreement was also expressed for learning being important in getting involved in community activity (mean of 3.6) and for keeping active and healthy (mean of 3.7). Both of these latter two statements received significantly stronger agreement from those who had only undertaken learndirect learning rather than alongside other forms of learning in the last three years, and we also saw stronger agreement from those in Northern Ireland. This is likely to be indicative of learndirect having attracted newer and more socially motivated learners.

The advantage of the adviceline survey is that it enables us to compare directly the characteristics of those who go on to undertake learning with learndirect and those who learn elsewhere (see Figure 3.5).

The most striking differences between adviceline users who went on to learn through learndirect and other learners, is their previous learning status and age (see Figure 3.5). learndirect learners were more likely to have been new learners — *ie* not have done any learning in the past three years, than other learners. learndirect learners were also older than other learners (the average age of a learndirect learner was 39, compared to 34 for other learners) (not shown in Figure 3.5). Self-funding was common for both kinds of learners, but individuals on ‘other learning’ were much more likely to have funded their own learning (52 per cent), compared to learndirect learners (39 per cent). learndirect learners were more likely not to have incurred any costs at all (36 per cent compared to 20 per cent of non-learndirect learners).
Does *learndirect* facilitate entry to learning by making it more accessible? We have looked at attitudes to *learndirect* learning from those who have only used it and, those who have also learnt elsewhere, to see if we can determine if the *learndirect* unique offer helps individuals participate in learning.

Just over half (51 per cent) of all respondents to the learners survey stated that they would have undertaken some other sort of learning if *learndirect* had not been available, but a large minority (forty-five per cent) stated that they would not have done so. Respondents with recent learning experience (ie within the past three years) were particularly likely to report that they would have undertaken some other sort of learning had *learndirect* not been available (64 per cent of experienced learners said this was the case, compared to 44 per cent of respondents with no recent learning experience). Conversely, respondents with no recent learning experience were more likely to report that they would not have undertaken another form of learning had *learndirect* not been available (51 per cent of respondents with no recent learning experience said this was the case, compared to 33 per cent of recent learners). This implies that *learndirect* is of most value in engaging with new learners.

Of those who thought that they would have undertaken some other sort of learning in the absence of *learndirect* (and those who were not sure), the majority reported that they would have done so at the same point in time as they had gone onto *learndirect* learning (53 per cent). However, 21 per cent reported that they would have done this learning later than they had actually started.

**Figure 3.5: Profile of *learndirect* learners and other learners**

Base: All those going into learning/starting a course following the call to the adviceline (excluding those in self-directed, informal learning) N=733

*Source: IES, based on survey of *learndirect* adviceline users, BMG, 2002*

**3.2.2 *learndirect* is more accessible**
learndirect learning. A further 17 per cent of were not sure when they would have undertaken some other sort of learning. We might infer from this that learndirect brought forward their decision to learn.

Respondents to the adviceline survey are asked if there are barriers to taking up further learning. Interestingly, those who had gone on to study with learndirect were less likely to feel there were barriers (14 per cent) than those who had studied with other learners (just over a quarter) and those who had not yet gone on to further study (36 per cent). This would indicate that learndirect is successfully reducing the barriers to learning. Those who had gone on to further study were also more positive about the likelihood of taking part in further learning, indicating both an immediate but also longer-term impact.

We also explored why some learners choose not to study with learndirect. In the learndirect adviceline survey, over half of those who went on to participate in learning that was not delivered through learndirect (58 per cent) reported that they had considered the learndirect route. When probed on their reasons for ultimately deciding against learndirect, the most common response was that there were no suitable learndirect courses available to them (46 per cent). Other reasons offered by respondents for deciding against learndirect learning, included:

- a preference for other courses/learning opportunities (16 per cent)
- no local learndirect learning centres (nine per cent)
- financial reasons (nine per cent).

Lack of interest in learndirect, lack of tutor support, lack of accreditation/qualifications; lack of access to a computer and poor IT/computer skills did not act as particular barriers to participation in learndirect learning.

The main reasons offered by respondents who had gone on to take up non-learndirect learning opportunities and who had not considered learndirect as a learning option (41 per cent) were:

- lack of knowledge of what is on offer through learndirect (36 per cent)
- a preference for other courses/learning opportunities (23 per cent)
- no interest in learndirect learning (12 per cent)
- course not available under learndirect (ten per cent)
- unsuitability of learndirect courses (eight per cent).

Other studies also paint a generally positive picture of the service provided by learndirect. Previous BMG surveys of learndirect
learners show a high level of satisfaction among participants, and there is also evidence of a significant number of repeat learners.

A small-scale study carried out by ECOTEC in 2001 makes a generally positive assessment of learndirect as a service, finding that, in a sample of 32 comparator organisations, learndirect possessed ‘clear strengths in relation to other providers’. Many features of the service were praised by the authors and regarded as comparatively unique and distinctive. These included the accessibility and flexibility of learndirect products, where access is independent of the academic calendar, and embraces a new and unusual approach to the learning centre more suited to the inclusion of non-traditional learners.

The case studies provide additional evidence on issues around accessibility from the perspective of staff and the learners. Our overall assessment is that there is considerable evidence of positive impact of learndirect on individual’s engagement with learning opportunities and that this is consistent across all the case studies regardless of type. There are a number of ways in which learndirect facilitates access to learning:

- **Affordable**
  - **Affordable** is more affordable — partly because of its bite-sized nature helps distribute costs and partly because it is subsidised
  - it helps overcome some of the psychological barriers that prevent people accessing learning
  - it helps overcome some of the physical barriers to learning.

We examine each point in more detail below, we have also looked at the issues of support that were raised in our case studies by learners and centre staff as being directly relevant to accessibility.

**Affordable**

For many learners, the subsidised learning offered by learndirect is a key incentive for them to undertake their learning. One of our hubs had introduced pricing for courses at an early stage but found course uptakes dropped dramatically. They persisted with the pricing policy for three or four months but then moved back to free ICT courses and saw interest rise again. Their view is that many learners are disadvantaged, and paying for learning (at least at the level provided by learndirect) was a major disincentive. We also heard from learners that part of the attraction for them is to undertake their learning in small units, which both distributes costs and can be less daunting than signing up for bigger courses.

The adviceline survey provides some information on funding, approximately ten per cent of all learndirect learning was funded by an employer, whereas employers funded other learning (or contributed to funding this type of learning) in 17 per cent of non-
learndirect cases (see Figure 3.6). Self-funding of learning was also more common in other forms of learning than for learndirect.

We have already seen that learndirect attracts relatively new and unsophisticated learners, and their ability and readiness to pay for learning is likely to be an inhibiting factor.

Overcoming psychological blocks

Several centres and learners highlighted the benefit learndirect offers in overcoming some of the psychological barriers to learning. For example, one community centre catering for a minority ethnic community, spoke of learners who were professionals in their own country but who struggled to find employment in UK because of a lack of language skills. learndirect means that these people can take a basic skills course and since no one knows what they are studying, there is no competition or embarrassment. In many other centres, we heard of the impact of being able to come in from the street and enquire without having to go through the hurdle of enrolment, of having learning accessible in central locations rather than having to return to a college, of learning with adults rather than feeling you had to return to school, and of learning at your own pace instead of feeling left behind.

In Northern Ireland, one the centres had historically mostly reached women (80 per cent), but found with the introduction of learndirect, they had an increase in male learners. They believed that men were likely to see learning through a computer as more ‘business-like’ and less like going back to school, which open learning courses are sometimes criticised for. They also believed
that it is because some men in their community would be uncomfortable in an open classroom setting and **learndirect** provides them with an anonymous environment where they can confidentially ask the support officer for help.

**Overcoming physical blocks**

For other learners, the barriers to learning are not so much psychological but physical. We heard many times how **learndirect** provides a learning experience that enables people to engage who would not otherwise be able to do so. In a community centre working with a minority ethnic community, the centre was seen to be a safe environment and enabled women from the community to learn. We were told that the ESOL learners at the centre were keen to access **learndirect** learning in addition to other courses (see below). They valued the interactive nature, being able to go back over things, at their own speed and in their own time. They can keep repeating the course until they get the mark they are aiming for. Some ESOL learners (in this case asylum seekers) are unable to access many forms of learning (they do not have a National Insurance number, they do not meet the residential requirements, etc.) and **learndirect** may be the only option open to them.

Across all the case studies, we spoke to many learners who said they would not have engaged with learning if it had not been for the **learndirect** offer. For many, signing up is easy and seems relatively informal, and the learning can take place at a pace that suits them and is a lot less daunting than traditional courses.

We had mixed views on the attractiveness of a qualification. Several centres and learners stressed that they did not want or need to provide qualifications. For example, one centre used to run courses based on a seven week block of face-to-face learning, leading to a qualification (such as OCR or ECDL). They can now offer the knowledge courses through **learndirect** without a qualification. This particularly suits individuals who are retired or who don’t need the qualification for professional reasons.

In contrast, another centre had set up a package so that employees studying a **learndirect** course can work towards a qualification (based around the ECDL). The chance to get a qualification had motivated one employee interviewed to go on the course.

In one of our sectoral hubs, we spoke to employees from two companies who had all done either no, or virtually no training in the previous three years. They commented that important influencing factors for them were the flexibility of the offer, no cost, and the chance of doing a qualification.

For Lantra (the Sector Skills Council for the environmental and land-based sector) there are particular attractions around the offer.
The agricultural community has been very hard hit as a result of BSE, Foot and Mouth etc. They were reported as taking a lot of convincing that learning is something that will really benefit them. Farming, and many other occupations within land-based industries, are seasonal, daylight and weather dependent occupations. Learners require a high degree of flexibility in their learning arrangements. Traditional term structures and opening times within colleges have not always supported such a flexible approach. The opportunity to complete bite-size pieces of learning at a time and a pace to suit was very attractive to learners.

One learner said that the **learndirect** courses ‘allowed me to get a lot behind me very quickly in comparison to TEC courses’. He had already taken an open learning course which was a 32 week course at night, but did not want to do that again because of the time commitment. He found the **learndirect** courses much more manageable.

Another learner had a good track record in employment and took redundancy from his previous job. He now wanted to set up his own business and was working his way through the relevant **learndirect** courses. He found that they fitted in with his needs and he liked the fact that he could pop in when he wanted. He was very positive about the support from the staff at the centre.

Another learner had previously completed an open learning course but had found it too much and felt that the tutoring was poor. He was also frustrated with the pace of the open learning courses, as he preferred to go at his own pace, and was disappointed at the lack of attention that he got in the class when he needed assistance. He found out about **learndirect** and that it had similar courses with the advantages that he could do them in his own time, he could have some interaction, and there was an easy point of reference or help when he got stuck. He did not feel that he would have carried on learning without **learndirect**, as the open learning courses did not suit him and he was beginning to get demotivated by the experience.

### Support

Whilst not directly relevant to our evaluation of Ufi, we were struck how often the issue of support for learners arises as both an incentive for study, a problem with some **learndirect** learners, and an issue for centres in delivering the offer.

Several centres mentioned the problems of keeping in touch with remote learners, both from a pragmatic perspective but also regarding the benefits that accrue from getting it right. In centres that predominately cater for individual learners, there are fewer concerns that the timescales adopted in terms of chasing learners may be inappropriate, although we did have many comments about the administrative burden of maintaining contact. Certain kinds of learners will, however, find the systems used by **learndirect** incompatible with their circumstances. This was most marked amongst learners studying with Lantra, where there are very busy periods such as lambing, when farmers are unlikely to have time for coursework. As learners, their preference is to enrol,

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Learner 1</th>
<th>Learner 2</th>
<th>Learner 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>Open learning course</td>
<td>Bite-size courses</td>
<td>Individual business setup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time commitment</td>
<td>Time flexibility</td>
<td>Needs met</td>
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<td>Tutoring</td>
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<td>Support</td>
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have some help getting started, and then pick up and put down their learning as their workload allows. Some learners felt that the pace at which they were driven to complete the courses was incompatible with their circumstances. They resented the request for evidence as to why they were unable to 'actively engage' with the course for the time being. The administration cost to Lantra of enrolling and withdrawing large numbers of learners was also considerable. We were told of occasions when the same learner has been enrolled and re-enrolled five times or more. Other learners we spoke to, however, hadn’t found the frequent log-on rules a problem. In fact these had been quite helpful in ensuring they did not let things lapse.

One centre commented that drop-outs were initially a problem but not any more. They felt the support systems that learndirect has put in place, such as goals and progress checks, have helped enormously. Centres commented that most learners prefer to have some form of personal contact rather than working completely alone at home. Many also appear to like the discipline of attending regular sessions at the centres.

The level of support offered to learners varied between centres. We visited one that offered a particularly supportive environment to learners and which was much appreciated. Learners felt the quality of the courses was very good, and the presence of staff particularly useful. The trainers issue homework packs, which learners can complete and then have ‘marked’ in the centres. Students can ring in from home if they experience any difficulties. The centre manager outlined the very low drop-out rates amongst learners. Any drop-out is usually more a deferral where individuals have to stop learning due to personal circumstances for a while. The centre manager will try and contact people who have missed sessions and encourage them to come back or establish why they have left.

**Virtual learners**

There are particular issues with those who choose to learn at home or for whom home learning is the only feasible option. Some have quite old computers that are slow or not compatible, which can be off-putting. Offering support to people by phone when they are learning at home can also be difficult if they have different equipment or software. Lantra’s experience was that virtual learners require greater time to be spent at the induction phase, ensuring that they are able to access the course material and that there are no problems with connectivity.
Large proportions of learners enrolled with one hub are doing so via their home PCs, and an estimated 90 per cent access `learndirect` materials using an ordinary BT telephone line. Consequently, they do not always have the most compatible equipment or versions of operating software for the `learndirect` online material. From the experience of both learners and the providers we spoke to (and other hubs), this dependence upon having the right kit was not always given sufficient attention at enrolment or in the early stages of the course. Learners who have difficulties in downloading material or navigating their way around a software programme where not all the functionality is enabled, are understandably frustrated. This frustration is exacerbated when their online tutors appear unable to help.

Arranging for remote learners to have access to a physical learning centre is not necessarily the answer. One tutor’s experience of making this arrangement for her learners was ‘a disaster’. Given the lack of access in rural areas to broadband, the centre encountered frequent telecommunications problems. On a regular basis, only three of the 25 PCs could access `learndirect` packages. Many of the learners consequently had wasted journeys and were very discouraged.

The majority of courses delivered via the Lantra-Online Hub are conducted virtually by the learner from their home or employer premises. The fact that such a large proportion of businesses in the land-based sector are family concerns (eg farms, or employ less than five people, eg veterinary practices), means that learners are learning in isolation. This is clearly not a style that suits everyone, and some kind of network for such learners, enabling them to communicate with other virtual learners on the same or similar courses would be very helpful. Lantra has, however, taken steps to sign up tutors/providers who are able to offer a ‘blended’ learning opportunity with access to other learners.

One of the private tutor/providers IES spoke to combines virtual support with classroom-based/one-to-one learning. She uses the concept of a PC Skills group for first time `learndirect` learners. This entails bringing a group of six beginner learners together for one full day in a classroom setting. This can be at their workplace or other suitable location. She finds this is useful to start people off, to give them a sense that they are not isolated in their learning, and to integrate them into the learning experience. They then tend to be more confident and motivated to learn and be supported virtually. She has found this model particularly effective for SMEs with small training budgets. The learning is more visible and it enables the business to signal its commitment to and expectations of the learners more formally. On occasion the tutor will encounter employees who are reluctant to display their ignorance in front of colleagues and will arrange to tutor them in their home.

A significant amount of the training that the ASSA hub (automotive sector) delivers for `learndirect` is not online (75 per cent), but is based around workbooks and supported by a facilitator. ASSA claims that this has led to high level of retention, achievement and progression. In particular, little of the learning done at one of the workplace centres is online, and most learners
do facilitated courses. ASSA thinks this is better, as it suits many learners to learn more this way. ASSA thinks that many potential learners, especially in the 24 to 45 year old age group, have learning difficulties and find unsupported online learning difficult.

We heard a similar story from two community centres who specifically cater for those with learning difficulties. They had both highlighted the value of a blended learning approach — using leardirect to provide the core learning materials but embedding them in a social learning environment with other activities to build networks and provide emotional as well as learning support.

### 3.2.3 Reasons for learning

If leardirect is to have an impact of employability and other job-related outcomes, then it is important to understand the degree to which individuals are learning for job-related reasons.

The most commonly reported factors involved in the decision to take up leardirect learning were (see Figures 3.7 and 3.8):

Figure 3.7: Factors involved in decision to take up leardirect learning, by economic activity

![Chart showing factors involved in decision to take up leardirect learning, by economic activity.](chart)

Base: leardirect learners N = 2,031

Source: IES, based on survey of leardirect learners, BMG, 2002
- personal interest (particularly so for those who were older or not economically active)
- to learn IT skills (more so for those of non-working age)
- to update skills
- to keep up to date
- to learn something new
- to learn skills relevant to current/previous job (particularly for those who were economically active, employed and with recent learning experience, but much less so for older or not working)
- to improve self-confidence, and
- to learn skills relevant to a future job (again, more often reported by those who were economically active, employed and with recent learning experience).

Not surprisingly, job-related skills were more commonly reported as drivers for taking up Leamdirect learning by those who were economically active and/or engaged in employment.
Approximately one-quarter of all learndirect learners reported that the learndirect learning they had undertaken was related to a current or previous job, or one they might do in the future. This was more pronounced for those respondents who were of working age, economically active, employed, or who had recent experience of learning (ie in the last three years). Those who had also undertaken other forms of learning in addition to learndirect in the last three years, were more likely to say that their learndirect learning was related to their current or previous jobs or a future job, and less likely to say that it was for their own personal interest and development. This is further evidence of learning progression: ie those who are more experienced learners are more likely to be undertaking learning for job-related reasons.

Conversely, four-fifths of all respondents stated that the learndirect learning they had undertaken was for their own personal interest and development. This was particularly the case for respondents who were not of working age, not economically active and/or not employed.

