

# Adult Learner Survey

## Executive Summary

[covering the Area Reports for Banstead, Epsom & Ewell, East Surrey, Elmbridge, Guildford, Mole Valley, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking].



***"It's transforming, isn't it? That you go in one way and then it alters you. It's almost a magical thing, giving credence to your hopes and desires."***

*(Rosemary on learning, Runnymede)*

**surrey lifelong  
learning partnership**

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***"You are all saying you aren't doing learning because you are out doing abcd. I am saying that I can't do abcd because I am out learning."***

*(Sandra, Weybridge)*

## INTRODUCTION

This is the most extensive and in depth review of adult learner views ever undertaken in Surrey. Over 650 adults were interviewed in small groups, each session lasting up to one and a half hours. The results of this ground breaking study are recorded within this Summary Report together with the ten area reports (available to download at [www.surreyllp.org.uk](http://www.surreyllp.org.uk)). It provides essential information for all those involved in planning and funding learning in Surrey.

Designed according to the requirements of the Learner Voice Network, a sub-group of the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership, this survey engaged the following target population groups:

- Adults working for businesses with fewer than 50 employees
- Adults living in the LSC-designated areas of relative disadvantage
- Adults aged 50+ to retirement age on relatively low incomes
- Part-time women workers on relatively low incomes
- Registered unemployed adults
- Adults in receipt of health and social care
- Young adults aged 19 to 25 years
- Adults from black and minority ethnic groups
- Adults living in rural areas
- Retired economically inactive adults
- Adults from the Traveller communities



Discussion was stimulated among people from the chosen population groups so that the researchers could eavesdrop, as it were, on their current thinking.

The survey was funded by the Surrey Learning and Skills Council in the main, as part of their Strategic Area Review, together with contributions by the Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership and the Surrey InTouch Partnership which has been very successful in implementing the recommendations made for them in the reports.

We wish to express thanks to all those people who participated and whose contributions are acknowledged in each of the ten area reports. We also wish to thank the seven researchers, Partnership staff and, in particular, Greg Gardner, who produced this summary report and provided ongoing guidance to the research team.

**Ken Jones, Chairman,  
Learner Voice Network**

**Kevin Delf, Chief Executive  
Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership**

***"Just to get better than I am, that is my plan. I am not thinking about anything else other than to get to the end of my course and be better than I am now."***

*(Registered unemployed man, Guildford)*

## KEY FINDINGS

The Adult Learner Survey finds that everyone involved in improving the quality and delivery of learning to adults now need to:

1. Increase access to learning by
  - identifying alternative community-based locations
  - improving transport to and from existing provision
  - providing integral childcare/respice provision and affordable crèches as the norm.
2. Better co-ordinate and creatively approach bite-size learning by
  - making it a more consistent part of mainstream delivery of learning
  - providing it all through the year regardless of the academic term breaks
  - targeting existing groups who meet in situations other than learning provision
  - increasing taster-style provision in order to attract new learners
  - reviewing teaching and learning styles to make the delivery of learning more flexible.
3. Expand the number of confidence-building sessions for adult learners, especially for people who have had a significant break away from learning by
  - collaborating with more existing groups e.g. young parents, church groups, people in receipt of health and social care, adult provision within Youth Service/Connexions, Mini-Sure Start, support groups for substance misuse, debt counselling groups, Job Centres, and other groups supported by community workers and voluntary organisations
  - developing progression routes in adult learning for those who want to go further in their learning following an initial confidence-building programme.
4. Develop bespoke marketing strategies and materials for discrete populations supported by guidance that is designed to meet the specific needs of identifiable groups; incorporate this approach into an improved, clearer information service detailing availability of local provision.
5. Deliver information, advice and guidance out among the community, and where possible deliver that service through trained, local, trusted individuals.
6. Hold a review of the way individuals are charged for their learning that addresses the perception that committing to learning involves too great a risk to the family of insolvency and adverse effects on the upbringing of children; where appropriate, provide imaginative financial incentives; in this process specific work will need to be done for those registering as unemployed and claiming Jobseekers Allowance in order to compensate for the negative effects of the 'six months rule'.
7. Further develop learning in the workplace by
  - engaging more employers, especially in smaller businesses, in training schemes that will improve the quality and profitability of the business itself and the capability and confidence of the employees;
  - providing incentives to both employers and employees to take part in such schemes;
  - engaging further with workforce organisations and sector skills councils to focus on particular employment sectors where there are national, regional or local targets to be met.
8. Explore further ways of engaging in dialogue with specific population groups where there is known to be low take up in adult learning.

