

Foundation Learning National Evaluation

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This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

- In October 2010, ekosgen and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake a national evaluation of Foundation Learning (FL). The main elements of the evaluation have taken place over a five month period from November 2010, with final reporting completed in April 2011.
- This is the final report from the evaluation. It draws upon all elements of the primary and secondary research undertaken since October 2010 and takes note of the findings of the Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report, published in March 2011.

Objectives and Approach

- The main objectives of the evaluation have been to review the delivery and implementation of FL to date and to assess its impact. Within these objectives, the evaluation was tasked with understanding how FL is being implemented locally, providing an assessment of views of FL amongst learners, practitioners and employers, and gathering evidence on the outcomes for young people undertaking FL.
- The evaluation has been based upon a combination of primary and secondary research, including surveys, case studies and analysis of national educational datasets. The main activities have included:
 - a telephone survey of FL leads in 149 local authorities (LAs) across England;
 - a review of international evidence on the approaches adopted in other countries that have provision comparable with FL;
 - an online survey of pre-16 and post-16 providers delivering FL in 2010/11 (292 responses¹);
 - consultations with ten employers and feedback (written and face-to-face) from 15 parents/carers of FL learners;
 - fourteen LA based FL case studies, selected on the basis of FL delivery experience (with the sample weighted towards those who had been delivering FL for at least one academic year to help ensure comprehensive findings) and geographic spread;
 - statistical analysis of the characteristics, attainment and progression of learners on FL programmes, compared with control groups of similar learners.

¹ Response rates are unknown as the web link to the survey was sent to providers by FL leads within local authorities and not by the evaluation team.

Foundation Learning

- Foundation Learning as a curriculum and learning programme has been developed to help raise participation and attainment among 14-19 year olds (and 19-24 year olds with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)) working predominantly below Level 2. It is intended to provide greater opportunities for progression through the development and delivery of personalised learning programmes that help learners to work towards intended destinations². Following trial and developmental delivery phases in 2007/08 and 2008/09, FL was piloted in 2009/10 in 22 LAs and with approximately 20,000 14-19 learners³. Alongside this was a phased implementation process involving 180 post-16 providers nationally.
- FL programmes are defined as having the following characteristics:
 - provision for 14-19 year olds (and/or 19-24 learners with LDD) working predominantly below Level 2;
 - combining subject/vocational learning, functional skills (maths, English, ICT⁴) and Personal and Social Development (PSD). The weighting of these combinations is dependent on learner need;
 - featuring provision that is accredited wherever possible and qualifications (other than functional skills) that are mainly, but not necessarily exclusively, drawn from the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF);
 - learners follow a personalised programme towards a specific intended destination (e.g. Further Education (FE), employment with training or Apprenticeships) with ongoing reviews of progress.

International Evidence on Provision Equivalent to FL

- The international evidence review identified the following countries where it was possible to scope FL equivalent provision and compare it with England: Scotland, Republic of Ireland, Malta, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.
- Searches were conducted of the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Framework Archive and Eurydice networks and where appropriate key informants in the identified countries were contacted to clarify and validate the information collected. Literature searches were also conducted from a range of databases and internet subject gateways.

² Adapted from the evaluation brief, Department for Education (October 2010)

³ In addition to the formal pilot, a further 11 authorities formed an 'extended network' in 2009/10 and were also given access to the FL support programme delivered by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. LAs in the extended network were also given the opportunity to visit (and buddy with) an LA in the pilot.

⁴ Information and Communications Technology

- The review of international evidence aimed to scope provision similar or equivalent to FL in other countries, identify evidence of the impact of such provision and explore any examples of innovative practice. Sources have included the Australian Education Index, the British Education Index, Education Resources Information Centre and the websites of relevant organisations such as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Department for Education, Young People’s Learning Agency, Skills Funding Agency and the Excellence Gateway.
- The main finding is that there is limited evidence of learning programmes equivalent to FL as a core component of education and training systems in other countries. While there is some provision internationally equivalent to Level 1 (for example in Australia and New Zealand), there is less evidence of Entry Level equivalent qualifications, in particular at Entry Levels 1 and 2. Furthermore, some countries in Europe (such as Belgium) have rejected the need to include qualifications at this level.
- Early school leaving is nonetheless a concern across Europe and although the rate is falling, it varies markedly across countries. While eight European countries are below the 10% target level set by the European Council⁵ (ranging from 4.9% in Slovakia to 9.9% in Finland), the highest levels are in Spain, Portugal (31.2% in each case) and Malta (36.8%). The equivalent rate for the UK as a whole is 15.7%.
- It is relatively rare in Europe for accredited provision to be made available for learners who leave school without achieving the necessary standards linked to the final year of compulsory education. The practice of repeating whole academic years is more common, especially in Germany, Austria, Belgium and France.
- Australia, New Zealand and (to a lesser extent) South Africa have provision at either Entry or Level 1 that is similar to FL, as it incorporates a vocational element and functional or basic skills components. Evidence on the impact of such provision reveals a mixed picture – whilst in New Zealand completion rates on FL-equivalent programmes are relatively low (below 50%), there is nonetheless a link between completion and positive outcomes, including further study or employment. State level activity in Australia (namely the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) appears to be having a positive effect on progression, although in South Africa there is less evidence of any such link.

Participation in Foundation Learning

- An estimated 84,000 pre-16 learners are participating in FL in 2010/11, although this is based on a considerable degree of approximation as it is calculated by applying the average learner numbers from the 86 LAs who were able to provide them to the other 65 LAs who were not. The estimated number of post-16 learners is around 56,500, although this figure was calculated the same way as the pre-16 figure and therefore the same caution applies. The characteristics of both cohorts appear to be similar to those of FL learners in previous years.

⁵ The target is to reduce the average number of early school leavers to below 10% by 2020 (the 2009 average for European Union countries figure was 14%).

- The vast majority of providers are targeting FL at learners who have a statement of special educational need or LDD, are recognised for school action or school action plus, or who were previously not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming so.
- A broad range of approaches is in use for identifying potential FL learners, including achievement records, in-house diagnostics, referrals from Connexions (and other agencies) and staff knowledge and opinion on learner need.
- FL provision is now considered by the majority of pre-16 and post-16 providers to be appropriate for its target learners. Private training providers are the least likely to report this, but their concerns focus mainly on the issues of funding (in particular the qualification based nature of FL funding) and assessment (where the appropriateness of the formal assessment of functional skills qualifications has been questioned) rather than on the specific content of QCF units and qualifications. More broadly, the ability to build and tailor FL programmes using what is generally seen to be an appropriate range of units and qualifications, is encouraging many providers to widen their FL offer.
- Factors having a negative impact on provider, and therefore learner participation in FL, include the cessation of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and cuts to the Connexions service. Uncertainty over the policy implications of the Wolf Report is in some cases causing expansion plans for 2011/12 to be put on hold.

Foundation Learning Delivery in 2010/11

- FL remains a strategic priority for the majority of LAs and providers. On average, post-16 providers appear to attaching a slightly higher priority to FL than their pre-16 counterparts, although the difference is not large. Average pre-16 priority ratings have fallen slightly over the past 12 months, due largely to the delivery of FL having become more embedded and its structure, content and format becoming better understood.
- Most providers delivering FL are doing so through 'full' programmes comprising vocational, PSD and functional skills qualifications. Most are also doing so using units and qualifications drawn largely from the QCF.
- In most providers, learners have some choice over their vocational area but due to practicalities/logistics, cannot choose the specific qualifications and units that they study. It is far more common for the levels of units and qualifications within groups to vary depending on learner ability, and for ongoing and personalised support to be offered to FL learners.
- There has been an increase in collaborative activity between providers – more than two thirds of providers now report that they are delivering FL in partnership. A strong message emerging from the evaluation is that partnership working underpins many of the most important benefits that FL generates, especially for pre-16 learners. Exposing pre-16 learners to new environments (including colleges and training providers) and introducing them to different workplaces and codes of conduct, for example, are seen to be integral to the development of their self-confidence, aspirations and independence, and all rely upon multi-partner delivery of FL programmes.

- Employer involvement in FL is growing although in most cases is still reported as being limited. Providing work experience or tasters for FL learners continues to be by far the most common form of employer involvement, although in some cases employers have also supported learners with specific qualifications or strands of work. Successful and ongoing employer engagement in FL is often achieved through the diligence and persistence of committed members of staff within providers.

Perceived Benefits of Foundation Learning

- The provider survey and case studies suggest that FL is leading to the needs of learners below Level 2 being better highlighted and understood. In part this is due to the infrastructural developments associated with FL, e.g. the QCF, and in part to the renewed or increased focus being given to provision below Level 2 amongst provider senior management and through curriculum planning as a result of FL.
- While most FL learners appear to value qualifications, or when asked agreed that qualifications per se are a good thing to have, teaching staff consulted through the case studies are less unanimous. Although not mutually exclusive, some stressed the importance of qualifications in helping FL learners to progress to positive destinations, while others attach less value to the qualifications and feel that the skills, and especially interpersonal and life skills, gained through FL will prove to be much more beneficial.
- Learners report enjoying FL more than they do (or did) mainstream schooling or their previous experience of other post-compulsory education. There are many anecdotal reports of improved learner engagement, motivation, behaviour and confidence as a direct benefit of FL and evidence that the practical application of skills is promoting a greater sense of independence amongst learners.
- Ten employers were consulted for the evaluation and are generally very positive about the attributes of FL learners and focused their feedback much more on their ability to perform tasks and interact with members of staff than on the value of their qualifications.

Current Challenges

- Whilst the visibility and profile of FL and its learners is growing, issues of perception and reputation remain, with staff in some providers unwilling to engage and parents reportedly (based on evidence obtained from providers through the case studies) expressing their preference for their child to do a full suite of GCSEs rather than FL.
- Functional skills continues to be the most challenging element of FL to deliver due to a widespread view that the qualifications are pitched at too high a level and that in some post-16 providers the formal assessments are leading to non-attendance.
- Many providers report ongoing difficulties in engaging employers in their FL programmes, with many post-16 providers concerned that there is no recognised funding for enabling young people to be placed on work experience with an employer unless they complete a

qualification (a situation that is unique to FL). Funding formulae for FL are also seen to be complex and lacking a mechanism for acknowledging partial achievement.

- The above has led to the suggestion that providers might be inclined to select learners for FL programmes that are the most likely to achieve full qualifications, although no reliable evidence of this emerged through other strands of the research.

Measuring Attainment and Progression

- The evidence shows mixed results in terms of the impact of FL on attainment and progression. It is important to note, however, that from a pre-16 perspective, data has only been available for learners that started on FL in 2008/09, since when many providers have refined their FL offer and developed a better appreciation of what works. The findings below should therefore be seen more as a baseline than as a conclusive or summative assessment of the impact of FL.

Pre-16

- The data suggests that completing an FL programme can appear to have a slightly negative effect on learners' chances of achieving a full Level 2 (five GCSEs at grade A*-C or equivalent) or full Level 1 (five GCSEs at grades A*-G) qualification, and on their total GCSE point scores. Specifically, 15% of FL learners achieved a full Level 2 compared with 20% of similar learners, and 51% of FL learners achieved a full Level 1 compared with 56% of similar learners. FL learners achieved an average of 201 points at Key Stage 4 compared with an average of 207 points for non-FL learners.
- This apparently negative impact is most evident for more able learners and those with no special educational needs. However, it is explained to some extent by the fact that the credit values of FL qualifications are lower than for GCSEs, even at grades D-G.
- Completing an FL programme has a positive effect on learners with low levels of prior attainment at Key Stage 3. For these learners, participating in FL increases their odds of achieving a qualification (of any sort) at the end of compulsory schooling. Pre-16 learners attending a special school who completed an FL programme were nearly four times more likely to achieve at least one qualification than similar pupils in special schools, while female learners who took part in FL were significantly more likely to achieve a Level 1 qualification than similar females not involved in the programme.
- The analysis found that participating in FL is not associated with increased odds of continuing in education or training post-16. However, no data was available on progression rates to other positive destinations, including supported employment and independent living, which would provide a more rounded and holistic picture.

Post-16

- Almost half of the post-16 FL learners in 2009/10 completed a full programme, while 79% achieved at least parts of it⁶. Not achieving one or more functional skills (or equivalent) qualifications was often the main reason for not completing a full programme. However, FL learners were still more likely to attain functional skills (or equivalent) qualifications in English and maths than other similar non-FL learners.
- According to the Individualised Learner Record (ILR), 71% of learners on FL continued in learning at the end of 2009/10, while 7% moved onto some form of employment (without training). After controlling for learners' background characteristics, such as prior achievement and LDD, FL learners were significantly more likely to continue in learning than similar non-FL learners. This was particularly the case for those learners who had achieved a full FL programme, who had nearly double the odds of continuing in learning than non-FL learners.

Looking to the Future

- LAs report that the 2011/12 academic year should see a considerable increase in the number of pre-16 providers involved in FL, depending on the outcomes of the Wolf Report. There will also be more or different qualifications and occupational areas being included within the scope of FL, both pre-16 and post-16.
- From a relatively strong starting point in most cases, LAs expect partnership working between providers to increase and become further embedded in 2011/12. In the main, this will be evident in terms of scale (more school and college links, more off-site delivery and in more vocational areas) than in new arrangements or ways of working.
- However, LAs and providers are now seeking clarity on the future of FL and vocational education more widely following the publication of the Wolf Report. There is evidence that some providers are planning to delay further expansion of FL until the policy position is better understood.
- Other factors influencing the future scale and type of FL delivery include funding, employer engagement and the cessation of EMA.

⁶ Note that the expectation is not that all learners will necessarily complete all three of the main elements of a Foundation Learning programme. An assessment of learner need should determine whether all three are appropriate on a case by case basis.

Conclusions

Implementation

- Estimates suggest that there have been significant increases in pre-16 and post-16 FL activity in 2010/11. Far more providers have become involved and the learner offer, in terms of the range of available vocational or subject areas, has become broader. Reflecting this, support for the principles of FL remains strong and it continues to have a high priority in the majority of LAs. Whilst the Wolf Report has caused there be some uncertainty in the sector over FL, there is nonetheless a large cohort of very willing providers and LAs who are committed to making it a success.
- FL in itself is not a new philosophy and in many providers consulted during the evaluation the only significant difference in the delivery infrastructure is in the qualifications that are being undertaken. FL is however acting as an enabler of change for provision below Level 2 and now appears to be delivering on its pledge of allowing providers to deliver more flexible, engaging programmes. Considerable progress has been made over the past 12 months, from a position where the perceived adequacy of FL qualifications was a constraining factor, to one where it is often encouraging and driving participation. Full FL programmes, with most qualifications drawn from the QCF, are now becoming the norm, whilst partnership based delivery and employer involvement is growing.

Benefits and Challenges

- Learners and providers continue to cite a range of benefits arising from FL, including the needs of learners below Level 2 being better highlighted and understood, a sense of reward and achievement through regular accreditation, comparatively high levels of enjoyment, and improved engagement, motivation and confidence. However, FL should not be seen as transformational – whilst there is evidence of it making a tangible difference to learners' lives, it is unrealistic to assume that it will consistently address the most deep-seated challenges (in relation to family background and social mobility, for example) faced by many within the target group.
- Opinions obtained during the evaluation on the value of FL are mixed, although few have suggested that it lies solely within qualifications. In the view of many of the teachers, tutors and managers that have been consulted, PSD-related skills and the attributes needed to progress to positive destinations are at least of equal importance, if not more important, than qualifications at the Entry Levels and Level 1.
- Whilst the visibility and profile of FL and its learners is growing, significant challenges remain. A rising number of private providers are becoming increasingly unhappy about certain aspects of the FL infrastructure, especially funding and funding formulae, the emphasis on qualification achievement and – linked to both of these – the absence of recognised funding for enabling young people to be placed on work experience with an employer unless they complete a qualification (a situation that is unique to FL). In addition, there is still a widespread view that most functional skills qualifications are pitched at too high a level and in some cases the formal assessments are leading to

non-attendance.

Equality and Diversity

- In the vast majority of providers, FL is proactively targeted at learners who have a statement of special educational need or LDD, are recognised for school action or school action plus, or who were previously/at risk of becoming NEET. Whilst from a pre-16 perspective they are significantly more likely to be male than female, they are not being selected on this basis. Selection is based upon them having achieved significantly below the national average at Key Stage 3 and/or having behavioural characteristics that make them suitable for FL.
- FL learners are more likely than learners generally to be of white British origin, but this is also representative of their educational achievement and other background characteristics rather than being a selection criterion in itself.

Attainment and Progression

- From an attainment perspective, FL appears to be most suited to pre-16 learners with low levels of achievement at Key Stage 3 and those with a statement of special educational need. Higher achieving FL learners are less likely to see a positive attainment impact, and on average FL appears to have a slightly negative effect on their chances of achieving a full Level 1 or full Level 2 qualification, and on their total GCSE point scores. However, this is explained to some extent by the fact that the credit values of FL qualifications are lower than for GCSEs, even at grades D-G.
- Post-16 outcomes on FL do not appear to be influenced by learners' prior attainment, although there is evidence of a significant provider effect on learners' chances of completing a full programme. There is also evidence that FL learners are significantly more likely to continue in learning than similar non-FL learners, especially where they have completed a full FL programme.
- These are, however, early findings, as the FL offer in many providers has been refined and improved since the learners under review completed their programme. The evaluation has also not been able to track non-learning outcomes, such as independent living or supported employment.

Recommendations

Given that at the time of writing the government's response to the Wolf Report had not been published, it is difficult to prescribe recommendations for FL. The suggestions below cover both strategic and operational considerations, but deliberately stop short of proposing significant changes or infrastructural developments.

1. **Policy position:** following the publication of the Wolf Report, LAs and providers are now seeking clarity on the future of FL, with some planning to delay further expansion until the policy position is better understood. The sector will appreciate a clear

statement from the DfE as soon as it can be provided.

- 2. Funding:** post-16 providers are calling for a fundamental review of FL funding and it is an issue that in the short term looks set to become more rather than less significant. Arriving at a satisfactory resolution is likely to be directly linked to the ongoing reputation of FL in the sector, especially amongst post-16 training providers, and is therefore important that the dialogue taking place between the DfE, training provider representative bodies and other relevant organisations be continued.
- 3. Longitudinal tracking:** to enable non-learning outcomes (independent living, supported employment etc.) to be tracked – and therefore for the impact of FL to be better understood – any further research or evaluation should include a longitudinal element to capture the experiences of a sample of learners who move into non-learning outcomes following FL. This will give a better and more holistic view of the extent to which FL is (as many providers claim) preparing learners for progression more effectively than equivalent provision in the past.
- 4. The non-deliverers' perspective:** whilst the evaluation has found that FL has a high degree of visibility and importance within providers, it has concentrated on those where delivery is already underway. As part of any subsequent FL related research or evaluation, it is recommended that a cohort of non-delivering providers be included to obtain a more rounded view on sector-wide attitudes to FL and to understand the reasons behind any delays or late starts.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

In October 2010, ekosgen and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) were commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to undertake a national evaluation of Foundation Learning (FL). The main elements of the evaluation have taken place over a five month period from November 2010, with final reporting completed in April 2011.

Rather than adopt a precise definition of FL, recent policy developments⁷ make it more appropriate to define FL programmes as having the following characteristics:

- Provision for 14-19 year olds (and/or 19-24 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)) working predominantly below Level 2;
- Combining subject/vocational learning, functional skills (maths, English, ICT⁸) and Personal and Social Development (PSD). The weighting of these combinations is dependent on learner need;
- Featuring provision that is accredited wherever possible and qualifications (other than functional skills) that are mainly, but not necessarily exclusively, drawn from the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF);
- Learners follow a personalised programme towards a specific intended destination (e.g. Further Education (FE), employment with training or Apprenticeships) with ongoing reviews of progress.

This is the final report from the evaluation. It draws upon all elements of the primary and secondary research undertaken since October 2010 and takes note of the findings of the Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report (hereafter referred to as the Wolf Report), published in March 2011.

1.2 Foundation Learning in Context

Foundation Learning as a curriculum and set of qualifications has been developed to help raise participation and attainment among 14-19 year olds (and 19-24 year olds with LDD) working predominantly below Level 2. It is intended to provide greater opportunities for progression through the development and delivery of personalised learning programmes that help learners to work towards intended destinations⁹. The overarching aims of FL are to¹⁰:

⁷ Such as the acknowledgement that it is currently appropriate for some Foundation Learning programmes to include qualifications from the National Qualifications Framework.

⁸ Information and Communications Technology

⁹ Adapted from the evaluation brief, Department for Education (October 2010)

¹⁰ Adapted from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service 'Quick Guide to Foundation Learning'

- Support improved engagement, participation and progression through Entry Level and Level 1 towards Level 2 or, where appropriate, towards other destinations such as supported employment or independent living;
- Bring coherence to programmes of study at Entry Level and Level 1 to support progression;
- Ensure that learners gain a minimum level and range of skills providing a sound foundation for further learning and employment;
- Support the delivery of quality learning programmes which help to encourage raised aspirations and a culture of lifelong learning.

The Department for Education estimates that FL could be suitable for some 600,000 learners – around one in five of England's 14-19 population¹¹. If successful, it is hoped that FL will motivate and enable more young people, including many who are vulnerable or at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET), to achieve greater economic and social wellbeing.

Following test and trial and developmental delivery phases in 2007/08 and 2008/09, FL was piloted in 2009/10 in 22 local authorities¹² (LAs) and with approximately 20,000 14-19 learners. Alongside this was a phased implementation process involving 180 post-16 providers nationally.

From the start of the 2010/11 academic year, FL has been delivered by a broad range of pre-16 and post-16 providers across England (all LAs are obliged to ensure delivery of some FL provision for 14-19 year olds and 19-24 year olds with high level LDD). It has now formally replaced Entry to Employment and the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, although in many providers the preceding one or two academic years represented a transition period where the aforementioned programmes were run alongside new FL activity.

FL was within the scope of the Wolf Report and in parts was criticised, the main arguments put forward by Professor Wolf being that:

- The qualifications achieved via FL programmes (will) have limited employer appeal;
- FL is cost-ineffective, due to the high(er) proportion of staff time that is spent undertaking assessments, gathering evidence, dealing with paperwork, and liaising with awarding organisations;
- Positive feedback on FL submitted via this evaluation for the review is reflective of pilot sites being almost invariably enthusiastic and early evaluations optimistic;

¹¹ This figure was challenged in the Wolf Report, which suggested it was too high (although the review did not offer an alternative).

¹² In addition to the formal pilot, a further 11 LAs formed an 'extended network' in 2009/10 and were also given access to the FL support programme delivered by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. LAs in the extended network were also given the opportunity to visit (and buddy with) an LA in the pilot.

- Funding for FL places too much emphasis on the achievement of qualifications and can result in learners moving from one qualification-based experience to another without appropriate consideration being given to the underpinning rationale.

The findings from this evaluation concur with some of the above and challenge other aspects of it. Subsequent sections of the report revisit the key points.

