European Social Fund: A profile of ‘inactive’ beneficiaries

Jean Taylor and William O’Connor

A report of research carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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Summary

Introduction (Chapter 1)

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study of recipients of European Social Fund (ESF) Objective 3-funded training. The research was conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The study focused on the experience of ‘inactive beneficiaries’ of ESF training. The term ‘inactive beneficiary’ describes those who were economically inactive and not in education or training when they started the ESF programme. The study focused on five main types of inactive beneficiary:

- disabled people;
- those with long-term illness not actively seeking work;
- lone parents in receipt of benefit;
- those with intensive caring responsibilities;
- women returners to the labour market not registered as unemployed.

The evidence presented is based on 33 depth interviews with inactive beneficiaries of ESF Objective 3 projects, who completed their courses between June and November of 2002. These were purposively selected according to key criteria from those inactive beneficiaries who took part in two previous surveys of ESF beneficiaries: the 2002 ESF Leavers Survey, conducted by MORI, and the Follow-up Survey of Leavers, conducted by NatCen in 2004. Fieldwork for this qualitative study was undertaken in August and September of 2004, approximately two years after course completion.

Both the Leavers Survey and the Follow-up Survey have contributed much to our understanding of the circumstances of inactive beneficiaries. The main aim of the qualitative study was to expand upon this profile of inactive beneficiaries, to explore the circumstances of labour market disadvantage, to gather experiences of ESF training and to explore the circumstances surrounding the various impacts attained.
While the report primarily focuses on the findings of the qualitative research, it also draws upon relevant statistical evidence from both the previous Leavers Surveys to build a broader picture of the circumstances and experiences of this group of ESF beneficiaries or to compare their circumstances with beneficiaries in general.

Background (Chapter 1)

The ESF is one of four structural funds of the European Union. Objective 3 aims to tackle long-term unemployment, promote equal opportunities, improve lifelong learning, encourage entrepreneurship and improve the role of women in the workplace. The programme operates by providing part-funding to projects to enable them to provide training, as well as employment-related advice for beneficiaries. There is a wide variation in the types of training provided. Projects offer a diverse range of training courses targeted at different groups of individuals encompassing those a long way from the labour market, those actively seeking work, as well as those already in employment. Objective 3 projects can apply for funding under five distinct ‘policy fields’:

- active labour market;
- equal opportunities and social inclusion;
- lifelong learning;
- adaptability and entrepreneurship;
- improving the participation of women in the labour market.

The characteristics of inactive beneficiaries (Chapter 2)

The Follow-up Survey of leavers has indicated that inactive beneficiaries differed from the sample of ESF beneficiaries as a whole in a number of significant ways. They were more likely to be female (74 per cent); were older (29 per cent of inactive beneficiaries were aged 50 or older); were more disadvantaged than the sample as a whole (45 per cent experienced three or more labour market disadvantages); and were much more likely as other beneficiaries to be out of work long-term (68 per cent compared to 29 per cent).

These estimates are complemented by the accounts of individuals in the qualitative study which revealed a wealth of information about how disadvantages were experienced by individuals in their everyday lives. The disabled people interviewed had a range of impairments, including visual, hearing, mobility, and learning disabilities. These impairments often coincided with physical health problems, and with mental health difficulties, particularly depression. Those with (long-term) health conditions described a range of different mental and physical illnesses that impacted upon their lives. The intensity and predictability of this effect varied, however, all conditions, to a greater or lesser degree, limited everyday lives and activities. Mental distress was recurrently said to coincide with and exacerbate more
longstanding conditions. Carers described a range of caring responsibilities for partners, elderly parents or children who needed extra support because of disability or infirmity. The intensity of these caring responsibilities varied and this affected the degree to which the person was available for work. Lone parents were generally female. The numbers and ages of children cared for, attitudes to childcare, individual needs of children, and degree of family support, varied. Finally, women returners of varied ages had spent different lengths of time out of the labour market.

There was considerable variation in how recent the factors causing labour market disadvantage had occurred in beneficiaries’ lives, ranging from longstanding disadvantage, to circumstances that were relatively new, perhaps occurring only months prior to beneficiaries’ entry into ESF training. The relative newness of disadvantage undoubtedly had implications for people’s perceptions of it, and their ability to cope with its ramifications for their work lives and personal circumstances.

In addition, where inactive beneficiaries had been absent from the labour market for longer periods, their original labour market disadvantages sometimes became compounded with additional disadvantage.

From the evidence collected in the qualitative study, it is possible to classify inactive beneficiaries into four distinct work orientations in the period prior to engagement in ESF. These encompassed those for whom:

- **work was an immediate priority**, including beneficiaries who wanted to start work as soon as possible. They tended to be highly work motivated, with consistent work histories and/ or those with fewer or less severe barriers to work, and recent work experience;

- **work was an option at some point**, i.e. beneficiaries who felt that work was a possibility at some time in the future but not yet. Their ability and willingness to move into the labour market in the future largely depended on changes to their personal circumstances;

- **work was not an option**, these beneficiaries, ideally, would have liked to have some involvement in work but could not conceive that they would do so in the foreseeable future, if at all. This was generally because they felt constrained from doing so by their personal circumstances and labour market disadvantage;

- **work was not a consideration** at any time in the future, including beneficiaries of varied circumstances. It encompassed beneficiaries who had already retired, those with health conditions or impairments that were considered too limiting to work, and those who felt that work could not be financially viable.

Underpinning these different outlooks are several distinct factors, all of which combined to influence an individuals work orientation at the point of entry to ESF. These encompassed:

- work experience;
- job search activity;
• barriers to work;
• education, training and support received prior to ESF; and
• attitudes to work.

These five different dimensions combined to produce beneficiaries' work orientations. These various combinations were not random. Rather, distinct patterns were evident in how these characteristics combined to determine work orientation. While beneficiaries in all four categories had worked at some point in the past. However, those beneficiaries for whom work was an immediate priority, and to a lesser extent those for whom it was an option, tended to have more recent work experience. Those who had more positive work orientations – for whom work was an immediate priority or was an option at some point in the near future, had current or recent experience of job search and work-related training, and more positive outlooks towards, and attitudes about, work. Conversely, those who were more distant from the labour market were not involved in any job search, had little or no recent work-related training, and had the least positive attitudes towards work – either because they thought it an impossibility or because they did not want to work. Finally, all inactive beneficiaries experienced barriers to work except those for whom work was not a consideration. Their perception or experience of barriers was understandably less because they had little intention of moving back into work.

How and why inactive beneficiaries access ESF training (Chapter 3)

Inactive beneficiaries accessed ESF training through two main points:

• organisations or agencies delivering employment-related services, including jobcentres or organisations whose aims included supporting people into work; and
• voluntary and community organisations delivering a range of community activities, who tended to engage and refer a wider range of individuals.

The avenue through which beneficiaries accessed ESF were generally associated with their work outlook. Work-orientated beneficiaries, for example, tended to access support from jobcentres or careers services prior to starting ESF programmes because they wanted help finding work or training to assist them in moving into work. Inactive beneficiaries who accessed ESF courses via community organisations or settings, exhibited a wider variety of work orientations.

Beneficiaries reported having three broad motivations for taking up ESF courses, which were broadly consistent with their work orientation:

• to help them move into work in the short-term;
• to improve their employability in general; or
• for non-work-related motivations.
The decision to start ESF courses was not always a straightforward one. However, in the course of the qualitative interviews, a wide range of issues was identified by inactive beneficiaries that facilitated their participation in ESF. Key factors included: clarity about the purpose and content of the training; flexibility about when and how beneficiaries can attend and the pace of the training; and low or limited financial burden upon beneficiaries. The environment of training was also said to be important, specifically in terms of the location and physical access and comfort.

Experiences of ESF training (Chapter 3)

Because of the diversity of policy fields under which ESF is funded, the type of training delivered can vary quite considerably. Courses pursued by those interviewed in the qualitative study included those that provided basic computer skills, helped with literacy and numeracy, or more specific vocational qualifications (for example, forklift driving licences, flower arranging or early years qualifications). The range of employability support provided included CV production, the development of interview skills and support with job search and work experience.

Despite the diversity in courses undertaken, it was, nevertheless, possible to identify some critical aspects of delivery. These included a preference for training in community settings, which was generally viewed as less intimidating by inactive beneficiaries. Group dynamics and atmosphere were also identified as being important determinants of beneficiaries’ experience of ESF courses, and could support course completion. The flexibility with which courses were delivered was a key influence on inactive beneficiaries’ experience in two respects: the rules surrounding course attendance and the pace of learning.

Inactive beneficiaries had a diverse range of training and support needs. The degree to which ESF courses met these depended, in part, on the extent to which providers were aware of individual needs and how well they tailored their training curriculum and support as a result. Assessment of individual need took several forms. Where beneficiaries recalled completing a Personal Development Plan (PDP), they recalled them as having performed an important function in helping to identify needs and learning goals. Even where beneficiaries did not recall a PDP, some still remembered a period of needs assessment. This was almost universally valued and felt to lead to a more beneficial experience of the course. There were instances where beneficiaries felt that their needs had not been addressed sufficiently at the outset of their involvement with ESF and, in these circumstances, it was felt that the training experience had suffered as a consequence.

The accounts of inactive beneficiaries indicate three main ways in which their individual needs were met by ESF courses: by the tailoring of course content; through the provision of support for learning; and in the help received with finding work or onwards progression.
The survey evidence suggests that most beneficiaries (four out of five) viewed their ESF courses as having been relevant to their needs. The qualitative evidence has shown what underpins this perception of relevance for inactive beneficiaries: initial expectations of the course; the content and level of difficulty; the usefulness of qualifications, certificates or skills; and the ability of tutors to identify needs and to act upon them.

Though non-completion of ESF courses was unusual amongst inactive beneficiaries, there were three main circumstances under which beneficiaries in the qualitative sample decided not to see their courses through to completion: because they had found a job; had decided the course was not relevant to their needs; or experienced a change in their personal circumstances.

Impact of ESF courses (Chapter 4)

ESF training played a range of different roles in supporting, prompting or driving individuals’ progression towards the labour market and, in the process, facilitated the acquisition of a range of diverse outcomes. These comprised three broad types of outcome: skills and qualifications, general employability and psychological benefits (including personal impacts and impacts on interpersonal relationships). These outcomes translated themselves into movement towards work in a number of different ways.

As might be expected movements into employment for inactive beneficiaries were not as prevalent as for other beneficiaries. Nonetheless, by the time of the Follow-up Survey, 32 per cent of inactive beneficiaries were in work. The qualitative study also found evidence to support the positive effect of ESF on work orientation. These transformations were many and various, however, they can be encapsulated in four broad patterns of ‘change’:

- **Movement into work**
  Direct transitions into work were exceptional amongst inactive beneficiaries. Rather, it was common for them to move into further training or pursue voluntary work before finding paid work. Work had been on the horizon for some individuals at the time of their contact with ESF training and participation in the programme had helped them to achieve this goal in a number of different ways, including confidence and skills acquisition. The jobs acquired by inactive beneficiaries were sometimes ‘stable’ and they intended to remain in them. However, there were examples where work gained after involvement in ESF was not sustained. This was due, in the main, to an incompatibility between work and personal circumstances.

- **Movement towards work**
  Movement towards work was characterised by two distinct changes in inactive beneficiaries lives. The first concerned movement into further education and training (just under half of beneficiaries (46 per cent) had participated in another type of training since their ESF course by the time of the Follow-up Survey).
Amongst those who progressed in this way, two broad types of training can be identified: training which was an extension of the ESF course, where ESF had resulted in raised aspirations or resulted in new interests; and training which replaced the ESF course, for example where it had not met their skills or employability needs. The second issue, which indicated a change in work orientation, was an apparent shift in some beneficiaries’ general attitudes to work. ESF brought about a change in attitudes in two main ways. First, it helped inactive beneficiaries to secure personal gains, such as confidence and self-esteem that encouraged them to think that work was a possibility. Second, the acquisition of new skills and competencies also contributed to beneficiaries feeling themselves to be more employable and prompted them to start to think about work as a realistic option for them. This attitudinal change then brought about behavioural change – such as increased job search.

• No change in work orientation
There were examples of little or no change in work orientation amongst all types of inactive beneficiaries in the qualitative study. It appeared that the opportunities available to some individuals continued to be constrained by their personal circumstances and barriers to work. Subtle movement was observable in the attitudes and behaviour of some but did not materialise into any significant movement towards work. Nevertheless, this group did report many positive outcomes from participation in ESF, such as increased confidence.

• Movement away from the labour market
In exceptional cases, inactive beneficiaries moved away from the labour market following their involvement in ESF, either as a result of deterioration in their health conditions, or where they had become discouraged by their lack of progress in relation to moving into work.

While participation in ESF courses has resulted in positive work outcomes for inactive beneficiaries, this effect was by no means universal. Two issues are important here. First, there is evidence to suggest that the effect of ESF was more limited amongst those inactive beneficiaries who were furthest away from the labour market on entry to ESF – those who considered work not to be an option or even a consideration. While ESF did produce a range of positive outcomes for these beneficiaries, these did not translate into work-related outcomes. It is unlikely that ESF alone could have tackled the sort of insuperable barriers to work and disadvantaged circumstances faced by some inactive beneficiaries. Second, the degree to which ESF supported inactive beneficiaries in moving towards the labour market was limited by the ability of the training and support provided to adequately address individual need. Where providers appeared to take a ‘one size fits all’ approach to delivery, and did not offer individually tailored support, the effect of ESF was, in the main, more muted. Conversely, where individually tailored support and guidance was offered, the programme had more success in helping to move inactive beneficiaries closer to and into work.
Conclusion (Chapter 5)

The final chapter draws together the key findings of the study and pinpoints the key implications for policy surrounding the ‘economically inactive’, as well as for ESF more generally:

- The evidence presented by the various strands of survey and qualitative research with ESF leavers, supports the dedicated attention shown to the circumstances of inactive beneficiaries. However, it is vital that we do not lose sight of the myriad of different circumstances and experiences that make up this group.

- It is clear that the ‘economically inactive’ are not all distant from the labour market. Rather they have a varied work outlook. This means that what they need from training and support will differ enormously. This will be a challenge for how ESF attracts beneficiaries and for the range of courses provided.

- The way in which the courses are delivered is important in enhancing the participation of inactive beneficiaries. This research has highlighted a plethora of issues that facilitate participation which will be useful not only to ESF providers, but to any programme that aims to engage this diverse group of people.

- The range of outcomes highlighted by this research suggest that ESF Objective 3 programmes are contributing to the priorities outlined in the National Action Plan for England and Wales, by supporting employability and human resource development, alongside other training and employment initiatives.

- An important consideration for policy makers is to what extent this array of outcomes translates into actual work. The qualitative research has shown that while ESF can assist the more work-orientated in their journey towards work, it has a lesser effect on those for whom work is not an option or not a consideration prior to their participation in the training.

The important role played by individually tailored support in helping to maximise the effectiveness of ESF, is underscored by this research. However, the nature of some inactive beneficiaries’ circumstances, makes movement towards work inherently more problematic without additional support – support that is outside the scope of ESF provision. To be at their most effective in helping the most distant from the labour market programmes such as ESF need to ensure that they are integrated into local provision.
1 Introduction

This report explores experiences of European Social Fund (ESF) training amongst the ‘economically inactive’. It is based upon research carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The report primarily focuses on the findings of qualitative research carried out with inactive beneficiaries. In addition, it draws upon relevant statistical evidence to build a broader picture of the circumstances and experiences of this group of ESF beneficiaries or to compare their circumstances with beneficiaries in general. The findings of two surveys are drawn upon throughout the report: the ESF Leavers Survey 2002, conducted by MORI1 (hereafter known as the Leavers Survey), and a Follow-up Survey of the same group of leavers conducted by NatCen in 2004 (hereafter referred to as the Follow-up Survey)2. Both surveys contributed to the understanding of inactive beneficiaries in different ways: The Leavers Survey provided feedback on the characteristics of participating beneficiaries, their experiences on the training courses provided and outcomes following the programme six months to a year following participation. The Follow-up Survey provided estimates of the longer-term impacts of participation in ESF, in the eighteen-month period following their participation in ESF programmes. The qualitative study builds on both these pieces of research. Through in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of inactive beneficiaries who responded to both the Leavers Survey and the Follow-up Survey, it was possible to explore the nature of inactivity in greater depth, to examine the process of participation in beneficiaries’ own words and to explain the different outcomes inactive beneficiaries have achieved as a result of ESF.

This chapter gives some background to the research, outlines its precise objectives and gives a description of the research methods used to conduct it.

2 Humphrey and Robinson (2005) Follow-up Survey of ESF Leavers DWP.
1.1 Background

The ESF is one of four structural funds of the European Union. The current funding programme commenced in 2000 and runs until 2008. In the UK, ESF funding operates through three programmes:

- Objective 1 – to develop areas which are currently underdeveloped;
- Objective 2 – to renew industrial, urban, rural and fisheries areas which are in decline;
- Objective 3 – to tackle long-term unemployment, promote equal opportunities, improve lifelong learning, encourage entrepreneurship and improve the role of women in the workplace. Objective 3 covers all of Great Britain excluding those areas covered by Objective 1.

The programme operates by providing part-funding to projects to enable them to provide training, as well as employment-related advice for beneficiaries. There is a wide variation in the types of training provided. Projects offer a diverse range of training courses targeted at different groups of individuals, encompassing those a long way from the labour market, those actively seeking work, as well as those already in employment. Objective 3 projects can apply for funding under any of five policy fields:

- active labour market;
- equal opportunities and social inclusion;
- lifelong learning;
- adaptability and entrepreneurship;
- improving the participation of women in the labour market.

1.2 Objectives of the study

Both the Leavers Survey and the Follow-up Survey have contributed much to our understanding of the circumstances of inactive beneficiaries. They have been able to build a demographic picture of the economically inactive, to measure attitudes about the different types of training received and to estimate the prevalence of different outcomes arising from ESF such as work, training and so forth. The main aim of the qualitative study was to expand upon this profile of inactive beneficiaries, to explore the circumstances of labour market disadvantage, to gather experiences of ESF training and to explore the circumstances surrounding the various impacts attained. Specifically, it aimed to:

- map the distance travelled towards work by different types of inactive beneficiaries;
- explain the different factors contributing to the attainment of various outcomes (work, training, etc.);
understand the role played by ESF training in achieving these (or bringing people closer to them);

- explore the factors contributing to the sustainability of outcomes for this group of ESF beneficiaries;

- explore reasons for lack of change in circumstances, attitudes and behaviour, where applicable.

1.3 Research method

The study used qualitative research because of its exploratory and explanatory power. Qualitative methods set the experiences of respondents in context, thus, helping the research identify and explore factors affecting inactive beneficiaries’ experience of ESF, as well as explain the different outcomes attained. This section gives an overview of the research design and methods used.