We also analysed the motivations to learn by the number of courses respondents had undertaken, to see if they varied as learning experience with Ufi increased. There is no evidence that there are any major shifts in the demographic characteristics of those who go on to further learning in terms of age or economic activity (eg those who learn more are not likely to be younger or more likely to be economically active compared to those who have only undertaken one course). There is, however, some indication that those who participate in more courses with learndirect are slightly more likely to have undertaken previous learning in the last three years (a shift from 36 per cent to 42 per cent). It was also clear that the preponderance of women decreases as more courses are studied: ie men are more likely to go on to further learning than women (see figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Number of learndirect courses studied, by gender

Source: IES, based on survey of learndirect learners, BMG, 2002
Those who go on to further learning are statistically significantly more likely to say they are learning (see figure 3.10):

- to gain skills related to a job they may want to do in the future
- because they wanted a qualification
- to update skills
- to keep up to date
- to improve promotional prospects
- because they wanted to learn something new
- to learn skills that will lead to a qualification
- as a stepping stone to further education, training or learning, or to complement other learning.

In other words, they are more likely to be focused on the future and progression.
As requested, we looked specifically at regional differences. Northern Ireland respondents were more likely to say they were studying for a qualification (18 per cent versus ten per cent), to improve their self-confidence (29 per cent versus 20 per cent) and to learn IT skills (66 per cent versus 58 per cent). This is at variance with the regional differences in adviceline contact. We have seen that Northern Ireland adviceline users were less likely to contact the adviceline for information on qualifications (see 3.1.1).

This sparked a more in-depth review of attitudes to qualifications. The messages from the data are not straightforward. We have seen that almost one in four who contact the adviceline do so because they are seeking information on qualifications, but this drops to one in seven callers from Northern Ireland.

However, many more say that as a result of calling the adviceline they have gained information on qualifications they could study — 43 per cent UK, 52 per cent Northern Ireland. Of adviceline callers who have gone on to learn, significant proportions have done so in part because they seek a qualification (one in three nationally and over half of learners in Northern Ireland). There seems to be a growth of interest in qualifications generally from the point of enquiry to actually participating in learning and this growth is greatest in Northern Ireland.

Using the TNS attitude to learning clusters, enthusiasts were more likely than average to be studying for a qualification, whereas the switched off and those with conflicting priorities were less likely. The work motivated learner is more likely to be learning to improve their promotional prospects whereas the switched off and those with conflicting priorities are less likely.

Relevant questions from the adviceline survey enable us to contrast these results with the motivations of those who learn elsewhere. The adviceline data also indicate that personal interest is the main motivator for those who go on to learn, but at lower levels than in the learners sample (see Figure 3.11). However, it would appear to be of more interest for learndirect learners than those who go on to learn elsewhere (75 per cent of learndirect learners said that this was a factor in their decision to take up learning, compared to 60 per cent of learners on other courses). Relatively fewer learndirect learners were undertaking learning to gain vocational skills or job-related skills (either for a current/previous job or for one they may do in the future) than were learners on other courses. However, they were much more likely to report that gaining IT skills was a factor in choosing that particular form of learning (44 per cent of learndirect learners compared to 24 per cent of other learners).

Those who progress to learning may have quite different motivations, than the general adviceline callers, for contacting the
adviceline. For example, relatively few callers contact the adviceline because they wish to obtain information about a qualification (24 per cent), but it is a main motivator for those going on to learning (nearly 40 per cent). Callers from Northern Ireland were less likely to be learning to gain skills relevant to their current or previous job (19 per cent versus 34 per cent rest of UK), and more likely to do so because they wanted a qualification (56 per cent versus 39 per cent rest of UK), which contrasts with the fact that Northern Ireland callers were less likely than other regions to be calling the adviceline to find out about qualifications. Northern Ireland callers were also more likely to go on to learning to develop personal skills (21 per cent versus 11 per cent), improve self-confidence (47 per cent versus 25 per cent), to learn IT skills (44 per cent versus 27 per cent), to learn something new (56 per cent versus 36 per cent), or for personal development (77 per cent versus 59 per cent). These differences are not attributable to differences in the demographics of callers from different regions.

3.3 Learning and behaviour

If learndirect was having an impact on learners’ behaviour we would expect to see that:

- engagement with learndirect programmes will result in individual learning
participants will believe the learning to be relevant and feel it to be not too difficult, and appropriately paced

• learners will apply their learning vocationally.

**Possible measures**

- What did they learn?
- Would they have learnt it anyway?
- What are they doing differently?
- Views on difficulty/perceptions of usefulness/motivation to learn/goal-setting.

### 3.3.1 Positive learning outcomes

In searching for positive learning outcomes, we have looked for hard evidence of learning gains, explored the views of learners themselves that their learning has led to gains, and the views of those closest to **learndirect** such as hub and centre staff and ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate) inspectors.

There is little in the literature that might be considered evidence of positive learning outcomes as a direct result of undertaking learning with **learndirect**. We have, however, been able to review a range of hub inspection reports in terms of their comments on quality and learner satisfaction.

Across the inspections, a range of strengths were identified, including:

- good advice, guidance and learning support
- high levels of learner satisfaction
- productive strategic partnerships
- well-equipped and welcoming learning centres.

Each of these strengths was identified at three or more of the hubs, and so may go some way toward presenting a general picture.

A number of areas needing improvement were also identified. Inspectors noted that:

- Although the benefits of strong leadership were beginning to be acknowledged by the hubs, three of the seven were felt to be disadvantaged by weak and unsatisfactory management; the remaining four hubs operated under ‘satisfactory’ leadership and management, scoring three on a five-point scale.
- The quality assurance system at five of the hubs was lacking or ineffective in some way.
- At three of the hubs, management data were either insufficient or inadequately used.
- The formal monitoring of equal opportunities was inadequate at three of the hubs.
- The monitoring of learners' progress and the effective use of learning development plans were found to be inadequate or inconsistent at four of the hubs.

It is perhaps worth noting, also, that hubs were typically strong in the delivery and promotion of ICT learning services, which constituted a significant strength. However, as a consequence, the range of courses under offer was sometimes rather narrow, and targets had not been met for course registrations in basic skills (Skills for Life) and business courses.

The learners survey provides more specific evidence of learner satisfaction. Over four in five survey participants who had completed a **learndirect** course said that they achieved all the learning they wanted. The proportion of satisfied respondents increases with the number of **learndirect** courses they have undertaken. Just over three-quarters of those who had completed one course felt they had achieved all the learning that they wanted, compared to nearly all (96 per cent) of those who had completed four courses. Interestingly, there was some evidence that those who had only studied with **learndirect** in the last three years were more satisfied (82 per cent had got all they wanted out of the learning) than those who had also studied elsewhere in the last three years (74 per cent got all they wanted from their learning). This might be a measure of learner sophistication or a result of moving on to more complex learning over time.

The learners survey also provides evidence of other learning outcomes. While the vast majority (86 per cent) of all those engaged in **learndirect** learning (whether they had completed the course or not) said they had gained ICT skills, other key benefits included:

- improved confidence and motivation (68 per cent)
- improved personal and social skills (60 per cent)
- better problem-solving skills (46 per cent).

Learners we spoke to were generally enthusiastic about their learning experience, seeing the courses as a way of learning new skills (typical of older people acquiring ICT skills) or of updating existing skills. The quality of the material generally compares well with that available elsewhere, and several learners commented that their learning had been more successful with **learndirect** than with other providers. This was echoed by centre staff who generally felt that individuals found learning a positive experience, often came back for more, and frequently preferred **learndirect** to other courses they had tried.
3.3.2 Vocational learning

There is considerable evidence on the strength of learndirect in developing ICT skills. For instance 90 per cent of participants in the learndirect learners survey had taken a course in information technology and the case studies indicated a similar level of popularity for using learndirect for ICT learning.

This is reflected in outcomes from learning. The most commonly cited gains from undertaking learndirect learning were (see Figures 3.12 and 3.13):

- IT skills (87 per cent)
- self-confidence and motivation (68 per cent)
- personal/social skills (60 per cent)
- problem-solving skills (46 per cent)
- opportunity to progress to qualifications (45 per cent)
- job-related skills, for future job (43 per cent)
- job-related skills, for current/previous job (34 per cent).

Job-related skills were more commonly reported as gains by people of working age, those who were economically active, those in employment, and those who had recent experience of learning (ie in the last three years).

![Figure 3.12: Gains from learndirect learning, by economic activity](chart)

*Figure 3.12: Gains from learndirect learning, by economic activity*

*Source: IES, based on survey of learndirect learners, BMG, 2002*
Some of these outcomes also rise with level of engagement with learndirect. Gains in job-related skills, teamworking skills, problem-solving skills, the opportunity to progress onto qualifications, key skills, IT skills, self-confidence and personal/social skills all increased with the number of courses studied (see Figure 3.14). There is other evidence of greater gains for more sophisticated learners. Those who have undertaken other forms of learning in the last three years as well as undertaking learndirect learning were more likely to say they had gained job-related skills, learndirect only learners were more likely to say they had gained personal skills and IT skills.

We looked more carefully at gains to see if we could understand better some of the factors that might be influencing outcomes. We conducted a multivariate analysis to explore gains to the learning advantaged and the learning disadvantaged, and the degree to which this varied by whether individuals had only undertaken learndirect learning, or whether they had also undertaken other learning. The learning disadvantaged subgroup were those learners over 45 who were economically inactive and had not had any other learning in the last three years. The learning advantaged subgroup were those younger than 45 who were economically active and had experienced learning in the previous three years. Not surprisingly, the learning advantaged group reported more gains from learning than the disadvantaged, but most interestingly, within this group those who had only learnt with learndirect reported more gains in total than those who had also learnt elsewhere. All groups had completed an average of two learndirect courses.

Figure 3.13: Gains from learndirect learning, by recent learning experience

![Gains from learndirect learning, by recent learning experience](image)

Base: learndirect learners, N=2,031

Source: IES, based on survey of learndirect learners, BMG, 2002
We also explored the attitude to learning clusters developed by TNS (personally disinterested, switched off, enthusiast, low priority, work motivated, independents and conflicting priorities) to see if these clusters helped inform our understanding of learning gains. Enthusiasts consistently report gains from learning more frequently than average, whereas the disinterested and the switched off report gains less frequently.

Case studies also supplied some evidence of occupational gains. One of our centres saw learndirect learning as an important addition to other courses learners may be studying, especially as a way of enhancing their learning experience and strengthening their ability to achieve. Another example was provided of someone who was on a computer maintenance course who also registered with learndirect, which reinforced his learning — all the technical details of the computer are shown on the screen and the learner can go through the whole process of dismantling and constructing a computer on screen (and repeat this as many times as needed). A further example was given of someone who was doing a spreadsheet and database course. He also used learndirect, and this helped him cope better with his course and to understand more fully what he was learning. Both these learners were reported to have progressed more quickly than they might otherwise have done.

Similarly, basic skill learners gain confidence and are more willing and able to move onto mainstream basic skills courses, and perhaps further. An ESOL learner reported that the learndirect learning was an important addition to the course he was taking anyway. Due to its interactive nature, it gave him more practice in
learning English properly. He could work at home and spend as much time as he needed going over things and at his own pace.

ASSA conduct their own learner research monthly, which shows high levels of learner satisfaction. The data also show that most ASSA **learndirect** learners learn in the workplace (mainly Nissan) and hardly any at home. Nearly all learners say that their knowledge has improved after completing the course.

ICT skills are of growing importance to the land-based industries. In farming, for example, there is now currently far more administration involved in, for example, keeping financial and other records necessary for the submission of grant claims and monitoring cattle movements *etc.* than in previous years. A PC has the potential to remove a lot of the administrative burden from the farmer. A large majority of learners in the sector are new to IT and to learning. **learndirect** courses were reported to offer an attractive means to equip themselves with basic understanding of using the Internet, email and introductory software packages.

It was also clear from the Lantra Sector Skills Plan that the needs of the sector were not restricted to ICT skills. The pressure on profits experienced across the sector has meant that micro SMEs have to enhance their financial and business awareness. There is a buoyant market in the provision of business advice to the rural agricultural sector. We heard of an example where **learndirect** has sought to develop a tool targeted at this issue, but the evidence from our Lantra case study would suggest that here **learndirect** has had very little direct impact. A new business development course (New Horizons, see box) developed for **learndirect** has, to date, engaged relatively few full participants for various reasons.

<table>
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<th>New Horizons</th>
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| Just one per cent of registrations with Lantra Online to date is for non-ICT courses including an environmental training programme which they said had been specifically designed for the land-based sector. They described the programme, entitled New Horizons, as developed by Ufi in partnership with DEFRA and Lantra at a cost of £180,000. Focusing on farm diversification, and the challenges and opportunities that it can bring, the course was designed to help users find alternative activities that will enable them to generate additional income. This may be a change in existing working methods or, more radically, diversification into non-agricultural activity. 

Lantra selected an independent firm of agricultural consultants as the primary vehicle for delivering the training. They had experience of, and offer advice across, a wide range of farm diversification activities. These include farm tourism, on-farm processing, added value sales, equestrian activities, farm shops, alternative livestock enterprises and building use. Specific advice is available from their 70+ business advisors on financial planning, marketing and funding. The programme fitted very well into their existing portfolio. |
The New Horizons programme was launched by the Agricultural Minister with advertising in the sector press. The Programme was advertised as a tool which:

'Will allow you to assess suitable diversification projects from the comfort of your own home. 'New Horizons’ is provided online — learn at a time that is right for you, at a suitable pace, without the need to travel. The tool is fully supported by a mentor both via email and the telephone. You receive £200 worth of support for £25.’

The tool works by guiding the learner step by step and:

- assesses your resources, looking specifically at livestock, buildings, people, machinery, land and water
- suggests options which best match your resources and takes you through a series of questions to establish the weaknesses and strengths of these options.

For the most suitable projects, future considerations are highlighted and useful contacts are listed.

Interest in the programme was strong and the consultant enrolled 120 learners very easily. They felt however, that the programme did not map easily to the learner’s agenda rather than that of learndirect. learndirect consider New Horizons to be a 20-hour course requiring seven hours of mentoring. The vast majority of the learners viewed the programme as a decision-making tool and a bite-size piece of learning. Most were reluctant to work through the options offered. If they had no water on their farm then they would not undertake that part of the programme. Many learners were simply keen to progress to the part of the tool that was most relevant to them. Consequently, the majority spent considerably less than ten hours of activity — some just half an hour or so on multiple occasions. An audit of learner activity revealed that more than 80 per cent had accessed it on more than two occasions.

The consultants are convinced that the programme was extremely useful in raising learners’ awareness of diversification options. learndirect, however, maintained that if a learner had not been active on the programme for the stated ten hours they had not completed the course and were not refunded the registration fee. The tutor/provider moreover, did not receive their fee.

The consultant felt that delivering the quality of mentoring support they believed necessary for the programme within the agreed learndirect fee rate was unworkable. They felt it took no account of the rural location of many in the land-based sector, their preference for a home-based tutor session, and the time taken to reach them. They lost money compiling what they see as the onerous and bureaucratic auditing requirements demanded by the funding body.

The consultants have found the concept of a New Horizons tool useful in promoting awareness of farm diversification options. As they no longer receive any funding to deliver it, the only alternative for their learners is that they pay much higher fees.

The specialist colleges have expressed a strong interest incorporating the New Horizons tool into their curriculum for business management. To date, Lantra, the SSC, have been unable to agree with Ufi a way
around the hurdle of double funding in this situation. This is a source of some considerable frustration, as the sectors recognise it is a very short jump between usage by the students and their parents — many of whom represent the sector’s target audience.

3.4 Outcomes

If learndirect was having an impact on the employment outcomes of participants, we could expect to see increasing participation in continuing learning and that their employability will improve.

- Those who have participated will be more likely to consider future learning and more likely to learn to a qualification.
- Individuals’ employability will have improved through
  - improved job search skills
  - greater confidence in their potential employability
  - reduced likelihood of unemployment
  - shorter periods of unemployment
  - increases in positive job changes.
- We would also expect to see tangible employment outcomes such as
  - better pay
  - increased promotions/increased responsibility.
- Job performance will improve.
- Attitudinal benefits could include
  - greater self-esteem
  - increased job commitment.

### Possible measures

Views on future learning
Intentions for future learning
Intentions on qualifications
Career/job impact
Improved performance in the job
Job change
Increased pay/increased responsibility
Promotion
Impact on job search/job application behaviour
End of unemployment
Impact on self-esteem/commitment/attitudes/job satisfaction/relations with colleagues etc.
3.4.1 Future learning intentions

There is evidence in the learners survey that many learners will build on the learning they have gained, to progress onto further learning. Almost three-quarters agreed that they felt more confident about learning something new, and intended to continue to develop what they had learnt on the course. Furthermore, some 45 per cent said that they felt they had gained the opportunity to progress onto qualifications. Almost two-thirds of those who were in or seeking work, said that they intended to apply what they had learnt to their current job or career. All of these intentions become more positive as the number of learndirect courses studied increased, peaking at three or more. Those who had only studied with learndirect and had not undertaken other forms of learning in the previous three years, tended to be more positive about learning something new, seeking or finding a new job, and keeping their job, than those who had also undertaken other forms of learning. This might imply that learndirect is especially useful to those who are new to learning and therefore seeking immediate rather than longer-term gains. Those from Northern Ireland were also more confident about learning something new, seeking a new job and seeking new responsibilities at work.

There is also evidence that learndirect helps people move into other forms of learning. Learndirect learning appears to have had a positive impact on the decision to undertake further learning for a significant proportion of learndirect learners. Of those who have recent learning experience (ie in the last three years), and have gone on to undertake other (non-learndirect) learning in the six months leading up to the survey, 48 per cent reported that their learndirect course acted as a stepping stone to this other learning. An even higher proportion (62 per cent) stated that their earlier learndirect learning complemented their other (non-learndirect) learning, and a considerable majority (84 per cent) of respondents stated that the availability of learndirect learning had made it easier to take up training and learning.

The likelihood of undertaking new learning in the next 12 months was fairly high for all respondents (mean = 3.56 on a scale of 1 to 5 where five is extremely likely), and highest amongst those respondents who had not undertaken any other learning in the three years leading up to the survey (mean = 3.99).

Just over half (55 per cent) of all respondents thought it likely or extremely likely that they would undertake some other learning in the next 12 months. Almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of this group of likely future learners indicated that they would still be likely to learn even if they had not already undertaken some learndirect learning. Almost half (47 per cent) of the likely learners planned to study for a qualification. However, respondents who were of non-working age, not economically active, and who were not recent learners (ie prior to learndirect had not undertaken any learning
in the previous three years) were less likely to be planning to study for a qualification in the next 12 months (58 per cent of learners planned to do so, compared with 38 per cent of non-learners; see Figure 3.15).