Evaluation Objectives

The two main objectives of the evaluation have been to review the delivery and implementation of FL to date and to assess its impact. Within these objectives have been the following aims and areas of interest:

- **Delivery and implementation:**
 - Inform the evolving policy development of FL, including in the context of the Wolf Report and its follow-up;
 - Understand how FL is being implemented at the local level including challenges faced and examples of innovative and effective practice;
 - Provide an assessment of views of FL amongst learners, practitioners and employers;
 - Understand more about the knowledge and skills learners acquire through FL and how qualifications are chosen and used;
 - Provide an assessment of the impact of FL on equality and diversity.
- **Impact:**
 - Provide evidence on the outcomes for young people undertaking FL, examining attainment and destination outcomes, including a comparison of outcomes with other Entry Level and Level 1 programmes;
 - Provide, where possible, evidence that could be used in a value for money assessment of FL (in relation to other Entry Level and Level 1 programmes)¹³.

The above have informed the methodology for the evaluation and the research tools that have been used throughout the assignment.

1.3 Methodology

The evaluation has been based upon a combination of primary and secondary research, including surveys, case studies and analysis of national educational datasets. Table 1.1 summarises the main evaluation activities, alongside which has been ongoing project management, progress reporting and steering group presentations.

¹³ Specifically, measurable changes in attainment and/or progression. For example, see section 6.2.2.

Table 1.1: Evaluation Activities		
Activity	Dates	Details
LA telephone survey	November 2010 – January 2011	A telephone survey with the FL lead in 149 English LAs. The survey explored FL implementation, including the scale and model of delivery, successes and impact, barriers and challenges, and partnership working. It was undertaken by Research Resource who were subcontracted to ekosgen throughout the evaluation. Only two LAs declined the invitation to participate in the survey, findings from which have been used throughout this report but most prominently in Sections Four, Five and Seven.
Review of international literature	November 2010 – March 2011	Synthesis and review of international evidence on the approaches adopted in other countries that have provision comparable with FL. In addition to identifying the scale of such provision, the review has explored evidence of innovative practice and critical success factors, together with impact on learners and employers. The findings from the review are presented in Section Two of the report.
Stakeholder consultation programme	November – December 2010	Twelve strategic stakeholders, with either direct involvement in FL now or experience relating to its development and early implementation, were consulted either by telephone or face-to-face. The consultations focused on issues such as the suitability of FL for a larger scale roll-out and its success at raising the profile of provision for learners operating below Level 2. The points raised by stakeholders have influenced the conclusions and recommendations (Section Eight) of this report.

Table 1.1: Evaluation Activities		
Activity	Dates	Details
Online survey of providers	December 2010 – February 2011	In 40 LAs (selected on the basis of the LA survey responses), pre-16 and post-16 providers delivering FL were asked to complete an online survey covering a range of issues including learner choice and personalisation, the composition of FL programmes, employer engagement, impact and future delivery plans. The survey generated 187 responses from pre-16 responses and 105 from post-16 providers ¹⁴ (a breakdown by provider type is provided in Table 1.2 below). The findings feature in Sections Three, Four, Five and Seven of this report.
Case study programme	February 2011	Fourteen LA based case studies have been undertaken, typically involving pre-16 and post-16 provider visits (including learner focus groups and tutor consultations). Ten employers and 15 parents/carers were also consulted through the case studies. Case study areas were selected on the basis of FL delivery experience (with the sample weighted towards those who had been delivering FL for at least one academic year to help ensure comprehensive findings) and geographic spread. Quotations and examples from the case studies have been included throughout this report.
Statistical analysis of FL activity	February – March 2011	Using a combination of data submitted by providers in 2008/09 and 2009/10, plus excerpts from the National Pupil Database and Individualised Learner Record, the characteristics, attainment and progression of learners on FL programmes has been analysed and compared with control groups of similar pupils. The results of the analysis are presented mainly in Section Six, with learner characteristics covered in Section Three.

¹⁴ Response rates are unknown as the web link to the survey was sent to providers by FL leads within local authorities and not by the evaluation team. This approach was taken because a) LAs have the most complete and up to date knowledge of which providers are delivering FL in their areas; and b) to help endorse the evaluation and remove the risk of issues being raised about unsolicited information requests being sent to providers.

The pre-16 and post-16 provider surveys asked providers to specify their organisation type. Three fifths did go (the remainder skipped the question) and their responses are shown in the table below.

Table 1.2: Provider Type Profile (based on provider survey responses)		
Pre-16	Number	%
Mainstream school	39	37%
Specialist learning needs establishment	24	23%
Private training provider	12	11%
Further Education college	8	8%
Specialist college	6	6%
Charity	6	6%
Pupil Referral Unit	3	3%
LA	2	2%
Other	5	5%
Post-16	Number	%
Further Education college	24	35%
Private training provider	21	31%
Charity	7	10%
Mainstream school	5	7%
Specialist learning needs establishment	4	6%
LA	2	3%
Specialist college	1	2%
Adult residential provider	1	2%
Other	3	4%
Source ekosgen, sample of 105 pre-16 providers and 68 post-16 providers Post-16 responses do not sum to 100% due to rounding		

1.4 Data Techniques and Limitations¹⁵

The analysis of learners' attainment and progression outcomes undertaken for the evaluation has been based upon the statistical techniques of propensity-score matching and multi-level modelling, each of which has been used to isolate the impact of participation in FL programmes on individual learners.

- **Propensity score matching** is a statistical technique through which individuals in the 'treatment group' (in this case FL participants) are matched according to key characteristics with similar individuals in a comparison group. This approach improves the strength of the comparison between groups by minimising the effect of any other differences other than the intervention of interest;
- **Multi-level modelling** is a form of multiple regression that is widely used in educational research where hierarchical data is available (i.e. individuals within institutions within LAs). This technique controls for the effect of variables that are included in the model, for example prior attainment, gender or institution attended, thereby enabling the effect of the intervention to be identified over and above any other such other influential

¹⁵ Further detail can be founded in Appendix C.

factors. It also accounts for the fact that, on average, learners are more alike within an institution than learners from different institutions.

The pre-16 data analysis has been based on the attainment and progression details of a sample 552 learners who, according to data collected by ekosgen, started an FL programme in 2008/09 or in 2009/10, completed in the 2010 summer term, and whose details could be matched to the National Pupil Database (NPD). (Note that the NPD does not currently enable learners on FL programmes to be easily identified, hence the need for primary data collection.) A subsequent matching exercise was undertaken between the NPD and the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) to trace the progression of learners from pre-16 to post-16 settings.

In terms of the limitations of this approach, the analysis could not include any learners on an FL programme whose details were not obtained via the aforementioned ekosgen-led data collection exercise in 2008/09 or 2009/10. During these exercises, pre-16 providers were asked to submit lists of their FL learners and whilst response rates were good in 2008/09 (in excess of 75%) they fell markedly in 2009/10 with many providers who in practice are likely to have had learners on FL learners programmes choosing not to return details¹⁶.

The analysis of post-16 FL learners has been based on ILR data from 2009/10 and 2010/11. The analysis of participation, attainment and destinations of the 2009/10 cohort was limited by the inconsistent use of the FL flag on the ILR¹⁷, resulting in a proxy definition being used to identify FL learners (see Section Six for further details). Whilst this led to a post-16 cohort (for analysis purposes) in 2009/10 of 18,168 learners, there is a strong likelihood that this excluded some learners that were undertaking an FL programme but who had not been entered for qualifications in all three of the main elements at the time of the analysis.

A related limitation is that destination data on the ILR for post-16 learners has only been available for around half of all FL learners.

It is important to bear these limitations in mind when reading Section Six of this report, but it should also be noted that the sample sizes that were available to the evaluation provide a strong degree of statistical confidence in the results.

1.5 Acknowledgements

Thanks are owed to everyone that has supported and participated in the evaluation. Whilst too many to list individually, they include all of the providers and LAs who have completed surveys, hosted case study visits and responded to arising queries and requests for clarification. Particular thanks should go to the Department for Education for their help and support throughout the evaluation. Foundation Learning stakeholders are also thanked for their input.

¹⁶ At the instruction of the (former) Learning and Skills Council, the requests for pre-16 FL learner details in 2009/10 were sent to FL contacts within each of the pilot and extended network local authorities. The contacts were asked to forward the requests to their providers. Whilst some did so, others did not, and returns were only received from 43 providers across ten different LAs. The completeness and quality of the returns was extremely variable.

¹⁷ Field A15 on the Learning Aim Dataset

2 REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

Summary of Key Points

- There is limited evidence of the provision of qualifications equivalent to FL programmes as a core component of education and training systems in other countries.
- While there is some provision internationally equivalent to Level 1 in England, there is less evidence of Entry Level equivalent qualifications, in particular at Entry Levels 1 and 2. Furthermore, some countries in Europe have rejected the need to include qualifications at this level.
- Early school leaving is nevertheless a concern across Europe although progress is being made towards the target to reduce early school leaving to 10% from 14.4% in 2009, and the average rate in Europe has fallen by 3.2 percentage points since 2000. Strategies in European countries to address early leaving include prevention, intervention and compensation.
- Australia and New Zealand have provision at either Entry or Level 1 that is similar to FL, as they incorporate a vocational element and functional or basic skills components.
- The available evidence of the impact of FL equivalent provision in Australia and New Zealand reveals a mixed picture of success in relation to attainment and progression. The key drivers of success appear to be ensuring the content is appropriate, relevant, flexible and appealing, having good quality teaching where teachers engage with learners in a different way from school and taking into consideration the needs and building on the strengths of learners who access this type of provision.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings of a review of the existing international evidence on the approaches adopted by other countries which compare with FL programme provision (including Entry and Level 1 provision). In particular, the review aimed to:

- Scope provision equivalent to FL programme provision in other countries;
- Explore any evidence of innovative practice in delivering Entry/Level 1 learning in other countries;
- Identify any evidence of the impact of such qualifications on employers and learners.

The initial review identified the following countries where it was possible to scope FL equivalent provision and compare it with England:

- Scotland;
- Republic of Ireland;
- Malta;

- Australia;
- New Zealand;
- South Africa.

Searches were conducted of the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Framework Archive¹⁸ (INCA) and Eurydice networks to scope provision in these and other countries. Following this initial scoping, the research team also conducted detailed web searches and contacted key informants in the identified countries in order to clarify and validate the information collected. Detailed summaries of the nature of FL equivalent qualifications (Entry Level and Level 1) in the countries listed above, and England, are provided in Appendix A.

The international scoping study was also used to identify key search terms for the purpose of a literature review to identify any evidence of innovation and impact of FL programme-like provision in other countries (see Appendix B).

Literature searches have been conducted from a range of relevant databases and internet subject gateways, including the Australian Education Index, the British Education Index, Education Resources Information Centre and websites of relevant organisations such as the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Department for Education, Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and the Excellence Gateway.

Agreed search parameters for the review were:

- **Age range:** 14-19 and up to 25 for young people with LDD;
- **Date:** focus on literature from 2003 onwards (following national roll-out of Entry to Employment);
- **International focus:** English and German-language literature from countries identified in the international scoping review.

2.2 Findings from International Policy Scope

The review suggests that there is limited availability of Entry Level qualifications in other countries – although the actual situation is obscured by a lack of evidence on the equivalence of such qualifications across countries both at a European and, even more so, at an international level.

The development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) from 2004 onwards was meant to foster such comparison (Cedefop, 2010a). As documented in a recent report

¹⁸ INCA provides regularly updated descriptions of Government policy on education in Australia, Canada, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the USA and Wales, and makes particular reference to the curriculum, assessment and initial teacher training frameworks in place. INCA is funded by the QCDA and managed by NFER.

(Cedefop, 2010b), the EQF was formally adopted by the European Parliament and Council in 2008 and introduced a timeframe for countries to reference their national qualifications systems to the European meta-framework by the end of 2010 and to indicate the appropriate EQF level for each new qualification they issue by 2012. Referencing refers to *'the process by which a level in a national qualifications framework or system is related to one of the eight EQF levels'* (Clark, C., 2010).

However, at this stage, detailed mapping to comply with this strategy is only available for three countries: the UK, Ireland and Malta. Although an EQF Newsletter in April 2010 (Quintin, O., 2010) suggested that: *'It is expected that some seven further countries will be able to finalise their referencing in 2010, while most of the others will need 2011 to achieve this process.'* (p.3), by March 2011, EQF mapping had not been completed by any additional countries. It could be argued that the UK was further progressed in having already established a qualifications framework within the country which equated qualifications of different types, including 'vocational' and 'academic' qualifications, than was the case in many other countries. Indeed, several countries, such as Germany and Sweden, were, according to the Cedefop (2010b) report, still at the stage of establishing their National Qualifications Framework (NQF) before matching it to the EQF. More meaningful comparisons will be possible once this referencing has been completed.

It is worth noting, however, that the lowest level of the EQF, Level 1, is equivalent to Entry Level 3 of NQF/QCF in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Access 3 in Scotland). Indeed, in France, currently the lowest level (Level 1) of their NQF is broadly equivalent with Level 3 of the EQF (Cedefop, 2010a). This suggests that very few other European countries are expected to offer qualifications at Entry Levels 1 and 2. This is confirmed by Cedefop (2010b), which noted that some other countries, including Belgium (Flanders) and Hungary, had considered introducing Entry Levels into their NQF, but had decided against it. In Belgium, this decision was said to be based on *'a fear that such a level could have a stigmatising effect'* (p.17). Hungary, on the other hand, had considered, but decided against, including Entry Level outcomes to recognise the learning taking place before entering primary school ('kindergarten'). It is worth noting, that even if adopted, such an Entry Level would have been linked to an education stage only, rather than viewed as a qualification level to be achieved by learners regardless of their age.

The international scoping review suggested that such an attitude is common across several European countries with regard to their NQFs. It means that very little or no accredited provision appears to be made available for learners who leave school without achieving the necessary standards/NQF levels linked to the final year of compulsory education. Instead, there is an emphasis in several European countries on learners achieving the necessary level of achievement suited to their education stage or age before progressing to the next level (QCDA, 2010). This is linked with the practice of repeating whole academic years if learners fall short of this level, which is common across many European countries (for example Germany, Austria, Belgium and France).

Overall, this needs to be considered in the context of the UK's overall approach to qualifications and how this differs from Europe. As the Qualification and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) (2010) contended:

'The concept of qualifications in the UK is a rather particular one. In some European countries the term is used to denote a complete set of skills acquired during a phase of education or training (achievement), referring to the instruction and whole experience of that phase as well as to the certificate that results. In the UK, though, the term is generally used rather more narrowly to refer to a certificate attesting to learning or validated attainment' (p.5).

Nevertheless, lower than average levels of achievement are a concern for countries across Europe. As the European Commission (2011) report found, the problem of early leaving from school, defined as those who have only achieved lower secondary education, is a key issue for European countries. This level of achievement broadly equates to the FL target group who are mainly working towards qualifications below Level 2. The report argues that early school leaving is associated with unemployment and an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion which impacts on individuals and on the wider economy and society.

Although the early school leaving rate across Europe has fallen recently by 3.2 percentage points since 2000, it was 14.4% in 2009 and varies markedly across countries. While eight European Countries are below the 10% target level set by the European Council¹⁹ (ranging from 4.9% in Slovakia to 9.9% in Finland), the highest levels are in Spain, Portugal (31.2% in each case) and Malta (36.8%). The equivalent rate for the UK as a whole is 15.7%. In order to address this, the European Commission (2011) emphasises that *'comprehensive policies against early school leaving should focus on prevention, intervention and compensation'* (p.6).

One component of preventative strategies that are identified is *'increasing the permeability of pathways'* (p.6). They cite examples of flexible programmes which incorporate work experience, alongside vocational and general education, in order to provide young people who are motivated by being in employment with an opportunity to work while they learn. Countries across Europe are also responding to the challenge of early school leaving with interventions. Key elements of these include establishing an environment in which young people are inspired to progress and engaging with agencies from outside school, including the local community and specialist agencies, to support young people with complex needs. In addition, personalised learning, additional guidance and mentoring were among the components of intervention strategies in addition to financial support. The third aspect of the strategies to address early school leaving includes compensatory approaches, such as financial support and 'second chance' opportunities to return to mainstream schooling. The second chance opportunities provide an alternative approach to mainstream schooling and *'one success factor is the provision of an individualised, supportive learning environment and a flexible approach tailored to the needs of each young person'* (p.8). However, it was noted that such compensatory approaches were less successful than preventative approaches.

It is evident that aspects of the FL programme reflect the approaches adopted in European Countries to address the issue of young people not achieving at the level that might be expected at the end of compulsory schooling. In particular, this includes the flexible, personalised learning approach and the involvement of employers.

¹⁹ The target is to reduce the average number of early school leavers to below 10% by 2020 (the 2009 average for European Union countries figure was 14%).

Within Europe, only England, Scotland, and Ireland (see Appendix A1, A2 and A3), currently appear to have Entry Level qualifications below Level 1 of the EQF (Entry Levels 1 and 2 in England are below EQF Level 1). As the Cedefop (2010b) report comments, these qualifications *'build on a different philosophy [from that of most other European countries] as they are supposed to assist a wide group of lifelong learners, such as individuals with learning difficulties, drop-outs from formal education and adults lacking formal qualifications'* (p.17-18). Furthermore, as the QCDA (2010) recently argued, following the consultation undertaken to inform the referencing of the UK qualifications frameworks to the EQF, such qualifications *'have particular significance for supporting learners who have basic skills or lack confidence; there is also substantial evidence that providing recognition for achievements at these levels is an encouragement to learners to take further steps on the qualifications ladder'* (p.10).

Iceland appears to be at the early stages of expanding their qualifications framework to include qualifications at this level. This is viewed as signalling *'a wish to develop not only a transparent but also an inclusive framework, able to address the (diverse) education, training and learning needs of the entire population'* (Cedefop, 2010b, p.89).

In South Africa (see Appendix A7), there is provision for Entry Level qualifications targeted at adults, which includes school leavers who did not achieve the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC). These are available at four levels, which appear to be broadly equivalent to Entry Levels 1 to 3 in England.

No Entry Level qualifications were apparent in other countries outside Europe equivalent to Entry Levels 1 and 2 in England, although such an assessment was limited by the lack of any framework like the EQF to establish equivalence.

Further investigation of documentation from the Government and qualifications agencies at the international level suggested that qualifications start either at the equivalent of Entry Level 3 of the UK QCF/NQF (or Level 1 of the EQF), or at the equivalent of Level 1 of the UK QCF/NQF (or Level 2 of the EQF). In New Zealand (see Appendix A6), for example, a programme called Youth Training is designed to target and provide training to school leavers with no or low levels of qualifications. The focus is on learners acquiring a valuable set of foundation skills that will enable them to move effectively into employment or progress to further education or training opportunities. The training leads towards national qualifications which are between Levels 1 and 3 on the New Zealand NQF (Entry Level 3 to Level 2 in England) and is typically full-time with work place learning. The training is free to learners who can also continue to claim benefits. The qualifications must be shown to meet the needs of local employers.

In summary, the evidence from the scoping review has revealed that there is little perceived value internationally of qualifications that are equivalent to the Entry Level component of FL provision in England (particularly Entry Levels 1 and 2), as a core component of their qualifications systems and structures for 14-19 year olds. Moreover, while there are some countries (such as Iceland) that are in the process of developing Entry Level provision, others (such as Belgium) appear to have rejected the need for such provision, although the reasons for this are unclear. This may indicate that England has identified a particular need for the accreditation of learning at this level that other countries either feel that they do not have or

have not yet identified. Alternatively, the aims and structures underpinning provision in the UK are different from those of most other countries and, consequently, require a different type of provision that includes Entry Level qualifications.

In England, it is also possible to gain a Level 1 qualification such as an NVQ, or by achieving grades D-G at GCSE. As GCSEs are the qualifications taken by the majority of young people at the end of compulsory schooling, on the whole, young people would be expected to achieve either at Level 1 (grades D-G) or Level 2 (grades A-C) when they complete school.

The policy review showed that most countries included in the analysis (for example, Australia, Malta and New Zealand) offer some form of equivalent Level 1 qualifications, including end-of-schooling certificates (similar to GCSEs at grades D-G in England) and vocational qualifications (similar to NVQs at Level 1 in England). As such many of these qualifications are not designed specifically for the main target group of FL programmes (including, for example, young people with LDD), but for the general population of school-age learners. As FL provision does not cover provision of GCSEs with the aim of only achieving grades D-G, it was deemed not appropriate to include achievement of end of compulsory schooling certificates in the comparison of FL provision internationally for this review. Moreover, it is worth noting that, as for Entry Level qualifications, there is a lack of evidence of equivalent qualifications in other countries.

However, some countries do provide qualifications that appear to be equivalent to Level 1 in England and aimed at the target group of learners on FL programmes. Australia (see Appendix A5), for example, offer vocational qualifications called Certificate 1s, which aim to prepare candidates to perform a defined range of routine and predictable activities such as basic practical skills, being able to undertake a range of tasks with clear direction and receiving and passing on information. Delivery takes place mainly in vocational education and training institutions, although some schools also issue or give credit towards Certificates at Level 1 and above.

Similarly, New Zealand (see Appendix A6) provides National Certificates at Levels 1 and 2, which appear to be equivalent to Entry Level 3 and Level 1 qualifications in England, delivered by accredited providers and Industry Training Organisations. They include, for example, a National Certificate in Employment Skills (NCES), which provides core skills and attributes to enable learners to successfully undertake employment and additional learning. NCES is awarded to learners who have demonstrated competence in literacy and numeracy, and other personal and technical skills.

In addition to accredited provision at Level 1 and Entry Level, which is the focus of FL, much provision in England for young people who leave school without achieving a Level 1 qualification, or for those with learning difficulties, is non-accredited or 'informal' learning provision (Spielhofer et al., 2009).

The referencing of non-accredited provision to the EQF and other NQFs was found to be at the early stages across Europe. NQFs are seen by many countries as an important instrument to strengthen and better integrate the validation of non-formal and informal learning (Cedefop, 2010b). As such, as was the case with Entry Level qualifications, it is not possible currently to clearly identify such provision on an international level.

However, the review was able to identify some such provision in Australia. While at school, there is provision for the assessment of Life Skills outcomes across different curriculum areas for pupils with special educational needs in some parts of Australia (for example, New South Wales). These are recorded via pupils' School Profile and School Certificate Record of Achievement (it is not externally assessed and not a separate qualification).

The international scoping review has highlighted the key similarities and differences with FL:

- Very few European countries have referenced their NQF to the EQF and consequently the equivalence and nature of lower level qualifications in such countries with those included in FL programmes is currently unclear. This is particularly the case with Entry Level qualifications;
- There appear to be very few countries offering Entry Level qualifications equivalent to Entry Levels 1 and 2 of the NQF/QCF in England, with the exception of Scotland, Ireland, South Africa and Iceland. Some countries in Europe have decided against including Entry Level qualifications as part of their NQF;
- The lowest level of provision accredited by the EQF (Level 1) is equivalent to Entry Level 3 of the NQF/QCF in England suggesting that lower Entry Level qualifications are not a core part of provision in Europe, in contrast to England;
- The provision of Entry Level qualifications in the UK appears to be based on a different attitude towards qualifications compared with other European countries; in the UK, there is an emphasis on allowing learners of all ages to acquire qualifications to enable them to re-engage in learning. In other European countries there appears to be a stronger emphasis on enabling learners to achieve the end-of-schooling certificates, with fewer opportunities to achieve Entry level or Level 1 qualifications for those who fail to do so;
- The issue of learners leaving compulsory education without having achieved the expected level of attainment is a concern across Europe and there are a range of measures in place to address this which focus on prevention, intervention and compensation. FL is aligned with some of these approaches that tend to combine vocational learning and basic skills, have a flexible personalised approach and include an element of employer or community involvement.