***"Knowing that your life is on track."***  
*(Young adult, Ashford)*

## FINDINGS BY THEME

### MOTIVATION TO TRAIN

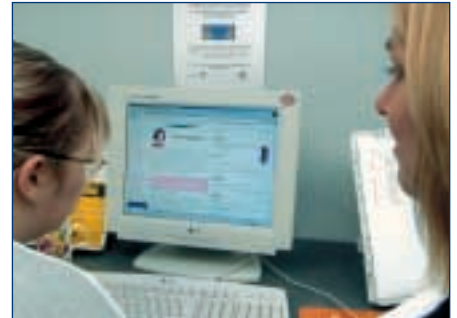
In this Survey learning and training is closely associated with improving the quality of life for most people. That is the single most important drive mentioned by people we listened to. But what people understand by quality of life differs enormously according to circumstance. Difficult as it is to generalise about what motivates people to train, the majority of comments came under the following headings:

#### Vocational

- Improving employability
- Helping to change career
- Increasing earned income
- Learning while you earn
- Gaining a qualification

#### Improving self image

- Finding time for oneself
- Increasing confidence
- Keeping your mind active
- Learning useful, relevant skills
- Keeping up with your children
- Proving you can meet a challenge
- Learning to speak English
- Taking part in voluntary or community work



#### Recreational

- Feeling pure enjoyment
- Pursuing a hobby
- Easing stress
- Mixing with other people

None of these is particularly surprising. Some groups are clearly 'hungrier' for learning than others because of their circumstances: someone who has become redundant who wants to retrain; someone with a disability who aspires to a job; a young parent who wants to provide for her child but who has missed out on further or higher education; an older mother who is coming to the end of a period of bringing up a family and now wants to put her personal development first for a change; someone who is coming to the end of a long working life and has never had time to pursue interests; someone who cannot speak English adequately. What dampens motivation for some of these people is the dent to their confidence that comes from a break away from learning or from paid employment.

What is perhaps more surprising is the short time it takes for young adults who drop out of further education before the age of 19 to regret the decision and then to come to the conclusion that it is too late to retrieve the situation. We heard many 19-year-olds tell us they had "missed the boat".

It is also interesting to note how motivation can be considerably enhanced by quite small things: for example, by taster sessions, peer support, informed and skilful guidance, the provision of a crèche, or by being told by word of mouth of an excellent course someone has just taken. For many people, it is simply a matter of finding the right teacher.

***"I could become someone else for a couple of hours."***  
*(Young mother, Runnymede)*

## BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Most people we spoke to have a series of difficulties that generally deters them from taking up learning provision. There are four difficulties that affect a very high proportion:

1. **The cost of learning**, which includes not only how much a learner lays out to pay for a course but also associated costs such as the cost of child care, the cost of travel, or time lost from earning income.
2. The **time taken and the distance to travel** to attend a learning programme inhibits people that; have busy lives at work or home, lack a car, live in places with poor transport facilities, or who may be nervous going out after dark.
3. Many people just **do not feel they have enough time to commit to learning** because of the demands made on their time by work and family responsibilities.
4. The final difficulty facing a high proportion of the people interviewed for this Survey is **low self esteem, lack of confidence in oneself**, or nervousness about making a fool of oneself in public.

The following difficulties mentioned were brought up in at least half the groups that we interviewed:

- Past experiences of education put some people off.
- Since a good proportion of people living in Surrey are the primary carers for young children, there is serious concern about the lack of crèche facilities accompanying learning opportunities.
- A lot of people believe that what skills they have are now outmoded and in particular that they will be hampered from learning because of poor computer skills.
- Accompanying the lack of self-confidence was an unawareness of the availability of professional guidance to help them think through what kind of learning was best in their circumstances, track it down and in some cases support them through the enquiry and enrolment process, such as the InTouch Service.<sup>1</sup>
- There is a course that you would like to enrol for but it is at the wrong time or is a full-time course when you have to work part-time to pay for it.
- Some people are very unclear what is available and where to look to find out what is available.
- Because a large proportion of people spend much of their waking hours at work it is a considerable barrier if your work does not offer you training.
- And for some people it is simply that they have not found sufficient motivation within themselves.

***"The course may cost just £22, which does not sound much,  
but getting that initial bit of money can be hard."***

*(Richard, Molesey)*

<sup>1</sup> Surrey InTouch is a network of organizations providing impartial information, advice and guidance on any aspect of learning, training or work to adults in Surrey aged 20 and over.