Those who had only undertaken learrndirect learning were somewhat less likely to consider that they would take part in new training or learning in the next 12 months, than those who had also undertaken other learning in the previous three years (mean of 3.4, compared to a mean of 4.2 on a scale of 1 to 5 where five is very likely). However, just taking those who think it is likely or very likely that they will undertake further learning, almost one-third of the learrndirect-only learners felt that they would not do so without their learrndirect experience, compared to just over 20 per cent of those who also had experience of studying elsewhere. The likelihood of taking up further learning also increases with the number of learrndirect courses studied, rising from a mean of 3.44 for those having completed one course, to a mean of 3.95 for those who had completed four or more courses. Those from Northern Ireland were more positive, with a mean of 3.76, than those from the rest of the UK (mean 3.54). We believe that this is further evidence of the relationship between those who can be considered learners having greater likelihood of continuing to study, compared to non-learners, and the importance of learrndirect in moving people from one group to the other.

Just over a quarter of respondents who intended to undertake further learning in the next 12 months (28 per cent) reported that their future learning was likely to be learrndirect learning. Higher proportions of those who were of non-working age, not economically active, not employed and/or who did not have any

Figure 3.15: Proportion of learrndirect learners likely to engage in future study for a qualification

Base: learrndirect learners who are likely/extremely likely to take up learning in next 12 months, N=1,110

Source: IES, based on survey of learrndirect learners, BMG, 2002
recent learning experience prior to going onto learn-direct, thought this future learning would be learn-direct (see Figure 3.16).

The case studies also had some evidence of learn-direct encouraging ongoing learning. One example given was of a man who cares for his wife who has Alzheimer’s. He struggled very hard to get out of the home for the first time, but the centre reported that he had enrolled on further courses and really enjoyed the opportunity and experience of learning. The manager also felt that the experience makes it easier for people to go on to other learning:

‘It’s easier to open the door to learning the second time. They are now able to go on to further education elsewhere as they have built up their confidence so much.’

We heard other examples of learners progressing from learn-direct learning to other forms of learning, sometimes at a high level.

One learner had not done any learning since ‘A’ level because of the effort and time it took to go into a college or learning centre — the accessibility of learn-direct had provided the right solution for him. He had become more competent, productive and efficient in his work, and felt much more confident in tackling computer problems and in using the software generally. He felt there had been a marked improvement in his understanding. He has signed up to do a short OU course in astronomy and if it goes well he plans to do a BSc. He would not have embarked on this had it not been for a positive first experience with learn-direct, which he felt had given him the confidence to work from home, a hurdle for some people. He feels he has been able to sustain and apply his learning at work, and has felt supported in this by his manager. He is not thinking of changing jobs but feels he is now more valuable to an employer with his new skills and improved attitude. The experience has whetted his appetite and he feels more able to do things he wouldn’t have felt able to do before.
3.4.2 Impact on employability

A new element to the survey measured outcomes from the learning in terms of increased confidence (about learning, about gaining employment and about job security) and intention to apply the learning in some way (at work, seeking greater responsibility and in continuing to develop the learning) through a number of statements rated on a scale (see Figures 3.17 and 3.18).

Agreement was generally strongest for statements that are not work-related, ie ‘Intend to continue to develop what learnt’ (mean score of 4.03) and ‘Feel more confident about learning something new’ (mean score of 4.01). Agreement with both of these also increases significantly with increased engagement with learndirect, ie with the number of courses studied. Not surprisingly, those statements that were most strongly related to work had greatest agreement from those who were in employment and those who were economically active: ‘Intend to apply what have learnt at work’ (mean score of 3.7 for the economically active and 2.9 for those who are inactive) and: ‘Intend to seek new responsibilities at work’ (mean score of 3.1 for the economically active and 2.7 for those who are inactive). The intention to apply what is learnt at work significantly increases with increasing number of courses studied (peaking at three) as does the confidence in seeking or finding new work.

Finding further evidence through the case studies of the impact of learndirect on individuals’ employability, or soft outcomes, is difficult. Talking to learners about outcomes is often premature, as many learners were still very much in the middle of their learning. Although centres had more information, they too may not see

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**Figure 3.17: Intentions and confidence resulting from learning, by economic activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Not economically active</th>
<th>Economically active</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intend to apply what have learnt at work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intend to seek new responsibilities at work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intend to continue to develop what learnt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel more confident about learning something new</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel more confident about seeking a job</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel more confident about keeping my job</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Scale: 1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly

Base: learndirect learners, N=2,031

Source: IES, based on survey of learndirect learners, BMG, 2002
longer-term impact on people. We did hear of a range of quite specific non-vocational outcomes, for example many learners report that they now felt more confident about working with computers, and felt it helped them relate to their grandchildren more easily. In Northern Ireland the impact that the centre staff and learners reported are wider social benefits, including greater confidence, ability to help children with homework and certification from courses.

Certainly, many people who attend for learndirect programmes hope that it will help them either get employment or get better employment, and all the centres could relate stories of individuals who had succeeded. A centre manager spoke of an individual who worked at a hospital and wanted to be a basic skills tutor, so they were currently working through all the relevant programmes and will soon start a City and Guilds course.

Another centre manager commented that there were a great many benefits to her learners:

‘For some people it can be life changing. They meet people, build up their confidence. I see people change from “I’m an idiot I can’t do it” to “I can do this!” It opens them up to trying new things.’

### 3.4.3 Employment outcomes

The balance of general evidence from the literature tends to be weighted towards evidence of soft outcomes over hard. For example, NALS (La Vale et al., 2001) explores the perceived benefits of learning. These were strong on learning new skills but also frequently focused on interest, enjoyment, meeting new
people, and boosting confidence. Learning undertaken for a work motive most frequently led to the acquisition of new skills and the ability to do the job better (just under a half of respondents, with a quarter mentioning improved work satisfaction).

This pattern, of learning being perceived predominately by learners to have general rather than economic outcomes, is confirmed by the Attitudes to Learning Survey (Campaign for Learning, 1998). Only five per cent of those surveyed thought that learning could lead to an increase in salary, and only ten per cent believed that learning could be useful in improving their job prospects.

However, there is plenty of evidence in the literature of a positive relationships between training and economic advancement. Based on evidence from a range of sources including the National Child Development Study, Green (1999) argued that:

‘The strong balance of evidence suggests that experiencing employer-provided training does indeed pay off.’

There are many studies that demonstrate a link between skills and wage gains accruing to the individual. All find significant effects, eg Booth (1991), Blanchflower and Lynch (1992), and in a later review, Blundell et al. (1999) who also believed that there were significant wage returns to learning. Dearden, Reed and Van Reenan (2000) conducted a regional review of the impact of skills on individuals and on the productivity of organisations, and also conclude that there are returns both for the individual and the organisation that employs them. Enhanced employability and greater job stability are cited as other benefits. There is no evidence in the literature of such positive gains specifically from learndirect learning.

The learners survey does, however, provide some evidence regarding employment outcomes for individuals and the degree to which respondents believed their learndirect learning influenced these. Approximately three per cent of respondents had obtained a new job in the same type of work since registering for learndirect learning. Five per cent of respondents had obtained a new job in a different type of work since undertaking learndirect learning. Less than two per cent of respondents reported that they had received a promotion since registering for learndirect learning, and just three per cent had obtained a performance-related pay rise. The number of learndirect courses completed did not appear to be related to the incidence of positive outcomes.

These are small numbers and therefore further analysis needs to be carefully interpreted. Nonetheless, of those who had made such changes, quite high proportions attributed their change to learndirect.

- Forty-one per cent of learndirect learners who had got a new job in the same type of work since registering for learndirect
thought that the learning they had undertaken with *learndirect* had helped them to achieve this outcome.

- Forty-four per cent of *learndirect* learners who had got a new job in a different type of work since registering for *learndirect* felt the same way.

- Half of those respondents reporting that they had received a promotion also stated that their *learndirect* learning had helped to bring about the promotion.

- Proportionately fewer respondents who had received a performance related pay rise thought that *learndirect* had helped them to achieve this (36 per cent).

Outcomes at work were slightly more likely to be experienced by those who had experienced other forms of learning in addition to *learndirect* in the previous three years, but were less likely to be attributed to their *learndirect* learning.

The case studies also occasionally reported more tangible benefits of learning. In Northern Ireland, for example, we heard of follow-on effects of learners setting up their own business or progressing to HE. Staff and learners were confident of the long-term impact, even though they have no way of causally connecting the course to a job or another course. Centre staff tend to have many positive examples on individual impact, but little in the way of hard data on long-term return to work.

A woman from an ethnic minority signed onto a course in IT skills to update her knowledge. She had previously worked in a bank, but had not worked since she had married and started a family. She had felt her skills had become too stale to enter the job market, but felt unable to go to college. She was pleased to be able to drop into a learning centre in her local High Street when she had time. She undertook a number of courses in office administration and was then confident enough to successfully obtain a job as a receptionist. In one of our centres, the assistant manager told us that she had started working in the centre as a volunteer after having enrolled on some courses to improve her learning. At school she had always been in the basic skills class. She went on to get a job in the centre as an administrative assistant and is now assistant manager. At a community centre they felt lots of learners progress in the job market, and said they felt as if they almost act as a training agency for health and social services.

A centre ran a ‘getting a job’ course — this included *learndirect* courses on customer service, getting a job, and basic IT training. Tesco were having a large recruitment drive locally, and four out of the 16 on the course found a job through the course. The manager thinks that *learndirect* played a role in their finding a job. Many were very nervous when they started and not very positive about their ability to find employment. The course changed their outlook, making them more confident and career minded.
3.5 Conclusions

What we have tried to do in this chapter is to explore the evidence along the central chain in our impact model, *ie* the degree to which *learndirect* helps take people from awareness of learning, to engagement, to positive learning experience and on to resultant outcomes. Where we can, we have looked at the degree to which the motivation to learn and learning gains are vocational, and may contribute to employability, as opposed to more social returns. This has been specifically to see if we can find evidence that would contribute to the strategic objectives of Ufi. We conclude that *learndirect* provides a step change in individual learning; it helps new and disadvantaged learners step in to learning; it helps new and experienced learners progress on to further learning, and it helps some individuals step up by filling skills gaps and realising personal outcomes.

3.5.1 Stepping in

Awareness of *learndirect* is growing, and increasing numbers of individuals are using the adviceline and undertaking *learndirect* courses. The survey data indicate an interesting difference between the two groups:

- Adviceline users tend to be active learners, fairly committed to learning in general and wanting to gain further job-related skills.
- The adviceline generally provided the information they were seeking and most users said that they were more likely to take part in learning as a result of their enquiry.
  - Most of them went on to pursue non-*learndirect* courses.
  - About half of those who contact the line have not undertaken any learning in the previous three years, indicating that the adviceline is attracting new learners.
  - It would also appear to be the case that the adviceline has a higher than average effect on increasing the likelihood of two attitudinal groups that are particularly difficult to attract — the ‘disinterested’ and those for whom learning is ‘low priority’.
  - There is evidence that people are making the transition from the adviceline into learning and feel that this move is facilitated by the service provided.
- People who opt for *learndirect* courses — either through the adviceline or from other sources — tend to be ‘new learners’, *ie* people without a recent experience of any type of formal learning.
• They tend to be older and less qualified than average learners and more interested in learning for personal rather than work-related reasons.

• A significant proportion are not actively engaged in the labour market and although many intend to pursue further learning, they tend not to be very interested in acquiring qualifications.

• We believe that learndirect is reaching those who have not undertaken learning in the last three years in much higher proportions than would be indicated from surveys such as NALS.

The evidence suggests that the form of learning that learndirect offers is particularly appealing to people who are nervous of displaying their lack of skills in public. The comparative affordability, anonymity and the non-threatening environment that learndirect offers were seen as attractive by many new learners, particularly those with some form of societal disadvantage. Learners are also attracted by the structure of learndirect learning, the ability to sign up for short courses, to progress at their own speed and repeat lessons until they are confident. However, it was also clear that learners also benefit from active support to keep them on track, especially if they encountered technical difficulties, which a number had. Virtual learners pose specific difficulties which have not all been resolved.

3.5.2 Stepping on

We believe that there is clear evidence that learndirect is particularly helpful in bringing new learners into learning and in contributing to learning progression.

Involvement with learndirect appears to increase the likelihood of pursuing further learning in the future. It also increases confidence in further learning and is believed to provide an important stepping stone to those who go on.

A significant number hope to study for qualifications, including many who have not participated in any learning in the previous three years. We can therefore conclude that learndirect has had an important influence on this group in changing their attitudes to learning and increasing their chances of gaining a qualification.

3.5.3 Stepping up

Learners undertake the learning for a variety of reasons. They are more likely to study for vocational reasons if they have previously undertaken learning, and the more learndirect courses they take the more vocational their motivations become.
Gains from learning follow a similar pattern, increasing with more learning. There is also a relationship between attitudes to learning and learning gains and outcomes. Those who are most positively disposed to learning report most gains, and satisfaction with learndirect increases with the number of courses completed. Small numbers of learndirect learners had experienced positive outcomes since undertaking their learning, but high proportions of those which had attributed these to their learndirect study.

Regional variations are not clear cut and we had quite mixed evidence from Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK. Attitudes to learning tend to be more positive, but learners tend to be less sophisticated in terms of their motivations to learn.

### 3.6 Key points

- The initial element of our evaluation framework focuses on awareness. At this level it can be hard to distinguish evidence about the adviceline from the network — while people have heard of learndirect they may not be clear about the distinction between the two services.
- According to the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) 2002 over half the adult population were aware of learndirect and five per cent had made use of the service (adviceline). Awareness has risen dramatically (from 26 per cent) over the previous year (La Valle et al., 2001). Usage had also risen (from three per cent).
- Awareness was strongest among active learners, younger people, employed people and women.
- Most people call the adviceline for information on job-related courses and felt they gained a clear idea of what was available. Callers tend to be ‘warm’ rather than ‘cold’, in that they are generally already fairly committed to learning.
- If learndirect is having an impact, then we can expect awareness and interest to be translated into engagement, and people to be more likely to get involved in learning activity as a result of their involvement with learndirect (either through the adviceline or the network).
- Learning rates for those who had heard of learndirect were higher than for those who were unaware, and these differences remained when allowance was made for demographic differences in those populations. The evidence is that the adviceline is attracting those who are less likely to be learners than average.
- According to the learndirect surveys, around two-thirds of callers to the adviceline said that as a result of their call they were more interested in training and learning and more likely to participate. For a significant minority of callers the adviceline was influential in making the transition from
awareness to entry and participation in a learning activity, but most were already on the path.

- Just over one-third of adviceline callers go on to undertake some kind of training or learning by the time they were contacted, and just over 40 per cent of these feel the adviceline has influenced that decision.

- Around a quarter of adviceline callers who take up learning do so with *learndirect* and the other three-quarters use some other form of provision (partly because there were no suitable *learndirect* courses). Callers who go on to *learndirect* are more likely than others to be 'non-learners', *ie* have little recent experience of learning.

- Compared with average learners, *learndirect* learners are more likely to be female, older and less qualified. A quarter of *learndirect* learners were retired and a further 15 per cent economically inactive.

- Almost two-thirds of *learndirect* learners had not engaged in any training or learning during the last three years. We therefore draw the conclusion that *learndirect* is successfully having an impact in engaging those not actively involved in learning. This conclusion is further reinforced by the survey finding that over half the *learndirect* learners with no recent learning experience said that they would not have done any learning if they had not registered with *learndirect*, compared with 33 per cent of recent learners. Around half of those who said that they would have engaged in learning in any event, indicated that involvement with *learndirect* brought forward their decision to learn.

- *learndirect* learners, particularly those outside working age and/or economically inactive were mainly motivated by personal interest (as opposed to a work-based interest) and wanted to learn IT skills.

- The case studies provided further evidence of *learndirect* facilitating entry to learning, particularly for those with little recent learning experience. Our case study interviews further suggested that *learndirect* was important because it was:
  - affordable
  - overcame psychological blocks — e-learning can be private and learners do not have to reveal their weaknesses to their peers
  - overcame physical blocks — by providing a safe, non-threatening environment, *eg* in community learning centres, and allowing people to learn at their own pace.

- *learndirect* learners are less likely to identify barriers to learning than those who study elsewhere.

- The case studies also demonstrated the need to provide learner support. There were strong suggestions of a positive
relationship between provision of support and course completion. Virtual learners pose specific problems that have not yet been fully resolved.

- There is a high level of satisfaction among *learndirect* learners with their experience and reported inspection reports. As a result of the engagement with *learndirect*, learners report that they not only gained technical skills, usually ICT related, but also softer benefits, such as improved confidence and motivation and improved personal and social skills. Satisfaction levels increase with the greater number of *learndirect* courses undertaken.

- A key measure of impact is what happens to learners as a result of their involvement with *learndirect*. The learners survey indicates that:
  - *learndirect* learners become more confident about further learning and more generally, *learndirect* made it easier to take up further learning and training. *learndirect* learning can act as an important stepping stone to other forms of learning, including qualification-based opportunities.
  - learners perceive more gains the more *learndirect* courses they undertake, and become increasingly vocational in outlook.
  - In terms of employment outcomes, most *learndirect* learners felt more confident about seeking or keeping their job as a result of their involvement. Of the few survey respondents who had changed job since registering with *learndirect*, around 40 per cent thought that their *learndirect* learning had helped. Half of those respondents reporting that they had received a promotion also stated that their *learndirect* learning had helped to bring about the promotion.
4. Impact on Organisations

One of the aims of this research is to ‘assess the impact of Ufi on organisations through increasing productivity and competitiveness’. Therefore, the impact of Ufi on employers is a major strand of our evaluation. The employer engagement plan; 2002/2003, specifically addresses the employer market, and sets objectives for continuing engagement.


Employer engagement has been an important feature of Ufi’s activity so far. In the last 16 months, Ufi has:

- engaged with an estimated 50,000 SMEs, representing 100,000 courses
- engaged with 20 large employers (LEs), representing 100,000 courses
- contracted with nine sector hubs
- earned £7m from these sources.