2.3 Evidence from Good Practice and Impact Literature

As discussed above, in the countries reviewed, formal provision and qualifications that are equivalent to FL in England are not common internationally, in particular at Entry Level (Entry Levels 1 and 2 in particular). Consequently, there is limited research evidence on the impact of such provision. Furthermore, where countries do have these qualifications in place (such as Ireland, Iceland and Scotland), most do not appear to have undertaken robust evaluations of their implementation or impact. The remainder of this chapter outlines the available evidence.

There is mixed evidence from the UK and elsewhere of the economic benefits of completing qualifications below Level 2. Dickerson (2006), for example, found that in terms of wages, the return from Level 1 qualifications in England *'is negligible or zero for both men and women'* (p.17). Similarly, McIntosh (2002) reported that the achievement of NVQ qualifications at Level 2 or below did not have any measurable positive effects. However, a later study by McIntosh (2004) did identify an impact of achieving such vocational qualifications, but only for those who left school with no previous qualifications. It is also worth noting that, reflecting one of main aims of FL programmes, the achievement of lower level qualifications, while possibly not resulting in measurable economic benefits, may have other positive impacts on young people, including acting as a 'stepping stone' to other more advanced learning at higher levels (Dearden et al., 2004; Spielhofer et al., 2007).

Internationally, it is clear that the relationship between low achievement at the end of compulsory schooling and limitations in longer-term opportunities is an issue common within England (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2010). In three of the countries included in this review (New Zealand, Australia and South Africa), there is some evidence of the impact of provision that has sought to address this by enabling learners to gain qualifications equivalent to Level 1 and, to some extent, Entry Level qualifications in England. As will be discussed below, the evidence reveals a mixed level of success.

In New Zealand, Youth Training is designed to target and provide training to school leavers with no or low levels of qualifications leading to national qualifications which are between Levels 1 and 3 (which appear to be equivalent to Entry Level 3 to Level 2 in England) on the New Zealand Qualification Framework (NZQF). In 2008, 45% of those taking part in Youth Training had no qualifications or less than 12 credits at Level 1 on the NZQF (40 credits are needed to be awarded a qualification at Level 1 of the NZQF). All providers have to track learners up to two months after leaving the system and as such the New Zealand Government records the destinations of the learners after completing their course. Analysis of the data (Maloney, 2010) showed that in 2008, 26% of those completing Youth Training went into full-time employment, 36% returned to the programme to undertake another course and 18% progressed to further training elsewhere. In total, 17% were either unemployed or out of the labour force, which was said to be a small proportion of a group that is traditionally hard to engage.

An international review of effective practice in engaging young people in literacy, language and numeracy learning (New Zealand Department of Labour 2010) noted that young people can be more motivated to learn these core skills where they are embedded in vocational learning. While noting that there is no one *'best way'* (p.7) to deliver programmes to young people who have not achieved in the mainstream school setting, the review outlined the key components required for effective delivery of such programmes which can be summarised as follows:

- Teaching the literacy, language and numeracy elements *'by stealth'* rather than as explicit discrete elements;
- Building on 'strengths' based of good initial assessment of the skills and abilities of learners;

- Making the learning relevant, including through involving external groups such as employers and the community;
- Incorporate goals that can be quickly achieved and that are realistic;
- Engage learners through activities that are fun, innovative and make effective use of ICT;
- Engender a learning environment that is relaxed and '*unlike school*' in which teachers respect learners and vice versa;
- Aim for the learning to be responsive to learners' changing needs;
- Teach in small groups;
- Take a holistic approach including, where appropriate, mentoring or counselling.

A study exploring the impact of Certificate 1 and 2 qualifications in Australia (which appear to be equivalent to Levels 1 and 2 in England) revealed similar mixed levels of success to the case in New Zealand. Certificate 1 and 2 courses appear to perform a similar function as FL programmes in England in enabling learners to develop general (including literacy and numeracy) and more vocational foundation skills in order to access employment or further study at higher levels. An evaluation of the impact of Certificate 1 and 2 courses (Stanwick, 2005) described these qualifications as '*aimed at developing basic vocational skills or preparatory access skills. They may also lead to further study.*' (p.6). The study showed that full completions of all components of certificates were relatively low – 33% for those who enrolled on Certificate 1 courses and 43% for those on Certificate 2 courses. Furthermore, there was a strong link between full completions and positive outcomes, including further study or employment. For example, 15-19 years olds who completed a Certificate 1 course were 26% more likely to be in employment than before the course, while this was only 4% for those who did not fully complete the course. The impact was also greater amongst younger learners (aged 15 to 19 than those aged 20 to 24).

In addition, there are developments equivalent to FL at a state level in Australia. Nationally, around 80% of young people complete the equivalent of 12 years education and training. Teaching in Australia is responding to the range of reasons why young people say they leave school early, including a wish to follow a more vocational route, to gain employment and a perception that schooling lacks relevance (Blake and Gallagher, 2009). In response to this, the state of Victoria developed a '*state-wide senior school credential through which participating students receive recognition for their achievements in programs that have traditionally not provided credit within a senior school qualification*' (p.53) at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced levels. Central to the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is an approach that seeks to ensure that learning is relevant and '*hands on*' and uses '*real life*' experiences and recognises and builds on the knowledge that learners already have.

The popularity of the VCAL is evident in its increased take-up (Teese *et al.*, 2007), from 546 learners in 2002 to 15,641 in 2008, and evidence from learner surveys which showed that 88% agreed or strongly agreed that the opportunity to take a VCAL was '*an important factor in*

staying on at school (p.7). In addition to its apparent effect on influencing young people to remain in learning, the VCAL has seen an increase in its completion rates from 71% in 2004 to 79% in 2008. Moreover, the percentage of young people who have completed 12 years of education or training in Victoria is above the average for Australia (89% in 2008 compared with 84% nationally) and has been increasing since the introduction of the VCAL in 2002 from 83% to 89% in 2008. The majority (85%) of VCAL learners progress onto further education, training and employment (Stokes, no date).

The key components of the VCAL include the applied learning principles underpinning the qualification and, the pilot evaluation found, the need for teaching to be less abstract and for a more '*adult learning*' approach to be adopted including working collaboratively and with the wider community (Henry *et al.*, 2002).

A recent study (Aitchison, 2010) examined the impact of Entry Level qualifications in South Africa as part of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), aimed at adult learners (aged 15 and above) in South Africa who do not possess any formal school qualifications. According to the 2001 census, 48% of the population had less than a full general education certificate (comparable to Entry Level 3 in England). However, research (Aitchison, 2010) suggests that so far the ABET system has not had a great impact on the literacy levels in the country and that there has been very little effective monitoring and evaluation of ABET. The research states that: '*Only a minute fraction of the students in the Public Adult Learning Centres have graduated with a full ABET qualification since 2001 when the Grade 9 equivalent examinations started, though about 250 000 learners attend class each year*'. This was partially explained by the fact that the ABET literacy educators are amongst the more poorly trained and paid education practitioners in the country.

In Slovenia, (Zalec *et al.*, no date), the increased risk of unemployment for those who left school early led to the development of Project Learning for Young Adults (PLYA) which gives young people who have left school early access to a range of learning approaches. This includes informal learning, group learning and individual project work that is tailored to the needs of the individual. They study basic skills and vocational elements and can access a mentor who works with them individually. It is a flexible programme which learners can enter and leave throughout the year and in which they can engage for varying lengths of time from three months to a year, according to their needs.

The majority of young people who participated in PLYA successfully completed the programme – around 85% in 2006/7. The key components of the PLYA programme that contribute to its effectiveness include the use of a personal education plan which is negotiated between the learner and their mentor. Reflecting the findings in New Zealand (New Zealand Department of Labour, 2010), the mentor role is key as they are able to work with the learner '*holistically*' as an individual and provide support and guidance, including in relation to personal issues not directly related to their learning, where needed.

Overall, the evidence from these countries suggests that the outcome in terms of attainment and progression from FL equivalent provision is mixed. In terms of progression, the evidence from New Zealand indicates that a minority progress into employment while a notable level of participants return to the training course. If this training was to involve progressing to a higher

level of qualification, it could be seen as a successful outcome; however, if learners continue at the same level then it could be argued that the provision is contributing to a warehousing effect whereby young people remain in learning but are taking qualifications that are not of value in supporting their future progression. In terms of attainment outcomes, the evidence from Australia and South Africa both indicate a high level of learners not gaining the qualification they were working towards. However, the outcomes from the VCAL in Australia indicate an applied learning approach that combines vocational and basic skill elements can be popular with learners and can lead to their successful completion of the course in the majority (79%) of cases.

The evidence suggests the effectiveness of the provision for young people who are at risk of early school leaving, and not achieving at the expected level, is related to the quality of teaching and the approach to learners which needs to differ from the approach in mainstream schools. The content of the programme benefits from being applied, made relevant to the real world and from including vocational elements alongside more basic literacy and numeracy skills. Provision also needs to be flexible and responsive to individual needs and build on learners' existing strengths, knowledge and abilities.

2.4 Conclusions

Overall, the international review of the literature has revealed little provision that can be said to be equivalent to FL in England in terms of the inclusion of Entry Level qualifications and the combination of components (vocational skills, Functional Skills and personal development skills). Moreover, it is evident that the approach to education and qualifications, and underpinning structures, in England differs in some key respects from other countries both within and outside Europe.

Consequently, this limits the scope for learning from other countries' experiences of FL equivalent provision, in a way that can be potentially transferred to FL in England. Nevertheless, it is clear that provision needs to have appropriate content and delivery approaches and meet the needs of a particular group of learners who may have complex needs.

3 PARTICIPATION IN FOUNDATION LEARNING

Summary of Key Points

- An estimated 84,000 pre-16 learners are participating in FL in 2010/11, representing a significant increase from the previous year (although this is based on a considerable degree of approximation). The estimated number of post-16 learners is around 56,500 which also represents a large increase from 2009/10. The characteristics of both cohorts appear to be similar to those of FL learners in previous years.
- The vast majority of providers are targeting FL at learners who have a statement of special educational need or LDD, are recognised for school action or school action plus, or who were previously NEET or at risk of becoming so.
- A broad range of approaches is in use for identifying potential FL learners, including achievement records, in-house diagnostics, referrals from Connexions (and other agencies) and staff knowledge and opinion on learner need.
- FL provision is now considered by the majority of pre-16 and post-16 providers to be appropriate for its target learners. Private training providers are the least likely to report this, but their concerns are focused mainly on the issues of funding and assessment rather than on the specific content of QCF units and qualifications. More broadly, the ability to build and tailor FL programmes using what is generally seen to be an appropriate range of units and qualifications, is encouraging many providers to widen their FL offer.
- Factors having a negative impact on provider, and therefore learner participation in FL, include the cessation of the Education Maintenance Allowance and cuts to the Connexions service. Uncertainty over the policy implications of the Wolf Report is in some cases causing expansion plans for 2011/12 to be put on hold.

3.1 Introduction

Estimating the number of learners involved in FL in 2010/11 is not a stated aim of the evaluation, but the size of both the pre-16 and post-16 cohorts can nonetheless be approximated and offer some context for the findings that follow in the subsequent chapters of the report. Also covered here are summaries of the approaches that have been taken for learner targeting and the factors that are having the most significant influence on FL participation in 2010/11.

3.2 Pre-16 Participation

The source for estimating the size of the pre-16 learner cohort is the LA telephone survey, where FL leads were asked how many learners are involved this year in their LA area. Of the 149 LAs that took part in the survey, 86 were able to provide a figure, whilst 63 were unsure.

As shown in Table 3.1, the estimated total number of pre-16 learners across the 86 LAs that provided a response is 47,904. For the purposes of illustration, if it is assumed that these LAs

are representative of those that couldn't or didn't provide a figure, then extrapolating out to the full cohort gives an estimated nationwide total of 84,000 learners and an average of 557 learners per LA. Note however that the extent to which the 86 LAs, in FL terms, are representative of all LAs nationwide cannot be verified through the survey returns.

Total learner numbers – 86 LAs	47,904
Total learner numbers – extrapolated to all 151 LAs	84,000
Average learners per LA	557
Source: ekosgen	

An accurate nationwide figure for pre-16 has been difficult to obtain in the past, but feedback obtained through the 2011 case studies and LA survey suggests that the current year has seen a significant increase in pre-16 learner numbers (the LA survey suggests that there are now in excess of 10,000 pre-16 learners on FL programmes).

Pre-16 learner characteristics on a statistically reliable scale are not available for this evaluation, but the case studies and provider surveys suggest that the pre-16 learner cohort is likely to mirror equivalent cohorts in previous years and comprise learners that:

- Are significantly more likely to be recognised as a having special educational need;
- Are more likely than learners nationally, and learners in their own schools, to be eligible for free school meals;
- Have achieved significantly below the national average at Key Stage 2;
- Are significantly more likely to be male than female.

3.3 Post-16 Participation

Post-16 FL learners have been identified using a variety of indicators, including the FL flag on the ILR and analysis of the qualifications for which they have been registered (Section Six provides details of the proxy definition).

The results suggest that there are currently around 56,500 post-16 learners working towards an FL programme. This compares with approximately 18,000 post-16 learners in 2009/10²⁰ and represents a threefold increase from the previous year (although in reality the 18,000 figure is likely to be a low estimate).

Table 3.2 provides a comparison of characteristics between post-16 FL learners in 2009/10 and 2010/11. The results show that in 2010/11 there is a lower proportion of FL learners with a prior attainment below Level 1, which could be interpreted as a sign that providers have begun targeting learners more likely to complete full FL programmes than in the past.

²⁰ Previous analysis of learner numbers in 2008/09 identified 2,660 FL programme learners. However, these figures were based on very different inclusion criteria (one significant difference is that it included learners aged 26 and above) and are therefore not included in the comparison here.

However, as discussed in later sections of the report, no qualitative evidence has emerged to support any such claim.

Otherwise, the characteristics of learners have remained quite similar, although proportionately there are now slightly more male learners and learners aged 16-18, and slightly fewer learners registered with a learning difficulty or disability.

Characteristic	2009/10 Foundation Learning	2010/11 Foundation Learning
Male	59%	62%
Female	41%	38%
Aged 16-18	92%	95%
Aged 19-25 with LDD	8%	5%
LDD (all ages)	45%	42%
White ethnic origin	84%	83%
Achieved no qualifications at Level 1 or above	50%	43%
Source: ILR		

3.4 Learner Targeting

The provider survey findings relating to the targeting of FL provision align with the quantitative analysis presented above, with the majority of providers confirming that FL in their organisation had been targeted at:

- Learners with a statement of special educational need, those recognised for school action or school action plus, or those with LDD (combined total of 90% of providers);
- Learners who were previously NEET or were at risk of becoming NEET (73% of providers).

Table 3.3 provides further detail and separates the provider survey results by pre-16 and post-16. Post-16 providers, and private training providers in particular, are understandably the most likely to have targeted their provision at learners that would previously have undertaken an Entry to Employment programme. Mainstream schools are the most likely to have targeted learners that would previously participated in the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme.

Table 3.3: Learner Targeting		
Pre-16 Providers	Number	%
Learners with a statement of Special Educational Need and/or those recognised for school action or school action plus	111	88%
Young people at risk of entering the NEET group	88	70%
Learners that would have previously undertaken the Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme	48	38%
Learners aiming for an Apprenticeship	35	28%
Post-16 Providers	Number	%
Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	79	94%
Young people previously NEET	66	79%
Learners that would have previously undertaken an Entry to Employment programme	57	68%
Learners aiming for an Apprenticeship	48	57%
Young people previously in jobs without training	20	24%
Source: ekosgen 2010, 126 pre-16 provider and 84 post-16 providers responses		

In terms of identifying learners that are or will be suitable for FL, a range of approaches are in use, including the following (information about which is taken from both the surveys and case studies):

- **Pre-16:**
 - Achievement records;
 - In-house diagnostic tools;
 - (Most importantly) staff knowledge of learner needs and abilities;
- **Post-16:**
 - Initial assessments;
 - Prior achievement (although providers report that this can be misleading);
 - Referrals from Connexions;
 - Information/referrals from organisations providing non-academic learner support, such as housing associations;
 - Promotional events and outreach initiatives.

There is also an increasing amount of dialogue between pre-16 and post-16 providers locally about the effective transition of FL pupils.

3.5 Factors Influencing Participation

FL provision is now considered by the majority of providers responding to the survey to be appropriate for its target learners. As shown in Table 3.4, more than four fifths of pre-16 providers and more than two thirds of post-16 providers responded in this way.

Table 3.4: Suitability of FL provision		
	Pre-16 Providers	Post-16 Providers
FL provision is suitable for learners in the target group	82%	70%
FL provision is <u>not</u> suitable for learners in the target group	7%	15%
Neither or don't know	12%	15%
Source: ekosgen 2010, 120 pre-16 provider and 79 post-16 providers responses Pre-16 responses do not sum to 100% due to rounding		

Beneath these headline findings are differences by provider type – namely that private training providers are less likely than others, in particular FE colleges and mainstream schools, to state that FL provision is suitable. However, this is only true of a minority (two fifths) of private training providers, and their concerns are focused almost exclusively on the issues of funding and assessment²¹ rather than on the specific content of the units and qualifications. On the contrary, most providers consulted during the evaluation (and especially during the case studies) are positive about the new QCF provision below Level 2, but these views are often secondary to the serious concerns they have about other aspects of the FL infrastructure.

Overall, however, it seems that unlike 12 months ago, when pre-16 and post-16 providers often saw QCF provision, and especially the perceived lack of breath from a subject area perspective, as a constraining factor, the converse is now true. The ability to tailor programmes of learning and to do so using what is generally seen to be a broad and appropriate range of units and qualifications, is now encouraging and enabling providers to widen their FL offer and refine existing programmes. This is particularly true of providers that have been involved with FL since before 2010/11 and who are more familiar with the QCF and the FL Qualifications Catalogue than those providers for whom FL is still relatively new.

“There is now much more available [in the QCF] than in the past.....it’s better set up to meet our learners’ needs.” – Pre-16 Provider

Other issues influencing provider, and therefore learner participation in FL, include:

- **Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA):** At the time of the provider surveys and case study consultations, the details on what will replace EMA had not been announced. Pre-16 and especially post-16 providers were very concerned that the removal of EMA would result in reductions in enrolment on FL programmes and increases in early withdrawal for those not able to meet the day to day cost of travel and subsistence associated with an undertaking an FL programme. We return to this topic in Section Seven;

²¹ As explained in further detail in Section Five, concerns over funding tended to centre on the qualification based nature of FL funding and the absence of funding for work experience that doesn't lead to a qualification. Concerns regarding assessment included the suggestion that the formal assessment of functional skills qualifications has led to issues of learner non-attendance.

Case study example

Since EMA was removed in January the provider (a general FE college) has found it more challenging to recruit learners onto FL programmes. The reorganisation of Connexions has also had an impact. Staff question whether they will be able to maintain viable group sizes next year in the absence of EMA and therefore question whether they will be able to offer FL over the longer-term.

- **Connexions:** As a result of local government spending reviews and budget reductions, the future of many Connexions services is in question. Whilst the scale and impact of any change is likely to vary by area, post-16 providers have voiced concern throughout the evaluation about potential reductions in FL referrals;

“Take up has been lower than expected so we’ve had to increase our outreach activity. The loss of Connexions services will make recruitment even more difficult.” – Post-16 provider

- **Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report:** Although not yet influencing FL activity to any significant extent, there is evidence from the case studies to suggest that FL participation will be influenced by the Wolf Report (in that some providers will refrain from implementing expansion plans for 2011/12) until the associated policy implications are known;
- **Complementary activity:** The scale of FL delivery and partnership working has increased significantly over the past 12 to 18 months, but there are still isolated examples where providers that are unable to offer full FL programmes, or to incorporate as many vocational areas as they would like, due to a lack of a local network of other providers also delivering FL.

3.6 In Conclusion

Although precise learner volumes are very difficult to quantify, primary and secondary evidence sources suggest that FL delivery is taking place on a far greater scale in 2010/11 than in previous years. The characteristics of FL learners do not appear to be changing significantly over time, reflected in the fact that FL is being targeted at largely the same groups of learners as in previous years.

One of the most significant developments over the past 12 months is that the availability and adequacy of FL provision has become a driver of activity and participation rather than an inhibitor²².

²² Inhibiting factors relate more to FL infrastructure than to the content of units and qualifications.

4 FOUNDATION LEARNING DELIVERY IN 2010/11

Summary of Key Points

- FL remains a strategic priority for the majority of LAs and providers. On average, post-16 providers appear to be attaching a slightly higher priority to FL than their pre-16 counterparts, although the difference is not large. Average pre-16 priority ratings have fallen slightly over the past 12 months, due largely to the delivery of FL having become more embedded and its structure, content and format becoming better understood.
- Most providers delivering FL are doing so through 'full' programmes comprising vocational, PSD and functional skills qualifications. Most are also doing so using units and qualifications drawn largely from the QCF.
- In most providers, learners have some choice over their vocational area but due to practicalities/logistics, cannot choose the specific qualifications and units that they study. It is far more common for the levels of units and qualifications within groups to vary depending on learner ability, and for ongoing and personalised support to be offered to FL learners.
- There has been an increase in collaborative activity between providers on FL over the past 12 months to the point that more than two thirds of providers now report that they are delivering FL in partnership. One of the strongest messages emerging from the evaluation is that partnership working underpins many of the most important benefits that FL generates, and especially those relating to pre-16 learner confidence and independence.
- Employer involvement in FL is growing although in most cases is still reported as being limited (the reasons for which are discussed in Section Five). Providing work experience or tasters for FL learners continues to be by far the most common form of employer involvement, although in some cases employers have also supported learners with specific qualifications or strands of work. Successful and ongoing employer engagement in FL is often achieved through the diligence and persistence of committed members of staff within providers.

4.1 Introduction

This section presents an analysis of FL delivery in 2010/11, focusing on a series of themes that include the priority attached to FL, partnership working, personalisation and learner choice, and employer involvement.

4.2 Priority of FL

FL remains a strategic priority in the majority of LAs – three quarters of the FL leads responding to the LA survey said that the priority afforded to FL in their area is high, while less than 5% said it is low (the remainder selected the mid-point option on the rating scale).

At a headline level, the above is also reflected in the provider survey results. Three quarters of the providers (pre-16 and post-16) responding to the survey stated that in 2010/11 they were giving FL a high priority, compared with only 2% who are giving it a low priority. On average, post-16 providers appear to attaching a slightly higher priority to FL than their pre-16 counterparts, although the difference is not large.