1.3.1 The sample frame for the qualitative study

The sample frame for the qualitative study comprised those inactive beneficiaries who participated in the Follow-up Survey who had agreed to be re-contacted about future research. The term ‘inactive beneficiaries’ describes those respondents who were economically inactive and not in education or training when they started the ESF programme between June and November 2002. This was determined on the basis of individuals’ own responses to questions in the Leavers Survey about their circumstances in the week prior to starting the ESF programme\(^3\). This qualitative study focused on five main groups of inactive beneficiary. These included:

- disabled people;
- those with long-term illness not actively seeking work;
- lone parents in receipt of benefit;
- those with intensive caring responsibilities;
- women returners to the labour market not registered as unemployed.

It is worth noting that the Leavers Survey and the Follow-up Survey included a broader set of inactive beneficiaries, and used slightly different definitions for some categories\(^4\). This qualitative study focused on a sub-set of inactive beneficiaries

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\(^3\) These definitions will not necessary correspond to definitions commonly used by the DWP, which generally relate to benefit receipt.

\(^4\) The list of labour market disadvantages included in the Leavers and Follow-up Surveys, therefore, encompasses: no qualifications; long-term unemployment/inactivity; returners; lone parents; minority ethnic groups; other language spoken at home; disability or health problems; and caring responsibilities.
because they were identified as the groups of particular interest to policy makers at
the current time. Cases excluded from this qualitative study, but included in the
Leavers Surveys, were those whose inactivity was defined solely by their lack of
qualifications, the long-term nature of their unemployment, their ethnic background
or their English language abilities, and who did not constitute one of the five groups
outlined already. Those engaged in education and training would also usually be
considered to be ‘economically inactive’, however, such beneficiaries were also
excluded from this study.

Nevertheless, while the basis of selection for the qualitative research drew on a
slightly narrower group of inactive beneficiaries, the interrelated nature of
disadvantage meant that the respondents interviewed sometimes reported a much
broader experience of disadvantage. For example, the qualitative research does
include people from minority ethnic groups and the under-qualified, who also
happen to be lone parents or carers. However, the random nature of this inclusion
means that the specific contribution of these characteristics to vulnerability or
disadvantage could not always be fully explored. Furthermore, individuals who had
been referred to ESF training courses from mandatory New Deals were excluded
from the sample, because it was felt that compulsory attendance was likely to differ
markedly from the general experience of inactive beneficiaries who had undertaken
the training voluntarily.

Inactive beneficiaries were included in the sample frame by virtue of their participation
in a single ESF training course. However, in practice, beneficiaries can, and do,
attend more than one such course. In the qualitative study, all ESF courses were
discussed in the course of the interview, and experiences of all of them were drawn
upon in the analysis and reporting of data.
Table 1.1  Profile of the qualitative sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample variable</th>
<th>No. in sample</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>50 plus</td>
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<td>Policy field</td>
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<td>Active labour market</td>
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<td>Lifelong learning</td>
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<td>Adaptability and entrepreneurship</td>
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<td>Improving the participation of women in the labour market</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of disadvantage</td>
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<td>Disabled person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person with long-term health problem</td>
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<td>Lone parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
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<td>Returner to work</td>
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<td>Number of disadvantages</td>
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<td>One disadvantage</td>
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<td>East of England</td>
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1.3.2  Selection and recruitment

Inactive beneficiaries were purposively selected for inclusion in the qualitative study according to key criteria decided at the outset of the research. These criteria were gender, age, policy field, type of labour market disadvantage and number of labour market disadvantages. Diversity in these criteria was deemed essential to capture the range of characteristics, experiences and outcomes possible amongst inactive beneficiaries.
Potential respondents were initially contacted by letter informing them of the research and letting them know that a researcher might call upon them to establish whether they were interested in taking part. Individuals were then selected according to the sampling criteria set out already. During the telephone conversation, prospective respondents were informed of the objectives of the research and what participation would involve. A short screening questionnaire was also administered to check for eligibility. Consent and eligible inactive beneficiaries were given information on the date and time of their interview, as well as a telephone number to call should they wish to discuss their participation further. A copy of the recruitment documents is included in Appendix B.

The original target for the qualitative sample was to interview 30 respondents. However, due to recording difficulties in the early stages of the research, verbatim data was lost, and so an additional three respondents were recruited to compensate for this effect on the sample. Table 1.1 gives an overview of the achieved qualitative sample. Achieving an ideal sample, along the criteria specified, proved difficult because of the limited nature of the sample frame. It contained more female and older inactive beneficiaries and it was impossible to fully target the sample selection to compensate for this. Similarly, there were very few inactive beneficiaries in the sample frame who had pursued training under Policy Field 4 (adaptability and entrepreneurship) and it was not possible to recruit any of these to the qualitative sample. Nevertheless, while these difficulties do place certain limitations on the data collected, there is sufficient diversity in the other key characteristics to ensure that the qualitative sample adequately reflects the circumstances of the broader population of inactive beneficiaries.

The qualitative research was initially located in four different geographical areas of England. However, the scarcity of beneficiaries with certain characteristics required this to be expanded so that the sample criteria could be fulfilled as much as possible. In the end, the qualitative sample covered seven distinct areas of England.

1.3.3 Conduct of interviews

The interviews were conducted using responsive questioning and probing to ensure that all relevant issues were fully explored. Interviews were conducted using a topic guide to ensure that a similar set of issues was explored with each respondent. This guide was designed in collaboration with the Department. The first interviews were conducted by researchers working in pairs, which allowed the research team to reflect on fieldwork approaches and strategies and pinpoint any slight changes that were needed to the content or structure of the topic guide. A copy of the final topic guide is shown in Appendix A.

Interviews were conducted in August and September 2004. They took place in respondents’ homes and generally lasted from one and a half to two hours. They were tape recorded with the permission of respondents and transcribed verbatim. All respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality at all stages of the research. £20 was given for each interview as a token of appreciation for participation and to cover any expenses incurred by taking part.
1.3.4 Analysis of data

Verbatim transcripts of 30 interviews, and notes taken of the additional three unrecorded interviews were analysed using ‘Framework’, a method developed by the Qualitative Research Unit at NatCen\(^5\). The first stage of analysis involves familiarisation with the transcribed data and identification of emerging issues to inform the development of a thematic framework. This is a series of thematic matrices or charts, each chart representing one key theme. The column headings on each theme chart relate to key sub-topics, and the rows to individual respondents. Data from each case is then summarised in the relevant cell. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes is noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or extract text for verbatim quotation. This approach ensures that the analysis is comprehensive and consistent and that links with the verbatim data are retained. Organising the data in this way enables the views, circumstances and experiences of all respondents to be explored within a common analytical framework that is both grounded in, and driven by, their own accounts. The thematic charts allow for the full range of views and experiences to be compared and contrasted both across and within cases, and for patterns and themes to be identified and explored. The final stage involves classificatory and interpretative analysis of the charted data in order to identify patterns, explanations and hypotheses.

1.4 Report coverage

Throughout the report, verbatim passages from transcripts and case illustrations are presented. To ensure that the anonymity of respondents is always preserved, specific details which might identify respondents have sometimes been omitted or changed. In particular, all names cited are fictitious.

The remainder of this report is divided into four further chapters:

Chapter 2 describes the characteristics of inactive beneficiaries, including the nature and intensity of their labour market disadvantages, and examines those factors which influenced work orientation.

Chapter 3 describes the experiences of ESF training. It explores access to, and involvement in, ESF courses and considers inactive beneficiaries motivations and expectations of ESF. It also explores the delivery of ESF training: the range of courses and support on offer and general experiences of the training, including perceptions of relevance and completion.

Chapter 4 describes the range of reported outcomes from ESF training, explores how the programme had an impact on the work orientation of inactive beneficiaries and offers explanations for different effects observed.

Chapter 5 draws out the key conclusions from this research and pinpoints some implications for policy surrounding ESF and the economically inactive.
2 Characteristics of inactive beneficiaries

This chapter describes the profile of the respondents included in this study. It aims to provide a context for greater understanding of the findings of Chapters 3 to 5 by building up a picture of the characteristics and circumstances of inactive beneficiaries. In particular, it will illustrate the different dimensions of inactivity, including labour market disadvantage, personal circumstances, and work orientation, which influenced what impact ESF programmes had on beneficiaries’ relationship with the labour market.

2.1 The experience of labour market disadvantage

The Follow-up Survey of leavers has indicated that inactive beneficiaries differed from the sample of ESF beneficiaries as a whole in a number of significant ways. They were more likely to be female – over three-quarters (74 per cent) were women, compared to 62 percent of the total sample. This perhaps reflects the higher proportion of women undertaking caring responsibilities for children or adults. Inactive beneficiaries were also likely to be older – 29 per cent of inactive beneficiaries were aged 50 or older, compared to 22 per cent of the sample overall. Unsurprisingly, those defined as inactive were more disadvantaged than those in the sample as a whole on entry to ESF, a fact that undoubtedly complicated their relationship with the labour market. Nearly half (45 per cent) of inactive beneficiaries experienced three or more labour market disadvantages, compared with 18 per cent of the beneficiaries as a whole. This was reflected in the length of time that inactive beneficiaries had been out of the labour market: they were twice as likely as other beneficiaries to be out of work long-term (68 per cent compared to 29 per cent).

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6 The labour market disadvantages included in this figure include a wider range of disadvantages than those focused on in the remainder of this report.

7 The Leavers Survey defines an individual as having been long-term unemployed if they were unemployed/inactive for six months or more amongst the under-25 age group, and unemployed/inactive for a year or more amongst the rest.
It is hardly surprising then that inactive beneficiaries have a unique experience of disadvantage, which can affect their need for employment-related support and training provided by ESF activities. The varied characteristics inherent in this group of beneficiaries render any attempts to conjure a simple definition of ‘inactivity’ all but impossible. This section, then, describes the diverse nature of disadvantage experienced by inactive beneficiaries in this study, the degree to which it was experienced by different individuals, and the impact this had on their relationship with the labour market prior to engagement with ESF.

2.1.1 Types of labour market disadvantage

The Follow-up Survey has shown that inactive beneficiaries were disproportionately more likely to have a labour market disadvantage than ESF beneficiaries taken as a whole. They were much more likely to have a disability or health problem and to have been out of the labour market for a long period of time. Inactive beneficiaries were also a great deal more likely to have caring responsibilities for adults or children and were slightly more likely to be lone parents. Table 2.1 below highlights the main differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of inactive beneficiaries</th>
<th>% of all beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability/ health problem</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parents</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returners</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Follow-up Survey.

These estimates are important in signalling how the experience of inactive beneficiaries might be different. They are complemented by the accounts of individuals in the qualitative study which revealed a wealth of information about how disadvantages were experienced in their everyday lives. This is described briefly below for the five types of inactive beneficiaries included in the qualitative research:

- The **Disabled people** interviewed had a range of impairments, including visual, hearing, and mobility. People with learning disabilities of varied severity also featured in this group, ranging from dyslexia to high-end cognitive impairment. These impairments – be they physical or learning – often coincided with physical health problems, and with mental health difficulties, particularly depression.

- Those with **(long-term) health conditions** described a range of different mental and physical illnesses that impacted upon their lives. The intensity of this effect varied amongst those interviewed, and was, to a great extent, dependent on the severity of the condition, however, all conditions, to a greater or lesser degree,
limited everyday lives and activities. Some had impaired mobility as the result of their illness, or were in severe, and sometimes continuous, pain or discomfort. The experience of long-term or chronic illness could also perpetuate further difficulty in people’s lives. Mental distress through conditions such as depression or agoraphobia were recurrently said to coincide with and exacerbate more longstanding conditions. There was some variation in the degree to which individuals could predict either the manifestation of symptoms, or the likelihood of recovery from the illness or condition. There was more clarity amongst those who described their condition as degenerative in nature or who depicted their condition as static but ongoing in manifestation and effect. Less clarity surrounded conditions that were unpredictable, periodic or recurrent with some periods of relapse. Conditions here included chronic arthritis or schizophrenia. Some were afforded more control over their health problems by using medication, however, this in itself was not always a panacea as it sometimes caused additional side affects, which could, in turn, impact adversely on an individual’s circumstances and capabilities.

- **Carers** described a range of caring responsibilities for partners, elderly parents or children who needed extra support because of disability or infirmity. The intensity of these caring responsibilities varied somewhat and this affected the degree to which the person was available for work or could participate in the world around them. Intensive caring responsibilities usually meant that work was not possible and those concerned were sometimes in receipt of Carers Allowance. Those with less intensive responsibilities – for instance, where the individual cared for only required periodic support or where caring responsibilities were shared with others – were sometimes able to combine their caring responsibilities with other activities, including work or voluntary activity. They appeared, on the whole, less isolated from the outside world.

- **Lone parents** were generally female, although there were male lone parents in the qualitative sample. The numbers and ages of children cared for by them varied, however, all had a youngest child who was less than 16 years old. Attitudes to childcare also varied substantially, impacting on lone parents’ relationship with the labour market. In some instances, lone parents’ children had special needs, for example, learning disabilities, health problems (for example, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)) or were particularly ‘clingy’, which also impacted on lone parents’ circumstances and attitude to work. As with the carers, the degree of help and support with caring that lone parents had from ex-partners, family or friends was mixed, and this undoubtedly affected the degree to which lone parenthood was, in itself, considered to be a form of disadvantage.

- **Women returners** to the labour market were aged between 25 and 62, and had spent varying lengths of time out of the labour market, ranging from six months to twenty years. In addition to the labour market disadvantage associated with not having worked for a long time, women returners also tended to have other disadvantages, particularly (sole) caring responsibilities for children, and sometimes for other adults.
2.1.2 Number of disadvantages

As noted already, not only were inactive beneficiaries more likely to have a labour market disadvantage, they were also more likely to identify themselves as having multiple labour market disadvantages on entry to ESF in comparison to beneficiaries as a whole\(^8\) (Table 2.2).

### Table 2.2 Numbers of disadvantages experienced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Inactive %</th>
<th>Total sample %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of the specified disadvantages</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One disadvantage</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two disadvantages</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more disadvantages</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Follow-up Survey.

Where multiple disadvantages were experienced, these were sometimes unrelated. Inactive beneficiaries could, for example, have long-term health problems of their own and also have unrelated caring responsibilities for a parent or partner. Alternatively, respondents experienced multiple and related labour market disadvantages. As noted, disability or long-term health problems often co-existed with mental distress (such as depression). Similarly, it was common for lone parents or women returners to also have significant caring responsibilities that exacerbated their distance from the labour market.

2.1.3 Recency of disadvantage

There was considerable variation in how recent the factors causing labour market disadvantage had occurred in beneficiaries’ lives, ranging from longstanding disadvantage (for example, through disability or health problems), to circumstances that were relatively new, perhaps occurring only months prior to beneficiaries’ entry into ESF training (for example, lone parenthood following recent relationship breakdown or newly arising health conditions). The relative newness of disadvantage undoubtedly had implications for people’s perceptions of it, and their ability to cope with its ramifications for their work lives and personal circumstances. Where the causes of disadvantage were longstanding, people had typically made adjustments to their lives in order to counteract, or cope with, the impact. Indeed, it was common for those with longstanding causes of disadvantage, such as a lifelong physical impairment or chronic illness to have tried to work or expand their daily activities in the past, with some considerable successes. However, this did not mean that such circumstances did not continue to present day-to-day challenges for beneficiaries, making it difficult to consider work or any future that was not dominated by the effects of disadvantage.

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\(^8\) As before, the labour market disadvantages included in this figure include a wider range of disadvantages than those focused on in the remainder of this report.
‘Like I say getting through the next couple of hours, the next day or two that, that was, you know, as far as I was getting. [The][…] longer term […] terrified the life out of me. And going out […] socialising, you know, I didn’t think that was an option and being happy as well, you know, obviously that wasn’t even a kind of option I think at the time. So working was definitely a sort of, you know, right down the bottom of the pile.’

(Female, 26, returner)

Where disadvantage had caused a recent move out of the labour market, there was sometimes insufficient time for beneficiaries to explore the full effect of it on their lives. In these circumstances, it was sometimes felt that more time was needed to adapt to the reality of new circumstances. Those who had recently become lone parents, for example, described the difficulties inherent in such a transition: having to deal with the immediate challenges resulting from the breakdown of their relationship such as housing problems, financial insecurity, and an increased need to provide emotional support to children, against a backdrop of emotional trauma. Perhaps understandably, work was not always a first priority.

‘They didn’t see their Dad very much and he was in that terrible stage of […] say[ing] he’d come round then not and all that stuff. So you just, I just felt they needed that constant all the time. […] They just needed someone to be there.’

(Female, 34, lone parent)

The degree of labour market disadvantage experienced by beneficiaries also sometimes changed over time. Changes to circumstances, perhaps a decline in caring responsibilities, the arrival of a new partner, or the easement of a health condition meant that many beneficiaries felt more or less disadvantaged at various points in the past, and this had allowed them to move into work. However, where circumstances changed again, such as the worsening of a health condition, or the burden of caring responsibilities increased, this sometimes precipitated a move out of work. There were some instances of this occurring repeatedly for the same person. For example, one female respondent had cared for three family members at different times over a period of more than ten years, necessitating her movement into, and back out of, the labour market.

Where inactive beneficiaries had been absent from the labour market for longer periods, their original labour market disadvantages sometimes became compounded with additional disadvantage. As noted earlier, there appeared to be a particularly strong relationship between mental and physical health conditions. Respondents with physical health problems that limited their ability to work, or participate in everyday activities more broadly, commonly described the development of depression and other mental health conditions, as a result of their poor health and the restrictions it placed upon their everyday activities.
Carol was diagnosed HIV positive nearly twenty years ago, and has lived alone in sheltered accommodation since then. When she was first diagnosed, she felt that it was like being given a death sentence, that she was just ‘waiting to die’. For about fourteen years she rarely left her home. Six years ago she started a new treatment programme. Her medication initially made her hallucinate and she became very paranoid, spending time in hospital. However, in the period up to ESF, she was beginning to feel physically better, but was still depressed.

(Female, 49, long-term health condition)

David was in a road accident in which he sustained very serious injuries, causing him to have to leave his job, four years prior to starting his ESF training. He has since developed a related degenerative condition and diabetes. He is in more or less constant pain and his mobility is very limited. As a result, David’s wife cared for him full-time. Even so, David had since applied for a number of other jobs, but has not been accepted to any of them. He was very depressed at the time of interview and described himself as having been suicidal in the past.