This represents over 100,000 people, or 20 per cent of Ufi’s activity. Our research also shows that a further 23 per cent have had active support (time, money or advice) from their employer for their learndirect learning.

This has been driven by a combination of employees’ initiative, and the availability of learner funding (most courses have been free to the learner). However, about ten per cent of this activity does not rely on funding. For example, in Wales, where learner funding is limited, employers are being attracted to learndirect on a full-price basis only.

Significant lessons have been learned from the year’s experience, including:

- the value of attracting small employers through their employees
- the value to large, distributed employers, of our extensive network of learning centres and nationally branded, government-backed ICT delivery systems
- our ability to pursue policy-driven objectives (eg basic skills learning) through employers
- the need to package and present our services as business solutions
- the need to tailor our services in the large employer market
- the importance of good quality intermediaries to reach the fragmented SME market.

As part of this engagement plan, Ufi proposes two objectives for the employer market:
1. to develop profitable commercial revenue
2. to support the policy objective of reducing the UK workforce skills gap.

In approaching the employer market, learndirect adopts a segmented approach, see Table 4.1, which allows for different channels to market, and different means of engagement (lead proposition).

The ‘Personal Solution’ proposition is to provide services through individual engagement, and is acknowledged by Ufi as ‘the most widely offered at the moment’. The ‘Business Solutions’ are varying combinations of advice, diagnostics, and consultancy, with tailoring of courses possible for large employers.

‘Premier Business Centres’ is the new name for a small number of learning centres (initially up to 100) which will be independently accredited as having advisors able to interpret business needs and offer relevant learndirect solutions. We were hoping to visit some of these centres as part of the case studies, but they were judged to be at too early a stage of development to make this generally possible. We did visit one such centre, identified because of its high engagement with SMEs.

Ufi are also in the process of developing specific products and toolkits that would be more attractive to employers than the current portfolio on offer. In some cases, this is a rebranding of existing products but in others will require new development.

In Ufi’s September 2002 quarterly progress report, it highlights a number of milestones in terms of engaging with SMEs. This shows that in the three months since July 2002, Ufi had:

- engaged 2,479 auditable SMEs — achieving 16,689 course take-ups
- engaged 25,949 SMEs (counted through survey), with a forecast of 50,000 for the year 2002-03
- achieved learndirect brand awareness levels of 76 per cent amongst SME training managers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of employees per employer</th>
<th>Total no. of employers</th>
<th>Total no. of employees</th>
<th>Key Channel(s)</th>
<th>Lead Proposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-19</td>
<td>3.3m</td>
<td>11m</td>
<td>Learning Centres</td>
<td>Personal Solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-49</td>
<td>50k</td>
<td>1.5m</td>
<td>Premier Business Centres Sector Hubs</td>
<td>Subsidised Business Solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-2,999</td>
<td>30k</td>
<td>5m</td>
<td>Premier Business Centres Sector Hubs</td>
<td>Full-price Business Solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,000+</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>6m</td>
<td>Direct Salesforce</td>
<td>Tailored Business Solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ufi, 2002
4.1 Awareness

In our framework, we state that if **learndirect** is having an impact on organisations, then we might expect that 'more organisations will be aware of **learndirect** (adviceline/network)'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of <strong>learndirect</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of range of courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of benefits of distance learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matlay and Hyland (1999) conducted an appraisal of the awareness of Ufi amongst SMEs. They analysed a sample of 6,000 businesses, and found a comparatively low level of awareness of Ufi amongst those firms with 50 or fewer employees (50 to 58 per cent awareness range), as against awareness amongst larger firms (86 to 100 per cent).

Some small-scale research by NOP, commissioned by Ufi in 2002, suggested that knowledge of **learndirect** by SMEs was limited, and generally gained through business contacts or coming across a learning centre.

The brand tracker presentation for the period up to April 2002, quotes previous research as showing:

- Seventy-six per cent of senior managers responsible for training in SMEs are aware of **learndirect**, of whom:
  - five per cent were aware of the name, but did not know it was a provider of learning
  - thirty-four per cent were aware of the name and knew that it provided training (but were not aware it was an e-learning provider)
  - thirty-seven per cent were aware of the name, and knew that it offered online courses.
- Of those who were aware that **learndirect** was a learning provider, but were not existing customers, 48 per cent cited their source of information as TV advertising.

Other (unpublished) research for Ufi from Taylor Nelson Sofres shows awareness of **learndirect** as a source of training among SMEs to be similar to organisations such as the local Chamber of Commerce, lower than Business Link and much lower than broad categories such as ‘local college’ and ‘private training provider’.

Evidence of employer awareness of **learndirect** from the case studies was, not surprisingly, limited. Most of the evidence we do have, is based on the views of centre staff from their experiences of trying to market to employers. In general, centres associated

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with geographic hubs tended to feel that employers, especially small and medium-sized ones, were difficult to reach, whereas those linked to sectoral hubs, the sectoral hubs themselves, and the two centres specifically identified by Ufi as having good connections with SMEs, were more positive.

The characteristics of centres varies greatly. It was clear to us that many centres are focused predominately on individuals. Such centres may predominately cater for those within a geographic or cultural community, older people seeking to develop ICT skills, or those seeking to enter the job market. They are often poorly connected with SMEs, and may struggle to raise their profile with employers. This is in distinct contrast to other centres, who see their focus clearly on vocational skills either marketed directly to individuals, or to organisations. In either case, their understanding and comfort with an employer market means they have a quite different perspective. These contrasts were very visible in our case studies.

**Geographic hubs**

In Lincolnshire and Rutland, we visited two centres, both of which deliver vocational skills training to individuals partly in their own premises but also within companies. Both market to small businesses through their own databases, market onto existing customers, and undertake more general marketing activities. One had tried marketing in business publications, but this was not very successful. There was particular appreciation of the support (financial and technical) from **learndirect** with marketing for small businesses.

In Northern Ireland, awareness of **learndirect** by organisations was reported by the centres as growing, although much of the emphasis on the marketing and promotion of **learndirect** continued to be at the community rather than organisational level. Attempts to engage businesses and raise awareness primarily occurred through local advertising and open days at centres, and through encouraging existing organisations who are involved in open learning courses, to consider moving to **learndirect**. Some centre staff found that employers were aware of the brand through national advertising, but not of the details of the courses that might be appropriate to their organisation.

Both centres that we visited said that they had yet to be as proactive as they would like in helping organisations make the connection, as they were so heavily involved in community work and individual learners that joined from off the street. This is being addressed, in some part, by the development of a diagnostic tool to aid engagement. For many of the centre staff, it was hard work to engage some of the employers, and they had to go and ‘dig them out to get them involved’.
High SME contact centres

One of the centres we went to specifically because of their SME profile, was very positive about awareness and engagement. Selling **learndirect** to businesses was described as ‘being in Teletubby land’ a reference to the high demand for the soft toys a couple of Christmases ago. We were told that the **learndirect** product was ‘perfect’ for SMEs — a high quality and low cost way of training staff. One interviewee found that generally, businesses were unaware of the benefits of **learndirect** but, once these were explained, it was easy to sell to them. A lot of their business had been initially generated through telemarketing and advertisements, but then word of mouth has also been excellent. It is now so successful, they are thinking about stopping all direct marketing.

Employers we spoke to who were working with this centre, were impressed with the range of courses on offer. They seemed well aware of what these were, but these were obviously employers who had already made contact with **learndirect** via their local centre. The centre were not supportive of the national advertising campaigns which exist currently, which they felt did not help raise awareness amongst employers. They currently rely much more on local advertisements.

**Sectoral hubs**

We would have expected sectoral hubs to be well placed on the whole with SMEs, but their actual engagement varied considerably. Through some, such as ASSA, a growing number of organisations are becoming aware of **learndirect** and the courses being offered. It seemed to us that it is a fairly narrow range of courses, some of which are very sector specific, or at least sector contextualised, were being offered. The main advantage of sectoral hubs is that there is generally good engagement with the sectors and, therefore, higher profile. What we were not able to test is whether the awareness is predominately of the sectoral body or of **learndirect**.
Organisational model

Barclays have a unique relationship with *learndirect*, using the centre network to deliver training to branch staff via certain designated Barclays centres. Machines are specifically branded and reserved for Barclays use only. The existing *learndirect* network enabled the organisation to create a UK-wide network very quickly. The network delivers some key induction training for new entrants, customer-facing courses, and information on new products. We could get no direct evidence on the level of awareness amongst Barclays employees, but the company acknowledged that usage at some centres was low. They believed that this was most likely due to a lack of awareness and promotion rather than inappropriateness of content, or the fact that centres were located in another building. Barclays acknowledge that their relationship with *learndirect* is still in its early days, their immediate short-term objective was to put in place a platform that would quickly provide access to training, and be cost effective compared to other delivery options. The subsequent medium-term objective was to build on this by enhancing the service through developing a wider range of programmes and promoting the *learndirect* route more extensively.

4.2 Entry

In our framework, we state that if *learndirect* is having an impact on organisations, then we might expect that:

- SMEs are more likely to provide *learndirect* programmes as they are easier to arrange and are better mapped onto their needs for development.
- Engagement with *learndirect* will mean that specific SMEs will provide training which they would not otherwise have done so (as measured by comparison with non-involved SMEs).
- As a consequence of engagement, SMEs will provide more training to a wider range of staff then they would have otherwise done.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide <em>learndirect</em> programmes (instead of others)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in SMEs providing training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide training to a wider range of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide more training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on benefits of <em>learndirect</em> provision, <em>eg</em> believe training better suited to organisation’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on reason for engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.1 Appropriateness of learndirect

Views on employer engagement with learndirect follow a similar pattern to those expressed with regard to employer awareness. The two concepts are inevitably closer together than some other aspects of the learning chain.

Geographic hubs

We heard from one geographic hub, that there were difficulties in engaging employers with some aspects of the existing hub network. They did not believe full cost recovery was achievable, as many companies, especially in deprived areas, were used to having funding from other sources. Some centres do not provide the right environment for organisational learning, eg colleges are full of young people and the environment is not conducive to being used by businesses and their adult employees. There may also be an issue of mindsets too; suppliers who market to organisations need to think differently and have a different approach. One of our LSC contacts commented that take up from SMEs had not been as successful as expected. He reiterated the view that many small companies do not train on the whole, and that in some sectors, staff are very mobile to other employers who may pay just a little more. On the whole, the centres supported the views on full cost recovery, with most feeling that it is difficult to engage widely with learners or organisations that will pay fully.

Another geographic hub felt there was a need to simplify the offer, target the marketing, look at the pricing strategy and pull together a package which answers employers needs more specifically. This would appear to support the direction learndirect have spelt out in their Employer Engagement Plan. The hub commented that at the moment, organisations’ needs cut across different portfolios of courses, which makes it difficult for centres to bundle courses appropriately.

Good contact from centres seems to be key in securing and maintaining SME engagement.

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One centre in Lincolnshire and Rutland offers both learndirect and other programmes. They commented that other programmes require the learners to come into the centre, whereas learndirect can place a pod in an organisation or have learners learning in the workplace, so they feel it is more flexible. The trainers go into the organisation and set learning goals on an individual or a group basis, depending on the numbers. Individuals or groups can come into centre, if the employer will release staff.

Another centre spoke of a company that allows staff one hour a week for training, so they have put in a pod, run a booking-in system and put tutors in. They find direct contact is important, as tutors can help people who have not settled well or need restarting.
In Manchester, a couple of centres who traditionally marketed to individuals were tentatively trying to explore the corporate market. For such centres, there was clearly much learning to be done before they might feel confident in such a marketplace. There are also issues of incentives, as many centres have experienced considerable growth in the individual market which leaves little time to pursue employers more actively. Funding constraints may incentivise some to try to explore full cost recovery, but their contacts are often easiest with very small, local firms, who may be least able or likely to pay.

In Northern Ireland it was difficult for centres to provide evidence of where businesses had used *learndirect* programmes instead of other suppliers, as the centres pitched their offerings to individuals within the organisations. Organisations were happy for *learndirect* to come in to the organisation to talk to individuals about what they offered, but could not always see how they might get involved in the selection of *learndirect* courses appropriate for their business.

**Ufi NI** are supporting the likelihood of SMEs engaging in *learndirect* programmes through a joint initiative with the Federation for Small Businesses. This is aimed at providing training to the organisation based on *learndirect* offerings that would not otherwise be undertaken. The context is that Northern Ireland is still traditionally a small business economy, where 85 per cent of businesses have less than ten employees. With the Federation of Small Businesses, they want to include ‘micro businesses’ and those with perhaps only four to eight employees. Ufi NI know that such smaller firms are much less likely to provide training, and that there is concern from SMEs that investing in training will be costly or lead to poaching of their trained staff by competitors, resulting in a lack of strategic HR planning in such organisations. Evidence Ufi have suggests most SMEs would consider investment in learning if the costs were subsidised. The approach of the joint initiative is to overcome the barriers caused by lack of funding to learners, which makes it too expensive for small businesses and individuals within them to be trained.

A workforce development plan is undertaken at the SME, by means of a diagnostic tool developed by *learndirect*. This includes a ‘business health check’ tool and a ‘training needs analysis’ tool, which is operated by *learndirect* centre staff. The results of this analysis help the business to select from a shortlist of 30 *learndirect* courses to meet the training needs of individuals. Centres are given the skills, tools, incentives and marketing to engage businesses in learning — in particular to develop more than basic skills learning. This initiative is only just being introduced and it is, therefore, too early to see any impact on uptake on individual or business performance, or whether the training is viewed as better suited to the organisation’s needs.

**High SME contact centres**

In contrast, those centres which had high SME engagement were operating comfortably and successfully in the SME market. Sometimes so successfully that funding was an issue. One centre commented that the main advantage of *learndirect* for their staff,
was that they were not required to travel to get to their course. With other providers, staff may have to travel some distance. The company benefits by not being restricted by the provision available locally, and the courses offered by learndirect largely meet their entire training requirements.

A Housing Trust training manager had used the learndirect provider for IT training before. When she was introduced to learndirect, the cost issue was important, but was not the only issue. They were initially sceptical about distance learning and e-learning in particular, ‘I’ve worked with other packages in the past and they’ve been a waste of time. learndirect is so comprehensive, there is nothing it doesn’t cover, even advanced users can learn from the basic stages’. Now that they have tried learndirect within one region, other areas want to get involved. ‘It is the best package I’ve seen. It’s very straightforward and has this way of keeping you interested, you don’t want to come off it. The stuff covered on learndirect is much more in-depth than other courses’.

This organisation has plans to use learndirect training on health and safety issues. Using e-learning for this is thought to be particularly useful, because people can go back over issues. The training manager commented that learndirect ‘works round work’ and that staff shortages don’t limit opportunities for training, as it is not necessary to fund cover whilst people are away or to grapple with the administration of setting up specific times for training.

A manufacturing company said they preferred the learndirect courses to the ones they used to offer staff. Also more staff can now access training. For example, one individual, who works in packing, wanted to do a learndirect course in order to learn how to use his computer at home. The managing director was happy to offer this training through learndirect, as it may have future business benefits and lead to an enhanced role for that individual. Previously, the cost of providing training has been a ‘slowing factor’ in terms of upskilling their workforce, as they would normally put only two or three people through courses in a given year. They also had a constant eye on the training budget. This year the company has spent around £8-900 on training their whole workforce through learndirect, plus the costs of offering individuals about an hour a week of work time to study. The company now has a comprehensive training plan, and they feel the learndirect model has encouraged this type of business planning. Other benefits mentioned include the fact that individuals can work at their own pace, and are not held back or restricted by other people in their ‘class’ at college. Also, when individuals need to use the knowledge gained through learndirect in a practical way at work, they can access the module of the training course and go back through what they have learnt. This means that knowledge is not lost over time, hence maximising the business benefits. Individuals have immediate access to the aspect of the course they need for their work.

One organisation the company had appointed a learndirect co-ordinator and a number of training inductors. This means that they are virtually self-sufficient, and meant that the centre did not need to be so closely involved.
Not all contact turns out to be positive, one of the centres we visited told us that they had approached a company, with a large number of employees, who had worked previously with another supplier using **learndirect**. Their previous experience had been so bad they would not let the centre come and talk to them about how they could support them.

**Sector hubs**

The experience of the sector organisations in terms of engagement was very variable, some were disappointed with little take-up by SMEs, due in part to the nature of the sector. In ASSA for example, there was limited take-up of online learning and access of learning materials in small businesses, partly reflecting the make-up of the sector, although those that did so felt it was relevant to their needs. However, they felt that there were more employees (non-traditional learners) accessing learning who would not normally do so, and that learners enjoyed the bite-sized nature of the learning, its relevance, and the environment in which it is offered.

For ASSA, its major client by far is Nissan, and much of what is offered is based around the company’s own productivity system, so much so that it begs the question as to why Nissan do not provide their own learning centre? Nissan report a number of reasons:

- They would certainly do something in their own right if the **learndirect** centre did not exist, but not to the same extent.
- Their prime business is making cars, not running a learning centre and they are therefore pleased to outsource the learning and training agenda as long as the supplier meets their four key criteria of: quality, cost, delivery and management.
- They would not provide Skills for Life courses, as they do not produce a clear enough benefit to an employer, and primarily help the individual.

Lantra’s experiences are very different. In the academic year 2001-02, 82 per cent of the hub’s learners were linked to SMEs (over 60 per cent of which are more accurately described as micro-SMEs or one-person businesses).

There are broadly three ways through which the hub engages organisations in **learndirect** courses:

1. A few large organisations contract out the provision of basic IT skills to Lantra Online.
2. Lantra’s partners enrol tutor learners within a SME via their own learning centre, community resource or site visit.
3. Lantra’s own team of regional field staff may recommend to those SMEs for which they provide advisory support, that a *learndirect* course would be appropriate. They may refer the learner to **Lantra Online**, a Lantra partner, or the geographical hub usually the local specialist college.

For one large land-based manufacturing company, the involvement with *learndirect* via the **Lantra Online** Hub is in its first year. A pilot was successfully completed in March 2002 with some 40 learners. There are currently 56 learners enrolled on a *learndirect* course. The vast majority (estimated 99 per cent) are on basic IT courses eg Introduction to Word, Excel, Spreadsheets etc.