Examples of actions or approaches that demonstrate the priority being attached to FL were provided through the surveys and case studies and include:

- Cross-department working groups and internal steering groups;
- Staff CPD (Continuing Professional Development) on FL related topics;
- The introduction of FL champions;
- FL as an agenda item on senior management team meetings and in strategic plans.

In the few cases where providers report that FL does not have a high priority, it tends to be because they were still in the early stages of implementation and delivery was relatively small scale.

The findings on priority have remained fairly consistent over the past 12 months (i.e. FL generally has a high priority), although pre-16 providers, and mainstream schools in particular, are not as unanimous as they were, resulting in the average priority rating falling slightly over time. The survey feedback sheds little light on why this might be, although the case studies do offer the following potential explanations:

- **Delivery experience:** in many pre-16 providers, and especially those visited during the case study programme, FL is no longer 'new', and whilst changes to units, qualifications and learning programmes will be ongoing, it is becoming an increasingly embedded part of the Key Stage 4 offer. As such, some providers are less likely to cite it as a high priority, especially from a development and trialling perspective;
- **Scrapping of the 2013 entitlement:** there is no longer a government pledge to make FL available to all learners for whom it is suitable from 2013. It may be that in some providers this has caused the priority attached to FL to be reduced, although the case studies found only limited, anecdotal evidence to support such a claim.

The main message remains that in those providers that are delivering FL in 2010/11, it has a high degree of visibility and importance. However, it should also be noted that the evaluation scope did not include any consultations with pre-16 providers still to begin delivering FL, the feedback from whom may have been significantly different. Should the DfE take forward any further research or evaluation relating to FL, it is strongly recommended that a cohort of such providers be included.

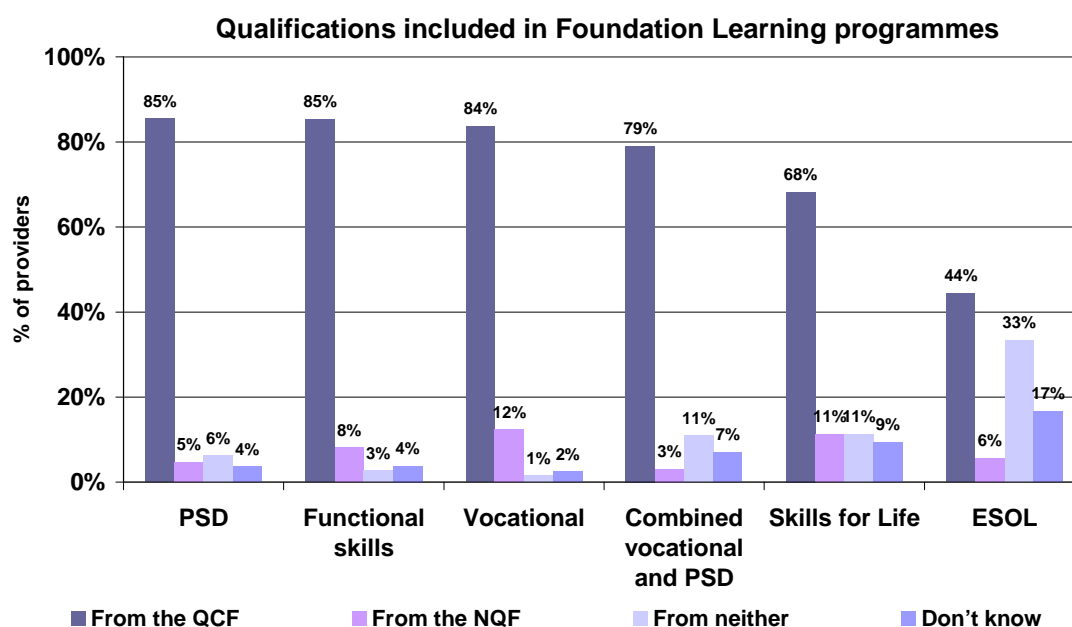
4.3 Completeness and Composition

In 2010/11, more than 75% of providers are delivering FL programmes containing all three of the main elements (vocational, personal and social development and functional skills qualifications) – referred to here as ‘full’ programmes. As shown in Figure 4.1, most are doing so using units and qualifications drawn largely from the QCF. For example:

- 72% of providers draw more than three quarters of their FL qualifications from the QCF;
- This is true of a higher proportion of post-16 providers (84%) than pre-16 providers (63%).

Other points to note are that combined vocational and PSD qualifications are very popular on FL (and becoming more so) and that there is little difference in the fullness of delivery between pre-16 and post-16 providers.

Figure 4.1



Source: ekosgen 2011, sample of 163 pre-16 and 90 post-16 provider responses

The delivery of full FL programmes is more common than it was 12 months ago, where around 65% of providers were delivering all three elements²³ (compared with more than 75% now). The use of QCF qualifications has seen a similar positive direction of travel.

²³ However, specifically on post-16, it is inappropriate to assume that the proportion of learners on a full programme will ever reach 100%, given the introduction in 2009 of greater provider discretion over which strands to include and to what extent. Whilst it is still anticipated that units and qualifications at Entry and Level 1 will be drawn from the QCF, there is no longer an expectation that learners aged 19+ learners will necessarily pursue full programmes.

In terms of the breadth of FL programmes, the survey shows that:

- Pre-16 providers are offering between one and ten vocational areas, and an average of three. The most common are construction, hair and beauty and motor vehicle;
- Post-16 providers appear to have a slightly wider vocational offer, providing qualifications in an average of five areas and ranging from one to ten. There is some overlap with pre-16 providers in terms of the most common (construction, retail and customer services and motor vehicle).

Although quantitative data on vocational areas has not previously been collected in detail, case study evidence from that work shows that this too represents a notable expansion of the FL offer, especially amongst pre-16 providers.

4.4 Personalisation and Learner Involvement

The survey results suggest that learners are able to select some or all of the qualifications that are included in their FL programmes at 78% of pre-16 and 81% of post-16 providers. Providers more often stated that some, rather than all, learners are able to select qualifications – see Table 5.1.

	Pre-16 Providers	Post-16 Providers
Yes – all learners	35%	34%
Yes – some learners	45%	47%
No	20%	18%
Source: ekosgen 2011. Post-16 total does not sum to 100% due to rounding.		

Over half of all providers in the survey also report that learners can select which units within qualifications to pursue. However, the case study findings strongly suggest that these are falsely inflated figures due to the way in which the survey questions have been interpreted. It is true that in most providers, learners have some choice over the vocational area covered by their FL programme, and therefore by proxy are selecting their qualifications, but it is currently very rare for them to actually have a choice between different qualifications in the same vocational area. It is much more common for providers to offer a ‘fixed programme’ within each vocational area that they deliver FL.

There are two main reasons for this:

- **Practicalities:** case study providers regularly said that the potential for having numerous very small groups of learners on the same programme, plus the associated timetabling complications, had influenced their decision to keep learner choice restricted to vocational area level;
- **Learner knowledge and awareness:** particularly amongst pre-16 providers, there is a sense that many learners starting an FL programme will lack the necessary knowledge – even with effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) – to make informed

decisions about which units and qualifications are most suited to their needs and aspirations. It also requires learners to actually want to have this level of choice, which providers say in practice is by no means always the case.

“We could have a situation where only one learner has chosen a certain combination of units and qualifications. From a timetabling perspective it would be a nightmare.” – Post-16 provider

“At 14, and for these types of learners, we [teachers] have a much better handle on the programme they need than they do.” – Pre-16 provider

In short, the delivery of FL is not yet exploiting the full flexibilities of the QCF and does not look set to do so for some time, if at all. However, providers do not see this as a problem but rather are balancing the choices that the QCF offers with practical considerations about planning and delivery.

What is far more common, and in fact has become the norm, is for the levels of units and qualifications within groups to vary depending on learner ability. This is more evident on PSD and functional skills qualifications than on vocational qualifications.

Also commonplace is the ongoing and personalised support offered to FL learners, including reviews and target setting (e.g. on attendance, behaviour and achievement), individual learning plans (paper based and online), lesson reviews and satisfaction surveys. In most cases, however, these have not been introduced as a result of FL, but rather they represent the continuation of good practice already in place, in some cases for many years.

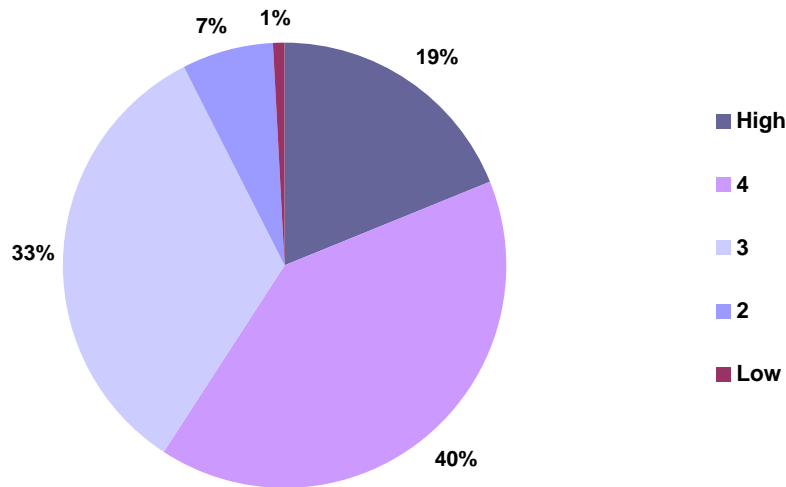
Post-FL destination planning between providers and learners is regularly occurring. Three quarters of pre-16 providers and 87% of post-16 providers report through the survey that learners are involved in planning for their post-FL destinations, often through ongoing advice and guidance, formal review sessions, support from Connexions and the integration of career planning sessions within FL delivery. Visits from employers, work placements and visits to post-16 providers were also cited.

4.5 Collaborative Activity

LA-wide FL implementation or working groups are now present in more than 90% of LAs (based upon survey data). In over two thirds of cases the remit of these groups covers pre-16 and post-16 and includes learners aged 19-24 with LDD. Whilst 60% of LAs rate the groups as effective (Figure 4.2), it would seem that in other cases there is scope for them to become more highly regarded. LAs where FL has been in place for longer were slightly more likely to give a positive rating ('4' or '5') than those where delivery had started in 2010/11.

Figure 4.2
Effectiveness of working groups
 Percentages based on response of those reporting working groups are in place
 (90% of total sample)

Source: ekosgen 2011, sample of 132 responses



In terms of partnership working on FL between providers, there has been an increase in activity over the past 12 months. The survey shows that two thirds of providers are now delivering FL in partnership with other organisations (there is very little difference in the proportions reported by pre-16 and post-16 providers) with activities commonly involving pre-16 learners attending colleges or training providers to:

- Undertake the vocational element of their FL programme;
- Access specialist facilities (often related to the above);
- Help prepare for pre-16 to post-16 transition.

Other examples include employers providing work experience/placements and taster sessions (see 'Employer Involvement', below) and visits/presentations to FL groups from the police and health or healthy lifestyle representatives.

Partnership working, taken as a whole, is considered effective by the majority of providers for whom it is currently a feature of their FL offer (pre-16 providers are slightly more positive than their post-16 counterparts in this regard although not significantly so). Linked to this – and an important evaluation finding that is reiterated in Section Five – is that partnership working underpins many of the most important benefits of FL that have emerged through this evaluation, and especially those relating to pre-16 learner confidence and independence. It works most effectively where relations between the pre-16 and post-16 provider are strong and well embedded, and where staff at the post-16 provider have experience of working with (and understand the challenges faced by) FL learners aged 14-16.

Although not commonplace, evidence did emerge through the case studies of pre-16 and post-16 providers working together, or communicating more effectively, to address FL related barriers. For example:

- In one of the case study LAs, the FE college and mainstream schools now discuss the transition needs of learners operating mainly below Level 2 to a far greater extent than they used to in the past;
- In another LA, three providers are working together to deliver FL for a cohort of learners facing significant challenges (e.g. drug use, teenage pregnancy) and have an agreement that learners can transfer from one provider to another if, for example, there are behavioural issues within a certain group or if a learner changes address;
- A third local LA has partnered with a neighbouring LA to provide a cross-boundary, and much broader, FL offer from a vocational area perspective²⁴. The same LA also undertakes a formal commissioning process with all providers before any FL delivery begins, the aim being to ensure consistent and high quality standards of delivery and IAG across the county.

Regardless of the future of FL, these examples show that it can and has made positive changes to the way in which providers work together to improve the learning experience and opportunities of some of the most disadvantaged learners. It is already developing a legacy in this regard that will strengthen if and when the scale of delivery across the country increases.

4.6 Employer Involvement

Employer involvement in FL is growing – 93% of post-16 and 65% of pre-16 providers responding to the survey state that employers were involved to some degree in their programmes, although in most cases this is described as being ‘limited’. Fewer than one in four providers state that it was either ‘moderate’ or ‘extensive’. Providing work experience or tasters for FL learners continues to be by far the most common form of employer involvement, although in some cases employers have also supported learners with specific qualifications or strands of work – see below.

“We have had ‘ambassadors’ from several workplaces that work with our students in their employability qualification. They have helped with interview techniques, behaviour in the workplace etc. These sessions have been very successful.” – Pre-16 provider

The main reasons why employer involvement is classed as limited can be grouped into the three categories (‘supply and demand’, ‘learner suitability’ and administrative burden’) covered in further detail in Section Five. However, providers consistently highlighted the importance of learners having experience with employers as being integral to their aspirations and self-confidence, and are in little doubt that where a learner is suitable for a placement but one cannot be arranged, it is to detriment of their FL programme as a whole.

²⁴ This approach has also been taken in another authority as well, the feedback from which is that it has been extremely successful.

“Seeing the world of work and learning the do’s and don’ts.....so important for these learners.”
– Pre-16 provider

Where employer engagement has been successful, and in two of the case study areas in particular, it has much to do with individual members of staff within the providers and their (unfailing) enthusiasm and persistence to ensure that all learners are placed – see below.

Case study example:

The employer engagement co-ordinator uses a range of opportunities, professionally and informally, to raise awareness of FL provision and to encourage employers to take learners on a half-day or one-day per week basis. Whilst this involves using existing networks and cold calling, it also extends to much more innovative and opportunistic approaches.

“I was at a local restaurant and happened to see the manager.....I spoke to her about FL and they’re now taking two of our learners, one day a week. Last week I was at the hairdressers and convinced them to take an FL learner who wants to work in hair and beauty. You’ve got to think creatively – cold calling isn’t enough in this area.”

This might seem like an isolated or anecdotal example, but it is worth noting that the area to which it relates is relatively rural and has a diffused business base. In the absence of the member of staff’s diligence and commitment, it is very likely that some of their FL learners would not have any employer contact during their programme.

4.7 Examples of Foundation Learning Programmes

The examples that follow were provided during the evaluation case studies. They are genuine examples of FL programmes being delivered in 2010/11 but due to their personalised nature (at least at learner group level), they should not be seen to be representative of FL programmes more widely.

Example 1: Post-16 FL Programme

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
AM	ICT (Functional skills)	Construction taster	Equality and diversity (NOCN)	English (Functional skills)	Equality and diversity (NOCN)
	Motor vehicle	Cookery (NOCN)	Construction (NOCN)	Job search (NOCN)	Childcare (CACHE and NOCN)
		Horticulture (NOCN)	Job search (NOCN)	Sexual health-female (NOCN)	Alcohol awareness (NOCN)
		FL Induction	FL Induction	Sexual health – male (NOCN)	
PM	Teamwork (NOCN)	Health and safety (NOCN)	Equality and diversity (NOCN)	Construction (NOCN)	
	Horticulture (NOCN)	Construction taster	English and mathematics Functional Skills	Childcare (CACHE and NOCN)	
	Customer service (NOCN)	FL Induction	FL Induction	Mathematics (functional skills)	

The vocational qualifications currently available to post-16 learners are:

- **Construction:** NOCN Progression units in Construction
- **Horticulture:** NOCN Step Up units in Horticulture; NPTC Level 1 Award/ Certificate/ Diploma in Practical Horticulture Skills
- **Retail:** NOCN Step Up units in retail
- **Customer Service:** NOCN Progression unit; City and Guilds Level 1 NVQ Certificate in Customer Service
- **Mechanics:** NOCN Step Up Units in mechanics
- **Childcare:** NOCN Progression units in Childcare; CACHE Level 1 Award in Caring for Children
- **Catering and Hospitality:** NOCN Progression units in Catering and Hospitality
- **Administration:** City and Guilds NVQ Certificate in Business and Administration

The PSD qualifications are:

- NOCN Entry Level 3/ Level 1 Step Up Award
- NOCN Entry Level 3/ Level 1 Diploma in Progression

The functional skills qualifications are:

- City and Guilds Entry Level 1 – Level 1 Functional English
- City and Guilds Entry Level 1 – Level 1 Functional Mathematics
- City and Guilds Entry Level 1 – Level 1 Functional ICT

Example 2: Pre-16 FL Programme

Day / Lesson	1	2	3	4
Monday	Vocational pathway			
Tuesday	PSD		English	Art
Wednesday	Vocational pathway			
Thursday	Maths	Art	Sport	Sport
Friday	Art	Art	PSD	

The vocational qualifications currently available to year 10/ 11 learners are:

- City and Guilds Level 1 Certificate/ Diploma in Salon Services
- City and Guilds Level 2 VRQ in Hairdressing
- ABC Level 1 Award/ Certificate in motor vehicle studies
- City and Guilds Certificate in Basic Construction Operatives (progressing to the Edexcel BTEC Level 2 First Certificate in Construction)
- Edexcel BTEC Level 1 Certificate in Engineering (progressing to Level 2 First Certificate in Engineering)
- City and Guilds NVQ Level 1 in Hospitality and Catering (progressing to NVQ Level 2)
- Edexcel BTEC Level 1 Vocational Studies
- Edexcel Level 2 Certificate in Art
- Edexcel Level 1 Certificate in Health and Social Care
- Edexcel Level 1 Introductory Certificate in Hospitality, Travel and Tourism.

The functional skills qualifications are:

- AQA Functional Skills in English – Level 1
- Edexcel Functional Skills in Mathematics – Level 1
- OCR Functional Skills in ICT – Level 1

The PSD qualification is the ASDAN Award in Personal and Social Development at Level 1.

4.8 Examples of Good Practice and Innovation

During the case studies, consultees were asked whether they considered any aspects of their FL delivery to constitute good or innovative practice. A range of suggestions were put forward, some of which in reality could be classed as 'common practice' (although that is not to say they were ineffective) and have therefore not been covered here – such as using Individual Learning Plans or varying the levels of qualifications within groups. Others were less common, and whilst in many cases it is too early to say from an impact point of view whether they do represent good practice, they at least appear to be innovative and have therefore been summarised below.

Learner Support and Motivation

- **Pre-16:** a school-college arrangement exists whereby teachers that delivered FL provision to former Year 11 learners – that have since progressed on to the college – spend one afternoon a week there to provide ad hoc support and informal IAG to those learners. It is seen as a way of helping the pre-16 to post-16 transition phase.
- **Post-16:** former FL learners (or learners who undertook similar provision pre-FL) deemed as role models for the current group are invited back to the college to speak to current FL learners with a view to improving their aspirations and motivation to progress onto positive destinations. An example includes a former learner who is now on a full time painting and decorating course and has joined the Territorial Army.
- **Post-16:** the college takes a less tolerant approach to indiscipline and inappropriate behaviour the nearer the learners are to completing their FL programmes. The idea is that. *“In the early stages there’s a lot more leniency – we’re still getting to know them, and they’re getting to know us, plus they often have some big issues to deal with. But as they get nearer leaving and getting a job we’re a lot tougher with them.....we are more likely to put them on report and not tolerate bad behaviour. We do it to prepare them for what it will be like in the real world.”*

PSD and Functional Skills Delivery

- **Post-16:** a tutor has developed activities and teaching materials for functional skills that are directly related to the vocational area of learners' FL programmes. For example, learners studying retail may complete an exercise to buy their weekly shopping. They will be given a list of items and asked to compare prices online across leading supermarkets to find the best deals. They are then asked to prepare a presentation and deliver it to the class using PowerPoint. The exercises are seen to combine functional skills in English, maths and ICT, develop personal and social skills as well as practical skills for independent living (shopping and managing budgets).

PSD and Functional Skills Delivery

- **LA:** one LA has commissioned development of a Foundation Learning Cloud – a one stop shop online portal for information about FL structures and networks, online resources, and information about meetings, training and development. The Cloud is available to all providers and stakeholders involved in FL across the LA.

Learner Offer

- **LA:** at least two LAs have partnered with neighbouring LAs to provide cross-boundary, and broader, FL offers from a vocational area perspective. One of the LAs also undertakes a formal commissioning process with all providers before any FL delivery begins, the aim being to ensure consistent and high quality standards of delivery and IAG across the county.
- **Pre-16:** three providers are working together to deliver FL for a cohort of learners facing significant challenges (e.g. drug use, teenage pregnancy) and have an agreement that learners can transfer from one provider to another if, for example, there are behavioural issues within a certain group or if a learner changes address.

4.9 In Conclusion

In broad terms, the FL delivery landscape (scale aside) looks similar to how it did 12 months ago and if anything is more positive. Full programmes and the use of QCF qualifications are more common, and the breadth of FL programmes, in terms of the number of vocational areas they cover, is expanding.

From a qualification perspective, personalisation is currently limited (in the main) to learners being able to select their vocational areas, rather than having an influence over the detail of their programmes. However, providers have a strong case that this is both necessary and sensible.

Providers often stressed that partnership working and collaborative delivery on FL is very important if learners are to be prepared for progression – and for the new and different environments they will encounter – as effectively as possible. Likewise employer involvement, and whilst this in particular can be difficult to sustain, the evaluation has shown that even in rural and deprived areas it can be achieved with relative success.

5 PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Summary of Key Points

Benefits

- The provider survey and case studies suggest that FL is leading to the needs of learners below Level 2 being better highlighted and understood. In part this is due to the infrastructural developments associated with FL, e.g. the QCF, and in part to the renewed or increased focus being given to provision below Level 2 amongst provider senior management and through curriculum planning as a result of FL.
- For most learners (especially those with a special educational need or LDD) there is a sense of reward and achievement that their learning is being regularly accredited and has a tangible outcome. Staff views were more varied, with many stating that the interpersonal and life skills gained through FL are far more important than the qualifications.
- Learners report enjoying FL more than they do (or did) mainstream schooling or their previous experience of other post-compulsory education. There are many anecdotal reports of improved learner engagement, motivation, behaviour and confidence as a direct benefit of FL and evidence that the practical application of skills is promoting a greater sense of independence amongst learners.
- Ten employers were consulted for the evaluation were generally very positive about the attributes of FL learners and focused their feedback much more on their ability to perform tasks and interact with members of staff than on the value of their qualifications.