## INFORMATION ABOUT LEARNING AND TRAINING

There are a growing number of people who are confident with the technology and interpret this as having immediate access to good quality information. With improved access to information comes higher expectations and more recognition of the flaws so we cannot confidently report that people feel well informed or satisfied with information services. There is also a noticeable growth in awareness of government-sponsored services such as the 'gremlins' campaign promoting basic skills programmes and learndirect.<sup>2</sup>



There is a long way to go in terms of promoting InTouch; at present in people's awareness it comes a long way behind local libraries, the internet, the Citizen's Advice Bureaux, the Job Centre, the adult education centres and the colleges as far as knowing it as a source of information is concerned.

There are serious issues about what constitutes effective information, i.e. information that meets people's needs and is likely to persuade them to take up learning or training. Don't discount, for example, the power of word of mouth.

Some people are much closer to good information than others. An employee in a firm with a good training policy and an appraisal system is likely to be relatively rich in information about appropriate training programmes. The point here is that raw information is not necessarily good information - it takes skilled appraisal of a person's needs and situation before it is clear what they need to know.

There is a really serious difficulty with people who are not only totally unaware of what kinds of information are available, but also do not know what questions to ask, or who actually feel intimidated in the face of what can sometimes be thought of as aggressive information provision.

It is therefore not surprising that we were frequently asked whether it was possible to provide information services that were specifically tailored to particular needs: e.g. for people who do not speak good English, for people who have been unemployed for a while, for women who have taken a break from employment to bring up a family, for people who have mental health issues, for people with disabilities, for the Traveller community.

What people sometimes find is that they pluck up the courage to ask for information only to find that either the place they have chosen to consult is the wrong place or the person they have contacted is the wrong person within the right organisation. This causes frustration particularly when there are a mass of detailed issues that people want to talk over with someone; all the sorts of things that staff at adult education enrolment days are familiar with: what they can do about child care, what credit they get from previous qualifications and experience, whether they qualify for benefits, what they can do about lack of confidence, what happens if they miss a week, whether there is a reading list, whether their particular disability can be catered for. It is clear that some people need more than just information; they need advice and guidance.

A lot of people would also like learning opportunities to be better promoted at a local level, using a wide range of media: leaflets through the door, posters in places they frequent, local radio advertisements, special events, open days, taster sessions.

***"You do feel as though you are getting the run around."***

*(Tina, Elmbridge)*

<sup>2</sup> learndirect is a network of on-line learning and information services. It's a government-sponsored initiative in flexible learning, intended to make possible the vision of a 'learning society' where everyone can learn and upgrade their skills throughout life.

## PREFERENCES FOR LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

There are very strong lobbies for:

1. **High quality teaching** - People tend to notice when teaching is not good enough, and unfortunately do not sufficiently acknowledge quality teaching when they receive it. But this was very much a given in what people were saying to us.
2. **Learning to be provided locally** - For many people who raise it, this means within walking distance, but for the majority it would just help enormously if the programme was within a bus drive or on a rail line if they live near a station.
3. **Taster sessions** - People are particularly put off by having to commit their finances long term without knowing what the programme is really like, whether they will appreciate the teacher, or whether it is pitched at the right level for their needs.
4. **Workplace learning** - It is many people's preference because it is clearly relevant to career development. You are fresh, you are in the right place to learn and generally with the right people teaching you, it is practical. You feel valued by your employer.
5. **Training in an area of labour shortage** - There is a degree of incredulity that more effort is not put into recruiting and training people for jobs for which currently there is a shortage of applicants and to plug the gap employers are recruiting people from outside Surrey and in some cases outside the UK.

Beyond these five key preferences the picture differs radically depending upon people's personal circumstances:

- **Timing of courses** - A variety of times is necessary. On the whole mothers of young children prefer a time in the middle of the day when their children are in playgroup, nursery or school. People in work prefer evenings or weekends. People who work variable shifts prefer a choice of times during the week. Retired people prefer daytime courses rather than evening courses.
- **Distance learning or on-line learning** - Some people like to learn on their own, at their own pace, in their own time, at home, and this can solve all kinds of barriers. However, a larger group of people feel that they would not possess the sticking power to motivate themselves without further support and anyway do not like learning as a lonely pursuit. On-line learning is still something of an untested novelty to most people. Many find on-line learning more attractive if it is combined with tutoring and social interaction.
- **Learning among your peers** - We frequently heard that people only go to adult education classes if they can take a friend. This helps overcome nervousness of stepping into an unfamiliar environment and worrying about exposing weaknesses to strangers. But there is a more significant point being made. Many people go to classes to find social contact or to be with like-minded people. The problem for another group is that this can quickly deteriorate into a clique from which they feel excluded.