(Male, 58, long-term health condition)

Alternatively, respondents felt more disadvantaged over time because the sheer length of time away from the labour market meant that skills were lost or outdated and, as a consequence, their employability had diminished considerably.

2.2 Work orientation at the point of entry to ESF

The purpose of ESF Objective 3 programmes is to improve employability, to increase access to the labour market, and to support individuals in their entry into work. The degree to which ESF programmes are able to fulfil these objectives depends, to a large extent, on how effectively they are able to address beneficiaries’ labour market disadvantage and associated barriers to work. It also depends on whether and how the programme impacts on beneficiaries’ orientation to work. Whilst the various ESF Leavers Surveys measure work status amongst inactive beneficiaries in the week immediately prior to the commencement of the ESF course, the qualitative data is able to provide a much more detailed description of beneficiaries’ attitude and behaviour in relation to the labour market at the time of entry onto ESF programmes – in short, their ‘work orientation’. From the evidence collected, it is possible to classify inactive beneficiaries into four distinct work orientations in the period prior to engagement in ESF:

- Those for whom work was an immediate priority included beneficiaries who wanted to start work as soon as possible. They tended to be highly work motivated, with consistent work histories and/or those with fewer or less severe barriers to work, and recent work experience.
Mark had worked at a large manufacturing firm for six years before having been made redundant. As part of his redundancy package, Mark was offered an ESF-funded retraining course. At the time of taking it up, he was anticipating that he would be able to move straight back into work. This was important to him, as his wife only worked part-time, so he was the main breadwinner for the family.

(Male, 45, disabled with long-term health condition)

Some of these ‘inactive’ beneficiaries, were in part-time or occasional work at the time of commencing their ESF programmes. They tended to be lone parents who supplemented their Income Support with a few hours of work a week. The amount of money earned was low and within benefit regulations. By virtue of their existing engagement in the labour market, they generally had a very positive orientation to work.

Prior to ESF, Fiona worked five days a week part-time for a family member, whilst her three year old son was at nursery school. She had worked consistently between finishing her A-levels and the birth of her son, when she gave up her job. She returned to work for six hours a week because she was ‘bored to tears’ at home. However, Fiona did not view her job as permanent and, at the time of starting her ESF course, was on the look out for a new job or career.

(Female, 26, lone parent and returner)

- Those for whom work was an option at some point were beneficiaries who felt that work was a possibility at some time in the future but not yet. Their ability and willingness to move into the labour market in the future largely depended on changes to their personal circumstances. These ranged from anticipated events, for instance, a youngest child reaching school age, to other, potentially less predictable changes, such as improvements in, or abatement of, health conditions.

Anne lived with her husband and four children. She had done four or five cleaning jobs in the five years leading up to her ESF course, but they had never lasted long. She attributed a high degree of importance to her role as a mother and homemaker, but also wanted to return to work at some point. ‘I was just happy staying in and being with the kids, that was my purpose in life, my role. He [Her husband] would go out to work and I would be there for the children. And then I did go to work, my eldest pulled me up one day and said ‘I can’t believe you’re going out to work all these years that I’ve come home from school and you’ve always been there for me. And now you aren’t even there for Tommy.’ And I was like, what do I do, I’m torn, I really don’t want to go out to work but on the other hand you know, it’s nice doing it’.

(Female, age 35, returner)
Those beneficiaries for whom **work was not an option** ideally would have liked to have some involvement in work but could not conceive that they would do so in the foreseeable future, if at all. This was generally because they felt constrained from doing so by their personal circumstances and labour market disadvantage. For these beneficiaries, work was not regarded as a practical, physical, financial, or emotional possibility. One determinant of this orientation was age, or more specifically, proximity to retirement. These beneficiaries were sometimes older (aged 50 and over) and because of this felt themselves as less attractive to employers. Alternatively, there was a view that insufficient time was available before retirement for personal circumstances to change and for them to acquire the necessary skills to become employable once again. Another key determinant was the severity of beneficiaries’ health conditions or disabilities which sometimes meant that work was a physical, or in the case of those with mental health problems, personal impossibility.

Diane has cared for her mother full-time for three years. She also cares for her nephew part-time, when his mother is at work. Diane stopped work after she sustained a slipped disk, which prevented her from performing her role as a nurse in a retirement home. She has suffered from depression following the breakdown of her marriage and her father’s death. Although she would like to return to work, or undertake further education, she does not feel that this is an option because of her caring responsibilities.

(Female, 29 carer and returner)

Those for whom **work was not a consideration** at any time in the future included two distinct groups of beneficiaries: It encompassed beneficiaries who had already retired by the time they commenced their ESF course and, therefore, had no intention of working in the future. A second group included beneficiaries who were capable of working, but were financially independent, and did not want or need to work.

Peter had worked full-time throughout his working life. He was reducing his hours in anticipation of retirement when his adult alcoholic son lost everything, and Peter left work to care for him. Although his caring responsibilities had reduced over the past few years prior to his entry onto ESF, Peter did not feel that he wanted to return to work, even in a limited capacity, and viewed himself as being retired.

(Male, 72, carer)
As is perhaps obvious from the brief descriptions outlined, underpinning these different outlooks are several distinct factors, all of which combine to influence an individual’s work orientation at the point of entry to ESF. These encompassed:

- work experience;
- job search activity;
- barriers to work;
- education, training and support received prior to ESF; and
- attitudes to work.

These factors are described in the remainder of this section. However, it is worth noting that though such factors or dimensions are disaggregated here to aid in their description and explanation, in reality they are interrelated and interdependent.

**Figure 2.1 Dimensions of work orientation**
2.2.1 Work experience

The first influence on an inactive beneficiary’s work orientation was the type, level and recency of their work experience. Inactive beneficiaries generally had some experience of working, but all had needed to leave work because of the impact of changes to their personal circumstances. The speed with which inactive beneficiaries had moved out of work varied. Beneficiaries whose circumstances had changed dramatically, generally moved out of work fairly promptly, as they did not feel that it would be possible to reconcile work with their new position. Beneficiaries whose circumstances had changed more gradually had sometimes tried to remain in work despite the challenge posed by their circumstances, but abandoned work when it became untenable. The recency of such departures also varied considerably. Some had very recent experiences of the labour market, while others had not worked in many years.

Four broad patterns of work experience can be identified:

- **Consistent work history, in one sector or type of work**
  These inactive beneficiaries had substantial and consistent work experiences, often in one sector or type of work. As a result, they sometimes had specialised skills or competencies. However, where these beneficiaries’ circumstances had changed in such a way that they could no longer do the same kind of work, they were sometimes concerned about their employability. In other instances, though, the change to their circumstances had acted as an impetus for them to move into a new type of work.

- **Consistent work history, without dedication to any one type of work**
  These beneficiaries had fairly consistent work histories, with few periods of worklessness. However, they had moved between different sectors or types of work during their working life, and had not committed to any particular types of work at the time of starting ESF. In some instances, these beneficiaries had unfulfilled work aspirations.

- **Patchy work histories**
  These beneficiaries’ work experience was not focused in a particular sector or type of work, and was characterised by more time out of the labour market than in a job. This was generally attributed to difficult personal circumstances and there was a recurrent feeling amongst this group that they were not very attractive to potential employers.

  ‘I’m probably the most unemployable person in the world […] I hadn’t got any history. You look back on my CV and there wasn’t kind of any commitment to anything. I’d had a few jobs. I’d sort of gone to uni for a bit. I’d kind of not really stuck at very much and thought well why would somebody employ me, looking at that, plus my history […] I’d been […] off work because of illness for quite a while and why would an employer look at that and think ‘oh that looks like somebody we want to employ.’

  (Female, 26, with mental health problems)
• **Very limited, or no, work experience**
  This pattern of work history was, in the main, described by two different types of beneficiary: younger beneficiaries who had not had the opportunity to acquire any substantial work experience and ‘women returners’ – older women who had spent the majority of their lives as home maker and, therefore, had very limited experiences of paid work. This limited work experience was often compounded by having few, or no, formal qualifications.

2.2.2 **Job search activity**

The level of job search activity undertaken was another key influence on inactive beneficiaries’ work orientation, reflecting the level of urgency they attached to returning to the labour market, and the degree of clarity they had about the type of work they wanted to pursue.

Four broad types of job search activity were described by inactive beneficiaries in the time prior to embarking on their ESF course:

• **Broad and intensive job search**
  These beneficiaries wanted to return to the labour market as soon as possible and they were, therefore, casting a wide net as part of their job search, and searching very intensively. Whilst their preference was to work in a industry or sector that matched their previous work experience, their priority was a return to work, and consequently, there was a willingness to entertain all types of work. An example of the intensity of activity was given by one male respondent who told of how he had submitted over 400 unsuccessful applications over a two year period to a wide variety of different jobs.

• **Targeted job search**
  Here, job search was limited to a particular type of work, geographical area, or even with particular employers. Those limiting or targeting their search for work in this way tended to have considerable work experience in one particular sector or type of work and wished to return to a similar or related job. Alternatively, they had physical or sensory impairments, or health problems, that limited the type of work that they could perform, or the distance they could travel to work, and, as a consequence, they targeted their job search accordingly.

• **Sporadic job search**
  The nature of job search was not consistent for some beneficiaries. Here, work was generally felt to be a possibility in the medium- or long-term rather than immediately, and, consequently, there was less commitment to searching for jobs on an ongoing basis. Rather, such beneficiaries looked now and then, on the off-chance that a suitable vacancy became available. A primary concern for these beneficiaries was the fit of work with their personal circumstances and responsibilities. They was some variation in the degree of clarity with which they went about their job search. Some had limited their search to a few positions that they knew would fit with their capabilities or personal interests. For others, job search was, by comparison, random. They appeared willing to do any type of work, so long as it fitted their circumstances.
• No job search
Those who did not undertake job search were generally those who did not feel that work was an option for the foreseeable future, or at all.

2.2.3 Barriers to work
A fundamental influence on a beneficiary’s work orientation in the time before contact with ESF, was their experience of barriers to work. It is worth noting that this range includes both actual and perceived barriers to work, that is, some of these were issues that beneficiaries had no direct experience of, but assumed, or feared, that they could experience should they look for work. Generally, the more active jobseekers, and the more work experienced, had more direct experience of labour market barriers, or issues that could constrain their involvement in the labour market. The range of these barriers – experienced or perceived – is described here.

Inactive beneficiaries reported facing a number of employability-related barriers: **Lack of skills and qualifications** presented significant impediments, particularly where beneficiaries had limited or less recent work experience and, consequently, did not have relevant or up-to-date skills or qualifications. There was recurrent mention, in particular, of the problems posed by a **lack of computing or IT skills**. This skill deficiency was a source of considerable lack of confidence. It was common for beneficiaries to report feeling ‘out of the loop’ as a result of this. **Poor literacy and numeracy skills** were another source of concern and were attributed, by some, to bad experiences of education, or poor or curtailed attendance at school. Whatever their cause they were considered to be a significant challenge, by some, in their search for work. There were some who felt that their **communication and presentation skills** were lacking and that this adversely affected them in job applications and interviews. The emphasis placed on such competencies by employers, over and above ‘actual’ job-related skills, was a source of frustration to some. Communication difficulties were also seen to be a barrier by those who spoke **English as a second language**.

Those beneficiaries who had been out of the labour market for a long period of time, considered their **lack of work experience** to constitute a significant barrier to work. This was sometimes described a ‘chicken and egg’ situation: needing experience to get a job, but not being able to get a job because of lack of experience. Older beneficiaries, in particular, felt that they were less employable because of their **age**. They feared discrimination from employers, and felt comparatively disadvantaged to younger applicants who they perceived to be in better health and to offer employers a better investment and longer commitment. A fundamental employability-related barrier was **lack of self-confidence**. It impacted greatly on beneficiaries’ perception of their own employability. It was typical for those who said they lacked confidence to feel that this disadvantaged them in the job application process and in interview situations.
The effects of **physical and mental health conditions or disabilities** presented a range of different barriers to work. Ill-health or disability represented an insuperable barrier for some beneficiaries because of the degree of pain or fatigue associated with such conditions, or the limited mobility they afforded the person. However, it would be wrong to assume such conditions and impairments always constituted an insurmountable barrier to work for those who experienced them. Even where circumstances presented significant challenges, they were sometimes accompanied by huge personal drive to engage in work. For those who experienced them, mental health conditions also presented a barrier to work. The effect of such distress was worsened by its sometimes unpredictable and sporadic nature. Even where they were not a barrier to work, **physical or mental ill health and impairment acted as a constraint on the type of work** that beneficiaries felt that they could do. This limited job search strategies, rendered existing skills obsolete, or required the development of new skills.

Concern about the **financial implications of moving into work** represented a considerable barrier for some inactive beneficiaries. Lone parents, in particular, expressed concern about **the transition from benefits to work**. These concerns were sometimes quite general and communicated a fear that their finances would get ‘mucked up’ by a move into work. Additionally, there were specific concerns for some about **financial security while in work** should they, for example, become unwell and not be able to work. There were recurrent doubts about **the ability to make work pay** – particularly amongst those with children. Some placed heavy emphasis on **the opportunity costs of work**, such as increased housing or childcare costs.

Indeed, where beneficiaries had children, **the cost and availability of childcare** were seen to present significant challenges to moving into work. Childcare responsibilities, where they were not a direct barrier, placed considerable constraints on the kind of work that parents could do, particularly lone parents. Achieving the right fit of work and home circumstances was a common concern. Alternatively, some parents viewed their main responsibility as being to provide care for their children and the prominence given to this prevented them from seeking work.

There is much congruence between the barriers reported by inactive beneficiaries in both the qualitative and survey research. In the Leavers Survey, there was a heavy emphasis on lack of skills as a barrier – 38 per cent felt they had the wrong training or skills or had no qualifications, 29 per cent felt their skills were out of date, while 13 per cent felt their basic skills were not good enough. Other prominent barriers amongst inactive beneficiaries included lack of recent work experience (37 per cent), age (28 per cent), the effects of a disability or health problem (29 per cent) or difficulty finding childcare (17 per cent). The Leavers Survey also highlighted other barriers, not mentioned in the qualitative research. Of particular note, 23 per cent saw their participation in work constrained by the availability of jobs in the local area, while 18 per cent attributed it to poor transport.
2.2.4 Experience of training and support prior to ESF

Inactive beneficiaries’ work orientation at their entry onto ESF programmes was also influenced by their exposure to other training and support prior to ESF. This section briefly describes the sorts of training and support accessed.

Not all inactive beneficiaries had experience of education, training or support prior to ESF, other than that they had received through compulsory education. Where they had received either training or support, they generally did so for two broad reasons:

- to help with a move into work, either through undertaking training to improve their employability, or by accessing support with work transitions;

- for personal or recreational purposes.

*Employment-related training and support*

Employment-related training and support was accessed from local colleges, voluntary and community-run training organisations, or community nurseries. Some respondents had undertaken training whilst still in paid employment, either as part of on the job training, or as part of a redundancy package.

The motivation for accessing such programmes varied somewhat. Broadly, three distinct motivations are evident. First, it was common for those who had been out of the labour market for some time, or who were seeking to move into a different type of work than previously, to have undertaken specific types of training (such as IT courses) to increase their general attractiveness to potential employers. Alternatively, beneficiaries had undertaken training or sought support with a specific work objective in mind. For example, a lone parent interviewed, undertook a crèche workers’ course at her local community centre because it was an area of work in which she had a longstanding interest and hoped to build a career. In such cases, it was hoped that the training pursued would enable them to get the kind of job they wanted. A final motivation for engagement in such training and support was to gain help in making the transition into work, although this was limited to those for whom work was an immediate option, or an option in the near future. Types of support accessed here included help with job search, support with drafting CVs and guidance around interview techniques. It was accessed through Jobcentre Plus and a range of voluntary sector organisations.

*Non-work-related training and support*

The types of non-work-related training and support pursued were many and various, ranging from ‘story sacks’ courses (the aim of which was to foster child development) to flower arranging courses. This sort of training and support was delivered mainly by local voluntary and community organisations, or local branches of national charities in a range of settings including church halls, local colleges, and nurseries. Work was not the primary motivation for involvement in this type of training. The wish to increase or update general communication skills (particularly IT
Characteristics of inactive beneficiaries

(proficiency) was a common driving force. While such courses could have beneficial effects on employability, this was not why they were pursued. For example, some beneficiaries took computer courses in order that they could interact and participate more in the lives and activities of their children or grandchildren. Such courses were a means of helping with homework. Others were motivated by their role as a parent or carer and undertook child-focused courses in order that they could understand their own child’s development better. Such courses were often the spark for some to consider a career or role in care outside the home. The motivation for some, however, was less focused on attaining anything but was fuelled more by the desire to get out of the house and to have contact with other people.

Whilst much of this support and training was not work-focused, it was common for beneficiaries to report raised confidence, increased skills and broader aspirations as a result of participation. Indeed, it was positive outcomes such as these that motivated some to seek the types of training and support offered by ESF programmes. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.2.5 Attitudes to work

The final influence on an individual’s work orientation prior to embarking on ESF was their overall attitude to work. This broadly depended upon the value they attributed to work and their attitudes to claiming state benefits.

The most positive attitudes to work were typically voiced by those who had enjoyable experience of work in the past, or had jobs that provided them with some sense of satisfaction. The sense of identity offered by work was foremost in these beneficiaries minds and many also remembered the positive effects of being valued by employers or colleagues. Beneficiaries with positive attitudes to work also tended to be the primary or sole ‘breadwinner’ in their household, and, therefore, attributed value to working because it allowed them to earn enough money to provide for their family.

‘That’s how I was taught, you work for whatever. And then, with the two children on my own [...] I was determined to prove to everyone [...] I really work hard. And I thought I’m going to do it for myself, you know, achieve whatever. I even bought this on my own, the house. And when I gave up work I thought, oh, I just felt I’d failed, you know? ‘Cos I, I was thinking to myself, how could I manage?’

(Female, 49, long-term health condition)

Where this ability had been take away, for example, though illness, beneficiaries felt it very strongly, but still retained a strong desire to work.

‘I desperately want to get outside these four walls and do something. You know, if I could I’d go out there sweeping streets. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what the job is. I don’t care if it’s cleaning public loos. If I can do it I’ll do it. I need to hold my head up, look after my own family, and not be dependent on the Government’.

(Male, 58, disabled/long-term health condition)
Even where such individuals were not able to move into full-time employment, for example, because of the unpredictability of a health condition, or because of a scarcity of jobs, that would value their limited abilities, it was common for these beneficiaries to undertake unpaid odd jobs to keep themselves occupied and give them a sense of achievement.