Challenges

- Whilst the visibility and profile of FL and its learners is growing, issues of perception and reputation remain, with staff in some providers unwilling to engage and parents reportedly (based on evidence obtained from providers through the case studies) expressing their preference for their child to do a full suite of GCSEs rather than FL.
- Functional skills continues to be the most challenging element of FL to deliver due to a widespread view that the qualifications are pitched at too high a level and that in some post-16 providers the formal assessments are leading to non-attendance.
- Many providers report ongoing difficulties in engaging employers in their FL programmes, with many post-16 providers concerned that there is no recognised funding for enabling young people to be placed on work experience with an employer unless they complete a qualification (a situation that is unique to FL). Funding formulae for FL are also seen to be complex and lacking a mechanism for acknowledging partial achievement.
- The above has led to the suggestion that providers might be inclined to select learners for FL programmes that are the most likely to achieve full qualifications, although no reliable evidence of this emerged through other strands of the research.

5.1 Introduction

The evaluation has identified a series of benefits and challenges that are arising from, and directly relate to, the delivery of FL in 2010/11. Most of these are already apparent whilst others are expected to become more prominent in the future as (or if) FL becomes more embedded within mainstream delivery.

This section draws upon all of the main strands of primary research undertaken for the evaluation, including consultations with learners, providers, stakeholders, parents and employers²⁵. It presents the main benefits and challenges that have been reported, wherever possible giving an indication of scale and (mainly in the case of challenges) potential severity.

5.2 Current Benefits

5.2.1 Raising the profile of learners and provision below Level 2

The provider survey, and in particular the case studies, suggest that the introduction of FL is leading to the needs of learners below Level 2 being better highlighted and understood, both within individual providers and across the sector more widely. In part this is due to the infrastructural developments associated with FL – most notably the QCF and its ongoing population – and in part to the renewed or increased focus being given to provision below Level 2 amongst provider senior management and through curriculum planning. In some cases it has been the perceived challenges of FL, such as funding and functional skills, that has led it to have greater visibility.

“FL has raised awareness about what the issues [for learners below Level 2] are and that is a huge breath of fresh air.” - Stakeholder

“The QCF is offering more and more for our learners.” – Teacher in a special school

For most learners consulted through the case studies, there is a sense of reward and achievement that their learning is being regularly accredited and that there is a tangible outcome, be that a certificate or the accumulation of credit²⁶. Learners with a special educational need or LDD in particular appear to take pride in the fact that they have something to show for their efforts and the case studies did reveal examples (albeit isolated) of learners securing positive outcomes that they attributed directly to this aspect of FL.

“I would never have applied for the job if I hadn’t got the certificate [in Salon Services]. I wouldn’t have thought I could get it...I would have thought there’d be no point.” – Learner who secured employment at a hairdressers

While most FL learners appear to value qualifications, or when asked agreed that qualifications per se are a good thing to have, teaching staff consulted through the case studies are less unanimous and are fairly evenly split between:

²⁵ Note that 15 parents and 10 employers were consulted and due to these small samples the findings their feedback should be considered indicative rather than conclusive.

²⁶ It was relatively rare for learners to state that they were aware of the concept of Credit Accumulation and Transfer although a small number of learners in post-16 providers understood the principle.

- Those who say that the qualifications would be useful in helping FL learners to secure employment or progression onto other positive destinations;
- Those who attach significantly less value to the qualifications and feel that the skills, and especially the interpersonal and life skills, gained by young people on FL will prove to be by far the most beneficial element of the programme.

That is not to suggest that the above are mutually exclusive – they are clearly not – but what is evident is that tutors and teachers often agree with the assertion from the Wolf Report that qualifications at the lower levels do not have significant currency with employers. What they do say, however, is that the qualifications are not an end in themselves, but one part (and often not the most important part) of the process of helping learners to progress to the point where, circumstances permitting, they can move onto qualifications that are valued and which enable them to compete in the job market. The qualifications at lower levels are a confidence and esteem building part of that process.

“We can equip young people with lots of qualifications.... that’s not the point....the real benefit is in how they learn to deal with different situations, like college and different workplaces.” – Tutor (referring specifically to young people with moderate learning difficulties)

Qualifications and accreditation aside, the opportunity that FL (and the QCF) offers providers to deliver in small, bite-sized chunks – i.e. units – continues to be valued and for many learners is considered integral to maintaining their engagement and enthusiasm.

The use of short courses *“helps to keep them interested... learners would disengage if they had to do longer courses.”* – Post-16 Provider

FL has enabled a *“shift from caring to learning...every student will have an accredited outcome when they leave the school.”* – Special school

“We make a big deal of celebrating what they achieve, because in their school life so far they haven’t had a lot of success.” – Pre-16 Provider

5.2.2 Flexibility

Flexibility in this sense relates to the ability that FL and the QCF offers providers to build qualifications and programmes of learning using units and rules of combination. As explained in Section Four, practical considerations have determined that FL programmes within vocational areas tend to be the same for all learners in a group, but there is widespread agreement that the programmes are better suited to group-wide needs and preferences.

“FL offers more flexibility....we can tailor programmes much more.” – Pre-16 Provider

“In choosing the units we try and take into account their lifestyles, hobbies and interests or care commitments”. – Post-16 Provider

“You can make sure the curriculum is a better fit for the pupils.” – Pre-16 Provider

Provider views on this topic have moved on significantly over the past 12 months from a position where they expected flexibility to become a benefit of FL, to one where it actually has. The main drivers of change have been:

- The population of the QCF with more qualifications at Level 1 and below during 2010;
- A better understanding amongst provider staff of the QCF, the FL Qualifications Catalogue²⁷ and rules of combination;
- A growing sense that – pre-Wolf Report – FL was becoming a more embedded part of 14-19 activity and one that providers could spend more time developing (i.e. building more varied programmes using QCF provision) without concerns over FL as a policy development being brought to a close.

These points are reflected in the survey finding that 75% of pre-16 and 58% of post-16 providers believe that FL offers a more flexible, personalised offer for learners than the equivalent pre-FL provision. Given that many providers are, or were until the publication of the Wolf Report, planning to further refine or broaden their FL offer for 2011/12, these ratings could be expected to increase were the survey to be repeated in another 12 months time. However, until the outcomes (from a policy perspective) of Wolf are known, there is a risk that providers will not commit time to further exploring new units, qualifications or rules of combination, nor establishing relationships with different Awarding Organisations, in the fear that it may effectively be wasted time.

5.2.3 A Positive Learning Experience

Over 100 learners have been consulted for the evaluation, normally in small (up to five learners) informal focus group settings. In most cases provider staff were not present at the focus groups although in some settings, such as special schools or where learners were not confident in the presence of strangers, a tutor also attended. Learners were normally selected by provider staff, although the evaluators did specifically make the request that they chose a representative sample and not just the most positive or most articulate.

The headline finding is that learners enjoy FL more than they do (or did) mainstream schooling (pre-16) or their previous experience of other post-compulsory education. The majority of learners report that it has positively influenced their engagement in, and opinions of, learning, often saying that it has helped them to realise that learning can be enjoyable and that it has made them more motivated to attend. Many had also identified, or were better appreciating, the link between learning and future earning potential. These findings are particularly true of learners aged 16-18 who had recently left, or been excluded from school, and for whom FL was their first experience of post-compulsory education.

“It’s been better for me here. When I came here I started learning more and making more friends. I was bullied before.” – Pre-16 Learner

“They really get involved. They don’t wait to learn. It engages them. I think it’s had a massive impact. It’s making them come in.” – Pre-16 Provider

²⁷ Views on the Catalogue are generally positive although still mixed. 70% of FE colleges find it useful, compared with 63% of private training providers and 35% of mainstream schools.

However, in terms of attribution, it would be wrong to suggest that FL is in itself the sole driver of this feedback. Whilst learners and providers alike regularly articulated the skills based outcomes that they feel have arisen as a result of FL (see ‘Skills Development’, below), some of the more general outcomes, such as feeling that they are treated as adults and having more classroom based support, are also common to other pre-Level 2 or alternative provision (Table 5.1):

Table 5.1: Attribution of outcomes	
New or FL Specific	Common to Other Provision
Regular recognition of achievement through unitised accreditation	A feeling of being treated more like adults than in school
Qualifications based around learning English, maths and ICT in a functional context	Working in smaller groups than in mainstream school or college provision
Programmes that are better suited to learner interest and aspiration	Learning in a non-school environment
	Regular reviews of progress and setting of goals and targets
	Developing work-relevant skills, both vocation specific and employability related.
Source: ekosgen	

The vocational elements of FL continue to be the most favoured, especially amongst post-16 learners. The opportunity of work placements (where appropriate and available in the local area) and the development of practical skills were often cited by learners and parents as being particularly beneficial and enjoyable.

“Being on the vocational courses like FL is used by the school as a carrot because the kids value being on those courses. It’s made clear that their behaviour and attendance at school is one of the criteria for them getting on the course.” – Pre-16 Provider

PSD is a wide-ranging area, but taken as a whole it is the second most enjoyed element of FL. Units and qualifications that learners can correlate directly with employment or earning potential have once again been the best received.

Functional Skills or equivalent qualifications remain the least favoured component of FL, although most learners enjoy and see the relevance of Functional Skills to a greater extent than they did maths and English in school. This is clearly due, at least in part, to the real-life context within which Functional Skills tuition is set²⁸, but also reflects feedback from teachers and tutors gathered during the evaluation that as learners get older, and especially as they make the transition from pre-16 to post-16, they often begin to recognise the importance of English and maths to their employment opportunities and earning potential.

²⁸ Examples include learners being taught weekly budgetary planning and minute taking from meetings.

"I used to hate maths but they said it would be different here and it has been. They help you do the things you think you can't do and it's more relevant." – Post-16 Learner

The summary position is that FL is being very well received by learners. However, it is important to recognise that whilst feedback ratings from learners are high, FL should not (yet) be seen as transformational. As explained in Section Four, in many providers it reflects a refinement to the offer below Level 2 rather than a fundamental change, and as covered in Section Six, measurable impacts are evident in some areas but not yet in others. Many FL learners face challenging personal and social circumstances and in some cases it is unrealistic to suggest that FL will lead these to be overcome (a view regularly put forward during the case studies by teaching staff). For others, FL helps the issues to be addressed, either in full or in part, equipping them with new skills and attitudes that enable them to progress (or at the very least to see the value of progressing) to positive destinations.

5.2.4 Skills and Attitudes

The surveys and case studies point towards a range of benefits arising from FL that can be grouped under the heading of 'skills and attitudes'. For example, three quarters of pre-16 providers and two thirds of post-16 providers responding to the survey report improved learner engagement, motivation, behaviour and confidence as a direct benefit of FL. Subsequent consultations with learners, provider staff and parents highlighted many examples of learners feeling more self-confident following their engagement with FL and being less daunted by the prospect of being exposed to new environments such as college, training providers or employers. The focus placed by most FL programmes on the practical application of skills is also reported to have promoted a greater sense of independence amongst learners.

"I used to be really shy, I wouldn't even get on a bus by myself... this has helped my confidence." – this learner now travels by bus between college sites – Post-16 Learner

"In dealing with people, accepting instructions and seeing things through to the end, there has been a noticeable improvement." – Parent of a Post-16 Learner

"It's more life related than the usual school lessons, so they are better prepared." – Pre-16 Provider

"I think it's [work placement] taught her a lot about what it's like to have a job and she'll always have a trade if she follows it through and qualifies as a hairdresser." – Parent

Efforts were made to obtain employer views on FL for the evaluation but it is important to note that as only relatively few employers could be consulted (ten), they should not be seen as being representative of any larger cohort. Nonetheless, they were extremely positive about the attributes of FL learners that they were hosting on placements and focused much more on their ability to perform tasks and interact with other members of staff than they did the value of the qualifications with which FL is equipping them. In particular, employers often noted that the skills and attitudes of FL learners were more suitable or advanced than those of equivalent learners that they had hosted in the past.

“They seem to get on with people and develop socially just that bit quicker. I always thought that was down to their interest but now I think about it, it could be more to do with their people skills at college and them being more ready and aware about mixing and talking in a certain way to adults.” – Employer (retail)

“It [FL] gives them communication skills – being able to work with other people, other adults, in a way that probably wasn’t so developed before.” – Employer (hairdressing)

“He has improved in his social skills, he is less shy, and he has improved in his ability to work more independently. He is mixing with adults and can cope and socialise much better than when he began.” – Employer (print services)

“I’ve seen kids with a lot of complex social circumstances change for the better. It makes them look at themselves in a way they never have done before and that sometimes gives them a kick to do something with their lives.” – Employer (charitable organisation)

Many providers, and especially those working with learners with a special educational need or LDD, argue that these benefits – often far less tangible than unit or qualification achievement in the short term – capture the real essence of FL and will lead to longer term, sustained benefits. However it is here that one of the main challenges becomes apparent – namely the perceived lack of funding, in relative terms, for PSD provision. This topic is revisited under ‘Additional Support Needs’ below.

“Something has clicked with [student name] in the last 6 months. She seems more mature, more sensible and more independent.” – Parent of a Post-16 Special Needs Learner

“The last six months have seen enormous changes and it is hard to unpick what the reasons are. But the college have a significant part. The biggest achievement is that he lives now independently, away from us, in a flat. That is a major accomplishment.” – Parent of a Post-16 Special Needs Learner

5.2.5 Retention and (Preparing for) Progression

Early signs of improved qualification success and/or retention rates were identified by 70% of pre-16 and 58% of post-16 providers in the surveys undertaken for the evaluation, although as shown in Section Six, these are less prevalent in the statistical analysis undertaken of FL activity in 2008/09 and 2009/10.

Looking to the future, the summary position on forecast impacts (taken from the provider survey) is that:

- 64% of pre-16 providers expect FL to improve progression rates to positive destinations;
- 61% of post-16 providers expect the same;
- 60% of all providers (with very little difference between pre-16 and post-16) expect FL to lead to more participation in post-16 learning and a more effective transition phase between pre-16 and post-16.

Preparing learners for progression is seen by many tutors consulted through the case studies to be as important as the progression itself, and certainly the latter is unlikely to be successful without the former. A huge amount of work – often informal and undocumented – takes place through FL and includes tutors driving learners to/from job, college or placement interviews, doing mock interviews and ensuring that they know how to dress and present themselves appropriately in a formal setting. Whilst some of this is delivered through PSD qualifications, much of it is not, especially the pastoral care that can be the difference between a learner attending an interview and not.

“The tutors have so many roles: teacher, mentor, shoulder to cry on, taxi! Their attitude and willingness to do so much work for the learners is invaluable.” - College senior manager

“I had goals before but now I have lots of goals, I’ve done a CV, I’m on the student council and would like to get a job and go up to Level 2 and be a social worker”. – Post-16 Learner

Learners could also make the link between FL and progression, especially where they had come to the course with relatively few ideas on what they wanted to do in terms of employment. The vast majority agreed that the support and experiences provided through FL have helped to raise their awareness of the options available to them and in some cases have challenged their perceptions about the value of post-16 study. Their feedback shows that FL has also improved their understanding of different vocations and in some cases raised their aspirations.

“The personal tutor talks to him weekly. It’s been very useful for him to know the next assignments, the next steps. He’s probably going to go on and work in catering.” – Parent of a Post-16 Learner

“I want to work with cars.....this course has helped me to decide that.” – Post-16 learner

“I feel more confident about getting a job. I’ve got more on my CV than I had before.” – Post-16 Learner

It was not uncommon for the case study focus groups to contain learners from families with one or more generations of unemployment, so whilst aspirational change is definitely evident in many cases, it is unrealistic to assume it will be unanimous (linking back to the point on FL being positive in many respects but not yet transformational).

5.2.6 Partnership Working between Providers

It is clear that FL has helped to promote and facilitate more partnership working between providers (examples of which are presented in Section Four), although in many cases this has built upon pre-FL relationships and collaborative arrangements.

“For FL we want to work together so young people get the best package.” – Post-16 Provider

“Many [providers] don’t have the capacity to deliver [as much learner choice as they would like] so following a collaborative approach has been good... FL gives you more licence to be flexible”. – Pre-16 Provider

The primary research undertaken from the evaluation has re-emphasised that effective partnership working underpins many of the benefits already described in this section. Exposing pre-16 learners to new environments (college, training providers) and introducing pre-16 and post-16 learners to different workplaces and codes of conduct, for example, are seen to be integral to the development of self-confidence, aspirations and independence, and all rely upon multi-partner delivery of FL programmes. As and when the DfE and/or its partner organisations issue further guidance to the sector on the development and implementation of FL, it would be advisable to stress the importance and potential benefits of providers working together to offer a holistic and varied programme that exposes learners to a range of different situations.

5.3 Challenges

As more providers have started to deliver full FL programmes, the main challenges – although already understood – have become more evident and providers have become more vocal about them. This is particularly true of private training providers, many of whom are delivering full FL programmes for the first time in 2010/11. The key challenges currently associated with FL, relevant both to private providers and more broadly, are summarised below.

5.3.1 Perception and Reputation

Whilst the visibility and profile of FL and its learners is growing, issues of perception and reputation remain. These are not as pronounced nor as widespread as they were 12 or 24 months ago but still include:

- **Staff reticence:** in some providers (although only a minority of those visited through the case studies), anecdotal feedback obtained through the case studies suggests that staff more used to teaching at Level 2 and above, and who are being asked for the first time to deliver to FL learners, are sometimes reluctant to do so and/or require specific training. This is more prevalent amongst providers for whom FL is new in 2010/11. In those providers where FL is more embedded, the issues tend to have been overcome or are in the process of being addressed;

“There was a hostile reaction from staff initially. They were seen as difficult kids and FL was seen as a bolt on.” – Pre-16 Provider

“There is a need to increase awareness that FL does not simply focus on ‘naughty kids.’” – Pre-16 Provider

- **Equivalence and need:** there are two elements to this. Most LA FL leads report that there are schools in their area yet to become involved in FL, often because they feel they don’t have appropriate learners, despite LA attainment analysis which suggests

that they do. Second, there have also been examples (in mainstream schools) of parents reportedly expressing their preference for their child to do a full suite of GCSEs rather than FL, their view being that even lower grade GCSEs will have greater currency in the job market than FL qualifications;

“Sometimes we need to educate parents because they think their children need to have GCSEs... no other options are considered.” – Post-16 Provider

“There is some stigma for schools still, particularly where they have a sixth form.” – Post-16 Provider

- **Regular assessment:** although regular accreditation through FL was cited as a benefit earlier in this chapter, some of the later case studies revealed examples of learners becoming disillusioned by the corresponding focus on assessment. This is most prevalent where providers are using units and qualifications from specific awarding organisations whose evidence requirements are seen to be particularly onerous.

“We are bored of doing exams over and over again.” – Post-16 Learner

“The kids get fed up producing leaflets and posters.” – Pre-16 Provider

One Work Skills Level 1 course was said to require *“lots of evidence and course work, like a Level 2 BTEC... [the awarding organisation] expected too much”*. – Pre-16 Provider

The above has resulted in some providers changing awarding organisations, which whilst inconveniencing and time consuming, has nonetheless improved providers’ knowledge of what else is available in the qualifications market.

5.3.2 Functional Skills

Functional skills continues to be the most challenging element of FL to deliver for the following two main reasons:

- **Difficulty:** two thirds of providers responding to the evaluation survey highlighted the difficulty of functional skills qualifications as an issue, often suggesting that the qualifications were pitched at a level above their stated level, and that the jump between the levels (especially from Entry Level 3 to Level 1) was too large. Providers that began delivering FL in 2008/09 were as likely to flag this as a challenge as those that began in 2010/11, suggesting that the problem has persisted over time;
- **Assessment:** providers – and especially post-16 private training providers – have expressed concern about the suitability of the formal assessment of functional skills qualifications, suggesting during the case studies that it is leading to non-attendance, learners walking out of assessments and, consequently, providers facing funding penalties.

"Lots of learners didn't turn up for the assessment" – Post-16 Provider

"Learners need to be performing at a higher level [than Level 1], just to contend with the format of the assessment." – Stakeholder

However, other providers are very deliberately taking a more proactive and forward looking stance, claiming that as functional skills will be a core component of FL, at least in the short term, it is their responsibility to modify or adapt the way they approach functionality and how they prepare learners for assessment.

"We [providers] can't just do what we did in the past. Entry to Employment has gone and we need to change." – Post-16 Provider

"It's up to us to prepare the learners as best we can for the assessment, to influence how well they do." – Special School Teacher

5.3.3 Employer Engagement

Many providers report ongoing difficulties in engaging employers in their FL programmes for the purposes of work placements or site visits. The issues relate to:

- **Supply and demand:** during the case studies providers reported that employers are often swamped with requests for work placements and work experience and as such it can be difficult to successfully place those learners traditionally categorised as being the most challenging and disruptive. This is particularly (although not exclusively) evident in rural areas;
- **Learner suitability:** although not specific to the engagement of employers per se, there are many FL learners for whom work placements represent too much of a stretch until they are some way into their programme and even then they need a level of support that is not feasible within many employment settings. It is becoming increasingly common for providers themselves to act as the employer and to host these pupils on a placement basis;
- **Administrative burden:** smaller employers in particular can be dissuaded from hosting placements due to what they perceive to be high levels of bureaucracy.

"Completing all the red tape is a discouragement because the company gets nothing from this - we're just helping the local authority." – Employer (print services)

"The schools can't complete all the risk assessments and so many opportunities for them (pre-16 learners) are scuppered as a result." – Employer (retail)

"Some kids are not safe to be in a vocational environment... we don't want to take any unnecessary risks or set them up to fail." – Pre-16 Provider

However, none of the above is unique to FL. Rather, they are all challenges that are regularly cited in evaluations of vocational education²⁹. It is also important to note that as reported in Section Four, there are examples from this evaluation of where the diligence and persistence of individual members of staff within providers has led employer engagement to have been extremely successful.

What is specific to FL is that there is no recognised funding for enabling young people to be placed on work experience with an employer unless they complete a qualification (a situation that is unique to FL). The argument being made in some quarters is that these qualifications often have little value to the employers hosting the learners and that there is therefore a degree of wastage or inefficient use of public funds that could be avoided if providers and employers were given more freedom over the structure and outcomes of the placements.

“At a time of high and rising youth unemployment it is clearly regrettable that a new programme should be implemented which in its practical operation reduces further young people’s ability to gain experience of, and learn from, being in a place of work.” Rathbone discussion paper on FL, December 2010

5.3.4 Additional Support Needs

Many FL learners have support needs that extend beyond educational attainment, including challenging personal circumstances. Providers highlight that intensive (informal) PSD support is required to address these needs (e.g. drug or alcohol use and emotional difficulties) alongside the more formal elements of FL if young people are to succeed. FL’s focus on funding qualifications within designated learning hours is said to limit the ability of providers to deliver this wider support unless it is through unpaid time and goodwill. Many do so, and have done for several years, but it cannot be assumed that they will be able to indefinitely.