***"It is not just training courses, it is having somebody who brings you on."***

*(Jean, Surrey Heath)*

- **Learning within your age group** - This particularly exercises the minds of the older adults we spoke to. Some adults do not want to learn in groups with recent school leavers who they suspect will be mentally quicker and will be impatient with them. That is one reason why the University of the Third Age is so popular. However, there are older people who associate their peers with age-related problems like memory loss, so are keen to meet younger minds.
- Self confidence will increase if you find that there is **a learning pathway that provides you with ongoing progression**, however small the steps you take along that pathway are - for some people that pathway might need some form of support akin to special needs assistance at school - for others it might just be a light touch intermittent monitoring to check you are on track.

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Participants in this Survey wanted:

- **More imaginative approaches to teaching**, communicating the enjoyment of learning, making use of best practice in teaching styles, and establishing positive relationships with the class.
- **More flexible forms of delivering learning**, which would include confidence-building approaches, learning tasters, bite-sized learning, short intense courses, roll on/roll off options, learning packages that mixed on-line/distance learning with tutor support and traditional classes, using learning sets or peer teaching, flexibility over completion dates.
- **A review of the system of funding concessions** and a look at more imaginative ways to give people financial incentives.
- **Affordable crèches at adult education centres to be the norm** rather than the exception or learning should be provided at or near schools, playgroups, leisure centres so that children are being looked after while their parents learn.
- **Guidance should be targeted at the specific needs of identifiable groups**, such as young people, university students, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, people who need help to go through basic application procedures, people with mental health issues, women returning to work, people from the Traveller community and from minority ethnic groups.
- **More contact with tutors in advance in a warm, friendly atmosphere** to help settle in to the learning programme and reassure the learner that personal development can be broken down into small steps.
- Learning providers to capitalise on **the natural human instinct to mix with like-minded people**.
- **To open up local facilities to use as outreach learning centres**, particularly in rural areas and areas of relative disadvantage.

***"I paid for it all myself and it was a nightmare for me because I was working 3 days a week while doing college 4 days a week."***

*(John, registered unemployed person, Surrey Heath)*

## FINDINGS BY GROUP CATEGORY

### 1. PEOPLE WORKING FOR COMPANIES WITH FEWER THAN 50 EMPLOYEES

Key observations provided by learners (70 respondents)

- Training is expensive so employees understand that employers are likely to be exclusively interested in how training will improve the profitability of the company rather than the employability of the employee. We frequently heard therefore that if employers do not raise training needs, then the employees do not raise them because they expect not to be taken seriously.
- What training there is tends to be on the job and in-house. The exceptions are the Modern Apprenticeship and where employees are financing their own development in their own time but both of these are very much the exception rather than the rule.
- Ambitious young adults who have experienced the realities of the business world see the benefit of working for a larger employer who has a serious commitment to training his workforce and the value of apprenticeships.
- Older workers who do not have formal qualifications feel they are disadvantaged by an over-emphasis upon qualifications rather than experience.
- Some people use jobs as stepping stones to other jobs and, similarly, training can be used as a stepping stone to another job. Although employers who support young people by sponsoring their apprenticeships create loyalty, that loyalty will disappear if the apprentice is not offered a job at the end with what is perceived to be an appropriate salary/wage.
- Learning at work is the preferred option for full-time employees because they are tired at the end of the day and do not feel alert for learning in the evening. They say that evening classes insufficiently support the range of training being sought. For those with family responsibilities this is doubly so. Mostly people, however, expect and are expected to do learning in their own time.
- The cost of learning or training is a considerable barrier for employer and employee alike. There should be more consideration for the needs of mature learners who want to retrain, not least because they are highly motivated. Any grants available should be well publicised.
- Some employees look on intellectual stimulation as a major source of motivation simply because they feel their job is not stimulating enough.
- It is difficult to access the InTouch Service because they are open only during working hours. Some people feel they are under-informed about learning opportunities. But other people are, or fear they will be, bombarded with information.

***"It's a question of whether it's right for the business for me  
as an employer to invest the money in them."***

*(Employer in Woking)*

- Because of time constraints learning provision needs to be relatively close to where people work or live.
- People on the whole are wary about spending time on learning that is not strictly relevant to the needs of their job or to their aspirations for a new career direction. Learning must be used straightaway or you forget it.
- Because of the time constraints of people who work full-time and have family responsibilities, learning out of working hours is frequently deferred until the middle years of working.
- Small companies frequently buy in training (including software packages for their employees) to save money and time.