The relationship with *learndirect* began when the company identified the need for an alternative means of work-based learning — particularly IT training. The key driver was primarily one of cost reduction. Training provision has been largely outsourced, and there was a desire amongst management to visibly reduce the amount of time spent away from the job. Lantra made a successful proposal to supply the *learndirect* courses and ‘improve the company’s employee benefit package by offering *FREE* or *heavily subsidised* training to the workforce’.

The beauty of the *learndirect* courses, as reported by the training and development manager, is that the learners can complete their coursework at home or at work. The company provides a number of dedicated PC suites where learners can get away from the distractions at their desk, should they choose. The company has made a point of stressing to line managers that, once accepted and enrolled upon a course, the learners should be given the appropriate time to complete it.

The comments of learners interviewed would suggest that experience with *learndirect* has a direct bearing on the take-up within smaller businesses. Within veterinary practices, for example, the satisfaction of the owner often led to referrals to other staff to take up the same or other courses.

Centre managers reported that employers did not like employees taking a whole year to do training and learning. In their experience, when employers hear about what *learndirect* can offer, they like the ‘bite-size’ chunks and immediacy of the learning.

Anecdotal evidence from Lantra’s provider partners suggests that the fact that many of the ICT courses are free or subsidised has been instrumental in securing the commitment of smaller businesses.

One textile company in the Northwest was making some 80 staff redundant. They provided *learndirect* courses to all those who wanted them during working hours. The learners were predominantly second-income females, many from an Asian ethnic minority. In the provider’s opinion, the timely access to training in basic IT skills in an environment in which most felt comfortable, was instrumental in many being able to secure alternative employment. The employer would not have been in a position to fund such training had it not been so heavily subsidised.
Organisational model

Around 11 per cent of staff have accessed the **learndirect** system in the organisational hub. The view of centre staff we spoke to was that, on the whole, engagement was low — maybe two or three learners a week for some. Usage also tends to be confined to the specific Barclays programmes, even though staff can access **learndirect** programmes as part of a personal entitlement to £150 worth of training each year. This may not be fully representative however, and we did hear of other centres where take-up was much higher. Nonetheless, centres, and the organisation themselves, commented that there had not as yet been a proactive approach towards getting employees to access the centres, either by the centres themselves or by Barclays. The company intended to undertake more promotional work as the next stage of engagement.

Barclays felt that the benefits of **learndirect** were that it was much quicker to organise training and to undertake it. It was also a more economical form of delivery. A training manager we spoke to, felt the relationship with **learndirect** was valuable and that the format was especially useful for knowledge development, but less so for skills training.

4.2.2 More SMEs providing training to more staff

There is some interesting contextual evidence of the amount of training and development that is taking place amongst employers, against which we would ideally wish to place findings specific to **learndirect**. For example, key findings from the DfES Learning and Training at Work survey (2001) show that:

- Nearly 88 per cent of employers interviewed had provided *job-related* training to their employees in the 12 months prior to the interview. This represented a decline of four per cent on the previous year’s results.

- Over 55 per cent of employers interviewed had provided *off-the-job* training to their employees in the 12 months prior to the interview. This also represented a decline of four per cent on the previous year’s results. However, the amount of off-the-job training *per employee* had increased from 1.7 days in 2000, to 2.3 days in 2001.

- Over 78 per cent of employers interviewed had provided *on-the-job* training for their employees in the 12 months prior to the interview. This represented a decline of five per cent on the previous year’s results.

- Job-specific training (70 per cent) and Health and Safety training (78 per cent) were the most commonly provided forms of off-the-job training.

- The larger the company, the greater the likelihood of both on-the-job and off-the-job training being provided. Seventy-five
per cent of employers with 5-24 employees provided on-the-job training, as against 94 per cent of employers with 500 or more employees; and more markedly, 49 per cent of employers with 5-24 employees provided off-the-job training, as against 93 per cent of employers with 500 or more employees.

There is also evidence from a range of surveys (Knowledge Pool, 2002; CIPD, 2002) that there are subgroups of the training-rich, and training-poor. The extent of support given by employers varies according to both the kind of qualification in question, and the particular occupation of the employee. Employees studying for professional qualifications, for example, tend to be given greater financial support than those working towards undergraduate degrees with business content; while those working in the finance sector are more likely to be funded for training than those in public administration.

There is certainly evidence to suggest that small companies are much less likely to train than large companies. A recent CIPD survey (2002c) notes that, of a sample of 753 employees, those working in small businesses were less likely than those working for larger firms to receive training, and were less likely to receive off-the-job training when any training was provided at all. The general low level of training in SMEs is supported by other research (e.g. Holden et al., 2002; Martin, 2002).

A study of training in small firms (Kitching and Blackburn, 2002) demonstrated the different orientation to training adopted by businesses, and that many owner-managers did not see the need for major investments in training, although where they did, they had a preference for training at the workplace.

The evidence from the literature, therefore, would indicate that raising the engagement of SMEs is both a difficult target for leardirect, but also of particular significance given their comparative reluctance to provide learning opportunities. There is also evidence that there are considerable numbers of relatively disadvantaged learners in larger organisations too. Those in non-managerial and non-professional roles, working in certain sectors, part-timers, and those with low educational qualifications, are all less likely to be offered learning, and this group may be particularly relevant to the leardirect offer. Interestingly, research for Ufi in SMEs by Taylor Nelson Sofres suggests that employers would prioritise intermediate level employees for online learning if they took up that form of provision.

The Kitching and Blackburn (2002) study, which involved a survey of over 1,000 employers with fewer than 50 employers, found very little evidence of engagement with Ufi (the term ‘leardirect’ was not used in the survey), with under one per cent saying they were involved.
The latest Learning and Training at Work Survey (2003) suggests a slightly higher level of engagement by small firms, although the question is slightly different. Overall, some five per cent of employers said that they had built links with Ufi/learndirect, in order to offer employees training and development opportunities. Involvement increased substantially by size of employer (Figure 4.1). The survey data also show that involvement varies by sector (highest in transport and public administration and lowest in distribution) and region (highest in the North east and lowest in the North west). Engagement with learndirect was reported to be lower than with other new organisations such as Sector Skills Councils (seven per cent) and Learning and Skills Councils (11 per cent), and substantially lower than longstanding institutions such as further and higher education establishments (29 per cent and 24 per cent respectively). However, such direct comparisons are unfair given the different nature and role of the organisations.

The Taylor Nelson Sofres research for Ufi found that around nine per cent of employers had ever contacted learndirect to find out about employee training — a similar level of engagement to the Open University, lower than with Business Link (20 per cent had used this source) and higher than large-scale private training providers.

### 4.3 Outcomes

We have sought to see if engagement with learndirect:

- reduces experience of skill gaps

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1 New at least in name and remit, if not in overall function or form of delivery.
• increases morale, retention, and reduces absence
• results in more innovation, better quality, and improved customer care.

**Possible measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on experience of skill gaps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased morale/retention/lower absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in business practice <em>ie</em> helping accreditation under IIP, adoption of quality standards, management practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved customer care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased profit (reducing costs, increasing income or increasing effectiveness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3.1 Impact on skill gaps

We had no evidence about the impact of *learndirect* on organisations’ experience of skill gaps.

### 4.3.2 Improved employee attitudes

Similarly, there was very little except anecdotal evidence of learners changing their attitudes as a result of participating in learning. We had only one comment from ASSA, who see *learndirect* learning as a means to end in this respect: of ‘getting people’s brains working and getting them motivated to learn and improve’.

### 4.3.3 Organisational outcomes

Reviews of the literature on the returns to training tend to be difficult to interpret, as there are two quite distinct camps. There are those who are cautious (or even downright cynical) with regard to the evidence: typical comments will centre on the lack of evidence (Green, 1999), the difficulties of measurement or the complexity of the competitive strategy of firms (Keep *et al.*, 2002); others explore positive evidence of returns.

Perhaps the most comprehensive overview to date, of returns to investment in training, is that undertaken by Keep *et al.* for the DTI (2002), and firmly in the sceptical camp. The authors note that the evidence on the positive impact of training is incomplete:

• Workforce skill — or the lack of it — may not necessarily be a determining factor in national productivity, as current policy rhetoric would claim.
● Only two UK studies analysing the possible links between training and profitability were found, and one of these found no clear relationship between these two factors.

● Studies using more general measures of company performance found only ‘complex, weak and unclear linkages’ between training and performance.

● No studies specifically examining the impact of training on relatively underqualified workers (below level 2) were found.

In addition, a number of problems surrounding the available studies were found, including:

● measurement difficulties associated with isolating the impact of training from other variables.

● a tendency for research to give small-scale ‘snapshot’ views and lack longitudinal breadth.

In other papers, Keep (2000a and 2000b) criticises current vocational learning policy objectives, claiming that employers’ reluctance to invest in employee training is largely a response to the character of the UK economy, rather than any lack of awareness, information, or funds on the part of organisations. Given the shape of the labour market, in which highly routinised, low-skill employment and the production of low-quality, low-cost, standardised goods prevails, upskilling does not make financial sense. In the light of this, universal progression towards a ‘knowledge-driven economy’ — propelled and sustained by vocational upskilling — is felt to be, at the very least, unrealistic.

In the most positive camp, there are those studies that do provide evidence that learning and development produces positive benefits to employers. For example, various studies on Investors in People suggest that those companies that are accredited as Investors in People can be more successful than those that are not (Hillage and Moralee, 1997; Tamkin et al., 2000), although the causality of impact is unproven.

Other econometric analyses have also been more positive. Sianesi et al., (2002) describe the evidence positively linking education with enhanced productivity as ‘compelling’. Dearden et al. (2000) also identify ‘a statistically and economically significant effect of training on value added per head in the UK’, using panel data over a 13 year period. The authors suggest that the importance attached to training by policy-makers is ‘not misplaced’ and, indeed, that problems of methodology and measurement may have led economists to underestimate the importance of training.

Some studies focused on SMEs have also shown (eg Cosh et al., 1997) ‘a strong significant impact of training on employment growth’, especially for those firms who trained persistently.
The evidence from the literature highlights the problems of identifying outcome measures for organisations, from their investment in training and development. This has proved to be a challenging part of this research too, and as yet, we have no data specific to learndirect from any other sources.

In many of our case studies, no organisations were identified for us to visit and talk to about their experiences. We focus here on one of the high-contact centres that was able to arrange interviews, and on our sectoral and large organisational contacts.

**High SME contact centres**

One centre manager described the benefits to SMEs being ‘they get the benefits of a broad portfolio of skills under one umbrella’. This is a lot easier than contracting with a range of providers, and the portfolio of courses, eg the Business Management courses offered by learndirect, are much broader than any one provider could offer.

Organisations believed that learndirect saved money, both directly, because the costs were less than equivalent training might be, and also because release times were much lower than for traditional forms of delivery.

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At a distribution company, they felt that training staff on how to use computers with learndirect has meant that less management time is spent demonstrating packages or talking staff through processes (both IT and business management). This represents a hidden cost benefit in addition to the low cost of the courses themselves. This is of major importance as order sizes and margins are getting smaller. There is a need to work smarter and quicker, rather than harder. A specific example is amongst the sales team. The sales force have all learnt to use Excel and, despite having one less person on the sales force than previously, they are meeting targets just as well as before. The managing director is confident that the investment in training and IT systems is the reason for this, and clearly believes that there is evidence of learndirect adding to the productivity of his workforce.

The training manager in a housing association believes that there are a number of ways in which learndirect training has enabled staff to become more productive. The first of these is by enhancing the skills of those with already good knowledge of various packages. Most people are self-taught with computers, so going back to the basics and relearning things thoroughly can extend knowledge. Staff also find the e-learning approach really useful in fitting around childcare arrangements. Individuals can learn more than one skill at once, do more than one course at once, and skip through sections that are not relevant to them. They are clear that developing the skills of staff helps the overall business performance.
Sectoral hubs

Our conversations with learners within organisations, indicated that some felt that the learning they had undertaken had been useful. For example, one learner said:

‘I am familiar with all this stuff about standard operations etc. and how to do the job, but the course helped me understand why I need to know it and what more I could know to help me get on and do a better job.’

The question for the organisation is: can this learning be applied effectively in the workplace and make a difference to the organisation? For example, ASSA provides productivity courses developed with Nissan, and it might be expected that employers benefit from the general upskilling of the workforce as their base abilities rise. However, the learning may be wasted if the workplace itself is not committed to productivity improvement generally (and implicitly, through adopting the methods built into the course — ie standardised operations, continuous improvement etc.). The applicability of tools developed in one context, to other different contexts, could not be tested as we did not have access to other organisations.

In another hub, the diversity of relationships between the hub and employer organisations made it difficult to generalise about learndirect’s impact. No direct evidence was available of this impact at an organisational level. Most of the impact reported was at the individual level, rather than on how individual learning had an impact on business practices, quality etc.

In one organisation, learndirect was widely used but the organisation took a relatively ‘hands off’ approach, and did not follow progress very closely. They expected the sectoral hub to contact them if there was a problem with activity rates or completion. They have not needed to do so to date. Contact between the in-house training team and the sectoral hub tutors is considered unnecessary. The organisation do not formally review the learner’s satisfaction with the learndirect experience. Anecdotal evidence suggests that employees generally find it an easy way to update and refresh their IT skills. They enjoy the flexibility of being able to do the coursework at a time and place that suits them. The training team have observed instances when learners have been able to directly apply new skills learnt to their work task in hand, eg when compiling a budget with a spreadsheet.

The organisation’s expectation is that its use of e-learning as a delivering mechanism for a broad range of development needs, will continue to grow. The parent organisation in the US has recently launched a corporate university. This is an online suite of modules and tools for management and leadership competencies, as well as core skill areas.

The training manager was unable to identify any data to measure the outcome of using learndirect on skills gaps, retention and morale, business performance etc. Basic IT skills are, however, important to the company, and learndirect is viewed as a low-cost way of delivering learning.
Organisational model

learndirect met a specific need for rapid access to market, which was achieved. However, as we have seen, it is still early days and too soon to judge organisational impact. Barclays acknowledge there is quite a bit of inertia in the company regarding entry into the learning, which they need to overcome. They commented that in the set-up phase, they found huge differences in quality, with commercial centres much more willing to be flexible and with the right attitude towards the bank. In contrast, colleges were found to be generally less flexible.

Overall, they felt that their achievement had been remarkable, but that more could be achieved with a more entrepreneurial approach. They felt that much of the intellectual and commercial push originated from the bank, and learndirect could benefit by taking the initiative more, especially if they wanted to build on the experience they had gained from this initiative with other organisations. Their impression was that the primary focus of learndirect was on getting individual learners into learning, and the employer focus was less well developed at this stage.

4.4 General points about Ufi

In the course of our discussions, a number of more general points were made about learndirect and its engagement with employers that do not fit neatly into the framework. These tended to centre around:

- concerns about some of the definitions and processes used by Ufi to manage hubs and centres
- the importance of personal support, both to the employer and the individual learner
- the relationships between different types of hubs and centres
- the more general role of Ufi in relation to employers.

4.4.1 Definitional issues

What is a SME?

Identifying whether an organisation is or is not a SME, can be problematic. One centre had contacted a range of employers, some of which appeared to be SMEs based on the numbers of employees on site, but later found them to be part of a larger group, though operating autonomously. They felt that there appears to be a lack of clarity from learndirect about what constitutes a SME. There are concerns that many of their clients will lose their eligibility and access to reduced cost or free courses over time. This becomes particularly important in marketing terms, and when trying to build the business up. In particular,
administrative staff and telemarketing staff can find the distinctions difficult, which might lead to employers not getting clear information.

When is a learner not learning?

Several centres commented on the implications of auditing the progress of company learners. The four-week chasing cycle that learndirect adopts is problematic from the employer perspective, for a variety of reasons (e.g., reorganisations, busy periods such as Christmas), any of which may cause a company to freeze staff time that can be spent on training during work hours. One centre said they believed this requirement contradicted the original motto of learndirect of ‘any time, any place, any pace’. The audit trail was felt to take time away from marketing and customer support, and some learners did not appreciate being pressurised.

Who is an adult?

It is sometimes difficult to work with employers with young workforces, as under 19s are not eligible to receive subsidised learning with learndirect. This may disproportionally affect young, forward-thinking employers, and those who want to develop younger members of staff. To employers, the ‘19 or over’ age limit seems strange, given that they can employ young people from the age of 16. It can be hard to explain this in marketing terms. This limit can also affect some sectors more than others.

Geographical limits

Some of the sectors were frustrated by only being able to operate in England.

4.4.2 Level of support

Some of the centres appear to offer a great deal of support and personal contact with the organisations they work with. This appears to directly affect their success, and how they are viewed. For example, one employer said:

‘If it wasn’t for X we wouldn’t continue with the training. Repeat problems when saving what you’ve learnt means that the training doesn’t work out to be cost effective as staff have to repeat what they have already done.’

This approachability, professionalism and attention to detail, is bound to be a factor in the success in attracting organisations and individuals alike.

The infrastructure necessary to provide an effective learning experience within small organisations, may not be available. Lantra, with their widely dispersed and, frequently, very small client population of companies, experienced difficulties of
delivering **learndirect** course material to a sector largely dependent upon traditional phone lines and older PCs *etc.* In these circumstances, the functionality with the software for ‘drag and drop’, ‘bookmarking’ *etc.* seldom work effectively, or just take too long to download. Problems of this kind, account, we were told, for approximately half of their drop-out rate. It is a source of some considerable frustration to the hub staff that, having engaged the ‘hard-to-reach’ community in learning, then fail to deliver the goods.

**Infrastructure**

The infrastructure is also important, *eg* offices which are clean, bright and smart, computer equipment which is new, and plenty of space for learners to use their PCs.

### 4.4.3 Generalist versus specialist centres

One high employer contact centre commented on the difficulties in generating interest in the Skills for Life courses. They felt under pressure to develop this area of the business. The target of 16 percent of learners on Skills for Life has not been realistic for them, which, because they are one of the major providers within their regional hub, has resulted in poor figures on this for the hub as a whole.

The point was made that colleges throughout the county already offer basic skills training, and that this would be the natural place to start offering computer-based Skills for Life training. Similarly, we have seen that other providers struggle to enter other market places that are not their niche.

The buoyancy of the individual market has also meant that there is little incentive for many centres to diversify into markets that they are less comfortable with. We suspect specialist centres are the way forward for **learndirect**, which is their own strategic conclusion. Nonetheless, we have seen that many centres, successful in their home market, are being pressured to enter new markets.