A positive attitude to work was not limited to those with considerable amounts of work experience. Less experienced individuals also attributed a high degree of value to work, not least in the income it could provide. For example, it was common for lone parents with limited work experience to espouse the importance of work – to set an example to their children or to escape the stigma of benefit receipt. Also women (from one and two parent families) sometimes viewed work as a chance to develop an identity for themselves in addition to being a parent or homemaker. However, having positive attitudes to work did not always mean that it was given the highest priority in everyone’s life. For example, some placed more importance on their role as a parent or carer, and work was a secondary consideration to this.

Victoria and her husband live with their three children. Her 19 year old son has cerebral palsy, and she devoted most of her time caring for him. Her family are financially comfortable, and she does not need to work. Victoria indicated that she would consider work, but that caring for her family would remain her first priority.

(Female, 45, returner)

There was some expression of negative or, at best, neutral attitudes towards work. However, these attitudes appeared to be closely related to respondent’s personal circumstances and perception of barriers to work. In this sense, the realisation that work was unlikely bred a pessimism in people’s outlook and attitude.

### 2.3 Relative contribution of different dimensions to work orientation

The five different dimensions already outlined combined to produce beneficiaries’ work orientations. These various combinations were not random. Rather, distinct patterns are evident in how these characteristics combine to determine work orientation. These are summarised in Figure 2.2. A number of key patterns are evident:

- First, beneficiaries in all four of the categories had worked at some point in the past. However, those beneficiaries for whom work was an immediate priority, and to a lesser extent those for whom it was an option, tended to have more recent work experience.
• Second, job search and work-related training and support was, unsurprisingly, absent amongst those beneficiaries for whom work was not an option or not a consideration. Conversely, those closer to work were actively looking for work and have previous experience of accessing work-related training and support.

• Third, whilst a range of barriers to work are evident amongst those who wanted to work in either the short- or long-term, the barriers to work experienced by those who considered work not to be a viable option were portrayed as insuperable. Those for whom work is not even a consideration did not appear to have a clear perception of barriers because they had little intention of moving into work.

• Finally, attitudes to work were more positive amongst those closer to work, but negative amongst those with insuperable barriers, who considered work not to be an option. This suggests that it would be a challenge for any programme to shift these attitudes.

It is against this range of background circumstances and outlook that inactive beneficiaries undertook ESF training. The next chapter explores beneficiaries’ motivations for embarking on ESF, as well as views and experiences of the training received.
### Figure 2.2 Overview of the determinants of work orientation prior to ESF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
<th>Job search activity</th>
<th>Barriers to work support accessed</th>
<th>Training and work</th>
<th>Attitudes to work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Work an immediate priority** | Generally had consistent work histories  
• Recent work experience  
• Some breaks in experience related to birth of children or health problems | Generally active except where:  
• Job to return to  
• Decision to move into work was recent | Various barriers related directly to disadvantage including health, childcare.  
Also perceived themselves to have a lack of qualifications. | Examples of work-related training and support being accessed.  
Others had not accessed support | Universally positive  
• Influenced by desire to provide for families as main/sole breadwinner |
| **Work an option at some point** | Consistent and recent work histories  
Consistent with recent breaks/curtailment  
Patchy or limited experience | Some job search (usually targeted)  
Some patchy/ opportunistic  
No job search | Childcare and confidence feature heavily  
Also lack of work experience, skill needs, health | Examples of work-related training and support being accessed  
Some accessing non-work-related support  
Others had not accessed any support | Wholly positive  
Positive but overshadowed by barriers/constraints  
‘Neutral’- work not a priority |
| **Work not an option** | Consistent  
Consistent with breaks/curtailment  
Patchy or limited experience  
Less recent | None | Various but barriers perceived to be more substantial:  
• Ongoing and limiting mental and physical health, disability  
• Caring responsibilities | No work-related training or support | ‘Negative’ as a result of constraints posed by circumstances and barriers to work, even where value of work recognised |
| **Work not a consideration** | Consistent but sometimes curtailed because of:  
• Health  
• Redundancy  
• Change in personal circumstances  
Not recent | None | Lower perception of barriers because work not a consideration but did feel health, caring responsibilities and confidence were potential barriers | No work-related training or support | Had no desire to work  
• Viewed selves as retired  
• Were financially independent |
3 The experience of ESF programmes

This chapter describes inactive beneficiaries’ experiences of ESF programmes. This chapter comprises two parts, the first of which considers access to, and involvement in, ESF courses. It deals specifically with the ways in which beneficiaries accessed training, and what factors facilitated participation in ESF courses. Inactive beneficiaries’ motivations for undertaking, and expectations of the ESF courses are also explored. The second part of the chapter considers the delivery of ESF training. It describes the range of ESF courses and support on offer, inactive beneficiaries’ experiences of the course, the relevance of the training provided, and the implications of these issues for completion.

It should be noted that some inactive beneficiaries had more than one encounter with ESF training, even though their selection for inclusion in the qualitative study, and also in the Leavers Surveys, was based on their participation in only one of these. While the qualitative interviews were structured so that the main emphasis was placed on this specific course, where multiple experiences existed, these undoubtedly were drawn upon by respondents in their discussion of their ESF experience.

3.1 Accessing ESF training

Inactive beneficiaries accessed ESF training through two main points. These were:

- organisations or agencies delivering employment-related services, including jobcentres or organisations whose aims included supporting people into work; and
- voluntary and community organisations delivering a range of community activities, who tended to engage and refer a wider range of individuals.

The points through which beneficiaries accessed ESF were generally associated with their work orientation. Work-orientated beneficiaries, for example, sometimes accessed support from jobcentres or careers services prior to starting ESF programmes because they wanted help finding work or training to assist them in moving into
work. The local jobcentre was, therefore, a key referral agency for those beneficiaries for whom work was an immediate option. In these instances, referrals to ESF training had happened following the identification of a training need – such as IT skills or CV writing – either by the beneficiary themselves or by jobcentre staff. Organisations offering careers services were a source of support for those beneficiaries wishing to return to work, but who needed assistance in thinking about what kind of work they could do. Local colleges, trade unions, and voluntary and community organisations offering employment-related support also acted as referral organisations to inactive beneficiaries for whom work was an option.

Beneficiaries were also referred to ESF courses via community organisations or settings. This happened in a range of ways: Parents sometimes came across training through contact with their children’s schools or nurseries. People, in general, found out about training by ongoing contact they had with a broad range of voluntary and community organisations. Alternatively, people responded to adverts placed by such organisations in local papers or found out about courses through publicity campaigns, such as door to door leafleting or promotion stalls in a various neighbourhood locations such as shopping centres. These approaches appeared to have engaged a wider range of beneficiaries, who exhibited a variety of work orientations. They constituted an important route into training for inactive beneficiaries who had begun to think about moving into work and for those who were furthest away from the labour market, who considered work not to be a realistic option for them.

3.2 Expectations of, and motivations for, accessing ESF programmes

This section considers inactive beneficiaries’ expectations of, and motivations for, accessing ESF programmes, in order to provide the context within which beneficiaries signed up for ESF courses, and help to explain their later experiences of the courses.

3.2.1 Motivations for undertaking ESF courses

Beneficiaries reported having three broad motivations for taking up ESF courses. These were:

- to help them move into work in the short term;
- to improve their employability in general; or
- for non-work-related motivations.

Those who wanted to move into work

The first type of motivation for undertaking ESF was to get help with moving into work more or less immediately. These beneficiaries wanted to move into work immediately or in the near future and wanted to undertake ESF training because they hoped that it would offer them the skills, qualifications or support necessary to
move into work. This desire to up-skill or re-skill is perhaps understandable given that having no qualifications or skills, or having the ‘wrong ones’, was by far the most prevalent barrier to finding work amongst respondents to the Leavers Survey (38 per cent of all beneficiaries cited it as a barrier).

Those expressing a desire to use ESF to facilitate a move into work, were either individuals who had to change careers because of the restrictions placed upon them by illness or disability or were beneficiaries who were starting out on new careers after a period out of the labour market. Some of these had an idea of what type of work they wanted to do in the future and ESF courses were viewed as supporting them on their path into work, especially where they offered skills-focused courses or qualifications, work placements or job opportunities:

‘The purpose of it was so you could do web design and go out and get a job, I think, straight away and you’d have to do a presentation and a web page for a client as part of the course. So that would be […] out there then as the official website. So in that respect it was very good, you know, it did gear you up […] Lots of businesses from around the area would come to the presentation. So, your chances of getting employed were not bad really.’

(Female, 34, lone parent and returner)

Beneficiaries who wanted IT skills to support their transition into specific jobs or types of work, or education or training courses, also accessed computer courses. In this sense, competency in IT was viewed as a facilitator to finding work, and progressing within jobs.

Those who wanted to move into work were not always clear about the type of work they wanted to do but felt that support from ESF might help them explore their options:

‘It was a careers development course, I wasn’t sure exactly what it was about I just saw a stand in the shopping centre and I went up and asked the ladies umm what it involved and they said it is to help you get back to work, to see what kind of work you might be suited to, to see what kind of things you are good at and what areas you are better at. And I thought well you know I wanted to work and maybe that will help me out.’

(Female, 25, lone parent)

Receiving support with moving into work was a key motivation for beneficiaries for whom work was an immediate priority, but who themselves felt that additional support was needed, or had been referred by jobcentre staff for such support:

‘So they were quite good in that respect that I could sit behind a desk so then I went on from Incapacity Benefit on to Job Seekers Allowance and it was Job Seekers Allowance that said to me you can do a course for your CV […] I was quite pleased in that respect because I hadn’t got a CV. I hadn’t been able to do a CV. I didn’t really know how to lay it out and that’s when I did my course for half a day.’

(Female, 56, Returner with disability and long-term health condition)
Those who wanted to improve their general employability

A second driving motivation for accessing ESF courses was to improve general employability. Here, inactive beneficiaries wanted to return to work at some point in the future and felt that acquiring the skills and competencies offered by ESF would help them find work when the time came.

Computer skills were a key competency sought by those beneficiaries wanting to improve their employability. In some instances, beneficiaries saw computer skills as improving their employability in a very broad sense:

‘No, it was just ……everyone is doing computers I mean even every job I noticed is computerised so I thought it was just handy to know and something to fall back on really.’

(Female, 29, lone parent and returner)

The acquisition of computer skills was particularly important for those beneficiaries who had been absent from the labour market for a long period. Here, beneficiaries felt that having computer skills would increase confidence, which in turn would help in their search for work but also in other life circumstances:

‘I think it just crept up with going to the school and people [saying] like we’re going to do this course, I just thought well I haven’t got anything, you know, I’ve got no qualifications. And yeah it might just be computers, but at least I would know something in computers, cause you know, all the children do, they can all switch a computer on. I can’t switch one on, I thought well, yeah, it would be nice to go and, it’s just a certificate but at least I can say I’ve done it, I’ve got it!’

(Female, 35, returner)

Individuals wanting to improve their employability also accessed courses delivering generic literacy and numeracy skills.

Those seeking non-work-related outcomes

Inactive beneficiaries who were motivated to undertake ESF courses for non-work-related outcomes, tended to be those for whom work was not an option, or indeed, not a consideration at all in the future. Instead, the desire to ‘get out of the house’ and meet new people was a motivating factor for some. Other beneficiaries were motivated by an existing social interest or hobby and signed up for related ESF courses, such as flower arranging. Alternatively, ESF was seen as a vehicle for acquiring skills that would be useful in voluntary or community-based work undertaken, generally by inactive beneficiaries who had retired from the labour market.
The significance of varied motivation

While there are three very distinct sets of motivations, these were not always disentangled in respondents’ accounts. Rather, some inactive beneficiaries exhibited a combination of motivations for undertaking ESF courses. Here the motivation to gain work, or to increase skills and employability existed alongside broader motivations such as wanting social contact or wanting to gain skills or benefits that would benefit their life in general. Unsurprisingly, however, there was a clear relationship between beneficiaries’ work orientations (outlined in the previous chapter) and what they hoped to gain from their ESF course. The participation of beneficiaries for whom work was an immediate priority or an option at some point, was guided more by work considerations. Conversely, those for whom work was not a consideration accessed courses for primarily non-work-related, usually social, reasons.

That said, there was evidence to suggest that motivations were not static. There were examples of beneficiaries who, prior to contact with ESF, had not viewed work as an immediate priority but whose outlook was changed by the opportunity presented by ESF. For example, a female returner who had not considered work prior to ESF because of the constraints posed by her family caring responsibilities decided, on receiving more information about what was possible through ESF, to undertake a course that qualified her as a registered childminder. Here as in other instances, beneficiaries undertook courses with no direct link to the labour market, but which were then instrumental in moving people towards the labour market. The role of ESF in producing work-related outcomes is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Jenny found out about the ESF ‘story sacks’ course from her local family centre, where she and her (then) two year old son attended mother and baby sessions, had undertaken a course to develop story telling and play skills in parents, and help them foster their child’s development. Jenny’s primary motivation for doing the course was to benefit her son, but she also felt that the course would add to her childcare and early years-related skills. Developing a set of relevant skills was important to Jenny, because she had begun to think about going back to work, and was focused on moving into work as a nursery nurse.

(Female, 31, lone parent)

3.2.2 Expectations

The Leavers Survey suggests that beneficiaries (including inactive beneficiaries) had a range of high expectations of their ESF experience: 77 per cent of inactive beneficiaries expected participation in ESF to improve the skills needed at work, while 68 per cent expected it to help with the attainment of qualifications. Interestingly, getting practical help to find a job was considered less important, only 56 per cent of inactive beneficiaries identified this as being something they wanted, or expected, from ESF. This may reflect a wider perception of ESF as a programme that trains people for work rather than one that directly facilitates with work transitions.
The qualitative work, by contrast, suggests that expectations of ESF courses were, on the whole, fairly modest, though it is important to remember that this component of the research took place some time after beneficiaries’ involvement in ESF had come to an end and recall of expectation may be patchy at best. While inactive beneficiaries generally viewed the opportunity to take part in ESF training positively, they did not generally expect that ESF courses would significantly alter their circumstances or be the primary catalyst for change in their lives (even where this ultimately turned out to be the case). The exception here was the highly work orientated beneficiaries who viewed ESF courses as an important step towards, or into, the labour market.

3.3 Barriers and facilitators to participation in ESF training

The decision to start ESF courses was not always a straightforward one. Understanding what influences participation amongst inactive beneficiaries is important so that such people can continue to be reached, in the most effective way, by programmes like ESF. This section explores this in detail.

It should be noted that the sample of beneficiaries included here does not include those who heard about ESF but chose not to embark on courses. Similarly, inactive beneficiaries who were referred to ESF training via mandatory New Deal programmes were excluded from this sample, because it was felt that the obligatory nature of this participation was likely to affect these beneficiaries’ experience of participation in ESF in such a way that they would not be comparable to the rest of the sample. It is likely that a greater understanding of the factors influencing participation could be gleaned from research with these two populations, however, this was outside the scope of the current investigation.

The practical and psychological barriers to participation in ESF identified by inactive beneficiaries were identical to those experienced in relationship to work and acted in broadly the same way. Rather than repeat them here, the reader is referred to Chapter 2 for a full exploration of these. From the accounts of inactive beneficiaries, it is clear that these barriers are generally understood by providers and that they have gone to significant lengths to help beneficiaries overcome these impediments, and to make ESF courses as inclusive as possible. In the course of the qualitative interviews, a wide range of issues were identified by inactive beneficiaries that facilitated their participation in ESF. They encompassed:

• Course description and promotion

The description of ESF courses was a key influence on participation. The perceived difficulty of ESF courses was a concern for inactive beneficiaries. The challenge that computer courses might present was a particular concern, particularly for older beneficiaries with limited experience of using computers. Lack of self-confidence could be such a substantial issue that beneficiaries were reassured if they felt that courses were extremely basic. One beneficiary, for example, described her initial perception of the ESF course that she chose to go on as
being for ‘people who [were] very thick, who [didn’t] know anything about computers’. Clear and precise descriptions of course content and requirements enabled inactive beneficiaries to make more appropriate decisions about their involvement:

‘I thought, well that’s fine because it’s for people who don’t know anything about computers. They said they would start you off how to use the mouse and everything, and I thought, oh wonderful. Because I couldn’t see myself going into a big college and saying, or doing something because I didn’t know where to start, but if they said they were going to start me off, people who don’t know anything about it, I thought, well that’s really, that’s really good. So I went’.

(Female, 49, lone parent with long-term health problems)

Conversely, beneficiaries who were undertaking ESF training so that they could move into specific jobs, or as a stepping stone to further training, were concerned that the content and the associated qualification would equip them for this. Again clear description facilitated their choice in this regard.

- **Ease of access**

Another significant factor that determined participation in ESF courses was the ease with which beneficiaries were able to access the course. A key element of this was the relationship between the referral organisation (if one existed) and ESF providers. Smooth transitions between the two organisations were valued. This ‘lack of hassle’ was important to beneficiaries, especially where they lacked confidence:

‘It was tied in with the jobcentre so it was a natural link really. It wasn’t like you didn’t have to go to a separate place, it was something that they were promoting.’

(Female, 38, lone parent)

Conversely, where the link between the referral and the provider organisation was less well developed, this tended to place more responsibility on the beneficiary to secure participation, which sometimes led to difficulty. Such arrangements were viewed less positively.

Similarly, clear explanations of course content and level seemed to be a significant factor in determining individuals’ willingness to take part.

- **Financial accessibility**

ESF training courses were generally free to eligible beneficiaries or available at a minimal fee. Inactive beneficiaries reported that this was a key factor in allowing them to access the training, especially where courses would have been very expensive on the ‘open market’. Beneficiaries who were out of work or had caring responsibilities, reported having little, if any, spare income and felt that they would not have been able to undertake the ESF training if it had involved any significant cost. Low or non-existent course fees were deemed essential
where participation itself generated extra costs for individuals, such as for equipment or for childcare. In some instances, additional financial subsidies or grants helped beneficiaries to participate in ESF training, for example, by helping beneficiaries buy low-cost computers on which to practice their IT skills. In exceptional cases, however, beneficiaries indicated that they were so keen to undertake the training that they would have paid for it.

- **Location of training**
The location of the training provider was reported as a practical facilitator by those respondents with disability or long-term health problems who could not travel for long distances in comfort. Proximity to home could also act as a facilitator to the participation of those beneficiaries who experienced psychological barriers associated with travelling out of their local areas, or who did not like public transport. In one such instance, a beneficiary with mental health issues and lack of confidence said that the fact that the ESF training was nearby meant that she ‘*couldn’t use the excuse of not wanting to use buses*’. However, location was not an issue for all respondents. For example, one disabled beneficiary travelled more than 30 miles to participate in their ESF course.