## 2. RESIDENTS IN AREAS OF RELATIVE DISADVANTAGE

Key observations provided by learners (82 respondents)

- There is a strong sense that learning can make a difference to the quality of your life, be this through career progression or through giving something to your family's future.
- Overcoming lack of confidence is a major issue for many people: e.g. for a group of women in one area what was particularly successful about taking part in the Story Sacks project in their local primary school was the way it led you in to an activity which was gentle as well as useful. Lack of confidence is often related to past negative experiences at school and to the length of time since any successful learning has taken place, including time taken out of employment during a period of bringing up a family.
- A very big problem for most people is how they are going to afford to take a learning programme. It is not just the cost of the course but in some cases the cost of travel and obtaining childcare, the cost of loss of income if you take time off work, and the cost of on-line learning if you have access to a computer.
- A lot of the younger people we spoke to are driven by the need to find a way of improving their career prospects, a qualification that will impress an employer.
- Courses for women intending to return to work are considered very helpful.
- The motivation can be very strong but the problems of lack of confidence, cost and time often seem insuperable so people think in terms of small, manageable amounts of learning.
- The strongest suggestion from these groups was that learning should be put on within familiar community provision, such as schools, churches or halls.
- A number of the researchers felt that the very meetings we were holding were generating interest in learning and should be followed up.



- People were sometimes unclear about where to find information about learning programmes and had had some poor experiences during their searches. Much could be done if local community workers and residents became committed to training to the Matrix Standards under the auspices of the InTouch Service so that they can offer professional information, advice and guidance on learning.
- People often referred to having someone or needing someone they can trust who will ask about information on their behalf and maybe give them some advice or guidance without perplexing them with jargon.
- Although there was a lot of interest in improving computer skills, not everyone has the access or the skills and on the whole people in this group were not particularly interested in learning on-line unless it was part of a larger package of learning.
- When courses are cancelled it is remembered and reduces motivation to apply for future courses. Interest in learning needs to be nurtured over a long period.
- People wish to be taught in a stimulating way.

***"Maybe things like having classes on confidence? Just encouraging people into thinking you have a lot to offer. So you weren't good at school, that doesn't mean you're not good at anything at all. It's tapping people's resources, what they're good at and then encouraging them to go to training."***  
*(Resident of North Guildford)*

### 3. ADULTS AGED 50 TO RETIREMENT AGE

Key observations provided by learners (69 respondents)

- The most common observation among people with widely different interests and aspirations is their acceptance that they live in fast changing times. This has an impact on self esteem: e.g. the replacement of the tradition of British manufacture by people assembling kits that have been made in the third world can be unsettling, the implication being that their hard-won skills are no longer wanted which hurts their pride.
- Skills can now be learned at an evening class, as a leisure activity rather than a badge of proven worth as a paid worker. That can be more life enhancing because employment for many has become associated with pleasing a line manager with a target to reach rather than finishing a job in your own way and drawing on your wealth of experience to finish it well.
- This group was divided over how far computers were a benefit. On the one hand, it appealed to their natural curiosity and could be useful; there was interest in the flexibility offered by on-line learning. On the other hand, they did not like the way it shut people away. Whereas younger people take the digital age for granted, these people tended to talk much more about how it had liberated them or entrapped them, depending on whether they had got on terms with the new technology or not. There is a substantial number of people in this age group who feel they have become trapped because life has become increasingly digital and they still live in a pre-digital age.

- Many people in this age group feel anxious about attending classes that contain school leavers or young adults.
- However, there are people in this age range who are considerably more confident than this and are still active in employment or voluntary work or are looking forward to a sustained period of learning that they may have missed when they were younger. These are people often who had no opportunity to go to university when they left school. They can be quite hungry for learning, for example, a woman, who was a learning support assistant, had mapped out what she wanted to do - to complete the A Levels she needed to take a degree in microbiology after she retired. This was after a long wait for the opportunity.
- It was clear several people were prepared for one last career change before they settled for retirement and some were keen to be retrained after one or multiple experiences of being made redundant. There was one man in Surrey Heath who was retraining to be a youth worker, for example. People who have worked hard throughout these changing times have a number of things they can still offer society and they can sometimes be rather disappointed that no one is asking them what further things they are capable of.
- The problem for many in this age group is that while they are well aware of what skills they have obtained through working and family life, they are very unsure of what aptitudes remain dormant. They are therefore excellent subjects for aptitude appraisal.
- Some were approaching retirement with no specific plan except 'pottering in the garden', as one man put it, but in general this is an interesting generation likely to take seriously the idea that retirement takes place now at 70 and who are looking for real choices, both recreational and vocational, in their learning.