### 4.4.4 Sectoral versus geographic hubs

There is scope for confusion and misunderstanding about the role of a sectoral hub and its relationship with, and difference to, geographical hubs. Some believe it has put the Sector Skills Councils in the difficult position of being both ‘poacher and gamekeeper’. Lantra, for example, have a close relationship with the specialist agricultural colleges — however, many are part of geographical hubs, and this can lead to confusion/tension. The current funding arrangements with the LSC and Ufi provide a disincentive for the colleges to support this. They also state that
they, and their provider’s partners, receive no referrals from the **learndirect** adviceline. Anyone phoning through to the **learndirect** adviceline, having seen the national advertising campaign, will be referred to a geographical hub.

### 4.4.5 For industry or for individuals?

A few of the interviewees in the sectoral hubs felt that there was some confusion over the remit of Ufi, with, they argued, too much emphasis on community-based work, replicating what colleges do compared with the resources spent on industry, small or large. Others recognised that different markets, e.g., employers or individuals, needed different marketing strategies, although this could lead to problems when there were different pricing policies applying to individuals and organisations.

### 4.5 Conclusion

Our evidence on organisational impact is light. Our view is that this is not through failing to identify appropriate sources, or not accessing the right organisations, but because there is little evidence available. Despite its name, Ufi appear to have made little impact so far on organisations and our conclusion is that Ufi’s relationship with organisations is still at an early stage. Although we were able to find examples of positive evidence, we had to search hard for it. In our geographical case studies, evidence of organisational impact was very difficult to find, and even in some of our sectoral case studies, evidence still pointed to a focus on individual rather than organisational benefit. Our large organisation case study also demonstrated ambiguous evidence of impact. On the one hand, **learndirect** had offered quick access to an extensive e-learning network, but on the other, uptake, learning and organisational benefits, were limited. Problems with the offer to organisations have also been evident.

There is still work to do, which Ufi themselves have acknowledged in beginning to work on dovetailing the **learndirect** programmes to the needs of the organisation, and packaging them accordingly. We suspect specialisation will be an important factor in reaching new markets. Success will also depend on a change of mindset and the ability to seek out and develop new relationships and ways of working with organisations.

### 4.6 Key points

- One of the strategic aims of Ufi is to increase productivity and competitiveness, and so the impact it is having, particularly on SMEs, is an important element of this evaluation. Ufi has recently launched a new segmented approach, including the development of Premier Business Centres targeting small and
medium-sized employers, and specific employer-focused products.

- Some of Ufi’s own research shows that most managers responsible for training had heard of **learndirect**, mainly through national advertising. While most of the learning centres we visited in the case studies concentrated on individuals, and had little direct connection with employers, those which were focussed on businesses reported growing awareness among the employer community. One argued that although initial awareness of what **learndirect** had to offer was low, once it was explained, it was relatively easy to secure interest.

- Similarly, engagement with employers (as opposed to individuals who happened to be employed) appears to be variable, often quite low but higher in those few hubs and centres specifically targeting the employer market. Overall, around five per cent of employers say that they have built links with **learndirect**. Involvement rises considerably with size of employer. In the case studies, we did find examples of extensive engagement, with demand potentially outstripping capacity to deliver, mainly for ICT-based courses, although the penetration of parts of the employer market (e.g. SMEs) by sector-based hubs appeared variable. While over ten per cent of employees in the organisational hub we visited had accessed the **learndirect** system, actual engagement was considered to be low.

- Although there is evidence in the literature that investment in training can generally lead to improved organisational performance, we found little other than occasional anecdotal evidence of such an impact for **learndirect**. This does not mean that the linkage does not exist, and there certainly is evidence of employees using **learndirect** courses to gain specific skills which are then applied in the workplace. However, most of the workplace training provided by **learndirect** could be seen as building a foundation for further skill development, from which attributable organisational outcomes could be attained.

- Demand for **learndirect** in the workplace is strongest for ICT courses. Evidence from the case studies suggest, that the free or low-cost delivery was thought to be a considerable aid to engagement with employers.

- Our discussions with hub and centre personnel, and others, throw up a number of issues relating definitions and processes used to manage the **learndirect** infrastructure, which at best cause ambiguities and confusion, and at worst impede performance. These included:
  - difficulties applying the definition of an autonomous SME
  - the relevance of the audit rule that learners needed to be active at least once in a four-week period
• the ineligibility of 19 year olds for subsidised learning
• the application of targets relevant to one market, to another, e.g., pushing Skills for Life courses in employer markets, or encouraging successful community centres to target SMEs
• the overlap between sectoral and geographical hubs, and the influence this can have, for instance on their relationship with specialist colleges.
5. Impact on Provision

Ufi, through *learndirect*, was conceived as a ‘new kind of organisation’, involving innovative forms of learning based on ICT. Thus, in addition to directly having an impact on individual learners and the organisations in which they work, *learndirect* could be expected to have an influence on learning provision more generally, *eg* by stimulating the market for e-learning through creating an infrastructure of online learning materials and equipment. *learndirect* could also have a more direct influence on the nature of provision, through its adviceline, *ie* by stimulating more people to access more suitable courses.

When we originally developed the methodology for the project, we intended to look at the impact of *learndirect* on the general provision of learning opportunities, primarily through the effect of the adviceline and the network on the general learning market. We quickly found that the case studies themselves were not providing as much information on provision as we had hoped, although they did give us an insight into the experiences of the providers who were now *learndirect* centres. In an attempt to partly fill this gap, mid-way through the study we developed and issued a survey to providers registered with the LSCs in Lincoln and Rutland, Manchester and Stockport, and Hereford and Worcester.

5.1 Awareness

Our assumptions are that if *learndirect* is having an impact on the general learning market, this could be demonstrated by:

1. other providers having marketed their own programmes more extensively
2. advice from other providers about their own programmes having improved
3. awareness of the benefits of *learndirect*.

5.1.1 More extensive marketing

Response rates to our survey of providers were low, perhaps not surprisingly for an unsolicited survey of this kind, and therefore
the results need to be interpreted cautiously. Fifteen of our respondents were not existing *learndirect* providers, and had never been so. About two-thirds of these had heard of the adviceline but none provided any information about themselves to the adviceline, and not surprisingly, had not had any learners who had come to them via the adviceline. Respondents did not feel that they had changed their approach to marketing because of *learndirect*.

We found no evidence in the case studies that other providers had changed the ways in which they marketed their programmes, as a direct or indirect response to *learndirect*.

### 5.1.2 Quality of advice

The survey of adviceline users does ask questions on the quality of advice from other sources. For some other sources (colleges/universities, trades associations/professional bodies or trade unions, friends and family), satisfaction levels are slightly higher than with *learndirect*. However, *learndirect* had a higher level of satisfaction than other potential sources, *e.g.* careers services and employers, Jobcentres, and Learning and Skills Councils. We can conclude from the level of usage reported earlier, and users’ satisfaction, that *learndirect* makes an important contribution to the development of the overall learning market.

### 5.1.3 Awareness of the benefits of *learndirect*

Nine of our respondents were existing *learndirect* providers. We specifically asked them why they sought to become a provider. The most frequent reasons given were to do with the range of programmes *learndirect* offers, and the ways in which these complemented the providers’ existing offer. Six out of the nine who responded, said that the fact that *learndirect* complemented their existing offer, offered programmes of relevance to their existing client group, and offered such a wide range of programmes, were all of great importance in terms of their seeking to become a *learndirect* provider. Other strong reasons were a realisation that the e-learning delivery route was increasingly popular (of great importance to five, and of some importance to a further two), the fact that *learndirect* were becoming a major supplier of the kinds of courses they wanted to deliver (of great importance to four respondents, and of some importance to a further three), and seeing *learndirect* as a potential source of additional income (also of great importance to four respondents, and of some importance to a further three). The quality of programmes was a strongly important factor for three respondents, and of some importance for a further four.

There is, therefore, some evidence to suggest that organisations seek to become *learndirect* providers predominately because
learndirect is compatible with their previous business and offers significant breadth and quality of programmes.

5.2 Entry

We hypothesised that if learndirect were having a general impact on learning provision, then:

- more providers will be exploring and providing flexible delivery
- other providers will find increased referral of students from the adviceline
- referrals will be appropriate.

A further measure that emerged as we conducted our work, was the fact that learndirect will encourage alternative forms of provision.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Possible measures</th>
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<tr>
<td>Changes in course provision as a result of learndirect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Growth in learning opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distance learning offer/increased flexibility of learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of students coming from adviceline increased — can only be perceptual, as we have no before measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on appropriateness of referral — can only be perceptual as we have no before measures.</td>
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5.2.1 Increasing flexible delivery

There is general evidence in the literature of a growing interest in e-learning, both in the workplace and in the education service (see, for example, Pollard and Hillage, 2001). The Labour Force Survey includes a question of those engaged (primarily in vocational learning) about how they learn.

The accompanying Figure (Figure 5.1) shows the increase in the use of CD-ROMs and the Internet for learning purposes.

Our survey of providers showed very little impact of learndirect on other providers’ learning offer but, as we have stated, this may have been a function of the low response rate rather than the absence of impact. The respondents offered a range of programmes, most frequently of long-term duration, but nine also offered short courses lasting up to 30 hours. Delivery also varied but most frequently was face to face, either in their own or in an employer’s premises. Perhaps because of this profile, most did not consider learndirect to be a competitor; indeed only two respondents did so.
Even where respondents were making some kind of change in their delivery methods, *ie* becoming more modular or offering more courses using e-learning, they did not attribute the change in any way to *learndirect*.

It is also clear from our visits to learning centres, that *learndirect* is contributing to the growth in computer-based learning. While most learners (over three-quarters according to the survey of *learndirect* learners) go to a *learndirect* centre to undertake their learning, a quarter also do so at home. It is not clear, however, the extent to which *learndirect* is contributing to the development of virtual learning (*ie* completely remote from a learning centre), as relatively few *learndirect* learners appear to learn in this way. We have seen that the virtual learning route poses specific challenges for *learndirect*, and that most centres prefer their learners to attend, and therefore be accessible to support. Where there is a strong virtual learning presence, the problems of connectivity and learner ICT capability, become more pertinent.

We did hear some criticism that even *learndirect* was not flexible enough. Some private providers reiterated Lantra’s own concerns that the *learndirect* ICT courses are not as helpful as they might be, because they are not context specific. The case material, and examples within the course material, are not relevant to the experience and needs of the land-based sector user, and they expressed a need for tailored courses.

Source: IES/LFS, 2002
Lantra itself is actively developing such courses, eg spreadsheets for farmers and growers with highly relevant case material on, for example, crop scheduling. They are also developing a managed learning platform, that will enable industries in the sector access to paper- and CD-ROM-based courses, plus a range of tutor support.

ASSA had developed generic productivity materials, which it hoped would be of relevance outside the automotive sector, although there was little evidence of take-up other than from the ASSA hub.

**leardirect** has also facilitated the development of a range of Skills for Life basic skills courses and materials in conjunction with other agencies.

Finally, the ‘bite-sized’ nature of **leardirect** learning appeared to be well received by learners, especially those who had a particular learning need (eg in the field of IT), or who were new or recently returned to learning, and feared the commitment of a conventional course.

### 5.2.2 Impact on entry into learning

None of the respondents to our provider survey acknowledged any impact of **leardirect** on the kinds of learners coming into learning, or on organisations being more willing to pay for courses. One of the respondents said that learners wanted learning opportunities to be offered more flexibly, one that learners were less nervous of new technology, and one that organisations were less willing to pay for courses. Two respondents felt that **leardirect** had had some impact on organisations wanting learning to be offered more flexibly.

**leardirect** providers had generally seen the volume of learners grow through their involvement with **leardirect**, and felt that they were reaching the kinds of learners that they would not otherwise be able to access. For seven out of the nine providers, **leardirect** had helped them grow, and just over half mentioned that their financial viability had improved, that they were more able to gain financial leverage from other funding bodies, and had developed partnerships with other organisations.

### 5.2.3 Alternative forms of provision

One measure of the impact of **leardirect**, is the enthusiasm demonstrated by other providers to become **leardirect** providers. In our geographic centres, there had been considerable demand and the numbers of registered centres had grown significantly over the previous year. Most were now at near capacity, and funding issues meant they were unlikely to grow much more. One centre commented that this growth had been achieved without
needing to go out to the marketplace. Instead, they had tended to react to providers coming to them, rather than having to drive the growth of centres. Initially, interest had been shown by traditional training providers such as colleges and some private providers, but with time, they have also found that providers working in IT solutions found **learndirect** an attractive option to starting their own business. It enabled them to start quickly, without having to develop their own materials.

It was also apparent from our case study visits, that **learndirect** had been instrumental in helping develop a non-college based infrastructure of learning centres in community-based facilities and in encouraging new providers into publicly funded provision. This was reported to be important in reaching potential learners who felt intimidated by the relative formality of a college-type environment. Using a computer was also felt to be less threatening to people who were worried about revealing their lack of knowledge in public. Several such community-based centres felt that **learndirect** had made a big difference to them, frequently making them more financially secure, enabling them to provide bigger and better premises, and freeing them from the administrative burden of constantly completing funding application forms. Some also mentioned that funding from other sources very rarely paid for administrative support, and income from **learndirect** meant that admin staff could be taken on and retained. This had a direct impact on local employment and the quality of service the centres could offer on all of their activities.

Three of the centres we visited commented that they had moved to **learndirect** from other providers because of the benefits of the **learndirect** offer, usually being cheaper and more flexible to deliver. Some centres had continued to run other programmes in conjunction with **learndirect** where they believed they were complementary, or catering for slightly different populations. Some had initially offered other programmes in parallel, but had increasingly moved to **learndirect**.

The private providers IES spoke to who were working with Lantra, were largely enthusiastic about the strategic impact of **learndirect** on the market for learning provision.

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A private provider cited the example of a training course they were hoping to develop on Radiology for the veterinary market, and for which they had received a European grant. It had not been a success to date, largely due to the lack of basic IT skills amongst the target group. In recent months, they believe **learndirect** has made significant steps in breaking this barrier down. ‘**learndirect** is the Trojan horse responsible for running down the computerphobic.’
5.3 Conclusions

Evidence for the impact on provision is moderately weak. There is general evidence of a growth in computer-based learning, but we cannot attribute this to **learndirect**, and it may reflect more general changes in the learning market as suggested by the few providers who responded to our survey.

The survey relies on very few responses, mostly from providers whose current learning offer is very different to that of **learndirect**. They do not see **learndirect** as a competitor, and have not noticed any other impact of the organisation. Where there is clear impact is on those organisations that make up its network of physical and virtual centres. These organisations have seen considerable gains; reaching new learners and growing business with greater financial security. For community centres, their **learndirect** offer tends to support their other work with the community.

The overall view is that **learndirect** offers a low-cost, high-quality product.

5.4 Key points

The third dimension in which **learndirect** could be having a strategic impact is on the nature of learning provision more generally, *eg* by increasing general awareness of the learning opportunities available, or contributing to the development of new forms of learning:

- The survey evidence is that the **learndirect** adviceline makes an important contribution to the development of the overall learning market, although this was not echoed in the (limited) evidence from providers.

- The volume of, and satisfaction among, **learndirect** learners suggests that **learndirect** is influencing the nature of learning by providing a range of bite-sized opportunities, previously not generally available and yet highly attractive, particularly to new learners.

- Computer-based learning is growing, and **learndirect** contributes to its development both through helping people acquire ICT skills and also helping to create an online learning infrastructure. It does this by both sustaining individual (often non-college based) learning centres, and providing computer-based learning materials and opportunities.

- There is relatively little evidence that the range of courses developed by **learndirect** has added significantly to the range of materials and opportunities available outside the area of ICT.
Evidence for impact on the overall learning infrastructure can be found in the enthusiasm that many providers demonstrate in seeking to become learndirect centres.

The extent to which learndirect is assisting the development of a virtual learning infrastructure is less clear. Most learndirect learners visit physical learning centres rather than use the Internet, eg from home. The virtual learning route poses a range of technical and learner-based issues which have yet to be overcome for most learndirect learners.
6. Conclusions

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to assess the impact of Ufi as an instrument of policy, and the influence it has had so far on the learning market. In this final chapter, we draw on the evidence presented in the previous chapters to answer this question, and specifically to:

- establish, as far as we can tell, the extent to which learndirect has been successful in achieving its key objectives
- assess the impact on individuals of the knowledge and skills they have gained through learndirect
- examine the wider influence that Ufi, through learndirect, has had on the supply and take-up of learning opportunities, and on the learning market as a whole, including any unforeseen benefits or unwanted consequences
- discuss options for a longer-term evaluation strategy for Ufi.

We begin by looking at whether learndirect is meeting its intermediate objectives and longer-term aims, firstly for individuals, including the impact of knowledge and skills gains, and then organisations. Next, we look at the wider impact on the learning market. Finally, we explore an evaluation strategy.

6.1 Is Ufi achieving its key objectives?

The overall aims of Ufi are twofold:

1. To boost productivity and competitiveness of business by
   a) improving the supply of skilled and qualified people
   b) helping employers retain and train employees
   c) reducing the cost of training
   d) raising business performance through increased skills.
2. To help individuals gain knowledge and skills that will enhance their employability, by increasing their ability to get, change or keep a job, and progress their career.

To operationalise these rather general aims, the department has set intermediate objectives for Ufi, to:
increase the number of people participating in lifelong learning
widen participation by changing attitudes towards learning of those who would not otherwise have participated
increase the number of companies (particularly SMEs) providing learning opportunities to employees
improve the quantity and quality of provision.

The aims and objectives are oriented slightly differently. The overall aims are clearly very vocational in their outlook and are focussed on labour market outcomes, whereas the intermediate objectives appear to be somewhat less so, with their emphasis on ‘lifelong’ learning — which could include learning by those not economically active, or not associated with work-related goals.

We have developed an evaluation framework (set out in Chapter 2) to link these aims and objectives to evidence we set out to collect, using existing surveys and through our case studies. The framework is based on a ‘chain of impact’, which looks for evidence that learndirect helps individuals access information on learning, facilitates their participation in learning opportunities, provides useful and enjoyable learning and, through this learning, improves individuals’ employability and, when applied in a positive way at work, leads to organisational benefits. Ufi’s intermediate objectives are mainly placed to the left of this chain, focussed more on participation than on outcomes, whereas the aims are clearly to the right.