- **Timing and flexibility of provision**
The timing of ESF course sessions, and flexibility around when they could be accessed were important factors in facilitating some beneficiaries’ participation. The ease with which people were able to commence courses was one facilitating factor:

  *‘[there] really wasn’t any hassle about it, it was just … we’re here, come and see us. See how you fit in and kind of pick it up from there.’*

  (Male, 57, disabled with long-term health condition)

Similarly, the timing of course provision was important. Where ESF training was run within school hours, for example, this facilitated the participation of lone parents and women returners with younger children, and meant that they could reconcile the training with their caring responsibilities. Other ESF training was run on a ‘drop-in’ basis, so that beneficiaries could choose when they attended the training centres. Again, this suited beneficiaries with caring responsibilities, but also those who had unpredictable health problems. Conversely, where courses were less flexible, this made participation difficult for this latter group.

- **Physical accessibility and comfort**
The physical accessibility and comfort of training providers’ premises was identified as being a key facilitator by beneficiaries with disability or long-term health problems. Good wheelchair accessibility was reported very positively by mobility-impaired beneficiaries. The comfort of training rooms received a great deal of emphasis from beneficiaries with long-term health conditions that made it difficult to sit still for long periods, or alternatively, limited their mobility. In these instances, comfortable seating arrangements and an appropriate layout had a big impact on whether or not beneficiaries were comfortable, and able to fully participate in, or concentrate on, the training.
Childcare
The availability of good quality on-site childcare at the ESF training providers’ premises or the provision of childcare grants were identified as key facilitators of participation amongst inactive beneficiaries with children. The availability of childcare, however, was not significant for all parents. Some had access to alternative forms of childcare or had a preference for using informal care.

Peer support
Attending ESF training could be an intimidating experience for inactive beneficiaries, and peer support played an important role in encouraging individuals to participate. These beneficiaries – often women returners and female lone parents – tended to lack confidence in themselves, having been out of the labour market for a long time. They were sometimes nervous about attending training in a group context or had misgivings about their own ability to do the training. The opportunity for friends to also enrol in such courses – who may not have faced the same barriers or shared the same ‘inactive’ status – was key in these beneficiaries decision to take part. Indeed, some indicated that they would not have signed up otherwise:

‘[I wouldn’t] have applied off my own bat, never in a million years’
(Female, 26, with long-term health problems)

‘I struggled bringing Tommy up on my own, struggled with Tommy’s behaviour, sort of struggled by eventually and you know a lot of things going on, and I did feel down, had been on and off antidepressants and that, and I didn’t know where my life was going really, it wasn’t really a good time, I was like in two minds doing these courses and had I been at [the local college] I probably wouldn’t have even contemplated about doing them, but it was like my friends are doing it, oh come on you know do this course you know, cause the more people that get going the better, cause I think, I think there was a class level that had to be above a certain level to make it worthwhile for them to do this course. And I think we were all like encouraged to do it, and I thought well you know nothing to lose by doing it.’
(Female, 35, lone parent and returner)

Courses delivered by voluntary organisations in established community settings appeared to be particularly successful in encouraging this sort of peer support and, consequently, in engaging inactive beneficiaries who were further away from the labour market or who were socially isolated. Friends and family could also play a role in encouraging individuals to participate. The role of husbands in encouraging women returners to take part seemed to be an important facilitator, for example.
3.4 Delivery of ESF

The first three sections of this chapter have illustrated that participation for inactive beneficiaries is not a straightforward issue but borne of diverse motivations and expectation, and dependent on a range of facilitators to help beneficiaries overcome the barriers they perceive. The second half of this chapter now turns to focus on beneficiaries’ views about the delivery of ESF.

The Objective 3 programme encompasses five policy fields, each of which reflects a specific policy emphasis. Consequently, the type of training delivered varies quite considerably both within, and between, the different policy fields. Inactive beneficiaries featured in the courses provided across these five policy fields. Table 3.1 features the distribution of inactive beneficiaries across the different policy fields as estimated by the Follow-up Survey. It also shows the distribution of cases within the qualitative study across the same five policy fields.

Table 3.1 Distribution of inactive beneficiaries across Objective 3 policy fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>% of inactive beneficiaries</th>
<th>Distribution in qualitative study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy field 1</td>
<td>Active labour market</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy field 2</td>
<td>Equal opportunities and social inclusion</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy field 3</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy field 4</td>
<td>Adaptability and entrepreneurship</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy field 5</td>
<td>Improving the participation of women in the labour market</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table illustrates, inactive beneficiaries have experienced projects delivered under a range of different policy fields, all of which were concerned in some way with the provision of skills and support with work transitions. Courses pursued included those that provided basic computer skills, help with literacy and numeracy, or more specific vocational qualifications (for example, forklift driving licences, florist’s flower arranging or early years qualifications). The range of employability support provided included help writing CV’s, the development of interview skills, work experience and support with job search. Some courses also appeared to offer related business start-up grants. In the qualitative study, no two experiences were identical. Indeed, cases were purposively sampled to give as varied a context of delivery as possible. This limits the extent to which evaluative statements can be made about any one mode of delivery or indeed any individual policy field. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some critical aspects of delivery which cut across these varied experiences and settings, these are described and discussed in this section.
3.4.1 Delivery setting and modes of delivery

The type of setting in which ESF courses were delivered depended to some extent on the type of provider organisation. Courses delivered by professional training providers and colleges tended to be delivered in educational settings. ESF courses provided by voluntary organisations were delivered in more community-based settings such as community centres, local nurseries and church halls. More local and familiar environments were generally viewed as less intimidating by inactive beneficiaries because they were already familiar with the organisation providing the training or had established friendships or social networks on-site. There was sometimes a view (particularly amongst lone parents and women returners) that a classroom-based experience would have been daunting.

The group dynamics and atmosphere on ESF courses were identified as being important determinants of beneficiaries’ experience of ESF courses. Where group dynamics worked well, people reported a number of positive associated outcomes including confidence and encouragement. Group dynamics sometimes supported the completion of courses:

‘...if somebody else is stuck or if I was stuck, we could bounce off each other, I’ve done that I could say oh well, you’ve gotta go into this to find a programme for that. So we just all bounced off each other if one was stuck we would just all help.’

(Female, 35, returner)

Conversely, where group dynamics were poor, this could make it difficult for beneficiaries to complete the course, and affected their experience negatively:

‘The rest of the people in my group were all smokers and would all go out and smoke, make their decisions, get their ideas, decide that they’re gonna do and then come back and not bother to tell me. They set up a group e-mail, you know, so you could all connect, they didn’t put me on the group e-mail, you know, and it was all just things like that. And after a while you just think, well sod you, I just can’t be bothered with this. And the tutors didn’t seem to want to know.’

(Lone parent and returner with long-term health condition, age 34)

Group dynamics could result in beneficiaries deciding not to complete their ESF courses where they were felt to undermine the learning process. They were also identified as contributing to positive outcomes from ESF courses. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The mode, and format, of ESF courses varied widely, depending on the subject matter, type of training provider and delivery setting. Notwithstanding these differences, it was the flexibility of delivery that had a key influence on inactive beneficiaries experience of the training. The emphasis on flexibility was concentrated in two key areas:
• **Course attendance**
  Flexibility in relation to when beneficiaries could attend training centres, or how long it took to complete courses, was viewed positively. The level of flexibility depended, in part, on the mode and format of delivery, for example, self-driven or on-line courses were more flexible than classroom taught courses. Open or flexible attendance at training centres was particularly important to people whose availability was constrained by caring responsibilities or unpredictable illness. This type of flexible provision was considered appropriate given the profile of learners the training was being delivered to:

  ‘Coming and joining at different times…it was all to suit people’s own timetable really, you know, I mean the, you didn’t have to be there from 9 til 12 in the morning, you could join in at 10 and go at 12 or go, just go in for an hour if that’s all you could fit in, and nobody would, I mean you signed yourself in and signed yourself out, but it wasn’t, there wasn’t any strict time keeping. Oh I thought it was a good idea for, for adults, I think, I think probably if you’d, if you’d got the motivation to be there, then you’ll be there.’

  (Male, 57, disabled with long-term health condition)

• **Pace of learning**
  The length of courses varied, ranging from half a day to a year, and depended on the level and content of the course. Beneficiaries responded positively to courses where they felt the pace and level of difficulty to be manageable and that took into account their individual abilities. Courses where the learning experience could be varied to match changing circumstances were particularly valued. Where there was a degree of flexibility in relation to the pace at which courses were completed, this garnered considerable support, especially amongst beneficiaries who had disabilities or health conditions. The nature of their circumstances meant that they could not sit still for a long period of time without a break and, therefore, took longer to finish a curriculum. This sort of flexibility had enabled some to reach a successful conclusion of their course, where in other more restrictive circumstances, this might not have been possible. In instances where people had not been allowed to complete their courses because of time restrictions, this led to feelings of disappointment or left individuals with a sense of failure – which could compound the difficulties they faced.

3.4.2 **Tailoring of courses and tutor support**
Inactive beneficiaries had a diverse range of training and support needs. The degree to which ESF courses met these depended, in part, on the extent to which providers were aware of individual needs and how well they tailored their training curriculum and support as a result.

**Assessing individual need**
The survey data suggests that a high number of beneficiaries felt that courses had been tailored to their individual needs, with just under half recalling having
completed a Personal Development Plan (PDP) on commencing their course. Whilst beneficiaries in the qualitative sample did not always remember or discuss the completion of a PDP, where they were recalled they were seen to have performed an important function in helping to identify needs and learning goals:

‘Well I know how to do that and I know how to do that, but it’s all a bit tricky, so we would fill questionnaires in I think it’s good because at the end of it you’ve got the one when you first start, where you basically you know, well I knew nothing. And then by the end of it there was this list that ‘He said I can do all of that’ I can do it it’s proved it because I’ve done it here, I knew nothing then, but I know it now in a matter of sixteen weeks.’

(Female, 35, returner)

Even where beneficiaries did not recall a PDP, some still remembered a period of needs assessment. This was almost universally valued and felt to lead to a more beneficial experience of the course. It appeared from beneficiaries’ accounts in the qualitative study that there was not universal experience of this sort of individual needs assessment. This is perhaps due to poor recall amongst some respondents. It is also possible that individuals had their needs assessed implicitly, and so would not recall a specific event or time when this occurred. Some, who did not recall an explicit needs assessment, on reflection during the interview, did not feel that this was either necessary or appropriate for someone in their circumstances. Nevertheless, there were instances where beneficiaries felt that their needs had not been addressed sufficiently at the outset of their involvement with ESF and that their experience of the training received suffered as a consequence.

Strategies for meeting individual need

The accounts of inactive beneficiaries indicate three main ways in which their individual needs were met by ESF courses: by the tailoring of course content, through the provision of support for learning and in the help received with finding work. These are discussed in the remainder of this section.

Tailoring of course content

Tutors responded to individual needs identified by tailoring the course content. Assessments helped providers recommend those elements of training or aspects of support that would most benefit the individual in question, for example, in helping them to move in a particular type of work:

‘There was a load of support I mean when I was telling them I might have to do a speed test and it was like, ‘come on, I will put some on for you, and you can practice, and you can time it’. Everything was kind of geared to what you wanted.’

(Female, 38, lone parent and returner)
Support for learning

Beneficiaries generally described the support that they had received from the tutors on their ESF courses in a positive light. Approachability and friendliness were repeatedly mentioned as key qualities. Encouragement was also valued highly, especially by participants who were less confident about undertaking the training or about the environment in which it was delivered.

Tutors were reported as having supported beneficiaries in a number of different practical and personal ways. Support with classroom tasks was an important way in which tutors could help beneficiaries complete, and get the most out of, their courses. Where ESF courses were delivered in classroom settings, beneficiaries reported that tutors had offered individual support when it was needed. These findings are supported by the Leavers Survey’s data which suggests that three-quarters of beneficiaries felt that the level of support offered had been appropriate for their abilities. The accessibility of support was particularly important for those who lacked confidence or found the ESF courses difficult. In one such instance, an older training participant indicated that they appreciated the patience and support of their tutor, who they felt must have been frustrated by their basic knowledge of computers.

In the exceptional cases where evaluations of tutor support were less positive, this was because beneficiaries felt that tutors had been less supportive of them, for example, in not offering sufficient help with the completion of coursework, or in some cases, in the management of groups dynamics. In these instances, beneficiaries sometimes struggled with courses, and failed to fully complete them.

Helen attended an ESF course that was focused on building up her employability skills. The course included basic computer skills and work experience modules. Helen enjoyed the classroom element of the training, but was upset when the tutor told her that her written English skills should be of a better standard given that this was her first language. She became even more frustrated the course tutor failed to turn up to her work experience placement to do an assessment for her portfolio on a number of occasions. Helen felt that this was particularly a shame since she had such good feedback on her work experience placement but nothing concrete to show for it. She eventually completed her portfolio without this evidence but it was never assessed. Helen was disappointed not to have her portfolio and, at the time of interview, appeared to have lost the momentum and confidence she had developed during her time at her work placement.

(Female, 32, lone parent and returner)

Support with finding employment/ onwards progression

A second kind of support offered by tutors was help thinking about work options. Work-orientated inactive beneficiaries who were not certain of the type of work that they might do, valued help in thinking about their work options. This was invaluable
to those who had positive work orientations prior to engagement in ESF (those for whom work was an immediate priority or an option in the near future) but also to those whose orientation changed during their involvement in ESF. Support included informal conversations as well as specific activities such as career planning and psychometric testing.

Tutors also supported beneficiaries by illuminating personal and career strengths, and relating these to future work options. Beneficiaries reserved particular enthusiasm for tutors who had helped them identify transferable skills or competencies, as this boosted their confidence about their own employability:

‘[The tutor said] So it shows that you can communicate, and you can answer a phone’ and I’m thinking, ah you know I never saw it like that, I never saw it in a positive, it’s something you just do naturally, you know, you call the doctor or you take the child to school and tell the teacher oh, the child is not well, it’s on antibiotics and things like that, so that’s all communication, I thought oh. So it sort of opened my eyes, you know? To think there’s so much more. […] So I started looking at things in a different [way] They talk about windows, you know? Closed windows and open windows and I’m thinking, oh! It was quite something, isn’t it?’

(Female, 49, lone parent with long-term health problems)

In some cases, the identification of transferable skills was informal or occurred by accident:

‘…while I was on the course when the computers went down and we were looking for the cause of why a particular computer had gone down. And although I’m not an electrical engineer – I’m a mechanical engineer, electrics do come into it, so I looked at the computer and came up with what was wrong with it, and I had one moment of glory. I actually got the bloody thing to run….. They brought it up. They said, ‘Why don’t you look – instead of doing this sort of thing, why don’t you look to – you’re an engineer, for God’s sake. Alright, you’re mechanical rather than electrical, but the two do intertwine.’

(Male, 58, Disabled with long-term health problem)

Support for beneficiaries with finding employment and onwards progression from ESF appeared to receive relatively little emphasis in some courses. Job placements and recruitment opportunities were offered at the courses with a stronger focus on employment. However, inactive beneficiaries attending other courses received limited support in this respect. There was some criticism of this - even amongst those very distant from the labour market who were perhaps not thinking about work to begin with - and some of those who had attended the less work focused courses felt that they could have benefited from investigating work possibilities. Where those with very positive work orientations were placed in less work focused courses or programmes, it meant that they did not receive the support they needed to translate ESF outcomes into employment.
3.5 The relevance of ESF courses

The survey evidence suggests that most beneficiaries (four out of five) viewed their ESF courses as having been relevant to their needs. The qualitative evidence suggests that relevance was determined by a number of key factors:

- **beneficiaries’ initial expectations of the course** impacted on how relevant they ultimately perceived the course to be. Those beneficiaries who hoped that ESF would help them move into work despite substantial employment-related or circumstantial barriers, were sometimes disappointed by the outcome of ESF, despite having been satisfied by its delivery. Where expectations had been more modest, respondents talked more about their enjoyment of their course than its relevance;

- **the content and level ESF courses** both had strong influences on how relevant beneficiaries viewed them to be. Where course content closely reflected beneficiaries’ interests or needs, this was met with an enthusiasm that appeared to add an extra momentum to the attainment of individual goals. Conversely, where there was a mismatch between the content or level desired, respondents were frustrated or discouraged and, as a consequence, sometimes voted with their feet by leaving ESF courses early;

- **the usefulness of qualifications, certificates or skills** attached to the training was an important determinant of course relevance. The acquisition of a specific qualification was, in some instances, a key motivation for undertaking the ESF training. One respondent reported how, for this reason, he was very frustrated when he found that the qualification being delivered as part of his ESF course was not valid for the purpose he had in mind. Individuals sometimes pursued ESF courses in order to validate skills they already had but for which they had no formal qualifications. In such circumstances, the content of the course was considered less important than the outcome. One beneficiary, for example, reported that their ESF course in web-design was ‘too easy’, because they were already familiar with the subject matter, but they had wanted to complete it in order to get the qualification attached to it;

- **the ability of tutors to identify beneficiaries’ employability needs and to act upon them** was the final factor in determining whether or not ESF courses were considered relevant by inactive beneficiaries.

Where courses were less relevant, beneficiaries tended to investigate other avenues, such as other training or sources of support. This, along with other outcomes of participation in ESF, is discussed fully in Chapter 4.
3.6 Completion of ESF courses

Non-completion of ESF courses by respondents in the qualitative study was unusual. The Leavers Survey estimates support this. Only 16 per cent of beneficiaries across the total sample left courses earlier than expected, with only a third of these quitting for negative reasons (for example, because of the perceived shortcomings of a course). Just over a quarter (28 per cent) left for positive reasons because they had started a job or a different course.

There were three main circumstances under which beneficiaries included in the qualitative study decided not to see their course through to completion. These were because they:

- **found a job**
  People tended to move into work rather than completing their ESF training because their main priority was to return to paid employment as soon as possible. These individuals were sometimes motivated by a strong desire to provide for their dependants or to escape benefits;

- **decided the course was not relevant to their needs**
  The factors underpinning perceptions of relevance are outlined above. For the more work-orientated the pathways offered by ESF towards work was not always perceived to be as expedient as they would like and, consequently, they decided not to continue the course;

- **experienced a change in their personal circumstances**
  These beneficiaries had to leave ESF courses because their personal circumstances had changed in such a way that they could no longer reconcile the training with their other responsibilities.

It is worth noting here that the sample included another type of beneficiary who, though they had finished the training, themselves felt that they had not completed their course because they believed that their portfolio had not been assessed or returned to them. These beneficiaries expressed a sense of frustration and disappointment. Where work was an option, they also felt that they had missed out on receiving formal acknowledgements of their efforts through certification or accreditation.