***"Just think about the skills that will be wasted when you lot retire!***

***What can you do about that?"***

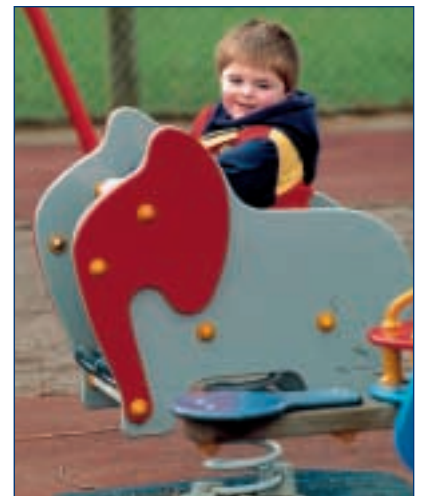
*(Thomas, Oatlands Park Working Men's Club)*

#### **4. WOMEN IN PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT ON LOW INCOMES**

Key observations provided by learners (81 respondents)

- There is a strong sense that parenthood and taking the primary caring role in the family, with the associated break from both full-time employment and education, brings for virtually all the women we interviewed a steep drop in self-confidence, derived partly from the length of the break and partly from spending so much time exclusively with children.
- There is a perception that during your time out your job is restructured, new computer systems are introduced, and no one recognises your primary role as a mother as a proper function. You think you are falling behind. Taking a casual part-time job does not revitalise your skills because the skills are low level. When you do seek to return to your old job you are under skilled - for example, nursing is now an all-graduate profession, though the nursing profession may be one of the better examples because managers are looking more flexibly at what the returning mother can bring to the profession rather than excluding them in the expectation of appointing newly qualified graduates.

- An important consideration is the cost of learning and associated costs; part-time work is usually a vital component of the family's income and is low paid.
- A lot is expected of working mothers. The complaint of women in a lot of part-time jobs is that there is little consideration of their training needs. Universally these women suffer from the pressure of time and lack of energy. There is a lack of childcare provision for those precious moments for your own learning time. Tiredness that comes with childcare is enormous and some respondents also report that they felt they had more problems retaining information following child birth.
- There are so many problems - low self confidence, lack of time, lack of affordable childcare, low wages - that from a purely logistical viewpoint you might consider working from home and on-line learning as a possible solution. This does work for some women but mostly it ignores other important issues - the need to get out of the house and to meet with like-minded people, the need for the push that regular meeting with a tutor brings and the fact that you have to have a computer at home.
- Despite all the barriers, in fact it can be seen at least in part because of all the barriers, many of these women were hungry for learning. They were vocationally motivated both for personal satisfaction and to provide for their children and recreationally motivated to find 'time out for me'. Although the ultimate goal is often to gain specific qualifications to further career prospects, the first step can be something much more modest.
- A major step forward would be to have childcare provided as the norm in adult education centres rather than the exception. It would also help if the terms and conditions of the study programme were interpreted as flexibly as possible: the course taking place on several days a week for you to choose one, extending the time for the course to be completed from one year to three or even five years.
- The information needs are therefore very particular to this group. We came across examples of women who were capable of finding things out for themselves but also women who felt very cut off from information, advice and guidance. There are various routes for information to be passed along: via the midwife, the health visitor, nurseries, schools.



***"I am a single mum. To think of doing a course and paying childminding on top of that is too much. I work part-time and over half my wage goes on my daughter's childcare anyway."***

*(East Surrey)*

## 5. REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED ADULTS

Key observations provided by learners (82 respondents)