This sets an important context for our overall conclusion. The evidence we have collected and examined indicates that Ufi has made considerable progress in achieving its intermediate objectives. However, we have found less evidence that it is yet succeeding in meeting its wider aims.

6.1.1 Impact on individuals

Facilitating the entry of individuals to lifelong learning

Awareness of learndirect is growing fast, especially amongst those who are younger, and economically active, a group that might be especially important in terms of the strategic outcomes of Ufi. Even amongst groups usually disadvantaged in learning terms, Ufi may be playing a role in increasing the awareness of learning opportunities — learning rates for older, non economically active callers, are higher amongst those who have heard of learndirect than amongst those who have not.

The adviceline mainly acts as a channel for existing learners to find job-related courses, usually outwith the learndirect portfolio. Callers to the adviceline are well disposed to learning, and tend to be seeking information that is predominately vocational. The weight of evidence is that the adviceline does facilitate entry into
learning, with creditable proportions of those who contact the line making the transition into learning. Others believe that they are likely to engage with learning in the near future as a consequence of their call and the adviceline is a key influence on this transition. While we know from survey evidence that the information and support they receive from the adviceline is viewed positively, and can be instrumental in helping them access further learning, we know little about what happens to them (or at least, those who take up non-learndirect learning) after that.

The majority of those who go on to learn, do so with other providers than learndirect. However, there are many learners who appreciate the learndirect offer. There is evidence that it reduces the barriers to learning and that once people have undertaken some learning, they are more likely to go on and do more. Vocational learning increases with the number of courses studied.

We conclude that learndirect, through both the adviceline and the network, is making an important contribution to increasing the number of people participating in learning. However, they contribute in different ways and, crucially, to different groups of people. The adviceline predominately attracts existing learners, and the network new learners. We explore the profile of learndirect learners below.

**Widening participation**

learndirect learners are more likely to be of non-working age, low qualified, and to have not done any learning in the three years prior to calling the adviceline. learndirect would appear to facilitate the entry into learning, especially for the learning disadvantaged.

learndirect has some unique features that attract people. Learners appreciate the relative affordability of learndirect, the private nature of the learning. They also appreciate the structure, which places learning outside formal education or training providers in accessible venues, and in a format that can be taken at the learner’s pace.

Learners are positive about their learning experience, feel that they have gained from their learning, and feel more confident about learning something new. We believe that learndirect has demonstrated that it gets new learners into learning and moves many of them on to more learning.

**Gaining employability**

Does learndirect help improve vocational skills or soft skills of relevance to the work environment?
There are mixed messages here; **learndirect** is especially appreciated by new learners who have no experience of other forms of learning, but even experienced learners feel they gain from their **learndirect** courses. The majority of learners are learning for personal interest, but we have seen that learning progression is associated with a rise in vocational reasons for learning. This is not to imply that there is a causality with learning activity developing vocational motivations, it may be that further learning is more likely from those who have a vocational motive already. There is, however, evidence that further learning is made more likely by participating in **learndirect** courses.

Most of the learners who take a **learndirect** course like what they find. There are high levels of reported satisfaction, and many take up more than one course. As a result most, getting on for 90 per cent, say they gain better IT skills. Fewer, around four in ten, say they gain job-related skills. There are ‘softer’ learning outcomes as well, and most say they benefit from improved self-confidence and motivation, and better personal and social skills.

As far as employment outcomes are concerned, our evidence base is weaker, but there are some positive findings. We found a number of anecdotal examples in the case studies of people having the confidence and, for example, the ICT skills, to pursue and gain employment opportunities. Relatively few survey respondents had changed jobs since their involvement with **learndirect**. However, a significant proportion of those who had — over 40 per cent — said that that **learndirect** had helped them achieve progression in the labour market, whether it be a new job in the same or a different type or work, or a promotion. This does suggest that, at least in the minds of some learners, **learndirect** contributed to improving their employability. However, we do not know, for example, whether **learndirect** learners are more likely to progress, or progress as far as similar people not involved with **learndirect**.

Involvement with **learndirect** also appears to increase the likelihood of pursuing further learning in the future. In the case studies, we encountered a number of examples of people who had acquired the learning habit as a result of their engagement with **learndirect** learning. Three in four **learndirect** learners said that they were more confident about further learning as a result of their experience, and hoped to build on what they learnt. Of those that had pursued further learning, almost half said that their **learndirect** experience had provided an important stepping stone to other forms of learning, and around two-thirds said their **learndirect** experience had complemented their other learning. Therefore, **learndirect** not only acts as a key starting point for many new learners, but it also gives some of them — perhaps one-third — an impetus to go further.
Almost a half of those who plan to go on to further learning, hope to study for qualifications. Working through the survey results indicates that around a quarter of all learndirect learners plan to go on to study for a qualification. Perhaps most significantly, around one-fifth of previous non-learners intend to pursue qualifications. As we have seen, learndirect is instrumental to them getting involved in learning in the first place. We can therefore conclude that learndirect has had an important influence on this group changing their attitudes to learning and increasing their chances of gaining a qualification.

**Contribution to the lifelong learning journey**

There is, therefore, considerable evidence that learndirect is helping people progress in their learning journey. However, the network users tend to be at an early stage, and it is clear from the case studies as well as the surveys that many learndirect learners are new learners. Many of these are far removed from any employment-related destination. Indeed, some may not be intending to go in that direction at all, a quarter were retired and a further 15 per cent ‘economically inactive’. For the adviceline users, many of whom are active learners, the connection with employability and work-related outcome is potentially much closer.

The evidence could be characterised as being very strong on attracting individuals to learning, strong on widening participation, but weaker on employability. This is not surprising if the chain of impact is also appreciated as a funnel, with many at one end, but relatively few journeying all the way along the chain to achieve significant personal and vocational outcomes at the other.

**learndirect** can be seen to have been set a hard task. By succeeding in attracting people to learning and widening participation into traditionally disadvantaged learners, it is engaging with those who have a long way to travel to achieve significant employment-related outcomes. What it does do is to galvanise learners, bringing them into learning, and for a few, sending them on their way.

It would be a mistake to conceptualise the path from learning to individual and organisational outcomes as a smooth slope, it is perhaps better conceptualised as a flight of steps. Progressing forward requires that first learners step up, each step building on what has gone before. Sometimes, the movement is upward rather than forward, but it is impossible to go forward without first going up a level. Rather than a smooth and uninterrupted flow along our chain of impact, some aspects of learning lay the foundations for the future. Their value is not in the link to measurable and long-term individual or organisational outcomes, but rather in their providing the means to move on to the next step. The value of much of **learndirect**’s engagement may be in
providing the foundations that make further learning, and hence impact, possible. We believe that **learndirect** is important at three stages:

1. **stepping in** — facilitating entry into learning, both through the adviceline and the network

2. **stepping on** — progressing to further learning, again through the adviceline and the network

3. **stepping up** — the impact on individual and organisational outcomes, for which we have less evidence.

### 6.1.2 Impact on employers

**Increasing the quantity and quality of learning provision**

There is a much weaker existing evidence base on employer impact with no equivalent to the adviceline and learner surveys. We anticipated that the case studies would provide information on employer engagement and outcomes, but in most cases the evidence was light. We repeatedly heard that employers were more difficult to attract and, on the whole, the preference of hubs and centres was to work with individuals.

Although there is some evidence to suggest that **learndirect**’s ‘penetration rate’ among employers (at five per cent) is similar to that among individuals, the balance of evidence as a whole indicates that **learndirect** has so far had less success in penetrating the employer market. However, it is also clear that some of the specialist business learning centres and the sectoral hubs have achieved success in particular niche markets, operating very different models and with very different impact. Some are still individually focused, others predominately organisational, and others still operating a mixed model. What seems to work is a happy coincidence of employer or sector need for accessible, low-cost learning (such as that demonstrated by Lantra) with **learndirect**’s core capability.

What we have seen work is niche players in niche markets. The question for **learndirect** is whether this will ever mature into a more generally applicable model. This is difficult to judge, as **learndirect**’s offer to organisations is much less well developed and is currently in transition from an initial expectation that organisational impact would accrue, through the learning of individuals (by improving the labour market of relevant skills), to a more explicit organisational approach. Anticipating organisational impact through the mass engagement of individuals has been shown to be a relatively low impact route, in part because it is too diluted, and invisible to most employers. **learndirect** is now articulating much more clearly an employer focused offer, albeit quite a disparate one.
We believe that this segmented approach is essential if learndirect is to be able to respond to the needs of highly variable organisations and sectors. Organisations are demanding in terms of accessibility, quality and appropriateness of the offer. Some of the criticism we heard was that learndirect material was not as tailored as some organisations would like to their specific circumstance. Achieving greater penetration amongst employers will present some major challenges for the learndirect network.

A key issue is assessing the degree to which the employer market might emulate the individual market, where we have seen a latent demand for learning from those who have not previously engaged. learndirect did not have to create this market, the trick was to access it. Employers may behave differently, there are large numbers of SMEs who do not engage with formal learning, and it is difficult to assess if they will do so with growing awareness. learndirect’s current penetration of about five per cent of the employer market, does not tell us much about their penetration of the universe of SMEs who are keen to provide formal training. The problem is both in determining that population, accessing it, and in further accessing the majority who are much more reticent to provide learning.

We conclude that it is still too early to judge the employer offer and whether the changes that learndirect have put in place, in terms of their approach to the employer market, are likely to be a precursor to much wider appeal and success or not. The evidence from the Employers Skill Survey (Hillage et al., 2002) is that intermediate skills remain a major problem in the UK, there are also difficulties at basic skill levels. However, other work that IES is currently doing, to evaluate a major UK training initiative (Employer Training Pilots), has shown that employers rarely see these as their responsibility. The lack of management skills has also been identified as an important element of the UK productivity gap. These may not be skills gaps that play to learndirect’s strengths, we have seen that learndirect is valued by many individuals for entry-level learning and this may be less attractive to organisations.

We were, unfortunately, unable to comment on the new Premier Business Centres, but our case studies indicated that niche players with the right mindset are key to success.

Has learndirect boosted productivity and business performance?

There is very little concrete evidence that learndirect has so far contributed directly to improved productivity and competitiveness. We did find some examples of individuals gaining skills which they then applied in the workplace, and fewer examples of employers who felt learndirect learning had helped their
employees. The evidence is fairly sporadic and anecdotal. There are three reasons for this absence of evidence:

1. Firstly, **learndirect** is far more involved with individuals than with organisations (other than where the two are the same, in the case of one-person businesses or owner-managers).

2. Secondly, the nature of the learning provided could be seen as largely of a foundation level, on which more advanced technical or job-related skills could be built.

3. Thirdly, is it very difficult to trace the links from any form of learning through to organisational performance, and indeed, many employers do not make such a link themselves, often arguing that it is self-evident. The evidence in the literature that does exist, briefly reported in Chapter 4, largely links higher-level learning (level 3 and beyond) to organisational outcomes. **learndirect** therefore acts at a fairly low point in the chain of impact. This does not mean it does not have an effect, but that any effect it does have is difficult to see. In the absence of any direct linkage, we could infer positive organisational outcomes from widespread employer take-up and/or their positive views and opinions. We have yet to see such evidence either, but this may reflect Ufi’s concentration on individuals rather than organisations, and may come about through the new employer engagement strategy that has been adopted.

### 6.1.3 Impact on provision

The impact on provision is also difficult to discern. **learndirect** certainly adds to the general e-learning infrastructure through:

- its presence on the Internet
- the development of online learning courses and materials
- contributing to the development of a network of computer-based learning centres, both within, and perhaps more importantly, outside colleges.

As far as we could see, **learndirect** had made relatively little impact on the virtual learning market, which still poses a range of technical and learner-based issues that have yet to be overcome for most **learndirect** learners. However, as **learndirect** develops its employer model, so its delivery model may also evolve with an expansion of virtual delivery.

It is difficult to both isolate the impact of **learndirect** here, and also to assess its significance and to judge what would have happened if **learndirect** had not existed. Overall, the balance of evidence available suggests to us that **learndirect** has contributed to both the expansion and the diversification of the learning market, and hence it may have impacted relatively lightly on other suppliers. Because it is serving to grow the learning market
it is not in direct competition with existing providers, and might instead be seen to be positively contributing to both an increased market, and the progression of individuals to other learning opportunities.

The evidence from individuals is that **learndirect** has provided learning opportunities that would not otherwise have been available, and in a way that is uniquely accessible. It has a unique offer of presenting learning in bite-sized chunks, and delivering it in a way that enables people to engage much more easily than with traditional forms of learning. The evidence from many organisations that have become **learndirect** centres is that providing **learndirect** courses has complemented their original offer, widened their market, and given them access to a high-quality and wide-ranging portfolio of materials.

### 6.2 Key messages from the evaluation

The main messages emerging from this evaluation are:

**learndirect has so far had more of an impact on individuals than on organisations**

The evidence of the impact that **learndirect** has had on individuals is strong. Through both the adviceline and the network, it is instrumental in helping large numbers of people access learning. Those who take up **learndirect** courses gain not only skills, most often ICT-related, but are more confident about themselves and motivated to learn more. However, **learndirect** has yet to make significant inroads into the employer market, on which it has recently focussed. There is evidence from the sectoral hubs and specialist centres that it can achieve success, at least in niche markets.

**Stepping in — learndirect contributes to lifelong learning by engaging new learners**

**learndirect** is particularly appealing to disadvantaged learners. Almost two-thirds of people taking up **learndirect** courses — *ie* around 150,000 in the last year — are new learners, and have not been engaged in any formal learning activity in the previous three years.

**Stepping on — learndirect leads to further learning progression**

Around 50 per cent of **learndirect** learners intend to continue their learning journey in some way or other. A significant proportion — around a quarter — of all **learndirect** learners, intend to pursue further learning leading to a qualification. While some would
have followed this path in any event, around one-fifth of new learners hope to continue to a certificated course.

**Stepping up — learndirect is helping some learners enhance their employability**

Most employed **learndirect** learners intend to apply what they have learnt in the workplace. A significant minority of those who have progressed in the labour market, say that the skills and confidence they gained through **learndirect** helped them get on.

**learndirect is contributing to the expansion and diversification of the learning market**

**learndirect** is adding to the general e-learning infrastructure through its presence on the Internet (although the virtual learning market is still fairly underdeveloped), the development of online learning courses and materials, and supporting the development of a network of computer-based learning centres.

### 6.2.1 learndirect faces some key challenges:

- **Lifelong learning versus productivity**

  Engaging new and disadvantaged learners in accessible and attractive learning is not the best way to also seek to enhance organisational productivity — at least not for quick returns. **LEARNDIRECT** may be having a considerable impact on laying the foundations to learning, rather than in the higher levels of learning that might itself be causally related to individual or organisational outcomes. We do not believe that **learndirect** will be able to link through demonstrably to productivity for some time, if at all.

- **Getting in versus getting on**

  The emphasis on learning progression might pose some problems of reconciliation for Ufi between the attractive nature of bite-size learning, allowing learners to learn at a pace that suits and in a way that is non-threatening, and yet which also provides a route to the acquisition of qualifications and the encouragement to people to take it.

  This raises the question of what happens after **learndirect**, and whose role is it to suggest further learning activity beyond **learndirect**.

- **Virtual versus supported learning**

  There seemed to us to be unresolved issues regarding virtual learning. Whilst it was of significant potential, many users experience problems of connectivity, and there are unresolved administrative issues of audit trails and chasing learners. We also
saw the example of one potentially highly valuable, but quite sizeable, course suffering from widespread failure of its learners to complete it in a virtual environment, which then leaves the provider unfunded. There was a clear need to break this course down into bite-sized learning so that learners would complete it and progress, and this may be of particular importance to virtual learners.

More generally, support is very important to learners at two key stages: stepping into learning, and stepping on within learning. There is evidence showing that IAG (Information Advice and Guidance) before take-up is very important (learners are then engaged on the most suitable and appropriate learning), and that support is crucial for new or disadvantaged learners (to minimise drop-out and improve retention and achievement). Support is also critical for encouraging learners to make the transition to other learning, and we have already mentioned some of the issues around roles and responsibilities for this.

- The benefits and risks of specialisation

It seems to us that Ufi has moved from a relatively universal provision (aimed at individuals, delivered through learning centres) to a more specialised and tailored approach. A generic approach has the advantages of cost and simplicity but the risks of failing to meet more specific needs, and therefore not maximising opportunities. There were some indications from our research of still greater pressures of specialisation.

Alongside the advantages of specialisation in terms of market, there are also pressures to specialise in content. Some sectors may struggle to see the benefits of a foundation-learning based offer unless it becomes particularly bespoke, and therefore loses its generic nature.

As we understand the current management regime, all centres have targets in terms of, for example, Skills for Life and ICT, and for engagement with individuals and organisations. However, it is not clear whether the targets reflect the specialist abilities (and context) of the particular centres. In our experience, centres find it difficult to engage in areas with which they are not familiar. Another approach would be to promote specialisation — perhaps at the expense of universal coverage and provision, and encourage centres to focus on what they are good at.

6.3 Options for a longer-term evaluation strategy

Finally, we briefly consider what form any longer-term evaluation of Ufi and learndirect could take. The key considerations in designing an evaluation strategy for any policy intervention include:
• The clarity of the intervention, and the extent to which it can be isolated from other factors (policy, labour market or participant-related) which affect likely outcomes.

• The clarity of the expected outcomes — *ie* the proximity of the intervention to the outcomes, whether they can be easily observed and measured, and when they are likely to occur.

• The size of the expected effect that the policy would have on those outcomes — *ie* what level of added benefit is the policy expected to achieve.

• Can we measure the counterfactual, *ie* what would have happened in the absence of the policy. This can be difficult when a policy is universally applied.

We suggest applying these considerations to those areas of **learndirect** activity that we wish to measure.

The essence of the evaluation strategy should be the ability to know if **learndirect** is meeting the aims and objectives set for it. In trying to answer that question, we have developed the evaluation framework which seeks not only evidence against the long-term strategic aims or the interim objectives, but which also seeks evidence against a chain of impact that leads from one to the other. We have identified that, in terms of evidence some cells in our framework are much lighter than others. The focus of our evaluation strategy should be to fill the gaps.