In conclusion then, there are clearly different experiences of ESF amongst inactive beneficiaries, and different factors that facilitate both engagement with and completion of the training. The next chapter turns to the question of outcome, specifically inactive beneficiaries’ perceptions about the outcomes they attained through their involvement with the programme.
4 Impact of ESF programmes

This chapter explores the impact of ESF on inactive beneficiaries. It begins by describing the broad range of outcomes attributed to the ESF training received. The effect of ESF on inactive beneficiaries’ orientation to employment is then considered, and different patterns of change in relation to work are outlined. The final section discusses the key factors that influence the sorts of impacts experienced by inactive beneficiaries.

4.1 Reported outcomes of ESF training

The purpose of ESF programmes is to help individuals with labour market disadvantage to move into work, but also to enhance their employability. ESF training, as described in Chapter 3, played a range of different roles in supporting, prompting or driving individuals’ progression towards the labour market, and in the process, facilitated the acquisition of a range of diverse outcomes. These comprised three broad types of outcome: skills and qualifications, general employability and psychological benefit. This section explores these in more detail. Employment outcomes are covered in the next section.

4.1.1 Skills and qualifications

The work-related skills gained by inactive beneficiaries ranged from the highly sector-specific skills including forklift driving, website design, childminding, ‘story sacks’ and flower arranging, to more generic skills such as computer skills. Indeed, practical skills relating to particular jobs were reported as being a key outcome by all beneficiaries in the Leavers Survey, with 63 per cent pinpointing these as an outcome of their ESF course. These practical skills were valued because it was felt that they would help to secure a job, particularly by those who hoped to build a new career in a specific sector or type of work. Another significant outcome from ESF courses was the acquisition of IT skills. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents to the Leavers Survey highlighted that this occurred as a direct result of participation in ESF. Up to date computer skills were viewed by inactive beneficiaries as fundamental in helping them move into, and progress in, work. Computers were described as the
‘way of the future’ and the acquisition of computer skills was a source of substantial confidence for inactive beneficiaries, especially those who had been out of the labour market for a long time:

‘I would have been terrified to use anything, you know, not having switched on a computer to use it. What looks like a complicated programme is not you know once you get to know it its not […] I think it would be quite fair to say that, if I hadn’t been able to do the courses that I did, I certainly wouldn’t have been able to do the job that I do.’

(Female, 26, returner with long-term health problem)

Gaining these skills and qualifications held varying degrees of significance for beneficiaries. A high degree of pride was attached to certificates and accreditation by some beneficiaries, particularly those with low confidence. Here, the completion of ESF training, and acquisition of a certificate represented a significant personal gain. For women, it helped them to prove themselves as something other than a wife or mother. For disabled people, and those with chronic health conditions, it helped them to define themselves as a person distinct from their illness or disability. Certificates were valued by some beneficiaries as evidence that they were still capable of achieving things even if they had been out of work or education for long periods of time or had low educational attainment at school. For some, the qualification was the first gained since leaving school, or the first qualification they had ever achieved:

‘I suppose I felt good that I’ve actually after all these years I’ve done something and I’m gonna gain a certificate, and I felt good, because it’s daft because it was only a basic computer course, but it was the first thing I’d ever done on my own, and the first certificate I’d ever got.’

(Female, 35, returner)

Qualification or accreditation was viewed more pragmatically by some respondents who saw them purely as a means to an end, mainly as a passport into work. Here there was less emphasis on the personal or emotional effects of such gains. Instead, qualifications were valued for two reasons. Beneficiaries recognised the need to learn new skills and to possess concrete evidence of their new abilities. Gaining their qualification was a way of doing this. Conversely, some believed themselves already skilled in certain areas, and saw their certification as a way of authenticating these.

4.1.2 General employability

A second group of outcomes experienced by inactive beneficiaries related to improvements in their ability to demonstrate and evidence their employability. This was the explicit aim of courses focusing on the provision of CV writing help and support, or courses with in-built work experience components. Beneficiaries reported increased confidence as a result of their exposure to working environments and positive feedback of their performance. Having a record of this experience was also felt to improve employability by demonstrating competency in a working
environment and acquisition of sector-specific skills. As noted in Chapter 3, some tutors encouraged beneficiaries to think about what transferable skills they possessed and this equipped some beneficiaries to present these clearly to potential employers.

Improvement in basic skills was identified as an outcome from ESF training in the Leavers Survey. Twenty-nine per cent of all beneficiaries reported improved reading and writing skills. However, these sorts of outcomes were not spontaneously mentioned in the qualitative research. Indeed, there were some examples of beneficiaries not having felt that these had been addressed sufficiently in their ESF courses. Here, inactive individuals reported ongoing difficulties with reading and writing, and a concomitant lack of confidence in relation to work.

4.1.3 Psychological benefits

Two main kinds of psychological impact were said to arise from involvement with ESF: The first concerned beneficiaries’ own personal well-being and the second the quality of their interaction with others.

Personal impacts

One of the most important outcomes for inactive beneficiaries was increased confidence and self esteem. This is supported by the Follow-up Survey data, which indicated that increased confidence was the most common outcome reported by beneficiaries (24% at the Follow-up Survey). Increased confidence was almost immediate for some beneficiaries, once they had overcome their initial fears and doubts of participation. For example, one respondent indicated that ‘after the first week [I] didn’t really [bat] an eyelid’. Confidence could also build gradually fuelled by the sense of achievement derived from successful participation in the training, and ultimately by obtaining any certificates and qualifications. Increased confidence was also a product of the environment or context of training provision. Inactive beneficiaries (particularly lone parents and returners) spoke highly of the supportive group or community-based settings in which they had undergone training. Indeed, the experience of these settings was at times valued more than the context of the course itself. As a result of such interaction, inactive beneficiaries reported increased friendships or social networks and improved communication skills.

Increased confidence and sense of achievement raised beneficiaries’ aspirations and some developed a taste for further training or development. They were conscious of the momentum participation in ESF training had offered them, and were reluctant to lose the gains achieved as a result of it.
Anne lives with her husband and four children, the youngest of whom is seven years old. She left school aged sixteen and had never had a long-term job. Her experience, in the main, was of being a wife and a mother. In the period leading up to ESF, she had done a few cleaning jobs, which she liked because she ‘enjoyed being classed as something else, not just a mam’. The jobs never really lasted long, often because she found them to difficult to balance with her caring responsibilities for her family. Anne felt that she suffered from depression and low self-confidence prior to going on the ESF course. She found out about the basic computer course whilst she was undertaking some voluntary work as a classroom assistant at her son’s school. The students on the course were mainly women and she felt it was a really supportive atmosphere. At the end of the course she received a certificate, of which she was very proud. Following the ESF course, Anne progressed onto a higher level computer course and starting a teaching assistant qualification. She did not feel that she would have had the confidence to do this, if it had not been for the initial ESF course.

(Female, 35, returner)

Depression and anxiety were experienced by beneficiaries across all disadvantage groups, and participation in ESF training sometimes helped alleviate this. In these instances, beneficiaries felt that getting out and about, developing relationships or friendships with other beneficiaries, and achieving things on their courses improved their mental health. Anxiety was said to have been alleviated through participation in courses, through getting out of the house, confronting fears, or just doing anything that did not involve thinking about their difficult situations. Where beneficiaries were suffering from depression related to situations like family breakdown, attending ESF courses had provided structure and order, as well as something to look forward to in periods of substantial upheaval and distress. Positive gains were also achieved for beneficiaries with related conditions like agoraphobia:

‘It’s also made me a lot more comfortable about going out the house, you know, when I’m able to. Before […] it wasn’t so much whether I was physically able to. I would sometimes get my coat on and stand at the door for about 10 minutes and then take my coat off and sit down again. And then do that umpteen times. And then if it wasn’t [to buy] something for the cats I would just, you know, just not get anything. So I mean, I mean it’s all been little steps, you know, that have all helped, different things. And that [the ESF course] has been quite a big one.’

(Female, 49, with long-term health problem)
Interpersonal relationships

Improvements in family relationships were an additional consequence of ESF training. Parents (usually lone parents and returners) gained a range of skills including story telling, craft and IT skills, which they used for play or educational outcomes with their children, supporting the development of closer, more rewarding, relationships. As discussed already, beneficiaries pinpointed the confidence that they had gained in themselves as a result of ESF and some reported, with no small amount of pleasure, the pride with which their families regarded their achievements. Improvements in interpersonal relationships were sometimes a direct result of changes in a person’s own emotional well-being, changes they attributed to ESF (and discussed above). For example, where prior to to ESF, depression or stress had made relationships difficult, the improvements brought about by ESF also benefited relationships with family members:

‘At the time [before ESF] I was like at a low point and thought I can’t even bring Sam up right, never mind do anything else. [With ESF] you’re doing something that’s not involving your child for a change. Like they’re in the creche, you know, they’re safe and happy in there and you’re doing something like for you, which I think I needed at that time as well…I stand up to him more now probably. It’s made me more confident and [I] lay down the law better with him. I’m more calmer, more relaxed, more receptive to how he is.’

(Female, 35, lone parent)

ESF courses, therefore, resulted in a range of different formal and personal outcomes that influenced beneficiaries’ relationships to the labour market, and their circumstances more widely. The way in which these translated into movement towards work is examined in the next section.

4.1.4 The distribution of benefit from ESF

The experience of these three sets of outcomes was not universal amongst the beneficiaries interviewed. The psychological benefits of participation in ESF were widely experienced by each of the four types of inactive beneficiaries outlined earlier in the report. However, there was evidence to suggest that experience of the more work-related outcomes was limited to those beneficiaries who had an interest in working, either immediately or at some point in the future. Even those who wanted to work but felt it was not an option for them, reported improvements in work-related skills and in their general employability. Those for whom work was not a consideration did not report any outcomes related to work.

4.2 The impact of ESF on work orientation

As might be expected, movements into employment by inactive beneficiaries were not as prevalent as for other beneficiaries. Indeed, as Figure 4.1 demonstrates, the changes to the inactive population were comparatively modest when compared with other types of beneficiaries (i.e. those in work, education or unemployed on entry to ESF).
Nonetheless, in the period following participation in the ESF course, the Leavers Survey estimated that 22 per cent of inactive beneficiaries had moved into work (nine per cent into full-time work and 13 per cent into part-time work). Employment levels continued to rise over the intervening period so that a year later at the time of the Follow-up Survey, a third of inactive beneficiaries (32 per cent) had moved into work at some point after their participation in ESF. Lone parents were the most successful type of inactive beneficiary at finding work, with nearly half (47 per cent) having found employment by the Follow-up Survey. Carers and returners also fared comparatively well with 43 and 37 per cent, respectively, returning to work. Those beneficiaries with disabilities were the least successful in moving into work, with only 18 per cent achieving this outcome.

Changes in activity status were also reflected by movement into education and training. Twenty-one per cent of inactive beneficiaries were engaged in further education or training courses immediately following the course, with 10 per cent still doing so at the time of the Follow-up Survey.

These various statistical trends are also reflected in the accounts offered by the individuals interviewed in the qualitative study. Four types of work orientation apparent amongst inactive beneficiaries prior to their participation in ESF were outlined in Chapter 2. These encompassed:

- work was an immediate priority;
- work was an option at some point;
work was not an option;
work was not a consideration.

The experiences recounted by inactive beneficiaries indicate substantial movement between these categories in the period after participation in ESF. Moreover, ESF had such a direct effect on some beneficiaries’ experiences that it could be said that a fifth category of work orientation was created following participation in ESF: those beneficiaries in paid work.

The transformations in beneficiaries’ employment status and/or attitude to work as a result of ESF are many and various. However, they manifest in four broad patterns of ‘change’:

- movement into work;
- movement towards work;
- no change in work orientation;
- movement away from the labour market.

The remainder of this section describes these different experiences in detail and the role ESF played in producing them.

### 4.2.1 Movement into work

As noted already, estimates indicate that 32 per cent of inactive beneficiaries were working at the time of the Follow-up Survey. The qualitative sample also comprised individuals who had experienced similar positive effects. Depending on their initial work orientations, these individuals had travelled varying distances in relation to the labour market, often on different timescales. Direct transitions into work were exceptional amongst inactive beneficiaries. Rather, it was common for them to move into further training or pursue voluntary work before finding paid work. The role that personal circumstances played here should not be underestimated. The sorts of difficult personal and family circumstances described in Chapter 2 were not easily transformed and it took people time to affect the sorts of changes desired. Indeed, the Follow-up Survey also found that beneficiaries who moved into work did not usually do so directly upon completion of ESF training.

Nevertheless, work had been on the horizon for some individuals at the time of their contact with ESF training (specifically, those for whom work was an immediate option and those for whom work was an option at some point) and participation in the programme had helped them to achieve this goal in a number of different ways. The range of positive outcomes from ESF, outlined earlier in this chapter, all combined to help some participants into work. Confidence gained from ESF training received repeated emphasis from inactive beneficiaries of all types, and was described by beneficiaries as having offered them the motivation and momentum to consider work and to pursue employment opportunities. This included those for whom work had not been an option at the time of their contact with the
programme. Here, confidence, coupled with other factors such as skill development, appeared to help them to secure employment.

Ellie had experienced mental health problems since her late teens. She left her job in nursing because her condition got too bad for her to function properly. In the period since leaving work, she had received continuous treatment for her condition. Ellie described herself as having depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. She felt herself to be unemployable and did not know what she would do if or when her condition got better. Ellie initially did an ESF-funded computer course, and then progressed on to do a CLAIT computer course in order to build her computer skills further. This training offered her a great deal of confidence, and she moved into voluntary work. She was eventually offered a part-time administrative job at the same organisation.

(Female, 26, long-term health problems)

The acquisition of particular skills or qualifications also supported respondent’s movement into work. Here, beneficiaries felt that skills gained on ESF training had improved their employability and this helped them secure work.

Farhana’s husband had become ill with Crone’s disease and had given up work shortly before she found out about ESF. His condition was very poor and her caring responsibilities for him were fairly intensive. Despite the fact that she had never worked before, Farhana and her husband decided that she should go out to work to support them. Farhana did feel not feel she had any valuable skills, compounded by the fact that she did not speak English fluently. Her ESF course gave her a combination of computer skills and job search support. She felt that the course had improved her confidence and enhanced her interview skills. After the course, she got a voluntary job as a receptionist, and subsequently moved into part-time paid employment as an administrative assistant.

(Female, 33, carer)

Whilst the impact of ESF was generally indirect, it did, in some cases, make a much more direct contribution to inactive individuals finding work. In these instances, the ESF course on offer had represented such an exact fit to beneficiaries’ needs that it facilitated an immediate move straight into work.
Julie lives with her husband and three children, the youngest of whom is two. She had worked in a variety of different childcare settings in the past, and had also tried working in a supermarket. At the time of starting the ESF course, she had recently left her full-time job in a supermarket because she found it too hard to combine with her caring responsibilities for her children. She had not found new work because she felt that her caring responsibilities constrained the hours which she would be able to work. In addition, she felt that the cost of childcare meant that work would not be financially worthwhile. She embarked on an ESF-funded course in childminding. The course offered accreditation at the end of it, and registration with the local authority, meaning that she could start work straight away. Having completed the course, Julie began part-time work as a childminder.

(Female, 32, returner)

These descriptions of the role played by ESF are supported by the survey evidence. The Follow-up Survey has indicated that 70 per cent of inactive beneficiaries who had found work said that ESF training helped them to do so.

The sustainability of work

The survey evidence highlights the strong contribution made by ESF in helping inactive beneficiaries secure sustainable work, with over two-thirds (70 per cent) of those who has started working since the course, still working at the time of the Follow-up Survey. However, a significant minority (22 per cent) had slipped back into inactivity. In the qualitative study, there are also examples of cases where work gained after involvement in ESF was not sustained. This was due, in the main, to an incompatibility between work and personal circumstances. Individuals moved into work and found they could not cope with its demands on their time, the conflict it produced with their personal responsibilities, or the demands it made on their physical health. These circumstances generally brought an end to employment. Difficulties within the workplace also played some role.

Phil, aged 47, left his job in site maintenance following a car accident that left him with injuries that impaired his mobility. He was undertaking an ESF-funded business start-up course when he was offered a job as a manager of the materials store on a local building site. Phil was enjoying the course but was not committed to the idea of starting his own business. The pay being offered on the building site job was very good, and much more than he would have been able to earn running his ‘own little business’. He took the job but found it required more physical work than he had anticipated and the demands of the job made his health condition worse. Some of the perks of the job that he had been initially promised never materialised. To make matters worse, he felt his colleagues harassed him because of the limitations imposed by his disability. All of these issues caused him to give up work.

(Male, 47, Disabled with long-term health condition)
There is also evidence to suggest that sustainability of work is connected to the type of employment which inactive beneficiaries gained following ESF training. The Follow-up Survey found that 74 per cent of inactive beneficiaries who moved into work had only one job, suggesting perhaps a degree of stability. The qualitative research confirms this, demonstrating considerable job satisfaction amongst some of those who gained work. However, there is also evidence to suggest that work gained was, for some inactive beneficiaries, little more than a stop gap which allowed them to undertake other activities such as education or training or to fulfil their caring responsibilities. These respondents had ambitions to move into different, more challenging, and, ideally, full-time, work. In one such example, a young lone parent had decided on a new career as an accountant as a result of ESF careers advice. At the time of interview, she was undertaking training for this, whilst supporting herself and her child by undertaking part-time work as an administrative assistant. Undoubtedly, this sort of employment was less satisfying and, arguably, more volatile.

4.2.2 Movement towards work

The survey evidence indicates that 68 per cent of inactive beneficiaries were not working at the time of the Follow-up Survey. However, while actual work was not an outcome for the majority of beneficiaries, the qualitative study can demonstrate that inactive beneficiaries did make significant movement towards work, change which they attributed to participation in ESF training. Movement towards work was characterised by two distinct changes in inactive beneficiaries’ lives. The first concerned movement into further education and training, the second related to a shift in beneficiaries’ general attitudes to work.

Movement into education and training

The statistical data available demonstrates the significant role that ESF and other training could play in acting as a ‘stepping stone’ on the way towards work. The Follow-up Survey suggests that for many beneficiaries, participation in ESF courses encouraged them to undertake further training. Just under half of beneficiaries (46 per cent), for example, had participated in another type of training since their ESF course. This figure was even higher amongst those aged 25-49. Furthermore, of those who had undertaken further training, 32 per cent said that they either probably, or definitely, would not have undertaken further training had not been for ESF.