“Academically these learners are OK but they need help to build up their confidence and address what we call ‘baggage’ before we can think about qualifications.” – Post 16 Provider

“It’s great that they get a qualification but these young people are particularly vulnerable, they’ve got lots of confidence issues, lots of substance misuse problems, mental health problems, very difficult social circumstances – and we don’t have the capacity through doing more and more qualifications to deal with that as much as we’d like to.” – Pre-16 Provider

5.3.5 Funding and Standard Learner Numbers

For some time, funding has been, and continues to be, the most frequently cited challenge relating to its successful implementation. In summary, the arguments – put forward during the case studies and far more prevalent amongst post-16 providers than their pre-16 counterparts³⁰ – are as follows:

²⁹ For example, *Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme Evaluation* (Research Report DCSF-RR084), April 2009, and reports from the evaluation of Young Apprenticeships (York Consulting and NFER) submitted to the Learning Skills Council between 2005 and 2007 (unpublished).

³⁰ Pre-16, FL is funded through mainstream systems, so in theory pre-16 providers will face the same funding issues as post-16 YPLA funded providers. In practice, however, concerns over funding were raised far more frequently by post-16 providers than pre-16 providers during the evaluation.

- **Complexity:** Post-16 FL is funded using the YPLA's demand led funding formula, the number of variables within which is seen to be confusing for many providers³¹;
- **Qualification focus:** under the current system, where young people fail to achieve complete qualifications (as currently there are no partial or unit success measures available on anything other than a pilot basis), there is a risk of it having a negative impact on the provider's FL funding in the following year. The argument put forward by providers, and especially private training providers, is that many young people participate in learning because they want a job and will withdraw from the provision as soon as they get one, especially if they have a family to support. In some cases – for example jobs with training – the learner will have moved into a positive destination but the provider effectively faces a funding penalty;
- **Learner selection:** the above point leads to the suggestion put forward by some of the stakeholders that the system encourages providers to be risk averse and to select learners for FL programmes that are the most likely to achieve full qualifications. However, no reliable evidence of this occurring in practice was obtained through the evaluation;
- **Increased administration:** post-16 providers (especially those who previously delivered Entry to Employment) frequently reported that they are now obliged to deliver a far higher volume of accredited qualifications than in the past, leading to higher registration and certification costs and a more resource intensive administration workload.

It is not within the brief of the evaluation to recommend changes to funding for FL, but it is very important to emphasise how strongly many providers feel about these issues and the extent to which they are threatening the reputation of FL. Informally and formally, providers are calling for a fundamental review of FL funding and it is an issue that in the short term looks set to become more rather than less significant.

“The financial return would probably be about the same now as with Entry to Employment but the expectation is on us to deliver more for less. The demand on us is about four times more now than what we would have had on Entry to Employment in every area.” – Pre-16 Provider

“Providers are having to manage funding and not learning.” – Stakeholder

A related issue is Standard Learner Numbers (SLN)³², which have been based on each (post-16) provider's prior curriculum offer. The view put forward by former Entry to Employment providers is that their SLN values are significantly lower than those of FE colleges, whose pre-FL provision was often based upon a full-year, full-time GNVQ offer (Entry to Employment

³¹ Detailed consultation upon FL funding formulae was not within the scope of the evaluation hence the absence of further explanation against this point. More insight is provided in the December 2010 paper by Rathbone – *An Issue of Equity and Entitlement* – although it should be noted that the contents of the paper does not necessarily represent the views of the evaluators.

³² SLN values are listed on the Learning Aims Database and are used as a basis for the funding calculations in all Demand Led Funding Models. Whilst the SLN gives a robust measure of volume learning, the relative cost of that learning must also be taken into account, measured by the Provider Factor.

was typically a shorter programme). As the FL framework is largely standard across post-16 providers, former Entry to Employment providers have argued that they are at a relative disadvantage and are restricted in the breadth and depth of support they can offer to learners.

As with other funding considerations, SLN changes sit outside of this evaluation's scope but once again the strength of sentiment that exists within certain parts of the sector needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

5.4 In Conclusion

Learners and providers are able to articulate a range of benefits arising from FL delivery in 2010/11, most of which are underpinned by effective partnership working. None of these is new, but then nor would that be expected given that FL has not changed significantly in terms of either structure or target group over the past 12 months. Nor should FL be seen as transformational – whilst there is evidence of it making a tangible difference to learners' lives, it is unrealistic to assume that it will consistently address the most deep-seated challenges (in relation to family background and social mobility, for example) that many within the target group face.

Opinions obtained during the evaluation on the value of FL are mixed, although few have suggested that it lies solely within qualifications. In the view of many of the teachers, tutors and managers that have been consulted, PSD-related skills and the attributes needed to progress to positive destinations are at least of equal importance, if not more important, than qualifications at the Entry Levels and Level 1.

As with the benefits, the challenges of FL carry over from previous years, although the severity being attached to some of them (especially funding) is growing. Whilst the online survey of providers showed largely positive results, it is important to note that a growing number of private providers are becoming increasingly unhappy about certain aspects of the FL infrastructure.

6 MEASURING ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESSION

Summary of Key Points

Introductory Note

- The analysis shows mixed results on attainment and progression. It is however important to note that from a pre-16 perspective, it mainly covers learners that started on FL in 2008/09, since when many providers have refined their FL offer and developed a better appreciation of what works. The findings should therefore be seen more as a baseline than as a conclusive assessment of the impact of FL. Furthermore, the data did not allow non-learning outcomes, such as independent living or supported employment, to be identified.
- It should also be noted that the post-16 data did not enable an analysis of the impact of participating in an FL programme on learners' attainment.

Pre-16

- The data suggests that completing an FL programme can appear to have a negative effect on learners' chances of achieving a full Level 2 or full Level 1 qualification, and on their total GCSE point scores. This is most evident for more able learners and those with no special educational needs (and to some extent can be explained by the fact that the credit values of FL qualifications are lower than for GCSEs, even at grades D-G).
- However, completing an FL programme has a positive effect on learners with low levels of prior attainment at Key Stage 3. For these learners, participating in FL increases their odds of achieving a qualification (of any sort) at the end of compulsory schooling.
- The analysis found that participating in an FL programme is not yet associated with increased odds of continuing in education or training post-16. However, no data was available on progression rates to other positive destinations, including supported employment and independent living, which would provide a more holistic picture.

Post-16

- Almost half of the post-16 FL learners in 2009/10 completed a full programme, while 79% achieved at least parts of it. Not achieving one or more functional skills (or equivalent) qualifications was often the main reason for not completing a full programme. However, FL learners were still more likely to attain functional skills (or equivalent) qualifications in English and maths than other similar non-FL learners.
- The analysis identified a significant provider effect on learners' chances of completing a full programme, suggesting that some providers were more successful at helping learners to achieve all required elements of their FL programme than others.
- According to the ILR, 71% of learners on FL continued in learning at the end of 2009/10, while 7% moved onto some form of employment (without training). After controlling for learners' background characteristics, such as prior achievement and LDD, FL learners were significantly more likely to continue in learning than similar non-FL learners. This was particularly the case for those learners who had achieved a full FL programme, who had nearly double the odds of continuing in learning than non-FL learners.

6.1 Introduction

One of the core aims of the evaluation has been to explore the emerging impact of FL on participating learners. The impact on attitudinal change and softer skills development has been assessed through the case studies and is covered in Section Five. This section of the report draws upon the analysis of the NPD and ILR and discusses impact in relation to qualification attainment and learner progression³³. It is separated by pre-16 and post-16 with overarching conclusions drawn in the closing sub-section.

6.2 Pre-16 Learners

The pre-16 analysis of attainment and progression uses as its sample a cohort of 552 learners reported to have started an FL programme (or at least some of its constituent parts) in 2008/09 or 2009/10 and to have completed in the 2010 summer term (this data was collected by ekosgen³⁴). The sample of pre-16 learners is relatively small (in comparison with post-16 learners) mainly due to the limited number of schools participating in the pilot at the time the data was collected (late 2008 and again in late 2009). To track progression, pupil data from the NPD was matched, where possible, to the ILR.

The analysis has been based on the statistical technique of propensity-score matching and multi-level modelling³⁵ to compare the attainment of the 552 FL learners with a matched and weighted group of similar individuals nationally that are not involved in FL (see Section One of this report for an explanation of these statistical techniques). In order to achieve a valid comparison of the impact of FL on attainment, any individuals with characteristics not shared by any of the 552 learners were removed from the comparison group. For example, learners achieving above Level 5 in Key Stage 3 English and learners of particular ethnic origins were not included. The result is that the only significant difference between the two groups is that the comparison group have not participated in FL.

6.2.1 Characteristics of pre-16 learners on Foundation Learning programmes

The 552 learners on FL share certain characteristics that are different from those of the overall population of learners (see Table 6.1). They tend to have attainment that is significantly lower than the average for their age group at Key Stage 2 and 3, consist of more than twice as many boys as girls, and are very likely to have special educational needs (around a third of learners in the sample of 552 attended a special school)³⁶. Learners participating in FL were also more likely to be in receipt of Free School Meals, were more likely to be of White ethnic origin and to have English as their first language.

³³ NPD and ILR are the administrative systems that are used to record all learners engaging in courses or training at post-16 providers in England.

³⁴ Note that the NPD does not currently enable learners on FL programmes to be easily identified, hence the need for primary data collection.

³⁵ Further details on these techniques are provided in Appendix C.

³⁶ Note that not all learners with special educational needs in the sample attended a special school.

Table 6.1: Pre-16 Learner Characteristics		
Characteristic	Foundation Learning	
	Pupils	Pupils Nationally
Male	69%	51%
Female	31%	49%
Eligible for free school meals	34%	13%
Attending a special school	34%	2%
SEN		
None	11%	75%
School Action	22%	14%
School Action Plus	23%	7%
Statement	45%	4%
English as first language	95%	89%
White ethnic origin	89%	83%
Achieved Key Stage 3 English at Level 5 or above	8%	74%
Achieved Key Stage 3 Maths at Level 5 or above	14%	76%
Achieved Key Stage 3 Science at Level 5 or above	13%	71%
Source: Comparison of learners on NPD completing an FL programme at the end of 2009/10 in Year 11 with other learners not participating in FL.		

6.2.2 Attainment at Key Stage 4

The analysis suggests that completing an FL programme appears to have a slightly negative effect on learners' chances of achieving a full Level 2³⁷, a full Level 1³⁸ and on their total GCSE point scores at the end of Key Stage 4 compared with similar non-FL learners. Specifically:

- 15% of FL learners achieved a full Level 2 compared with 20% of similar learners;
- 51% of FL learners achieved a full Level 1 compared with 56% of similar learners;
- FL learners achieved an average of 201 points at Key Stage 4 compared with an average of 207 points for non-FL learners.
- FL learners achieved significantly fewer points at Key Stage 4 in their eight highest grades achieved than other similar learners (167 points on average compared with 172 points).

Multi-level modelling shows that this apparently negative impact was most evident for more able FL learners and those with no special educational needs, suggesting that learners who

³⁷ Five GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent

³⁸ Five GCSEs at grades A*-G or equivalent

have a chance of being able to achieve a full Level 2, or even a full Level 1, are less likely to do so if they participate in FL. However, it is important to note the following explanatory factors:

- The credit values of FL qualifications are lower than for GCSEs, even at grades D-G. For example, an Entry Level 1 qualification has a credit value of 10 points, an Entry Level 2 qualification 12 points and an Entry Level 3 14 points. Functional Skills qualifications at Levels 1 and 2 are worth 12.5 and 23 points respectively. This compares with 16 points for a GCSE at Grade G (the lowest GCSE pass) and 22 points for a GCSE at Grade F³⁹;
- Learners completing Entry Level qualifications as part of an FL programme would not normally be expected to achieve a full Level 2 and many of them would not be expected to achieve a full Level 1 at the end of Key Stage 4.

The analysis also shows that participating in an FL programme has an apparently positive effect on pupils with very low attainment at Key Stage 3 (i.e. those who have achieved below Level 4 in two or more subjects) and those with a statement of special educational needs. For these pupils, completing an FL programme was associated with an increased chance of:

- Achieving at least one qualification of any type or level at the end of Key Stage 4;
- Achieving at least one vocational qualification at the end of Key Stage 4.

Comparing the full cohort of 552 learners with a comparison group of similar learners further endorses the above and shows that FL learners were more likely to:

- Achieve any qualifications at Key Stage 4 (97% of learners compared with 90% of similar learners);
- Achieve a vocational qualification at Key Stage 4 (65% of learners compared with 61% of similar learners).

In other words, the analysis of the first cohort of pre-16 young people to participate in FL has shown that, while it does not increase their achievement overall, it can make a difference to whether or not a young person achieves any qualifications at the end of compulsory schooling.

Learners on an FL programme were also more likely to achieve at least one qualification at Level 1 (one GCSE at grade A*-G or equivalent) at Key Stage 4 (83% of learners compared with 80% of similar learners), although this difference is not statistically significant. However, female learners who took part in FL were significantly more likely to achieve a Level 1 qualification than similar females not involved in the programme.

Pre-16 learners attending a special school who completed an FL programme were nearly four times more likely to achieve at least one qualification than similar pupils in special schools.

³⁹ See: http://www.education.gov.uk/performance/tables/schools_10/points.pdf

6.2.3 Destinations of Pre-16 Learners

One of the key aims of FL is to help learners progress to positive destinations. For many learners, this may mean moving on to further learning at Level 2 or below. For others, particularly those with special educational needs, positive outcomes may include independent living or supported employment. For the purpose of this analysis, no data was available on these latter outcomes. Instead, the analysis was only able to consider positive outcomes in terms of moving on to education or training⁴⁰.

The destinations of pre-16 learners were assessed using linked NPD and ILR data. This involved investigating how many of the 552 FL learners (and learners in the comparison group) could be identified in the ILR or NPD as participating in post-16 learning. It is based on the assumption that any learner who did not appear in either dataset was not in formal education or training⁴¹.

Working on this basis, the analysis found that participating in FL was not associated with increased odds of continuing in education or training post-16. Whilst 71% of learners on an FL programme progressed in this way, the same was true of 74% of learners in the comparison group. Multi-level modeling was not able to identify any significant differences in the apparent impact of the programme on progression rates for different types of learners, such as males and females.

However, as noted above, no data was available on other positive outcomes for FL programme learners. The case studies suggest that some FL learners moved into supported employment (without nationally recognised training) or independent living, and did so with a more appropriate skill set, better life skills and greater self-confidence than if they had not participated in FL. Indeed, the case study feedback suggests that this is the case, but in the absence of supporting statistical evidence it remains anecdotal.

6.3 Post-16 Learners

The post-16 analysis of attainment and destinations uses the ILR and focuses on learners who started on FL in 2009/10. In the absence of a consistently used FL indicator on the ILR in 2009/10, a proxy definition was agreed (in consultation with DfE and YPLA) to identify learners that could be reliably be assumed to be working towards an FL programme. This definition included all learners who were entered for:

- A vocational qualification, a PSD qualification (or a combined vocational/PSD qualification) and two Functional Skills qualifications (English and mathematics) from the QCF eligible for inclusion in an FL programme;

⁴⁰ To include progression to independent living or supported employment would have required a large scale primary data collection exercise with pre-16 providers which was not considered appropriate at this time.

⁴¹ While it is possible that in the matching process an individual who did progress was not identified in the post-16 datasets this is unlikely to have been a large number of individuals and would be unlikely to affect the overall outcome. Overall, 86% of learners were matched to the post-16 datasets. Similar analysis has been conducted for previous evaluations using more detailed versions of both the ILR and NPD (not yet available for this cohort of students). These previous analyses found a national progression rate of 90%.

Or:

- A vocational qualification and a PSD qualification from the QCF (or a combined vocational/PSD qualification), as well as a combination of either Skills for Life Numeracy, Skills for Life Literacy, Skills for Life ESOL⁴², Key Skills Application of Number or Key Skills Communication qualifications.

The definition was restricted to English and mathematics Functional Skills or equivalent qualifications as there are no Skills for Life qualifications in ICT.

Learners were excluded from the definition if they matched the above criteria but were also registered on the ILR as:

- Being aged above 26 or aged 19-25 with no LDD;
- Being on an Apprenticeship programme (at Level 2 or above);
- Having been entered for any qualifications at Level 3 or above;
- Having prior attainment of Level 3 or above;
- Having been entered for a vocational and/or PSD qualification at Level 2 or above.

These exclusion criteria were introduced to remove learners from the sample completing a learning programme largely at Level 2 or above, who do not therefore match the intended FL learner characteristics. However, the definition does include learners completing Skills for Life/Functional Skills/ESOL/Key Skills qualifications at Level 2, as evaluation evidence gathered since 2008 shows that is possible for a learner to be completing a learning programme largely at Level 1 or below, while working towards one such qualification.

The proxy definition provided a cohort of 18,168 individual learners across 528 providers. The characteristics, attainment and destinations of these learners were compared with those registered on the ILR as working towards Entry and Level 1 qualifications but not on a full FL programme (hereafter referred to as 'the comparison group'). The same exclusion criteria as for the FL group were applied to the comparison group.

6.3.1 Characteristics of Post-16 Learners

Table 6.2 summarises the main characteristics of FL programme learners alongside learners in the comparison group (not registered as completing a full FL programme). It shows that FL learners were very similar to the matched comparison group in terms of age and gender, but were more likely to be White British/White Other, to consider themselves as having a learning difficulty or disability and to have not achieved a qualification at Level 1 or above before embarking on their learning. Note that these differences were controlled for when comparing the attainment and destinations of these two groups of learners using multi-level modelling.

⁴² English for Speakers of Other Languages

Table 6.2: Post-16 Learner Characteristics		
Characteristic	FL Learners	Comparison Group
Male	59%	60%
Female	41%	40%
Aged 16-18	92%	90%
Aged 19-25 with LDD	8%	10%
LDD (all ages)	45%	35%
White ethnic origin	84%	81%
Achieved no qualifications at Level 1 or above	50%	32%
Source: ILR		

6.3.2 Attainment of Post-16 Learners⁴³

The majority of learners on FL (79%) achieved at least some elements of their programme, although less than half (47%) had completed it in full by the end of summer term 2010⁴⁴. Fourteen percent of learners had achieved no full qualifications as part of the programme (although some had achieved units) and 7% were registered as continuing on their programme into 2010/11.

Not achieving one or more Functional Skills qualifications (or equivalent) emerges from the data as the most common reason for not completing a full programme. While 68% of learners starting an FL programme had achieved both a vocational and a PSD qualification, or a combined vocational/PSD qualification, only just over half (55%) of learners had achieved both a literacy and a numeracy qualification (Functional Skills or equivalent).

Multi-level modelling shows that learners that had achieved no qualifications before starting on FL were significantly less likely to complete a full programme. However, learners with at least some qualifications but below Level 1 were just as likely to complete a full programme as learners with Level 1 or even Level 2 qualifications. In other words, learners with higher levels of prior attainment among the FL cohort were as likely to complete the full programme as those with lower levels of prior attainment (excluding those with no qualifications at all). The analysis did however reveal a significant provider effect on learners' chances of completing a full programme, i.e. some providers were more successful at helping learners to achieve all required elements of their FL programme than others, regardless of learner characteristics.

⁴³ The analysis of post-16 attainment has concentrated mainly on the completion of FL programmes. To compare the attainment of FL learners and non-FL learners on the constituent parts of FL – e.g. vocational or PSD qualifications – would require an exercise to categorise NQF qualifications as either vocational or PSD to make the comparison valid (NQF qualifications would be prevalent within any comparison group). Such an exercise was not within the scope of the evaluation.

⁴⁴ Note that the expectation is not that all learners will necessarily complete all three of the main elements of a Foundation Learning programme. An assessment of learner need should determine whether all three are appropriate on a case by case basis.

Provider effect aside, the analysis shows that black and minority ethnic learners were more likely to complete the full programme than learners classified as White British/White Other. Furthermore, learners aged 16-18 with LDD were also more likely to complete a full programme than learners in the same age group without LDD.

Finally, learners on an FL programme have increased odds of attaining Functional Skill (or equivalent) qualifications in these two subjects than other similar learners in the comparison group. This aligns with the findings from some of the case studies that completing Functional Skills alongside vocational and PSD qualifications can be a motivating factor for learners.

6.3.3 Destinations of Post-16 Learners

Destinations data were available on the ILR for around 50% of the FL programme and comparison group learners.

The analysis shows that 71% of these FL learners continued in education or training (this includes work-based learning and a small proportion who continued on their FL programme), while 7% moved into some form of employment without training (including voluntary work). Eight percent of FL programme learners were known to be NEET. The destination of the remaining 14% of FL programme learners was classified as 'other' with no further detail provided. Previous research by NFER⁴⁵ has suggested that providers often classify joining the armed services or leaving the country or area as 'other'.

Overall, young people who had participated in a FL programme were *less likely* than the comparison group to have progressed onto positive destinations (for example, 79% of the latter continued in education or training) and more likely to have become NEET (only 4% of the comparison group became NEET⁴⁶).

However, these figures do not take into account the characteristics of the FL participants, which as shown in Table 6.2 were noticeably different in important respects as well as the impact of individual providers. Multi-level modelling suggests that, after controlling for these, FL learners are significantly more likely to continue in learning than similar learners in the comparison group.

This was particularly the case for those learners who had completed a full FL programme – completing a full programme was associated with nearly doubling the odds of continuing in learning compared with similar learners in the comparison group. Those learners completing only parts of an FL programme were also more likely to continue in learning, but only slightly more than the comparison group. In contrast, those FL programme learners who did not complete any parts of their programme were less likely to continue in learning than learners in the comparison group – only 45% of such learners continued in learning compared with 77% of those who achieved a full programme and 68% of those who achieved parts of an FL programme.

⁴⁵ E.g. evaluations of the Young Apprenticeships Programme, including Golden, S., O'Donnell, L., and Benton, T. (2010). Evaluation of the Young Apprenticeships Programme: Outcomes for Cohort 3. Unpublished report for YPLA.

⁴⁶ 8% continued into employment without training and the remaining 10% of learners was 'other' and no further details were available.

Table 6.3 highlights the probability of moving onto other education or training for learners on FL programmes compared with similar learners in the comparison group (it excludes learners who continued in learning on an FL programme or with their current providers). The results suggest that among FL learners who achieve the full programme, about one in two moved onto further learning compared with only around one in three of similar learners who had not completed an FL programme.

Table 6.3: Probability of FL learners and similar non-FL learners moving into further learning	
Learner Type	Probability of moving into further learning
FL – full achievement	51.4%
FL – partial achievement	39.3%
FL – no achievement	18.7%
Similar non-FL learners	36.4%
Source: ILR 2009/10	

Whilst a higher proportion of FL learners than comparison group learners were reported to have become NEET, further analysis suggests that this is only true of learners who did not complete their full programme. If learners did complete, they were no more or less likely to become NEET than members of the comparison group.

It is worth noting, however, that further analysis (not possible within the scope and timescales of the evaluation) would be needed to determine the extent to which learners completing an FL programme had moved onto learning at Level 2 and whether completing a full programme improved their chances of such progression.

6.4 In Conclusion

From an attainment perspective, the evidence at this early stage suggests that FL programmes are most suited to pre-16 learners with low levels of achievement at Key Stage 3 (i.e. those who have achieved below Level 4 in two or more subjects) and those with a statement of special educational needs. Higher achieving FL learners are less likely to see a positive attainment impact, although there are explanatory factors for this which extend beyond the content and suitability of the qualifications.