We have made two assumptions:

1. *We are talking about the adviceline and the network.* They are obviously different forms of intervention, and we have seen that they involve different groups in different ways. In our view, they need to be evaluated separately (although the data captured about adviceline users provides an ideal base from which to start any evaluation process).

2. *The evaluation should measure both individual and organisational chains of impact.* Whilst there is considerably more evidence on the individual, and we have some doubts over the likelihood of there being measurable organisational outcomes, we still feel that the evaluation strategy should provide evidence as long as there are organisational impact objectives.

We present our suggestions for an ongoing evaluation strategy through two key stages. Firstly, an identification of the gaps in evidence and how they map on to what we want to collect, and the presentation of options to fill the gaps.

### 6.3.1 Gaps in evidence

In Table 6.1, we present a simple view of the learning framework and how the existing methods provide evidence against it. It is
clear that the current evaluation methods adopted by learndirect/DFES, tend to focus on the front-end of the framework rather than longer-term acquisition of learning or its impact on individuals or organisations.

In Table 6.2, we explore wider existing evidence sources against our framework of specific possible measures. As we have noted, most evidence concentrates on individuals, and is weighted towards the left-hand side of our framework. Whilst there is some evidence from the two major surveys of learning gains from learning activity, this is perceptual, and based on a relatively short timeframe from the learning experience. Repeating the longitudinal survey will help explore this further, and allow for ongoing exploration of learning outcomes such as job moves, promotions etc.

Table 6.2: Long-term evaluation outcome indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If learndirect is having an impact on organisations ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Increasing organisational awareness of learndirect (advice line/network)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>SMEs more likely to provide learndirect programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SMEs will provide training which they would not otherwise have done so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SMEs will provide more training to a wider range of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with <em>learndirect</em>:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduces experience of skill gaps</td>
<td>ESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases morale, retention, and reduces absence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results in more innovation, better quality, improved customer care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases productivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases profit by reducing costs, increasing income or increasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If <em>learndirect</em> is having an impact on individuals ...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More individuals aware of <em>learndirect</em></td>
<td>NALS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High levels of transition to learning</td>
<td>Adviceline survey/NALS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on impact of <em>learndirect</em> adviceline</td>
<td>Adviceline survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will make entry into learning easier</td>
<td>Adviceline survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The adviceline offers relevant learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New learners</td>
<td>Adviceline survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of disadvantaged learners views on accessibility</td>
<td>NALS/adviceline survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning and behaviour</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive perceptions of individual learning</td>
<td>Adviceline survey/learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of learning, intention to apply</td>
<td>Adviceline survey/learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More likely to consider future learning, and more likely to learn to a qualification</td>
<td>Learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners will apply their learning vocationally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved job search skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More confident in their potential employability/less likely to be unemployed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periods of unemployment will be less</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive job changes will increase:</td>
<td>Learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better pay, promotions/increased responsibility</td>
<td>Learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job performance will improve</td>
<td>Learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudinal benefits will result:</td>
<td>Learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater self-esteem</td>
<td>Learners survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased job commitment</td>
<td>Learners survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If **learndirect** is having an impact on other providers ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other providers will have marketed their own programmes more extensively</td>
<td>Growth in adviceline database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice from other providers about their own programmes will have improved</td>
<td>Learners survey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More providers will be exploring and providing flexible delivery</td>
<td>Labour Force Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other providers will find increased referral of students from the adviceline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals will be appropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: IES, 2002*

We have used NALS to help provide a baseline against which to judge the **learndirect** data, however, the questions do not completely align, which makes comparison difficult. It is also not clear from NALS questions on awareness of **learndirect**, whether it could be construed as referring to the adviceline rather than the network. Greater alignment between the surveys would be helpful. The LFS also does not ask questions specific to **learndirect**.

There are considerable gaps in the evidence on employer activity and gains. There is no equivalent employer survey sponsored by **learndirect**, and few questions in the employee survey that might explore employer involvement.

Other existing employer surveys, such as Learning and Training at Work, do not ask questions specifically on **learndirect**.

### 6.3.2 Filling the gaps

**Individuals**

*Baseline data*

To help identify the impact of **learndirect**, it is important to understand what the general learning population looks like, how this compares to non-learners, and what the rates of learning are for different groups. This baseline can be taken from NALS, although it is important to allow for the differences in the demographics between the different survey populations, and examine equivalent sub-populations.

We do not believe it to be possible to answer the question of what would have happened in the absence of **learndirect**, as those who are not aware of either the adviceline or the network are in a diminishing minority, and are not representative of the learning population as a whole.
Engagement data

Engagement data is, on the whole, good. We did however, try to explore different kinds of learners using a typology developed for learndirect by TNS. However, these clusters of learning types did not help our understanding of why some learners gain more than others, or why some engage further in learning than others. We suggest some broader explorations of learner motives and attitudes to learning, and some ongoing evaluation as to whether such categories help predict learning engagement or outcomes.

Learning gains

Further waves of the longitudinal survey should be undertaken, and should continue to examine learning gains and any resultant behavioural changes over time. We would suggest three or four waves, six months apart.

Similarly, intentions to learn, further learning activity, and progression in learning, should all continue to be tracked to form a longitudinal series.

Learning outcomes

A greater longitudinal element to the learners survey would also allow further investigation of the individual outcomes of learning, and would help identify greater numbers who had experienced changed circumstances, and help, explore the degree to which they felt that learning had played a part in this transition.

Comparisons with other learning

To be able to compare learndirect learning, activity with other forms of learning requires us to explore the adviceline sample in greater depth. Our conclusion is that the best option for evaluating the long-term comparative impact on individuals, would be to track two groups of adviceline users over a period of time (up to five years) to assess their relative progression in the labour market (assuming ‘employability’ is the defined outcome. One group, the participants, would be those adviceline users who go on to learndirect learning. The other group, the control, would match the participants and be selected from those who do not (immediately) go on to learndirect learning.

6.3.3 Organisations

As we have seen, there is very little evidence currently available on employers experience of learndirect. There are four possible broad approaches to gathering more information on employer engagement and gain from learndirect learning:
using the learners survey to ask questions related to employment and employer support for learning

- creating an employer survey vehicle based on employer engagement contacts

- financing one-off surveys of SMEs, as have been conducted previously

- placing questions regarding learn direct into existing employer surveys, eg Learning and Training at Work.

Using the existing learner survey has the advantage of utilising an existing vehicle cost-effectively. Those learners in employment could be asked an additional module of questions that would explore employer characteristics such as size and sector, employer provision of training, and previous training experience. The limitation of this approach is an inevitable focus on awareness and entry.

An employer survey of organisations who engage with learn direct through the employer engagement model, should provide ongoing data and, if employer engagement activity is successful, is the natural complement to the individual surveys. It may not be an appropriate step at this stage, while employer engagement is so low, but should be borne in mind for the future.

One-off surveys are limited in their ability to explore longitudinal gains, but are a good way of tracking awareness and engagement. Whilst penetration amongst employers remain low, they may not find sufficient numbers of those who have engaged with learn direct to be able to track outcomes for the organisation.

Appropriate questions in other surveys would be cost effective, but there tend to be major problems in negotiating the acceptance of additional questions.

None of these are necessarily rigorous tests of effect. We do have concerns over any rigorous attempt to test the impact of learn direct on productivity and competitiveness. The likelihood of a positive outcome from such organisational work is low, and the risk is that a lot of people would be asked a lot of questions over a long period of time, without any ‘effect’ being identified. If, as we have suggested, much of the impact of learn direct is in laying the foundations for higher level, more complex learning, seeking to link these inputs with visible outcome measures may be looking too far along the chain.

**6.3.4 Impact on provision**

We do not suggest a wider provider survey, but would approach a broader understanding of the impact of learn direct on provision in the first instance, through the surveys of adviceline users and learners. Views on changing approaches to learning would help to
monitor changing perceptions over time. Direct questions of those who have had experience of other forms of learning, and further exploration of why individuals make the learning choices they do, would be helpful. It may not however, be possible to identify the role of *learndirect* in any changes in provision, as there are a host of other factors that will affect transitions in approaches.


Appendix 1: Evaluation Indicators, Sources and Methods

Appendix Table 1: Aligning evaluation measures to sources and methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>How</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of <strong>learndirect</strong></td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of range of courses</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of benefits of distance learning</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation of training need?</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNA/appraisal?</td>
<td>Other orgs</td>
<td>Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of <strong>learndirect</strong> courses in preference to others</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in training provision</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide training to a wider range of staff</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey &amp; interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide more training</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey &amp; interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on benefits of Ufi provision, <em>eg</em> training better suited to</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey &amp; interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organisation’s needs</td>
<td>Other orgs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for engagement</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on skills gaps</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey &amp; interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased morale/retention/lower absence</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey &amp; interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in business practice, <em>ie</em> IIP, quality standards,</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey &amp; interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management practices</td>
<td>Other orgs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Who</td>
<td>How</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changes in innovation</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Survey &amp; interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved quality</td>
<td>Other orgs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved customer care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased productivity</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other orgs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased profit</td>
<td>SMEs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other orgs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Individuals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>How</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of <strong>learndirect</strong> (where heard about)</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
<td>NALS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive views on relevance (view on why want to learn?)</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
<td>Existing CSS interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted other sources of information — compare</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
<td>Existing CSS interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explored range of courses available — why <strong>learndirect</strong>?</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
<td>Existing CSS interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on info./advice given (ie pertinence? Ease of access? Met need? Pursued learning? Overcame barriers?)</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
<td>Existing CSS interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Entry**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Management info.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign-up rates to programmes</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign-up to other providers</td>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>NALS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement levels of new learners</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSS NALS</td>
<td>Management info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement of disadvantaged groups</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSS NALS</td>
<td>Management info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear objectives for learning</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New survey element</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of learning to career/job</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSS/new survey element</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on course arrangements</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View on impact of course on barriers to entry</td>
<td>Advice-line user, prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New survey element</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Learning and behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning and behaviour</th>
<th>Management info.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What did they learn?</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would they have learnt it anyway?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Who</td>
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<tr>
<td>What have they been able to use?</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are they doing differently?</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on difficulty/perceptions of usefulness/motivation to learn &amp; apply/goal-setting</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on future learning</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions for future learning</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions on qualifications</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved performance</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job change</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased pay, increased responsibility</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on job search/job application behaviour</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of unemployment</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on self-esteem/commitment/attitudes/job satisfaction/relations with colleagues etc.</td>
<td>Prog users</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Providers**

**Awareness**

| Changes in advice & info. provision? | Providers | Interviews |
| Impact of learndirect adviceline | Providers | Interviews |

**Entry**

| Changes in course provision as a result of learndirect | Providers | Interviews |
| Growth in learning opportunities | Providers | Interviews |
| Distance learning offer/increased flexibility of learning | Providers | Interviews |
| No. of students coming from adviceline | Providers | Interviews |
| Appropriateness of referral | Providers | Interviews |

**Key:** Orgs = organisations, CSS = customer satisfaction survey

*Source: IES, 2002*
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Appendix 3: Discussion Guides

Hub managers and staff

Background

Background to the hub and centres, *ie* number of centres, size, locations. Quality of infrastructure?

When set up, brief history of the hub and its network, any significant changes.

Key characteristics of the area:

Performance against indicators: (information below should be available) what are the views about performance against the indicators any factors affecting.

Performance against indicators

| 1. Course uptakes per 1,000 population |
| 2. Proportion of Skills for life courses |
| 3. Proportion of ICT courses |
| 4. Proportion of Business and Technical courses |
| 5. Proportion of courses which are hybrid |
| 6. Proportion of courses which are web based |
| 7. Learners per 1,000 head of population |
| 8. New learners |
| 9. Repeat learners |
| 10. Age profile of learners |
| 11. Gender profile of learners |
| 12. Ethnicity profile of learners |
| 13. Completions |

*Source: Ufi Performance Indicators 2001-2002*
**Business planning**

What are the key elements of the business plan? What are the priorities for the next three years (look for growth, new areas, quality issues, partnerships, marketing issues etc.)?

How are these being actioned?

How was the business plan arrived at? Any disagreements amongst partners?

What are the particular challenges of this area (geographic, sectoral)?

Does the centre have an equality action plan? What is it?

**Quality**

How does the hub ensure quality of centres/delivery?

Are there differences between the centres?

What inspections, audits have been carried out, what were the results? What has the impact been?

What is the level of customer satisfaction?

Any idea of the percentage of learners who go on to study for a qualification?

**Marketing**

How does the hub/centres market itself, eg website, new learners, repeat learners, businesses?

**Management**

Numbers and grades of staff?

Processes for communication and liaison and management with centres? Check for contracts, meetings, communication etc.

How are staff selected, managed and developed?

What is the make up of the board? How does it operate? What contribution does it make?

**Delivery**

How are the various initiatives, eg ICT strategy, learner support, marketing, skills for life and workforce development delivered?

How are budgets arrived at and secured?
Learning Centres

**Background issues**

Number of learner places? Equipment available?

Environment?

Current levels of enrolments?

Staffing?

**Support**

What support is available to learners?

What is the background of staff in the centre?

Does the centre cater for special needs, *eg* disability, English not being a first language?

How is progress monitored?

What is the completion/drop-out rate? How does this compare with targets?

**Learners**

What is the profile of learners, *ie* age/gender/ethnicity/previous educational attainment *etc.*

What are the proportions of remote learners? How are these supported? Are they work or home based?

How does this relate to targets?

How do learners hear about the centre?

What are they studying? Profile of courses.

What proportion are studying for qualifications? What affects this, *ie* what might increase it? What are the barriers?

How do you keep learners engaged, sell on other courses?

What proportion are supported by their organisation? In what way?

How are learning needs assessed? Are learning goals set?

How is learning assessed?

How are organisations engaged with the centre? Issues of contact, communication, support, evaluation?
Learners

**Background**

Previous educational attainment

Other learning undertaken in last three years

How got on the programme?

**learndirect**

What studying now?

For those in work — level of organisational support *ie* time, money

Why interested in this? Any particular reasons for using *learndirect*? Would you have done some learning anyway?

What were you hoping to get out of the course?

How heard?

What did you think of the learning provided?

Was there anything that was particularly helpful?

For new learners — what stopped you learning before? Why were you able to learn this time? Was *learndirect* able to overcome some of these problems?

**Learning**

What do you think you have learnt?

What do you think of the level of the course, the pacing, the support available?

Have you been able to use the learning? In what way? Has it been helpful? What are your intentions regarding future use of the learning?

What are you doing differently, *ie* how is the learning being applied?

How do you feel about learning now? Your abilities as a learner?

What intentions do you have about learning in the future? How firm are these, *ie* plans made, signed up *etc.*

Are you likely to study for a qualification? How likely *etc.?*
Impact

For those in work

Has the learning had any impact on your job? In what way? Check for amount of work, new skills, customer service, quality etc. Probe on what they are doing differently and what difference this might make to their organisation or colleagues?

Have you had experience of not being able to apply the learning or failing to sustain it? If so what were the reasons for the failure? (Explore organisational, line management, own unwillingness to apply or to sustain change, or lack of time.)

What has helped you apply learning? Explore support from the line, support from peers, systems such as appraisal etc.

Have you made any job changes since learning? ie moved job, been promoted, taken on more responsibility, increased pay?

Are you thinking about changing job? Has the learning had any impact on that?

For those not in work

Has the learning had any impact on your searching for work? eg kinds of jobs, clarity over what wanted, applications being made, confidence, what you can say about yourself?

Has the learning made any difference to your success in being considered for interview, performance at interview, job offers?

All

Do you think the learning has had any impact on you personally? Probe for self-esteem, affected attitudes towards job, work, colleagues or organisation? Has this made any difference to their behaviour?

Providers

Background

What kind of learning and development do you provide, eg content and delivery methods?

How many learners do you deal with?

What area do you operate in?

Main clients and how do they come to you?
Marketing

How do you market your programmes?
Has this changed due to learndirect?
What advice are you able to give learners?
Has this changed due to learndirect?
Has the learndirect adviceline had any impact on you?
What kind of referral levels do you get? Has this increased?
What do you think of the quality of the referrals?
Have you seen changes amongst other providers? In what way?

Provision

What have the trends been in the provision of learning, ie growth in offer, different delivery methods, use of distance learning?
Do you think you have made any of these changes in your course provision as a result of learndirect?
Do you see any trends from other providers?
What impact do you think learndirect has had on the learning market?
Do you think this is changing? In what way?

Employers

Background

Size
Sector
Workforce composition in broad categories, ie manual unskilled (are there ready categories from skills survey)?
Number of sites

Engagement with learndirect

What has been your involvement with learndirect, ie number of learners, number of courses?
Over what period? Trends?
What other training and development do you provide?

How first involved? Why did you use *learndirect*?

What courses do you think they provide?

How do you identify learning needs, e.g. training needs assessment, appraisal, business plans.

How do you find appropriate training?

Has the amount of training changed since using *learndirect*? Have the numbers of individuals engaged in training changed i.e. more or fewer individuals? Has the kind of training changed?

**Benefits**

What is your view on the provision of training from *learndirect*? Quality, applicability, spread, depth, level?

Is it more accessible? Does it meet your needs better than other training? If so in what way? Does it fill gaps for you in available training?

Have you saved money in learning delivery? Has it had any impact on other learning that you purchase or provide?

What benefits have their been for learners? What do you think has been successful, why, how measured?

**Impact**

Has the learning through *learndirect* had any impact on morale, retention, recruitment, absence levels?

Has there been any benefit of the learning on job performance, e.g. productivity, quality, customer care, use of equipment etc.?

Have you noticed any change in your experience of skill gaps (check question from ESS)?

Have you implemented changes in business practices, e.g. adoption of LiP, other quality standards, changed management practices, changed working practices, e.g. teamworking, self-managed teams etc.?

Any differences in the development of new products, marketing of new products etc.?

**Future**

What are your future intentions with regard to learning and development?
What stops you providing more learning?

What do you think are the key trends in the organisation that will have implications for learning?

Will you continue to use learndirect?

What else would you like from them? What would you like them to do differently?

**Intermediaries (LSC, SSCs)**

**Background**

Name

Role

Area