The qualitative research also illustrates the role of ESF in encouraging and facilitating further training and education amongst inactive beneficiaries, including both those who were work-orientated prior to ESF and those who started to think about work (and related training) as a result of ESF. Amongst those who progressed in this way, two broad types of training can be identified:
• **Training which was an extension of the ESF course**

Courses which represented an extension of ESF training were varied. The choice of further education and training, for some, represented a direct or linear progression from their ESF course, for example, to a more advanced IT training course or to a more specialised furniture-making course. Here, beneficiaries felt that they had benefited from their initial course, and wanted to build on these specific skills and qualifications. This type of progression occurred amongst work orientated beneficiaries (including both those for whom work had been an immediate priority and those for whom work had been an option at some point) who had undertaken courses that had prompted or fostered an interest in a potential type of work. Such progression was facilitated by subsequent courses being offered by the same provider or on the same site (for example, at community centres or nurseries).

However, not all training was apparently related to their ESF course. This was sometimes because the careers advice they had received as part of their ESF course had directed them to a different type of training or preparation for a new type of work. Such advice was invaluable in helping inactive beneficiaries to locate potential career options. Alternatively, some beneficiaries had undertaken a range of training unrelated to their original ESF course and had gained a range of skills and competencies in the process. This was not because the original ESF course was inadequate. Rather, because of confidence and/or raised aspirations gained through participation in ESF, these inactive beneficiaries were motivated to pursue other types of training in order to find one that suited them or to build up an array of qualifications that would enable them to move into work when the time was right for them.

Constance left her job as a nurse because her health condition meant that she could no longer do her job. Having always enjoyed cooking, Constance decided that she might try to open a small restaurant. She undertook an ESF course in computer skills because she thought that word processing and desktop publishing would come in useful when she was printing menus. The ESF course gave her further increased her confidence and motivation. Following the completion of the ESF course, Constance started catering and food hygiene courses, which she also thought would help prepare her for setting up her own business.

(Female, 49, with long-term health problems)

• **Training which replaced the ESF course**

Where beneficiaries felt that the ESF course did not meet their skills or employability needs, they often attempted to substitute it with an equivalent course or training programme. Those beneficiaries who wanted to move into work immediately or in the near future, tended to be motivated to undertake replacement courses. The experience of having to undertake a replacement training course could be a frustrating one for beneficiaries, and was considered...
by some to represent an unnecessary hurdle in their progression towards work. There were three main types of circumstances where this happened:

– where the course was not pitched at the right level or did not offer an appropriate qualification, and did not, therefore, help beneficiaries gain the skills they needed to move into work, either in the short-term (where work was an immediate priority) or in the longer-term (where work was an option at some point). Failure of ESF courses to address literacy and numeracy needs was an example of this.

– where beneficiaries identified other needs during the course of the training (such as literacy and numeracy) and felt that addressing these was more of an immediate priority. This could occur across all types of work motivation; and

– where the qualification arising from the ESF course was found to be inappropriate to beneficiaries’ need, for example, where it was not accepted in the sector of work the beneficiary wanted to do. This occurred where work was either in the short-term (where work was an immediate priority) or in the longer-term (where work was an option at some point). For instance, one respondent with a long-term health problem described his frustration at having completed an ESF course that offered a safety certificate which was not widely accepted by employers.

**Shift in attitudes towards work**

A second illustration of movement towards work was the obvious shift in attitudes to work that took place for some inactive beneficiaries following participation in ESF. ESF brought about a change in attitudes in two main ways: First, it helped inactive beneficiaries to secure personal gains that encouraged them to think that work was a possibility. Confidence and self-esteem were fundamental outcomes in this respect, and lent beneficiaries the momentum to explore work options. Second, the acquisition of new skills and competencies also contributed to beneficiaries feeling themselves to be more employable and prompted them to start thinking about work as a realistic option for them. This attitudinal change then brought about behavioural change including increased job search or more intensive engagement in services that could help them find work, such as Jobcentre Plus.

**4.2.3 No change in work orientation**

Though ESF has clearly played a role in moving some inactive beneficiaries closer to, or into, work, others, by contrast, experienced no such change in their circumstances. The Follow-up Survey has shown that 51 per cent of all inactive beneficiaries were still inactive following their involvement in the training (of the remaining 49 per cent of inactive beneficiaries, 32 per cent were working, 10 per cent were in education or training, and seven per cent were unemployed). This lack of change was most striking amongst those with a disability or a long-term health condition, where 57 per cent of those inactive on entry to ESF were still inactive or had returned to inactivity at the time of the Follow-up Survey. In the qualitative study, there were examples of little, or no, change in work orientation amongst all types of inactive
beneficiaries. It appeared that the opportunities available to some individuals continued to be constrained by their personal circumstances and barriers to work. Subtle movement was observable in the attitudes and behaviour of some, but tended to be characterised by a ‘one step forward, two steps back’ pattern, where attempts to move into work did not succeed. This resulted in significant disappointment for some. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that these individuals did not benefit from their involvement in ESF. Indeed, many initially reported similar positive outcomes to those described earlier in this chapter, however, these outcomes such as increased confidence or greater motivation were not translated into job outcomes.

4.2.4 Movement away from the labour market

In exceptional cases, inactive beneficiaries moved away from the labour market following their involvement in ESF. There were two main types of circumstances under which this movement occurred. The first concerned beneficiaries who had felt that work was an option at some point at the time of commencing ESF training, who since then had experienced a deterioration in their physical health that meant that they felt that work was no a longer realistic option. The older the beneficiary, the more inclined they were to presume that work was beyond their reach. The second concerned individuals who had been quite enthusiastic about work in the period directly after their involvement in ESF, but who, subsequently, became discouraged at their lack of progress in this regard. This disappointing experience – of having their expectations raised and then not fulfilled – had compounded their sense of isolation from the labour market, and they no longer viewed work as a realistic possibility for them.

4.3 Why does ESF have a differential effect for inactive beneficiaries?

Participation in ESF courses has resulted in positive outcomes for inactive beneficiaries. However, as is clear from the discussion so far, this effect was by no means universal. Understanding the reasons for this differential effect is clearly important to the future success of ESF training, and other interventions of this kind. From the qualitative research conducted, it is evidence that ESF’s effect on inactive beneficiaries is contingent on two key factors: inactive beneficiaries inherent work orientation and the identification and matching of beneficiary need by ESF providers. The exact contribution of these two is outlined in Section 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

4.3.1 Work orientation

Comparing the work orientation of inactive beneficiaries before ESF with that reported after participation in the programme, some interesting patterns emerge. ESF had a more demonstrable impact on the work orientations of those inactive beneficiaries who were closer to work at the point of contact with the programme – specifically those who considered work to be an immediate priority or a viable option.
at some point. Movements into, and towards, the labour market by these types of beneficiaries occurred either as a result of the positive benefits of ESF outlined earlier in this chapter, but also because of changes to personal circumstances (for example, a youngest child reaching school age) which made work more of an immediate possibility. The effect of ESF was more limited amongst those inactive beneficiaries who were further away from the labour market on entry to ESF – those who considered work not to be an option or even a consideration. While ESF did produce a range of positive outcomes for these beneficiaries, particularly psychological benefits, these did not usually translate into work-related outcomes. Indeed, the evidence suggests that it is unlikely that ESF alone could have tackled the sort of insuperable barriers to work and disadvantaged circumstances faced by some inactive beneficiaries. These different patterns are outlined in Figure 4.2, where symbols are used to represent the number of people in each typological category before and after participation in ESF. It should be noted that these distributions are provided to give a sense of composition of the sample, as well as to illustrate the patterns within it. They do not offer any evidence about the prevalence of outcome within the wider population of inactive beneficiaries.

**Figure 4.2 Change in work orientation following participation in ESF**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before participation in ESF</th>
<th>In work</th>
<th>Work an immediate priority</th>
<th>Work an option at some point</th>
<th>Work not an option</th>
<th>Work not a consideration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work an immediate priority</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work an option at some point</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work not an option</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work not a consideration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Qualitative study

The sorts of beneficiaries with these less positive work orientations at the point of contact with the programme had a variety of different types of disadvantage. Why this did not change as a result of involvement in ESF is very much rooted to the particular challenges inherent in these many disadvantages. Lone parents and returners, for instance, cited a number of barriers to work associated with their familial responsibilities which prevented any change in their work orientation, as well as strong beliefs that their children were too young to be without their full-time care. Work was considered an option at some point in the future, and ESF courses were seen to have prepared them somewhat for this eventuality. Whilst there are some examples of lone parents beginning to think about work earlier than they might have done otherwise, and some who moved into work, ESF was not able to challenge the work orientations of other lone parents and returners.
The effect of ESF on the work orientation of those with longer-term caring responsibilities is equally diverse. Irrespective of the gains brought about by ESF, there was sometimes a strong sense of responsibility and commitment toward the adults and children cared for and this meant that work remained unfeasible. Work was not viewed as an option in the foreseeable future by these individuals, and ESF had played a limited role in influencing this perspective. Where caring responsibilities were less intensive, or where there were alternative caring arrangements available, carers sometimes viewed work as a possibility. In these instances, the impact of ESF in shifting work orientation was more apparent.

Disability and long-term health problems represented a substantial constraint on the work orientations of a range of inactive beneficiaries. Work was still viewed as an option by some of these beneficiaries, but the nature of their impairment or health condition made it difficult to find work that they themselves felt they were able to do, or indeed, that employers felt they were able to do. Whilst these beneficiaries wanted to work, they were sometimes equivocal about whether or not work was an option. This was not a barrier that all ESF training was equipped to overcome.

David, 58, was in a road accident four years prior to starting ESF training. He sustained very serious injuries, which caused him to have to leave his job. Since then he had developed a related degenerative condition and is in nearly constant pain. David desperately wanted to work and had tried to access support from several voluntary sector organisations before doing his ESF-funded CLAIT course, which he hoped would improve his employability. Since then, David has applied for ‘hundreds of jobs’ and sought further support from a voluntary organisation that specialises in helping disabled people. At the time of interview, David had not found a job. A number of companies had told him that he was a health and safety risk, because they did not think they would be able to get him out of the building quickly enough because his mobility is so limited. He wanted to prove them wrong, but felt that they viewed him as unemployable, and that it would be difficult to challenge this view.

(Male, 58, with disability and long-term health problem)

ESF might arguably have played a potential role in finding appropriate employment for these beneficiaries, but their conditions severely constrained the type of work they would be able to do. In other instances, ESF did play a role in providing specialist support to disabled beneficiaries, but not paid employment.
Joanna had a learning disability which limited the type of work that she was able to do. Prior to being referred to her ESF project, she had undertaken some voluntary work, which she enjoyed, and which offered her mother respite from caring for her. Joanna and her mother were told about the ESF-supported employment project by a friend at a support group they attend for the families of adults with learning disabilities. Through the project, Joanna was matched with a support worker, who looked into further voluntary opportunities for her. She found Joanna a job working as a waitress in an old people’s home. Joanna really liked the job and felt happy there. Paid employment was not seen as an option in this instance, as Joanna requires a lot of supervision and support.

(Female, 30, with disability)

Finally, those who considered themselves to have retired from paid work represented a final group of inactive beneficiaries on whose work orientation ESF had a limited impact. The lengths of time which these beneficiaries had been out of the labour market varied, and it was rare for them to view return from retirement as possibility, either before, during or after, their ESF training. The inclusion of this group as a main beneficiary of a programme such as ESF is, therefore, called into question. Furthermore, it is possible that their inclusion could reflect the substantial proportion (50 per cent) of those inactive beneficiaries not in work, who indicated in the Follow-Up Survey that they were unlikely ever to return to the labour market, since of beneficiaries over age 50, 82 per cent indicated that this was the case.

4.3.2 Identifying and acting upon beneficiary need

The degree to which ESF supported inactive beneficiaries in moving towards the labour market was limited by the ability of the training and support provided to adequately address individual need. Where providers appeared to take a ‘one size fits all’ approach to delivery, and did not offer individually tailored support, the effect of ESF was, in the main, more muted. Where appropriate support with accessing the labour market was not offered as part of courses, work-focused beneficiaries did not receive the help they needed in making the transition into work. These sorts of courses appeared to have played a particularly limited role in addressing the substantial and varied barriers to work experienced by people with long-term illness and disability who wanted to move into work, largely because of their focus on skill provision or job search skills. There appeared to be less emphasis on important issues relating to access to the labour market – such as overcoming fear, dealing with potential discrimination and dealing with the challenge of inaccessible work environments. As a result, these beneficiaries either sought help elsewhere, or were discouraged by their experience, and moved further away from the labour market.

Conversely, where there was a focus on work transitions and tailored support and guidance was offered, the programme had more success in helping to move inactive
beneficiaries closer to, and into, work. Here, beneficiaries received help with CV writing, job search skills, and careers advice. In exceptional cases, skills-focused courses also offered tailored provision, for example in coaching individuals in specific computer programmes so that they could move into particular types of work.

It is perhaps because of this variation in how individual needs were recognised and addressed, that ESF played a limited role in challenging the work orientations of those for whom work was not an option or not a consideration. In these instances, individuals had been motivated to undertake courses for leisure purposes, or to support the development of skills for voluntary work. Where these expectations were fulfilled, respondents were pleased and were able to describe a range of personal outcomes including increased confidence, enjoyment and widened social networks. Whilst there was a limited role that ESF could have played in moving some of these beneficiaries toward work, because of their personal circumstances and substantial barriers to work, some who started out with non-work-related intentions, ended up moving into work. However, the potential for ESF to play such an holistic role did not appear to have been grasped by all providers. There were beneficiaries who were initially uninterested in work who might have considered it had their attitudes to work been fully explored or had they had been offered more support in contemplating what work might be like for them.

Carol has suffered with various kinds of mental distress since she had been diagnosed with HIV almost twenty years ago. Prior to participating in ESF, she had started voluntary work at a local community organisation for people with HIV, where she had gradually started interacting with other people. The ESF funded CLAIT course that she undertook, increased this confidence even further and, as a result, Carol started to think about the possibility of finding paid work. She knew that there was potential support available through the course, but did not ask her tutor about this because she did not feel sufficiently confident about her ability to move into work. Carol’s lack of confidence continued to pose a barrier to work after her ESF course. She has picked up a number of applications for both paid and voluntary work but is worried about completing application forms and having to do interviews. She is also concerned about having to declare her condition to prospective employers. Consequently, she has not submitted any of these applications. Despite this, she declared at the time of interview that she ‘daydream[ed] about going back to work’.

(Female, 49, returner with long-term health problem and disability)

Even where individuals had positive experiences of the courses themselves, this could be undermined where the outputs from courses did not match the beneficiary’s needs and help them in the way they had hoped. Work-orientated beneficiaries, in particular, were disappointed when ESF did not meet their needs in this respect.
Just prior to being made redundant, Bill, 45, was in an industrial accident. At the time of his redundancy, he had been transferred onto light duties because he was no longer able to perform his old role. When he was made redundant, Bill decided to look for a different types of work, and accessed an ESF-funded course through his old employer, which trained him to transport chemicals. In order to do this, though, he also needed an HGV licence, and, subsequently, went on a course to get one. Unfortunately, he failed this course, possibly as a result of his dyslexia. He could not work without the HGV licence, so he undertook a second ESF-part-funded course, accessed through the jobcentre which he hoped would lead to a forklift licence. Having completed this course, he found that the qualification was not valid. Bill was anxious to return to work so that he could support his family, and said that his experiences had left him anxious and very depressed.

(Male, 45, with long-term health problem and disability)

Where courses were not experienced as being relevant by inactive individuals, they sometimes chose to address this issue by signing up to replacement courses (as discussed earlier). Alternatively, lack of relevance could result in frustration and disillusion. Here, beneficiaries’ attitudes and behaviour to work remained the same, and beneficiaries did not move any closer to the labour market, unless they received support from elsewhere or were able to draw on their own personal resources to help find work.

There are, then, different outcomes of participation in ESF, driven not only by the course itself, but the ability of the training provided to shift inherent work orientations. The next, and final, chapter draws together some of the key issues relating to inactive beneficiaries and considers the salient policy implications.
5 Conclusion

This chapter aims to summarise the main findings of the study and draw out the key implications for policy surrounding the ‘economically inactive’ (and not in education and training), as well as for ESF more generally.

5.1 The nature of inactivity

The main aim of this study was to explore experiences of ESF training amongst the ‘economically inactive’. This group of beneficiaries of ESF is of particular interest because they are, arguably, further away from the labour market than other beneficiaries of the programme – such as those registered unemployed and those in education and training. The evidence presented by the various strands of survey and qualitative research with ESF leavers supports this dedicated attention to the circumstances of inactive beneficiaries. They are indeed a group of people with specific, and different, needs to the majority of ESF beneficiaries. The survey research, in particular, has shown that inactive beneficiaries have slightly different demographic characteristics – more likely to be women and older – and more inclined to suffer from labour market disadvantage than other beneficiaries, sometimes significantly so.

The term ‘inactive beneficiary’ is a useful construction used by policy makers and researchers to group together a whole range of people who are distant from the labour market. Recognising that such a group of people exists, and that they share a common set of difficulties, is important. However, it is equally vital that we do not lose sight of the myriad of different circumstances and experiences that make up this group. It comprises lone parents, disabled people, people with chronic illness, carers and women (usually mothers) who have been out of the labour market for significant lengths of time. While they do, indeed, have a certain type of shared experience, any policy that aims to enable and support these people must recognise that they are as different from one another as they are from people in work.

Equally, it is clear that the ‘economically inactive’ are not all distant from the labour market. The qualitative research has shown that amongst this group of beneficiaries there are different levels of activity, in life generally, but also in relation to work.
‘Inactive’ beneficiaries form a broad church of people from those who feel that work is not a consideration at all to those who are very highly work-motivated and want to make that transition as quickly and as smoothly as possible. This means that what they need from training and support will differ enormously and supports the sort of innovative and specific collection of delivery models that make up ESF Objective 3 provision.

5.2 ESF delivery and beneficiary experience

This multiplicity of experience and outlook does undoubtedly present challenges for ESF. Unlike other UK programmes that aim to tackle disadvantage – like New Deal for Lone Parents or New Deal for Disabled People – ESF is not focused on dealing with a specific experience or set of barriers. Therefore, providers face the difficulty of needing to be all things to all people, and fulfilling many needs at once. What someone who is work orientated will want from ESF is very different from someone who feels that they will never work.

The first way in which this challenge manifests itself is in attracting inactive beneficiaries to programmes in the first place. The characteristics of inactive beneficiaries included in the research, and the routes by which they enter into training, suggest that ESF provision is broadly targeting the right people and in the most effective ways. However, there is also evidence to suggest that the programmes are attracting people who are retired from the labour market, whose sole motivation for participation is for social or personal reasons. While the training is clearly valued by these people, and contributes positively to their lives, it is questionable whether a programme that aims to support employability should have participants who clearly place themselves outside the labour force. The issue of targeting is a difficult one because it is also clear that a stronger emphasis on work might put off others who feel that they are too distant from the labour market.