Post-16 outcomes on FL do not appear to be influenced by learners' prior attainment, although there is evidence of a significant provider effect on learners' chances of completing a full programme.

The findings on the progression impact of FL are mixed, but particularly on the pre-16 side, it is important to take note of the following:

- In many providers the FL offer has been refined since 2008/09 and 2009/10 as staff have developed a better appreciation of what works for their learners and have adapted their provision accordingly. The findings in this section should therefore be seen more

as a baseline rather than a conclusive assessment of the impact of FL on learner progression;

- The data available to the evaluation does not allow non-learning outcomes, such as independent living or supported employment, to be tracked. The same is true of learners moving into employment without nationally accredited training;
- The NPD does not currently record the achievement of units (as opposed to full qualifications). Situations where pre-16 learners have part completed QCF qualifications and effectively banked an amount of credit will therefore not have been included within this attainment analysis.

Should any new research and evaluation on FL be commissioned in the future, it is strongly recommended that it includes within its scope a learner tracking exercise that combines ILR and NPD analysis with primary research focused on non-learning destinations.

7 LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Summary of Key Points

- Depending on the outcomes of the Wolf Report, the potential exists for a significant increase in the number of pre-16 providers delivering FL in the 2011/12 academic year. There is also scope for more and different qualifications and occupational areas being included within the scope of FL, both pre-16 and post-16.
- From a relatively strong starting point in most cases, LAs expect partnership working between providers to increase and become further embedded in 2011/12. In the main, this will be evident in terms of scale (more school and college links, more off-site delivery and in more vocational areas) than in new arrangements or ways of working.
- However, LAs and providers are now seeking clarity on the future of FL and vocational education more widely following the publication of the Wolf Report. There is evidence that some providers are planning to delay further expansion of FL until the policy position is better understood.
- Other factors influencing the future scale and type of FL delivery include funding, employer engagement (in both cases see Section Five) and the cessation of EMA.

7.1 Introduction

Notwithstanding the outcomes and associated policy actions of the government's response to the Wolf Report (a point that applies throughout this chapter), the coming 12 to 24 months represent an exciting and potentially rewarding period of FL activity. The learner offer is set to be refined and made more personalised, learner numbers will increase and the range of curriculum areas in which FL is offered will broaden.

This chapter therefore looks to the future, summarising plans and highlighting the main enabling and inhibiting factors that will influence delivery going forwards. It draws primarily upon the telephone survey of LA FL leads and the online survey of providers.

7.2 Increase in Pre-16 FL Delivery

The 2011/12 academic year should see a considerable increase in the number of pre-16 providers, and therefore learners, involved in FL. In many LAs, delivery to date has been trialled with a limited number of mainstream and special schools, testing and refining delivery models that LAs now wish to roll out more widely.

On the same point, feedback from the LA survey shows that increasing the number of learners and providers (especially pre-16) is the top FL related priority for more than three quarters of LAs over the next year. This is equally true of pilot, extended network⁴⁷ and non-network LAs.

⁴⁷ In addition to the formal FL pilot of 22 local authorities in 2009/10, a further 11 authorities formed an 'extended network' in 2009/10 and were also given access to the FL support programme delivered by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. Local authorities in the extended network were also given the opportunity to visit (and buddy with) an authority in the pilot.

7.3 Extending and Refining the Offer

In almost all LAs, the next academic year is likely to involve more or different qualifications and occupational areas being included within the scope of FL. The more specific plans are being formulated in pilot and extended network areas (i.e. those that have more delivery experience upon which to draw), whilst non-network areas are in the earlier stages of forward planning. Even so, in broad terms the expansion of FL at a provider level is likely to include one or both of the following:

- **More or different units:** Numerous providers are planning to deliver FL in the same subject areas next year, and use the same qualifications, but plan to swap in/out certain units (based on rules of combination) to better align their offer with learner need. The case study findings suggest that this is most common where providers are delivering broad vocational and PSD qualifications, such as NOCN Step Up or Edexcel Vocational Studies;
- **New qualifications and subject/curriculum areas:** Other providers are planning to offer FL in more subject areas next year and in doing so will deliver more QCF qualifications below Level 2. Quantifying this is difficult as plans were generally in the early stages at the time of the case studies but qualitative feedback suggests that it applies to around half of all post-16 providers (especially FE colleges) and to a smaller proportion of pre-16 providers.

There remains little evidence of a move towards learners regularly being able to select the units or qualifications that will make up their FL programme. The reasons for this are the same as those given in Section Four (practicalities, group sizes etc.).

7.4 Raising the Strategic Priority of Foundation Learning

As reported earlier, the priority attached to FL by providers and LAs is reportedly high and has been for some time. It is therefore not surprising that relatively few LAs stated that further efforts were needed in this regard.

However, 14 LAs (six pilot or extended network and eight non-network) did specifically report that they will be taking action to raise awareness and increase the strategic priority given to FL by providers in their area. This will focus largely on mainstream schools, and specifically those that are yet to engage with FL to a significant extent. Although something of a generalisation, these tend to be higher achieving schools which report that they have few, if any, learners for whom FL would be an appropriate route. However, several local LAs have undertaken analysis exercises of attainment data that contest this assertion and plan to begin (or re-start) a dialogue with the schools concerned. This will include the highlighting of good practice, including the production of good practice guides, and new local branding for FL to try and remove any suggestion of stigma.

The new challenge that LAs will face is that, at the time of writing, the future of FL, following its assessment in the Wolf Report, is not known and schools that have already been slow to embrace FL are unlikely to do so now until more has been announced about its scope and scale over the coming months.

Case study example:

One LA has commissioned the development of an FL *Cloud* - an online FL portal where pre-16 and post-16 providers, partners and stakeholders can access information about the development of FL, the strategic groups that are in place, training materials and good practice examples on delivery and implementation.

The Cloud will be an interactive resource where materials and experiences can be shared on an ongoing basis. Its implementation aims to facilitate collaboration and communication between partners by overcoming the barriers posed by the LA's size and rurality which makes it difficult to bring people together for regular face-to-face meetings.

7.5 Collaboration and Partnership Working

From a relatively strong starting point in most cases, LAs expect partnership working between providers to increase and become further embedded in 2011/12. In the main, this will be evident in terms of scale (more school and college links, more off-site delivery and in more vocational areas) than in new arrangements or ways of working. Qualitative feedback obtained through the case studies highlighted examples where FE colleges will be offering additional vocational areas through FL and will be able to do so because pupils from more than one school will attend on the same day, resulting in larger and more viable group sizes.

"We're expecting all of our schools to delivering FL in collaboration with our local college" – LA FL lead

"Our plans are to expand delivery and to promote further collaborative partnerships. We want to be promoting best practice throughout" – LA FL lead

The case studies also showed that where FL programmes receive the most positive feedback from learners, in terms of their enjoyment levels and the extent to which they feel better prepared for progression, they have usually been exposed to a variety of different settings (e.g. college or training provider, employer) and that this has been made possible as a result of partnership-based FL delivery.

7.6 Factors influencing future plans

The achievement of the plans outlined above will be reliant upon a series of enabling factors and the resolution of challenges and inhibitors. These are discussed below.

7.6.1 Policy Position

As documented elsewhere in the report, LAs and providers are now seeking clarity on the future of FL and vocational education more widely following the publication of the Wolf Report. This is particularly true for mainstream schools and providers that are considering expanding or changing their vocational offer in 2011/12.

There is emerging evidence that some providers are planning to delay further expansion of FL until the policy position is better understood. This appears to be notably more prevalent amongst non-network LAs and in providers that are relatively new to FL.

“Schools are worried about budgets and until there is permanence over FL they won't want to commit learners to the programme” – LA FL lead

“We're ploughing on with development however we can't commit to anything when there's so much uncertainty over the future of FL” – LA FL lead

“Once we get clear signals we will expand greatly in schools” – LA FL lead

“Pre-16 – we are developing a cross-authority qualification and awaiting further developments at national level” – LA FL lead

“We are waiting to see the direction of travel from the Wolf Report. We were working towards the previous government guidelines but we're not sure what will happen or if FL will be staying” – LA FL lead

7.6.2 Employer Engagement

The LA survey shows that employer involvement in FL, whilst occurring to a greater extent than 12 months earlier, remains limited (see Section Four). There are well documented challenges to employer engagement (finding a sufficient number of willing employers, the suitability of some FL learners for work placements etc.), but there is also almost universal agreement among LAs, providers and stakeholders that more employer involvement is both desirable and necessary in the future as practical, work based experience is among the most successful means of maintaining learner engagement and equipping them with fundamental employability skills.

The case studies have shown that ongoing and successful employer involvement in FL programmes can be achieved, including in less affluent and rural communities, but this often relies heavily upon the contacts and networks (plus the persistence) of individuals within providers. Following this evaluation, there may be scope for the DfE to oversee the production of an employer engagement good practice guide, or to introduce a buddying system across LAs, although it would be important in advance to test whether a market exists and whether it would represent an effective use of time and resource.

7.6.3 Funding

Funding concerns are documented in Section Five and are therefore not repeated here. Suffice to say, however, that in the post-16 context it remains the most cited issue or challenge relating to FL and for many providers is likely to influence how widely across their organisation they offer FL in the future.

7.6.4 Cessation of EMA

Post-16 providers, including FE colleges and private training providers, are very concerned about the impact that the removal of EMA may have on the recruitment and retention of FL learners. The consensus view is that unless a replacement scheme is introduced that provides equivalent support to the most disadvantaged learners, enrolments onto FL programmes will fall and the risk of learners withdrawing early will increase.

“Changes to EMA have affected the uptake of the programme. We are working to open other avenues of financial support for this cohort” - Post-16 Provider (charity)

“The abolition of EMA for the pre-Level 2 NEET learners will have an impact on engagement and retention if the replacement does not specifically target these learners” – Private Training Provider

“More time and funding is required for us to give foundation learners the input to get them ready for Level 2. If they take two years to complete their Foundation Learning they will end up having to pay fees by the time they get to Level 3. The disappearance of EMA puts Foundation Learning in serious jeopardy and it is the young people who need Entry Level/ Level 1 input who will be least able to afford to study post-16.” - Post-16 Provider (FE college)

It should be noted that the consultations from which the above quotes are taken were completed when the details of the EMA replacement were somewhat unclear. Since then, the government has announced that an additional £180m will be made available for bursaries for low income 16-19 year olds.

7.7 In Conclusion

There is an appetite and willingness to continue to develop and expand FL at both the provider and LA level. This will see the range of curriculum areas increase and learner numbers, particularly pre-16, rise considerably.

However, there is a growing sense of caution surrounding future plans that is unlikely to change until the future of FL has been clearly articulated to the sector. For some provider types – most notably private training providers – issues relating to funding (including assessment and the perceived overemphasis on qualification achievement) will also need to be addressed if the growing sense of disquiet is to be overcome and FL expanded amongst this cohort.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Conclusions

8.1.1 Implementation

Estimates suggest that there have been significant increases in pre-16 and post-16 FL activity in 2010/11. More providers have become involved and the number of available vocational or subject areas has increased. Reflecting this, support for the principles of FL remains strong and it continues to have a high priority in the majority of LAs. Whilst the Wolf Report's findings on FL have caused there be some uncertainty in the sector over FL, there is nonetheless a large cohort of very willing providers and LAs who are committed to making it a success.

FL in itself is not a new philosophy and in many providers consulted during the evaluation the only significant difference in the delivery infrastructure is in the qualifications that are being undertaken. FL is however acting as an enabler of change for provision below Level 2 and now appears to be delivering on its pledge of allowing providers to deliver more flexible, engaging programmes. Considerable progress has been made over the past 12 months, from a position where the perceived adequacy of FL qualifications was a constraining factor, to one where it is often encouraging and driving participation. Full FL programmes, with most qualifications drawn from the QCF, are now becoming the norm, whilst partnership based delivery and employer involvement is growing.

8.1.2 Benefits and Challenges

Learners and providers continue to cite a range of benefits arising from FL, including the needs of learners below Level 2 being better highlighted and understood, a sense of reward and achievement through regular accreditation, comparatively high levels of enjoyment, and improved engagement, motivation and confidence. However, FL should not be seen as transformational – whilst there is evidence of it making a tangible difference to learners' lives, it is unrealistic to assume that it will consistently address the most deep-seated challenges (in relation to family background and social mobility, for example) faced by many within the target group.

Opinions obtained during the evaluation on the value of FL are mixed, although few have suggested that it lies solely within qualifications. In the view of many of the teachers, tutors and managers that have been consulted, PSD-related skills and the attributes needed to progress to positive destinations are at least of equal importance, if not more important, than qualifications at the Entry Levels and Level 1.

Whilst the visibility and profile of FL and its learners is growing, significant challenges remain. A rising number of private providers are becoming increasingly unhappy about certain aspects of the FL infrastructure, especially funding and funding formulae, the emphasis on qualification achievement and – linked to both of these – the absence of recognised funding for enabling young people to be placed on work experience with an employer unless they complete a qualification (a situation that is unique to FL). In addition, there is still a widespread view that most functional skills qualifications are pitched at too high a level and in some cases the formal assessments are leading to non-attendance.

8.1.3 Equality and Diversity

In the vast majority of providers, FL is proactively targeted at learners who have a statement of special educational need or LDD, are recognised for school action or school action plus, or who were previously/at risk of becoming NEET. Whilst from a pre-16 perspective they are significantly more likely to be male than female, they are not being selected on this basis. Selection is based upon them having achieved significantly below the national average at Key Stage 3 and/or having behavioural characteristics that makes them suitable for FL.

FL learners are more likely than learners generally to be of white British origin, but this is also representative of their educational achievement and other background characteristics rather than being a selection criterion in itself.

8.1.4 Attainment and Progression

From an attainment perspective, FL appears to be most suited to pre-16 learners with low levels of achievement at Key Stage 3 and those with a statement of special educational need. Higher achieving FL learners are less likely to see a positive attainment impact and on average FL appears to have a slightly negative effect on their chances of achieving a full Level 1 or full Level 2 qualification, and on their total GCSE point scores. However, this is explained to some extent by the fact that the credit values of FL qualifications are lower than for GCSEs, even at grades D-G.

Post-16 outcomes on FL do not appear to be influenced by learners' prior attainment, although there is evidence of a significant provider effect on learners' chances of completing a full programme. There is also evidence that FL learners are significantly more likely to continue in learning than similar non-FL learners, especially where they have completed a full FL programme⁴⁸.

These are, however, early findings, as the FL offer in many providers has been refined and improved since the learners under review completed their programme. The evaluation has also not been able to track non-learning outcomes, such as independent living or supported employment, upon which FL may have had a positive impact. We return to this topic under 'Recommendations'.

8.2 Recommendations

Given that at the time of writing the government's response to the Wolf Report had not been published, it is difficult to prescribe recommendations for FL. The suggestions below cover both strategic and operational considerations, but deliberately stop short of proposing significant changes or infrastructural developments.

- 1. Policy position:** as a result of the publication of the Wolf Report, LAs and providers are now seeking clarity on the future of FL, with some planning to delay further expansion until the policy position is better understood. The sector will appreciate a clear statement from the DfE as soon as it can be provided.

⁴⁸ The analysis of post-16 outcomes did not look at attainment per se but concentrated on the completion or otherwise of full programmes and the three different strands (vocational, PSD and functional skills).

2. Funding: post-16 providers are calling for a fundamental review of FL funding and it is an issue that in the short term looks set to become more rather than less significant. Arriving at a satisfactory resolution is likely to be directly linked to the ongoing reputation of FL in the sector, especially amongst post-16 training providers, and is therefore important that the dialogue taking place between the DfE, training provider representative bodies and other relevant organisations be continued.

3. Longitudinal tracking: to enable non-learning outcomes (independent living, supported employment etc.) to be tracked – and therefore for the impact of FL to be better understood – any further research or evaluation should include a longitudinal element to capture the experiences of a sample of learners who move into non-learning outcomes following FL. This will give a better and more holistic view of the extent to which FL is (as many providers claim) preparing learners for progression more effectively than equivalent provision in the past.

4. The non-deliverers' perspective: whilst the evaluation has found that FL has a high degree of visibility and importance within providers, it has concentrated on those where delivery is already underway. As part of any subsequent FL related research or evaluation, it is recommended that a cohort of non-delivering providers be included to obtain a more rounded view on sector-wide attitudes to FL and to understand the reasons behind any delays or late starts.

APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

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APPENDIX B: INTERNATIONAL COMPARATOR PROFILES

England A1

Country	England
What is the school leaving age?	Currently 16. From 2013 the participation age will rise to 17 (i.e. participation in some form of education or training) and from 2015 to 18.
Does the country have a qualification framework?	Yes – National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)
Are there entry level qualifications?	Yes - Entry Levels 1, 2 & 3
If yes, what do they consist of?	Vocational qualifications such as Entry Level Award in Introduction to Horticulture; Personal, Social and Development (PSD) qualifications such as Entry Level Award in Personal and Social Development; Functional Skills English, mathematics and ICT qualifications – and others related to languages and subjects.
Who takes them?	Various types of learner but often 14-16 year olds who are unlikely to achieve a Level 1/Level 2 qualification and adults post-16 who did not achieve Level 1
Are there Level 1 qualifications?	Yes
If yes, what do they consist of?	Academic qualifications: GCSEs D-G count as Level 1. Vocational qualifications (NVQ Level 1) and other qualifications on NQF or QCF, including PSD and Functional Skills qualifications
Who takes them?	Qualifications other than GCSEs are taken by various learners, but often 14-16 year olds who are unlikely to achieve many Level 2 qualifications and adults post-16 who did not achieve Level 2
What provision is there for learners not achieving standard qualifications/learners with SEN?	They can complete alternative qualifications while still at school or after school at Entry Level and Level 1 including as part of a Foundation Learning programme. ASDAN Bronze/Silver Awards are widely taken by such young people. See: http://www.asdan.org.uk/media/downloads/AoPE.pdf or http://www.asdan.org.uk/media/downloads/Bronze%20Silver%20info%20flyer.pdf

Scotland A2

Country	Scotland
What is the school leaving age?	16
Does the country have a qualification framework?	Yes – the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) See: http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/nationalqualifications/nqframework/cqframework.asp
Are there entry level qualifications?	Yes - including Access 1, Access 2 and Access 3/Foundation Standard Grade – these are equivalent to SCQF Levels 1-3 respectively (SCQF Level 3 is equivalent to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level 1). There are also National Certificates and National Progression Awards at SCQF Levels 2 & 3. See: http://www.scf.org.uk/TheFramework/InteractiveFramework.aspx
If yes, what do they consist of?	The basic building block for all SQA qualifications is the Unit. Units normally take about 40 hours to complete and there are three Units in Access 2 and 3 courses (no external assessment). Access 1 qualifications tend to accredit partial achievement of Units for Access 2 courses (called derived units) however there are also supported units for those who will need support with learning, and independent units that are not derived from Access 2 for those learners would not be able to achieve derived units. They are available in various subject areas, including, in academic subjects (English, mathematics, modern languages etc.), PSD areas (personal development, personal care, etc.) and enterprise through craft. See: http://www.access1and2.org.uk/mini/26898.html
Who takes them?	Access 1 – 3 qualifications provide opportunities for candidates who require additional support for their learning. These are routes to further learning. They are also qualifications with opportunities for progression - this may be to another qualification at the same level, or the next level. National Certificates are aimed at 16-18 year olds or adults in full-time education. National Progression Awards are mainly used by colleges for short study programmes, such as return-to-work courses or part-time learning for those already in work. See: http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/24067.html

Are there Level 1 qualifications?	<p>These are offered mainly in schools: Intermediate 1/General Standard Grade – available in mainstream curriculum subjects (English, mathematics, etc.).</p> <p>In schools and colleges: Skills for Work Intermediate 1: Available in more vocational subjects, such as construction or early education and childcare</p> <p>In work-place/college/training providers: SVQ Level 1 qualifications</p> <p>There are also National Certificates and National Progression Awards at SCQF Level 4</p>
If yes, what do they consist of?	<p>National Courses at SCQF Level 4 are designed to develop the skills and knowledge of learners in a specific subject area. A National Course at Intermediate 1 is allocated 24 credits at SCQF Level 4 and is usually made up of three units and a course assessment.</p> <p>Standard Grades also develop subject-specific skills and knowledge. A Standard Grade at General Level is allocated 24 credits at SCQF Level 4.</p> <p>Courses include: Certificate in Professional Food and Beverage Service, Certificate in British Sign Language and Certificate in Personal Effectiveness.</p>
Who takes them?	Level 1 qualifications are taken by young people in schools and adults in the workplace and at colleges.
What provision is there for learners not achieving standard qualifications/learners with SEN?	Access Levels 1 and 2.
Useful links	<p>http://www.access1and2.org.uk/ Site detailing the Access Level courses in Scotland.</p> <p>http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/6487.html Site offering guidance on the SCQF levels.</p>

Ireland A3

Country	Ireland
What is the school leaving age?	16
Does the country have a qualification framework?	Yes – the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) for Ireland
Are there entry level qualifications?	Yes – although in the NFQ they are called Level 1 and 2 Level 1 and 2 are broadly equivalent to Level 1 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)
If yes, what do they consist of?	These consist of a number of basic components often in numeracy and literacy, which the learner can achieve at their own pace and accumulate over time; e.g. Level 1 Certificate in Communications or Level 2 Certificate in General Learning For example see.: http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/documents/Level1Certificate.pdf
Who takes them?	Level 1 and 2 Certificates are designed to meet the needs of learners, both young and old, including those with intellectual and other disabilities, adults returning to training, and learners with few or no previous qualifications, including those within the workforce. (Country Education Profile: Ireland (October 2009))
Are there Level 1 qualification?	Yes - They are equivalent to Level 2 of the EQF
If yes, what do they consist of?	Academic qualifications: Junior Certificate (awarded to pupils who have successfully completed exams after 3 years of secondary education); Level 3 Certificates enable learners to gain recognition for specific personal skills, practical skills and knowledge, basic transferable skills, the enhancement of individual talents and qualities and achievements and learning relevant to a variety of progression options e.g. Level 3 Certificate in Keyboard and Computer Skills.
Who takes them?	The Junior Certificate is the normal qualification route for most learners (aged 14-15) Level 3 Certificates – not clear but presumably for all kinds of learners by a variety of learning providers
What provision is there for learners not achieving standard qualifications/learners with SEN?	Level 1 and 2 Certificates (see above)
	http://www.qualificationsrecognition.ie/recognition/ir_edu_train/documents/IrishCEP13October2009-PDF.pdf This document describes the whole education system in Ireland. http://www.ksll.net/Documents/PLA_One%20Step%20Up%20report_April%2009.pdf This document provides

Useful links:	information on education and training at Level 1 and 2 of the NQF for Ireland. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/irelandreport_en.pdf The report on referencing the NQF for Ireland to the EQF
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Malta A4

Country	Malta
What is the school leaving age?	16
Does the country have a qualification framework?	Yes – MQF (Malta Qualifications Framework)
Are there entry level qualifications?	<p>Yes – Level 1 on the MQF is comparable with Entry Level 3. The MQF levels 1 to 8 are aligned with the EQF levels 1 to 8. http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/maltareport_en.pdf</p>
If yes, what do they consist of?	<p>The school leaving certificate is at Level 1 on the MQF. Learners achieve a pass, merit or distinction. The reform to schooling has incorporated a holistic approach which values formal, informal and non-formal learning. Those learners who do not fully or partially achieve a MQF Level 1 at the end of compulsory schooling are awarded a certificate indicating that the learners have satisfied the legal requirement of compulsory education.</p> <p>As well as the school leaving certificate, there are two types of qualifications at Level 1; the Level 1 Certificate and the VET Level 1 Certificate.</p> <p>The Level 1 Certificate is made up of 40 credits. It is made up of key competencies only and does not include any vocational elements.</p> <p>The VET Level 1 Certificate is different from a Level 1 Certificate in that it contains elements of both sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge. The balance of credits between the three aspects is 70% key competencies, 15% in sectoral skills and 15% in underpinning knowledge. Attainment of the Basic Employment Passport together with Adult Skills Certificate or the Malta Qualification Council's 8 Key Competencies at Level 1 are also considered as a Full VET Level 1 qualification.</p> <p>The full VET Level 1 Certificate has the same parity of esteem as a Full School Leaving Certificate.</p>
Who takes them?	The Level 1 certificate is designed for those who completed their compulsory education but did not achieve a full Level 1 certificate in school.