- There was a greater incidence of low morale and cynicism among this population group than the others because of a feeling of rejection by employers, a feeling that your options in life are narrower than other people's, and the reduced circumstances arising from living on benefits.
- Training has to lead to employment, or at least a qualification to impress employers, but there is scepticism as to whether this really works, i.e. that a job actually materialises.
- Nevertheless we came across much enthusiasm for training.
- People receiving training through the Job Centre were appreciative. However, we found one common source of frustration - the regulation by which someone has to be registered unemployed for six months before they can take a programme of learning or training and still receive benefits (the six month rule). You cannot get a job because you do not have the skill but you cannot learn the skill because you have no job and are not entitled to training. Second to this complaint is that concerning the rule that only permits up to 16 hours study a week.
- You have to take what you are given rather than pursue your aspirations. The accepting of short term, low skilled employment means that many registered unemployed people repeat the cycle of one low paid job after another interspersed with periods of signing on. They are left with the impression that no one is particularly interested in helping you to improve your skills once you are registering as unemployed.
- Young people find it difficult to fit learning around the need to become financially independent of their parents.
- Some young people curtail their learning by finding casual employment, which lasts longer than they anticipated because they do not have the skills to go into more permanent employment and no longer have disposable time to devote to taking courses which would remedy the situation. They are fortunate if they find employment which develops their skills beyond the immediate tasks required to fulfil the short-term job they find themselves in. As a result they find their young adulthood is characterised by intermittent unemployment (even in a County with 'full employment') and little chance of upgrading skills in order to get out of this situation.
- Once young people have experienced employment and unemployment, they are more interested in gaining a Modern Apprenticeship.
- Learning on the job is most people's preferred method.
- A lot of people say they need help back into learning, just as much as they need help back into employment; there are positive memories of the job club.

***"It's not necessarily the cost of the course but the cost of living while you're doing the course."***

*(Mick, Runnymede)*

- The registered unemployed are known to the Job Centre and so for learning providers there is no need to comb the streets recruiting. They come to you, or at least the Job Centre. It is a place where information, advice and guidance on learning and training opportunities could be placed to good effect. The people we spoke to are responsive to this idea.
- People who have recently become redundant and have a higher than average level of skills recognise that their skills are quickly becoming outmoded and feel it is urgent to get training or retraining.
- It would make sense to most people registering as unemployed if they were pointed towards training in sectors where there were staff shortages.

## 6. ADULTS RECEIVING HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Key observations provided by learners (88 respondents)

- Personal confidence is a big factor in how highly motivated people felt towards making a commitment to a learning programme.
- Among those with mental health issues there is concern that they will be rejected for career paths they desire because of the stigma attached to their condition.
- There are clearly conditions that interfere with the prospects of employment and learning, causing considerable frustration.
- This population group appear to have the highest record of dropping out of learning programmes before completion.
- Being on a learning programme is a sign though that you are on the way to recovery or greater independence.
- For some people the learning goal is related to employment.
- There is some scepticism about the creditworthiness of NVQs.

***"It would be common certainly to me, and perhaps to most of us, if not all of us, we will wonder whether our mental health history will affect the way employers perceive us. And that will affect the training that we might have available to us. And certainly whether we would be able to fulfil what we wanted to do in terms of a job."***

*(Reginald, Elmbridge)*

***"I think I am my own biggest drawback. I need someone to kick-start my brain."***

*(Liz, Surrey Heath)*

- Not everyone feels comfortable in a mainstream class. In order to feel your way back into learning it was generally felt that you need to have some preparatory support from an adviser with some understanding of the difficulties you are facing and who does not put too much pressure on you.
- It was felt that key workers avoid mentioning learning and training opportunities because of the pressure that their clients will feel. However, if a client takes the first step and approaches an organisation to find out more about a learning option, then the key worker will take this as a signal that they can offer their own services in support of this quest. This will need to include an initial learning assessment.
- One way of giving more independence is to make the Internet more accessible. We met a number of people in this population group who have found learndirect or Internet cafes useful resources for learning, though there was some concern about the waiting time when you need help.
- Work experience - when the client is ready to undertake it - is a popular notion.
- There is a greater need among this population group for reassurance that learning will be conducted by people who are fully qualified to support people with health and social care needs and that the learning will genuinely improve job possibilities.
- The positive outcomes of learning are immeasurable for this group of adults. The improved recovery levels and life skills learnt make a daily difference to the quality of their lives.



## 7. YOUNG ADULTS AGED 19 TO 25 YEARS

Key observations provided by learners (66 respondents)

- Many young adults have just as strong a motivation to return to learning or training as other groups despite having recently rejected or dropped out of state financed learning some time between the ages of 16 to 19 years.
- Some young adults still find the thought of returning to learning unappealing.
- Those who dropped out of learning, and most of those we talked to, did so mainly because of an inability to meet the work deadlines, the need to earn money and scepticism about whether the learning they are doing will deliver a better job.
- A minority of young adults we spoke to have entered a job that takes care of their training.
- Others feel that it is now very difficult for them to return to learning or training. They are awakening to the fact that the system is not geared to the needs of the mature student.
- Much of the problem is to do with the logistics of how you fit learning around full-time work. The situation becomes more complex once the young person has children. Having taken a break away from structured learning, re-entry starts to look prohibitively difficult.
- The solution that presents itself as most attractive is finding a job that will train you but that is not easy to find.
- Young adults are more likely than other groups to use new technology either to find out what opportunities are available or to make use of on-line learning.
- Young people need advice when they are ready to listen to it (i.e. they may not be ready to listen to advice at the point when they are offered it).
- Some young adults are still not independent and are looking for guidance from an authoritative figure, someone akin to the form tutor they had at school.