The second way is in the nature of the training provided. Programmes need to be sufficiently diverse in their offerings to cater for the varied needs and aspirations of the economically inactive. Again, it seems from the evidence collected that the offer is broadly right because there is training available which suits the more, or less, work-orientated beneficiary. ESF training provided by organisations or agencies delivering employment-related services tended to focus on the provision of specific vocational skills or entry to employment. These attract individuals for whom work is a more immediate priority. Training delivered by community or voluntary organisations caters for a wide range of work orientations.

However, while the offer is broadly right, there is an issue about the channelling of beneficiaries to the right kind of training. We know that inactive beneficiaries approach the programme with diverse work orientations. Where the course embarked upon chimes with their overall objectives, this can be the basis for successful outcomes for that individual. Alternatively, where there is a mismatch between the work orientation of the person and the focus of the course, this can
cause difficulty and dissatisfaction. It may be that the recruitment and initial assessment of inactive beneficiaries needs more attention and that some providers could be better at unearthing beneficiaries’ true motivation for participation in the programme. Again, this is quite a difficult challenge because some beneficiaries clearly have latent motivations about work, even though they may appear at the outset not to have any interest in moving into, or towards, employment.

The way in which the courses are delivered is important in enhancing the participation of inactive beneficiaries. This research has highlighted a plethora of issues that facilitate participation. Key factors underpinning this include: clarity about the purpose and content of the training; flexibility about when and how beneficiaries can attend and around the pace of the training; and low or limited financial burden upon beneficiaries. The environment of the training is also important, in many ways. It needs to be accessible and comfortable to fully involve disabled people and those with chronic or long-term health conditions. In a more general sense, the context of the training needs to be inviting and non-threatening. Training is an unfamiliar activity for many inactive beneficiaries. Provision in community settings was clearly effective in maximising participation amongst the most isolated and hard to reach individuals. In addition, the ability for friends or family – who may not themselves be economically inactive – to participate in training, helped facilitate the participation of the most unconfident.

5.3 What does ESF contribute?

This research suggests that ESF training produces a range of outcomes for inactive beneficiaries. A substantial portion of these enhance employability. Improved skills, attainment of qualifications, better job search and interview skills, enhanced communication and presentation skills were all reported by inactive beneficiaries. Access to further training and education, a potential stepping stone to work, was also a key outcome. The more personal or ‘softer’ outcomes of participation in ESF should not be underestimated either. These are crucial outcomes for inactive beneficiaries and took the form of increased confidence and self-esteem, a renewed sense of achievement, and broader aspirations. Reduced isolation and increased social interaction were also key effects of the programme. These sorts of outcomes were important for all inactive beneficiaries but were, perhaps, more poignant amongst those furthest away from the labour market. The extent of personal development amongst these kinds of inactive beneficiaries as a result of ESF was striking. The range of outcomes highlighted by this research suggest that ESF Objective 3 programmes are contributing to the priorities outlined in the National Action Plan for England and Wales, by supporting employability and human resource development, alongside other training and employment initiatives.

An important consideration for policy makers is to what extent this array of outcomes translates into actual work. The statistical evidence has shown that a sizeable proportion (32 per cent) found work in the two years after participation. The qualitative research also demonstrates that in addition to those who actually
found work, there is a broader set of inactive beneficiaries who moved closer to
work as a result of their participation – either by further participation in education or
training or through a fundamental shift in their attitudes to work. Nevertheless, the
survey evidence also tells us that ESF has the least effect on inactive beneficiaries
(only 32 per cent of inactive beneficiaries have moved into work as opposed to 61
per cent of all beneficiaries). The qualitative research has shown that while ESF can
assist the more work-orientated in their journey towards work, it has a lesser effect
on those for whom work is not an option or not a consideration prior to their
participation in the training.

It is important to understand the reasons for this differential effect – not just for ESF
but for any programme that aims to improve the circumstances and outlook of
disadvantaged groups. Two issues are critical: First, the important role played by
individually tailored support, such as the development of a Personal Development
Plan, in helping to maximise the effectiveness of ESF is underscored by this research.
Where needs were recognised, understood and acted upon, this undoubtedly led to
a more satisfied training participant and a more useful set of outcomes. In situations
where such individual attention was apparently absent, important individual needs
went unnoticed and this ultimately meant that they were not addressed sufficiently.
It is clear from the experiences of inactive beneficiaries who felt that their needs were
not addressed, that they did not feel their full potential was uncovered during their
time on ESF. This sort of attention is required more by those further away from the
labour market – those for whom work is neither an option nor a consideration and
may explain why they fare less well than their more work-orientated counterparts.

Second, the evidence provided by the qualitative research suggests that the nature
of some inactive beneficiaries circumstances make movement towards work
inherently more problematic. Even those who successfully moved into work rarely
did so directly, typically spending time in education and training or voluntary work
on route. The barriers faced by some inactive beneficiaries make work unlikely or
improbable without additional support – support that is outside the scope of ESF
provision. The situation of disabled people and those with long-term health
conditions is one example of this. Whilst there were movements into work amongst
these sorts of beneficiaries, others were prevented from doing so not because the
training was ineffective but because of a whole variety of other reasons – such as an
inaccessible work environment, a fear of discrimination and so forth. Even those
who moved into work faced these difficulties in the workplace and this either made
work life difficult or jeopardised its security.

Nevertheless, while ESF cannot hope to tackle these sorts of issues single-handedly
where it has worked well its providers appear to be rooted within a wider array of
support that individuals can tap into to address these sorts of issues. In the case of
disabled people, for example, access to additional support in the form of Disability
Employment Advisers through Jobcentre Plus or to specialist voluntary sector
provision helped some individuals move closer to securing employment or, at the
very least, increased their awareness of active alternatives outside of paid work. It
would seem that this sort of ‘joined up’ provision is not universal, however, and
where it is not, key barriers and needs are left unaddressed. It is, therefore,
important that to be at their most effective, programmes such as ESF need to ensure
that they are knitted closely into the fabric of local provision for inactive beneficiaries.
Appendix A
Fieldwork documents
Research objectives

- Map the distance travelled towards work by different types of inactive beneficiaries
- Explain the different factors contributing to the attainment of various outcomes (work, training etc.)
- Understand the role played by ESF training in achieving these (or bringing people closer to them)
- Explore the factors contributing to the sustainability of outcomes for this group of ESF beneficiaries
- Explore reasons for lack of change in circumstances, attitudes and behaviour, where applicable

Timescales

It is useful to know that individuals will have:

- Finished the ESF course between June and November 2002
- Taken part in a MORI survey between April and June of 2003
- Taken part in the NatCen survey between May and August of 2004

1. Introduction

Aim: to introduce the research and set the context for the proceeding discussion

- Introduce self, NatCen
- Introduce research: briefly reiterate that this interview is a follow-up to an interview they participated recently regarding their participating in ESF training, their personal circumstances, work and education, what they are doing now
- Sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), who are responsible for administering ESF in England, Scotland and Wales
- Explain that the interview may cover some of the same topics as those covered in the 2004 survey, but that the depth interview will give them an opportunity to describe their experience in more depth and ‘in their own words’
• Explain that you will be ‘taking the respondent ‘on a journey’, asking them to think back to the period before they undertook the training and then following through to their present position

• Reassure re: confidentiality, tape recording, interview length, reporting

• Any questions?

2. Respondent introduction and background

| Aim: to allow respondent to introduce themselves and ensure they feel at ease with the interview context |

Confirm personal details (please check against survey information/screening proforma) **Please check for any changes since 2004 survey - outlined on summary sheet**

• age

• household members (who is in the household, their current activities, relationships to, and responsibilities for, each other). Explore intensity of caring responsibilities.

• tenure

• sources of income (prior to, and since attending ESF course)

• current activities - work, training, other. Collect details of current activities and cross-reference with section 7

Personal circumstances (depth):

• health (impact on ability to work)

Timeline:

• Explain that you would like to collect brief details (including dates) of all training/employment and other key events undertaken from the period just before ESF training to present day, and that you will then be asking about these things in more depth as the interview continues

**Confirm ESF training undertaken and establish the language used by the respondent to describe it. Use this language for the duration**

3. Summary of work history and barriers to work prior to ESF training

| Aim: to determine the respondent’s attitude to, and experience of work prior to taking part in the ESF training and explore the respondent’s perceptions about the barriers to work that they face |

• Work history
  - whether they have worked
  - length of time out of work (if they have worked before)
  - if they have worked, what have they done
  - overview of patterns of working
• Last job held: explore:
  - type(s) of job(s)
  - different employment area(s)/career paths
  - length of time in job(s)
  - main responsibilities/activities
  - hours, f/t vs. p/t
  - location
  - pay – level, frequency, variations in level (e.g. overtime, bonuses, etc.)
  - route to securing
  - satisfaction
  - nature of any progression/promotion
  - reasons for leaving

• For periods out of work (NB: focus on last five years)
  - when periods out of work occurred
  - length of time
  - reasons
  - plans for working/not working (during these periods)
  - steps taken to move back into work
  - activities during period(s) not working

• Explore any barriers to work prior to ESF
  NB: Please explore both barriers to work (i.e. objective barriers) and work constraints (e.g. work preferences, choices), and explore differences between these two issues

Prompt:
  - right training, qualification or skills
  - reading, writing, maths
  - age
  - availability of jobs locally (willingness to travel)
  - work experience/lack of
  - childcare (appropriateness, availability, cost)
  - health/disability (probe as to impact on ability to work)
- transport/ cost of transport
- understanding/ use of English
- preference for part-time work
- other

• Attitudes to work prior to ESF training
  - attitude to work prior to the ESF training
  - any short/ medium or long-term plans in relation to the labour market
  - if work was an option, under what timescales and circumstances

4. Summary of training undertaken prior to ESF training

Aim: to identify any experiences of having attended training prior to ESF

• Training/ education
  - type of training/ education
  - qualification/ accreditation attached
  - reasons for choice/ why began training
  - relationship between this, and other courses undertaken previously or subsequently
  - length of course
  - relevance
  - enjoyment
  - completion/ non-completion
  - perceived impact of course
  - how course relates to ESF (or not)

5. ESF Training (PRIORITY SECTION)

Aim: to explore the experience of the ESF training and determine its impact

• Accessing training
  - how they found out about training
  - how the training was presented/ marketed
  - accessibility of training (e.g. how they felt about the venue)
  - importance of course being free of cost
  - confidence about attending the training (any reservations?)
- triggers for attending/ any decision making process involved
- why began training (probe: to gain skills, up-skill, re-skill, move into different sector/ type of work)
- circumstances at time of training
- expectations of the training

**Nature of training undertaken**
- name of provider
- type of provider/ nature of provider
- aims of the training
- broad type of training undertaken
- what actually done on the course
- length of course
- content of course
- mode of delivery
- how felt about tutors and other individuals offering support in relation to the course
- advice and support received as part of the training
- relevance of the course (probe: content, focus, fit with needs and aspirations)
- completion of Personal Training Plan/ tailoring course content
- enjoyment (probe in relation to different aspects of course)
- completion/ non-completion
- accreditation received/ importance of this
- whether course met their needs

**Addressing barriers to work**
- barriers tackled by the training
- barriers not addressed by training
- type of support/ training or qualifications still required to address barriers

**Short-term impact of the ESF training**
- fit with expectations of the training
- hard skills (Literacy/ numeracy, job search skills)
- soft skills (Communication, team work, time management)
- qualifications
- work experience
- psychological aspects (e.g. confidence)
- plans and aspirations

6. **Training and support received since ESF training has ended**

Aim: to determine if, how, and why, the respondents’ personal circumstances and relationship to the labour market have changed since ESF training completed. Also to explore what other training and support the respondent may have participated in.

- **Participation in any other work-related training/ provision**
  - type of training
  - how accessed/ triggers for participation
  - qualification/ accreditation attached
  - reasons for choice/ why began training (probe: to gain skills, up-skill, re-skill, move into different sector/ type of work)
  - length of course
  - content of course
  - expectations of course
  - enjoyment (probe in relation to different aspects of course)
  - completion/ non- completion

- **Any other support received since ESF**
  - Formal, e.g. employment programmes
  - Informal, e.g. familial
  - type of support
  - relevance
  - impact

- **If/ where fits in with ESF training received (THIS IS KEY)**
  - How this support fits in with ESF training (or not)
  - whether possible to compare it to ESF training (similar, different)
  - whether training viewed as extension or replacement to ESF training (for what reason)
  - what it provided that ESF didn’t (if anything)
7. Relationship to the labour market since start/completion of ESF training
(PRIORITY SECTION)

Aim: to explore changes to the respondent’s circumstances-in particular their relationship with the labour market-since they completed the ESF training. Identify what influence, if any, ESF has had on this.

- Job searches undertaken since ESF training (if any)
  - type of work sought
  - job search strategy
  - intensity
  - attendance at interviews
  - experience at interviews
  - job applications- who suggested
  - ESF contacts- use of, reasons

- Explore for all jobs held (if any)
  - how they found the job (compare against previous experience of looking for work)
  - type of work
  - position/ role
  - work conditions (hours worked, type of contract)
  - reasons for choice/ how moved into this job
  - length of time in work
  - feelings about the job
  - fit with career
  - impact on financial situation
  - fit with other responsibilities
  - sustainability
  - if have moved out of work, why

- Participation in other work-related activity undertaken
  - volunteering
  - other
• **Relationship to the labour market**
  - short/medium plan
  - long-term plan
  - on-going barriers to work (prompt: household and personal circumstances, financial barriers)
  - distance travelled, reasons

  ➢ *If there has been no/limited change to the respondent’s circumstances, attitudes and behaviour:*
  - comparison with expectations of the programme (as identified earlier)
  - contribution of training to their live generally
  - contribution of training to addressing barriers to work
  - feelings about current circumstances
  - whether there is a desire for change
  - possible facilitators of change (is there anything else training could provide)

### 8. Impact of the ESF training on future plans (PRIORITY SECTION)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim: to explore the relative importance of ESF training on the respondent’s attitudes and behaviour in relation to the labour market, as opposed to other factors, e.g. change of circumstances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **Impact of ESF training on relationship to labour market**
  - on decisions to undertake training/move into work
  - on medium-longer term plans/aspirations in relation to work and more widely
  - other triggers
  - relative value/utility of ESF training

- **Other impacts of ESF training (to selves, household)**
  - personal/soft skills (e.g. confidence building, self esteem, language/numeracy/literacy),
  - relationships and other people’s views of distance travelled by respondent
  - financial
  - health
  - other
• **Sustainability of outcomes**
  - whether labour market position likely to change (whether in work/not in work)
  - factors/ circumstances supporting or inhibiting change
  - employability compared to previously

• **Other future plans/ aspirations in relation to the labour market**
  - short, medium and long-term plans
  - relative impact of ESF training

9. **Reflections**

| Aim: to round off discussions, ensure coverage of all topics relevant to respondent and to gain respondent’s suggestions for improvements to ESF and other work-related training |

• **Overall feelings about ESF training and any other training/ support received**
  - relevance to selves/ others
  - enjoyment

• **What other training/ support they would have liked**
  - what difference would it have made to them

• **Messages back to ESF/ DWP**

• **Anything else respondent wants to mention**
  
  Thank respondent and close
  
  Give incentive payment
Appendix B
Recruitment documents
Dear «TITLE» «SURNAME»

Thank you for taking part in our recent telephone survey on training courses paid for by the European Social Fund (ESF), which has been commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions. The information you provided has been very helpful. At that time, you kindly agreed to take part in any follow-up studies that were carried out. I am writing to let you know that we have now started such a study and are planning to carry out interviews over the next month.

The aim of the follow-up study is to find out more about people’s experiences of ESF training courses, and give them the chance to describe these experiences in their own words. One of our interviewers may be in touch with you over the next week or so to check that you are still happy to take part and arrange a suitable time for the interview. Unfortunately, we will not be able to interview everyone – if we do not contact you, thank you very much again for your earlier help.

Everyone who takes part in our follow-up study will be given £20 as a small token of thanks for their help. This interview will be slightly different from the one you have already completed and will last about an hour and a half, and will take place in your home (or somewhere else if you prefer). The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is an independent research institute and, as with the previous survey, everything that you say is treated confidentially.

If you have any questions, please call me at the NatCen on 020 7549 9548. Also, please let us know if there is anything that we can do to make it easier for you to take part.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Taylor
Senior Researcher
Qualitative Research Unit
Hello, my name is....
I work on behalf of the National Centre for Social Research, an independent social research institute which carries out research in a wide range of areas including health, crime, employment, education and politics. You should have received a letter us saying that we might contact you.

You may recall having recently taken part in a survey about your experience of taking part in training paid for by the European Social Fund (ESF). The information you provided has been very helpful. At that time, you kindly agreed to contacted about any follow-up studies that were carried out. The aim of the follow-up study is to find out more about people's experiences of ESF training courses, and to give them the opportunity to talk about their experiences in their own words. For this research, we would come and visit you in your home, or elsewhere if you preferred. We will be giving all interviews a £20 gift for their time.

Would you be willing to answer a few questions about this?

PLEASE TURN OVER

1. Can I just check I am speaking to ....
RECRUITER ENSURE THAT YOU ARE TALKING TO THE PERSON NAMED ON THE SAMPLE LIST. WE DO NOT WANT TO TALK TO ANYONE ELSE.

2. IF RESPONDENT IS A CARER, PLEASE ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTION
We understand that you have caring responsibilities that limit your daily activities or the work that you can do. Would you say that your main caring activities are for:

- Children 1
- One or more children with special needs 2
- Adult family members 3
- Friends 4
- Neighbours 5
- Others (please ask who) 6

PLEASE RECRUIT ONLY THOSE WHO FALL INTO CATEGORIES 2-6 ONLY

3. How many hours would you say spend caring per week?

- 1-15 hours 1
- 15-20 hours 2
- 20-30 hours 3
15-20 hours 2
20-30 hours 3
30+ hours 4

PLEASE RECRUIT ONLY THOSE WHO FALL INTO CATEGORIES 2-4

4. When we spoke to you in [insert approx date of survey] you were (insert relevant description). Have your circumstances changed since then?

   If Yes, how.
   No

5. If in work: What is your current occupation/job? Please indicate ____________________

   NOW CHECK THE QUOTA SHEET
   AND RECORD OUTCOME

   OUTCOME OF SCREENING INTERVIEW

   Not in quota
   Refusal (ENTER REASON)__________________________
   Recruited for interview

   1 END
   2
   3 GO TO Q9

6. Is there anything we can do to make it easier for you to take part?

   RECORD REQUIREMENT______________________________

7. May we take your telephone number so that we can call to check that you are still available on the day our interviewers are in your area?

   FILL IN INTERVIEW DETAILS ARRANGED (note do not insert address here)

   DATE_____________________
   TIME_____________________
   PLACE_____________________