Are there Level 1 qualifications?	Yes They are equivalent to Level 2 of the EQF
If yes, what do they consist of?	<p>There is the General Education Level 2 in schools and, as with Level 1, the Level 2 Certificate and the Level 2 VET Certificate.</p> <p>The Level 2 Certificate is made up entirely of credits for key competencies. In total a learner must achieve 60 credits at Level 2.</p> <p>The Level 2 VET Certificate consists of 60% key competencies, 20% sectoral skills and 20% underpinning knowledge. A minimum number of 60 credits must be achieved.</p> <p>The Malta Qualifications Council recommends that a full VET Level 2 qualification has the same parity of esteem as 4 General Education Level 2 subjects.</p>
Who takes them?	School learners and learners outside of school attending MCAST (Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology – which is an umbrella organisation for the majority of Malta's VET courses) and other training providers.
What provision is there for learners not achieving standard qualifications/learners with SEN?	
Useful links:	<p>http://www.mqc.gov.mt/malta-qualifications-framework Site of the MQF.</p> <p>http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/eqf/maltareport_en.pdf Report on referencing the MQF to the EQF.</p>

Australia A5

Country	Australia
What is the school leaving age?	There are different laws for different states, but in most parts of Australia young people have to be in some form of education, employment or training till they are 17
Does the country have a qualification framework?	Yes – the Australia Qualifications Framework www.aqf.edu.au
Are there entry level qualifications?	No
If yes, what do they consist of?	Not applicable
Who takes them?	Not applicable
Are there Level 1 qualifications?	Yes – Certificate 1s (vocational) and the School Certificate (Academic) The Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (SSCE) is either Level 2 or Level 3
If yes, what do they consist of?	Certificate 1 prepares you to perform a defined range of routine and predictable activities. Certificate 1 applications are a variety of employment related skills including preparatory access and participation skills, broad-based induction skills, and may include specific workplace skills possibly in a team environment. For example see Certificate 1 in Introductory Vocational Education: www.saworks.sa.gov.au/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=a%2Fvz%2Fu98x2s%3D&tabid=89
Who takes them?	Offered at vocational education and training institutions. Some schools also issue or give credit towards Certificates I-IV As of 20 December 2010, there were 1672 learners completing a school based traineeship (SBT – Certificate II) and 393 completing a school based apprenticeship (SBAs – Certificate III). See: http://www.sbatinnsw.info/sbat_figures.php
What provision is there for learners not achieving standard qualifications/learners with SEN?	The Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) provides training to assist unemployed people to make a real improvement in their language, literacy and numeracy skills.

	<p>While at school there is provision for the assessment of Life Skills outcomes across different curriculum areas in some parts of Australia (e.g. New South Wales) for pupils with special education needs, particularly those with an intellectual disability. These are recorded via pupils' School Profile and School Certificate Record of Achievement (i.e. not externally assessed/not a separate qualification).</p>
Useful links:	<p>http://www.australiamagazine.co.uk/?p=57 This page compares the English NQF levels with the AQF levels.</p> <p>https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/vetinschools/ A site that explains the role of VET qualifications in schools in Australia</p> <p>http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/learning/yr11_12/pdhpe/lifeskills/index.php This page provides information on Life Skills Courses in New South Wales.</p> <p>http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/life_skills_710_support.pdf This is an advice document on the planning, programming and assessment of Life Skills courses for learners in New South Wales.</p>

New Zealand A6

Country	New Zealand
What is the school leaving age?	16
Does the country have a qualification framework?	Yes – The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NQZF)
Are there entry level qualifications?	<p>Yes. NZQF Level 1 appears to be equivalent to Entry Level 3 in England (EQF Level 1).</p> <p>The NZQF Level 1 is made up of National Certificate qualifications which need to be at least 40 credits. For example there are National Certificates in Employment Studies and vocational areas.</p> <p>At this level there is also the National Certificate of Education and Achievement (NCEA) Level 1 which is the school-based qualification that students complete when they are 16 years old. This is worth 80 credits and may be more comparable with GCSEs.</p>
If yes, what do they consist of?	<p>At Level 1, National Certificates cover both vocational, PSD equivalent and key skill areas (mathematics and language).</p> <p>Please see: http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/nzqf/nzqf-levels/</p>
Who takes them?	Young people in schooling up to the age of 16, school leavers who have no or low levels of qualifications that are in Youth Training and adult learners.
Are there level 1 qualifications?	<p>In schools all students work towards the NCEA Level 2</p> <p>In other settings National Certificates at Level 2 are available. Examples include National Certificate in Agriculture, National Certificate in Drama and National Certificate in Pavement Surfacing.</p>
If yes, what do they consist of?	At Level 2, National Certificates cover both vocational, PSD equivalent and key skill areas (mathematics and language).
Who takes them?	In school all students work towards the NCEA. There are also many vocational qualifications available and offered in

	secondary schools. For example, the National Certificate of Tourism, National Certificate in Computing, and National Certificate of Motor Engineering.
What provision is there for learners not achieving standard qualifications/learners with SEN?	There do not appear to be separate qualifications for learners with SEN. It appears, where possible, learners with SEN are given extra support in mainstream settings to work towards the NCEA.
Useful links	http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/nzqf/nzqf-levels/ provides a description of the different levels on the NZQF

South Africa A7

Country	South Africa
What is the school leaving age?	15 or End of Year 9 (whichever comes first)
Does the country have a qualification framework?	Yes – South African National Qualifications Framework (SA NQF)
Are there entry level qualifications?	Yes – it appears that Level 1 on the SA NQF may be comparable to Entry Level 3 qualifications in England.
	<p>Regardless of the route taken, any qualification at Level 1 on the SA NQF is called a General Education and Training Certificate (GETC). The GETC is primarily geared towards gaining the fundamental skills needed to perform effectively within the workplace. It is a generalist qualification for all qualifications at Level 1 on the NQF (school and adult education) and as such each full qualification registered conforms to broad requirements.</p> <p>ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training) levels 1 to 4 (completion of level 4 results in the ABET GETC) are designed for adult learners and school leavers with low or no qualifications. The GETC for the ABET sector is a unit standards-based qualification, based on a combination of the Department for Education's eight learning areas and the 12 organising fields of the NQF (including specific units developed for ABET). Areas of learning include language, literacy and communication, mathematics, core elements and elective elements.</p> <p>The GETC for the formal schooling sector is a "whole" qualification, based on eight learning areas (outlined by the Department for Education). The qualification is based on the accumulation of credits between years 7 to 9 but only awarded in Year 9. The fundamental learning components comprise a total of 36 credits in communication and mathematics, the core learning component comprise a total of 60 credits spread across the following areas (life orientation, human and social sciences, economic and management sciences, natural sciences, arts and culture and technology). There is an elective element which comprises a total of 24 credits.</p>
If yes, what do they consist of?	Please see http://www.saga.org.za/docs/policy/getc.pdf
Who takes them?	All students in school and adults in adult education programmes.
Are there level 1 qualifications?	Yes – there are National certificates at Level 2 on the SA NQF (comparable with Level 1 on England's NQF)
If yes, what do they consist of?	National certificates Learners in school work towards the Intermediate Certificate – Grade 10.

	<p>There are a range of vocational national certificates at this level (for example: Introduction to Mechanical Engineering, National Certificate - Hairdressing).</p> <p>See http://reggs.saga.org.za/search.php?cat=qual for qualifications search.</p>
Who takes them?	<p>Students in school or home schooled and those in adult education. The school qualification is the first certificate towards achieving the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) awarded at Level 5.</p>
What provision is there for learners not achieving standard qualifications/learners with SEN?	<p>No specific qualifications. Learners with SEN will receive extra support. They may not necessarily fail a year if they do not complete all areas but will be moved up to the next year with extra support in the areas where they are falling behind. Generally, if learners do not pass a year they will repeat a year in school. However, pupils are only allowed to fail one Grade per learning phase. The phases are Grades 1 to 3, Grade 3 to 6, Grades 6 to 9 and Grades 10 to 12.</p>
Useful links	<p>http://www.saga.org.za/docs/misc/level_descriptors.pdf This document provides the level descriptors for the SA NQF.</p> <p>http://www.balid.org.uk/GMR/South%20Africa%20GMR%202010.pdf A review of the South African Adult Literacy policies.</p>

APPENDIX C: TECHNICAL DETAIL

This Appendix provides further details of the statistical analyses that were undertaken to assess the outcomes for young people who participated in the FL programme, reported in Chapter 6.

F1 - Sampling

The analysis was based on four samples of learners identified in the ILR and NPD administrative datasets as detailed in Table F1 below.

Age group	Category	Number of learners
Pre-16	Pre-16 learners who were identified as participating in the FL programme in the baseline data collection in 2009	552
	A matched comparison sample of pre-16 learners who had not participated in the FL programme	303,876
Post-16	Post-16 learners who were identified as FL participants using the proxy measure detailed below	18,168
	Post 16 learners comparison learners who met the criteria for the proxy measure detailed below	261,109

As discussed in Chapter 6, two approaches were used to identify the FL programme participants.

The pre-16 FL learner sample was identified through data collected through the evaluation of the FL pilot as learners who had:

- started a FL programme in 2008/09 or 2009/10 and completed it in 2009/10 (Year 10 at start of 2008/09)
- this was matched to the NPD for the end of 2009/10 academic year and the NPD/ILR matched dataset, which contain details of pupils' backgrounds and their attainment.

The pre-16 comparison learner sample was identified in the NPD using propensity score matching, as discussed in Section F2.1 below.

The post-16 FL learner sample was identified in the Learning Responsive Data-set FE L05 and Employer Responsive data-set full collection from the academic year 2009/10. As no clear identifier in the ILR for learners who were undertaking an FL programme was available, the sample was identified using a proxy measure outlined in Chapter 6 and presented below: Post-16 FL learners *included* all those who were entered for:

- A vocational qualification, a PSD qualification (or a combined vocational/PSD qualification) and two Functional Skills qualifications (English and Maths) from the QCF eligible for inclusion in a Foundation Learning programme;

- Or a vocational qualification and a PSD qualification from the QCF (or a combined vocational/PSD qualification), as well as both a Skills for Life Numeracy and Skills for Life Literacy qualification, or a Skills for Life Numeracy and a Skills for Life ESOL qualification, or a Key Skills Application of Number qualification and Key Skills Communication qualification.

Learners undertaking Skills for Life/Functional Skills/ESOL/Key Skills qualifications at L2 or below (not just Entry and L1) were included. The analysis was restricted to English and Maths Functional Skills only as there are no Key Skills or Skills for Life qualifications in ICT.

Learners were *excluded* where they were:

- Flagged as doing an apprenticeship (L2 or L3) – i.e. A15 '2' or '3';
- Entered for any qualification at L3 or above (i.e. vocational, PSD, Functional Skills, etc.);
- Entered for a vocational and/or PSD qualification at L2 or above.

The **post-16 comparison sample** was also identified in the ILR using a proxy measure as follows:

Learners were *included* who were entered for:

- Any qualification at Entry or L1.

Learners were excluded where they were:

- Flagged as doing an apprenticeship (L2 or L3) – i.e. A15 '2' or '3';
- Entered for any qualification at L3 or above (i.e. vocational, PSD, Functional Skills, etc.);
- Entered for a vocational and/or PSD qualification at L2 or above.

These samples formed the basis of the pre-16 and post-16 analyses which are detailed further below.

F2 - Statistical analysis

Two main analytical techniques were used to assess the outcomes of participating in the FL programme:

- Propensity score matching;
- Multi-level modelling.

F2.1 - Propensity score matching

In order to compare the outcomes of young people involved in Foundation Learning to other similar pupils propensity score matching was used. Propensity score matching involves using logistic regression to estimate the relationship between a wide range of background characteristics and taking part in Foundation Learning. As part of this process the probability of any individual taking part in Foundation Learning given their background characteristics is estimated. This probability is known as the propensity score. Existing research (Rosenbaum and Rubin 1983⁴⁹) has shown that in many situations matching two groups in terms of their

⁴⁹ Rosenbaum, Paul R.; Rubin, Donald B. (1983). "The central role of the propensity score in observational studies for causal effects". *Biometrika* 70 (1): 41–55.

propensity scores is sufficient to ensure comparability. As such the differences between those taking part in Foundation Learning and those not was summarised in the propensity score which was then used to weight the comparison group in order to take account of any differences between the groups. For the purposes of this analysis propensity score matching was applied to take account of any differences in:

- Attainment at Key Stage 3 English;
- Attainment at Key Stage 3 Maths;
- Attainment at Key Stage 3 Science;
- Attainment at Key Stage 2 English;
- Attainment at Key Stage 2 Maths;
- Attainment at Key Stage 2 Science;
- Gender;
- Level of Special Educational Needs;
- Eligibility for Free School Meals;
- Home language;
- Ethnicity;
- Whether the school a young person attends is a special school or a mainstream school;
- Level of deprivation in the area where the young person lives (IDACI).

The matched samples were then used in the pre-16 multi-level models discussed below. Propensity score matching was not undertaken for the post-16 for two reasons:

- Firstly, since the available number of background characteristics controlled for within the ILR analysis was much smaller than for the analysis of pre-16 data, there was no danger of the principle of *common support* being violated. That is, there was no need to identify and remove pupils from the comparison group with characteristics completely unlike any pupils within the Foundation learning group.
- Secondly, exploratory analysis using propensity score matching for the post-16 data yielded somewhat different results to equivalent analyses based upon multi-level modelling. Further investigation revealed that these differences were due to the fact that the application of propensity score matching did not adequately control for the differences between individual post-16 institutions. For this reason it was decided that propensity score matching was not an appropriate tool to use for the post-16 analysis⁵⁰ on this occasion.

⁵⁰ It should be noted that for the pre-16 analysis, results from propensity score matching and multilevel modelling were cross-validated against one another and found to give similar results.

F2.2 - Multi-level Modelling

Multi-level modelling, was undertaken to explore the outcomes for FL participants and the factors associated with these. It is a form of multiple regression that is widely used in educational research where hierarchical data is available (i.e. individuals within institutions within LAs) as it takes into account the fact that learners within an institution will be more alike than learners in different institutions. The models take into account the differences between learners, including the range of potentially influential background characteristics including, at a learner-level, prior attainment. This analysis enables us to say that, where differences are observed, these are over and above the expected differences given the background variables that are included in the analysis.

A number of models were developed for the pre-16 and post-16 analysis to explore the main research questions and the findings are reported in Chapter 6. For the pre-16 analysis, the following models were undertaken:

Attainment models

- Total points achieved at Key Stage 4;
- Eight highest points achieved at Key Stage 4 – to reflect the ‘quality’ of achievement;
- Whether learners achieved Level 2 (Five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A to C);
- Whether learners achieved Level 2 including mathematics and English (Five GCSEs or equivalent at grades A to C including mathematics and English or equivalent);
- Whether learners achieved Level 1 (Five GCSEs or equivalent at any grade);
- Whether learners achieved Level 1 including mathematics and English (Five GCSEs or equivalent at any grade including mathematics and English or equivalent);
- Whether learners achieved Level 1 in mathematics or functional mathematics;
- Whether learners achieved Level 1 in English or functional English;
- Whether learners achieved any Level 1 qualifications;
- Whether learners achieved any vocational qualifications;
- Whether learners achieved any qualifications.

Destination model

- Whether learners were engaged in post-16 education and training.

The variables included in each of the pre-16 multi-level models are shown in Table F2. This includes interactions where the value of one variable may be related to the effect of another.

Table F2: Variables used in pre-16 multi-level models	
Variable	Label
Cons	Constant
Laid	LA number
Schooled	Establishment number
Pupilid	Pupil ID
Flrpup	Known to be involved in the Foundation Learning Programme
Female	Female
Fsm	Eligible for FSM
Eal	English not the pupil's first language
Specsch	Special school
Senactp	SEN School Action Plus
Senstate	SEN Statement
Sennone	SEN None
Ethnic	Ethnicity – Mixed
Ethnica	Ethnicity – Asian
Ethnic	Ethnicity - Black
Ethnicom	Ethnicity - Other or missing
k3eng1m	Key Stage 3 English Missing or unclear
k3eng1I3	Key Stage 3 English Level 3
k3eng1I4	Key Stage 3 English Level 4
k3eng1I6	Key Stage 3 English Level 6
k3eng1Ia	Key Stage 3 English Level A
k3eng1Ib	Key Stage 3 English Level B
k3eng1In	Key Stage 3 English Level N
k3mat1m	Key Stage 3 Maths Missing or unclear
k3mat1I2	Key Stage 3 Maths Level 2
k3mat1I3	Key Stage Maths Level 3
k3mat1I4	Key Stage Maths Level 4
k3mat1I6	Key Stage Maths Level 6
k3mat1I7	Key Stage 3 Maths Level 7
k3mat1Ia	Key Stage 3 Maths Level A
k3mat1Ib	Key Stage 3 Maths Level B
k3mat1In	Key Stage 3 Maths Level N
k3sci1m	Key Stage 3 Science Missing or unclear
k3sci1I2	Key Stage 3 Science Level 2
k3sci1I3	Key Stage 3 Science Level 3
k3sci1I4	Key Stage 3 Science Level 4
k3sci1I6	Key Stage 3 Science Level 6
k3sci1Ia	Key Stage 3 Science Level A
k3sci1Ib	Key Stage 3 Science Level B
k3sci1In	Key Stage 3 Science Level N

k2eng1m	Key Stage 2 English Missing or unclear
k2eng1I2	Key Stage 2 English Level 2
k2eng1I3	Key Stage 2 English Level 3
k2eng1I5	Key Stage 2 English Level 5
k2eng1Ia	Key Stage 2 English Level A
k2eng1Ib	Key Stage 2 English Level B
k2eng1In	Key Stage 2 English Level N
k2mat1m	Key Stage 2 Maths Missing or unclear
k2mat1I2	Key Stage 2 Maths Level 2
k2mat1I3	Key Stage 2 Maths Level 3
k2mat1I5	Key Stage 2 Maths Level 5
k2mat1Ia	Key Stage 2 Maths Level A
k2mat1Ib	Key Stage 2 Maths Level B
k2mat1In	Key Stage 2 Maths Level N
k2sci1m	Key Stage 2 Science Missing or unclear
k2sci1I2	Key Stage 2 Science Level 2
k2sci1I3	Key Stage 2 Science Level 3
k2sci1I5	Key Stage 2 Science Level 5
k2sci1Ia	Key Stage 2 Science Level A
k2sci1Ib	Key Stage 2 Science Level B
k2sci1In	Key Stage 2 Science Level N
Idaci	IDACI (deprivation measure)
k3engf	Key Stage 3 English Fine Point Score
k3matf	Key Stage 3 Maths Fine Point Score
k3scif	Key Stage 3 Science Fine Point Score
Flfem	Interaction - Foundation learning*female
Flfsm	Interaction - Foundation learning*FSM
Flsenno	Interaction - Foundation learning*No SEN
Flsena	Interaction - Foundation learning*SEN school action
Flsenp	Interaction - Foundation learning*SEN school action plus
Flsenst	Interaction - Foundation learning*SEN statement
Flspec	Interaction - Foundation learning*Special school
fllowks3	Interaction - Foundation learning*At least two results below level 4 at KS3

For the post-16 analysis, the following models were undertaken.

Achievement model

- Whether learners achieved the full FL programme including all components (a vocational qualification, PSD qualification and functional skills or equivalent in English or Mathematics)

Destinations models

Destinations for post-16 learners were based on the variables included in the ILR LR39 field which define the destinations of learners as follows:

04	Part time employment
10	Full time employment
11	Unemployed
53	Self employed
54	Entered further education
55	Entered Higher education
59	Found voluntary work
61	Death
75	Full-time education or training (not FE or HE)
76	Economically inactive
77	Not in Education, Employment or Training
95	Continuing existing programme of learning
97	Other
98	Destination unknown

The following models were developed⁵¹:

- Whether learners progressed to a positive destination (part-time employment, full-time employment, self-employed, further education, higher education, voluntary work, full-time education or training)
- Whether learners became NEET or unemployed
- Whether learners continued in learning

Table F3 shows the variables included in the post-16 multi-level models.

Table F3: Variables used in post-16 multi-level models	
Variables	Labels
Female	Female
BME	Asian/Black/Mixed/Other
LDD1618	Age 16-18 with LDD
LDD19up	Age 19-25 with LDD
PriorNo	Prior attainment level - No qualifications
PriorEnt	Prior attainment level - Entry Level
PriorLv2	Prior attainment level - Full Level 2
PriorMis	Prior attainment level – Missing
SingSubj	Single sector subject area
FLproxy1	FL learners (NFER proxy)
AchFull	Current achievement status - Achieved full FL
AchPart	Current achievement status - Achieved part FL but not continuing
AchNone	Current achievement status - No achievement and not continuing
AchFull (outcome)	Current achievement status - Achieved full FL
PosDesti1 (outcome)	Positive destinations (L39=4,10,53,54,55,59,75,95)

⁵¹ For each of the outcomes two models were run. The first compared the outcomes for all of the Foundation Learning group to all of the comparison group. The second focussed on the outcomes for those young people who had completed their involvement in Foundation Learning (i.e. not continuing their existing programme of learning) and compared them to all of the comparison group who were not continuing their existing programme of learning.

PosDesti2 (outcome)	Positive destinations (L39=4,10,53,54,55,59,75)
NEET1 (outcome)	NEET or unemployed (L39=11,76,77)
NEET2 (outcome)	NEET or unemployed (L39=11,76,77)
ContLearn1 (outcome)	Continue learning (L39=54,55,75,95)
ContLearn2 (outcome)	Continue learning (L39=54,55,75)

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