***"It's only when you are older that you realise that you are stuck."***

*(Amanda, Molesey)*

***"I think if I went back to college now I'd just feel really old!"***

*(Jessica, Woking)*

***"It would make more sense to give us careers advice now, after you have tasted work and you realise what it is like and you've earned money. You know it is hard work. You know that it is the same thing every day, repetitive.***

***Education is obviously more fun, isn't it?"***

*(Hector, Molesey)*

- The solution to young adults' problems require careful planning and resourcing and revolve around:  
  
Vocational programmes in the evenings and weekends  
Earn as you learn programmes, including a substantial increase in the number of Modern Apprenticeships possible  
Support for childcare as a norm rather than the exception  
Financial concessions and grants for transport and child-care for those on low incomes.
- Since little is known about the InTouch Service outside colleges, it would be worthwhile marketing the Service at places where young people congregate such as the Job Centre, pubs and clubs.

## 8. BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS

Key observations provided by learners (23 respondents)

- Among this group there is a very strong motivation to take learning and training.
- When you come to the UK for the first time it takes time to establish what is available for you.
- Many people feel that their education in general is incomplete.
- A high priority is improving speaking, understanding and writing in English: If your English is poor your earning capability is much reduced and you can feel isolated and hopeless.
- The biggest barriers after poor spoken and understanding of English is the need to be working, seeking work and addressing financial pressures in general.
- For the women there are the usual problems of lack of childcare.
- In Woking the groups are supported by community projects and this is where they went for most of their information; the only complaint is that this tended to focus on basic skills and some vocational opportunities rather than more advanced courses.
- All communication to people with limited English needs to be in simple language or in multiple translations; this may also affect the use of some computer programs.
- Some people would like to learn interesting subjects in an "English for Speakers of Other Languages" context (e.g. we came across an arts class who would have liked to learn English in the context of learning art skills).

## 9. ADULTS LIVING IN RURAL AREAS

Key observations provided by learners (21 respondents)

- Many people start their consideration of learning by observing the lack of local facilities for this purpose, a situation worse than they remember it a generation ago.
- If adult education has been cut because of poor take up of courses, then this might be because they were the wrong courses.
- The younger people and the people in their earning years would like to see more vocational opportunities within reachable distance.
- For those on a reduced income, the cost of learning and associated expenses such as travel and childcare is prohibitive.
- Getting to a learning opportunity depends upon having a car.
- Small rural libraries tend to be the one source of information about learning opportunities.
- Younger people consider the Internet the first port of call but the Surrey-based information is not considered adequate and broadband is not yet available in many areas.
- Clearly on-line and distance learning would help solve the problems of distance and isolation but we did not find a huge amount of excitement about this possibility.
- There would be great interest in the more intensive use of local facilities for learning.



***"Quite honestly, you wouldn't be able to do anything round here if you didn't have access to a car - it's absolutely impossible."***

*(Resident of Waverley)*

## 10. RETIRED ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE ADULTS

Key observations provided by learners (20 respondents)

- On the basis of this Survey retired people are looking for something different, not something that is useful.
- Most of the people we surveyed are very keen to build mental stimulation into their lives (including in some cases taking formal qualifications) and this sometimes means high expectations of the quality of learning experience.
- Retired people get into all kinds of voluntary activity which can squeeze out the time that adult learning might take just as paid employment does.
- The one area where they are less confident is in computer classes, and those getting involved have to feel that they are going to get some use out of it.
- There is an opportunity at this age to do something ambitious and challenging for the sake of it: like going back to piano lessons which you left at the age of 14. Often this requires a little push or encouragement from someone else.
- Not everyone is going to have the confidence to seek out adult learning for themselves.
- Social interaction is an important part of learning.
- Although only touched on in passing, it is clear that people in this age group are in different financial situations and also respond differently to those situations. One person referred to feeling better off since being retired because the demands on the purse are fewer, where as another person talked about the challenge of adapting to a reduced income.
- This is clearly an age group that looks more towards adult education provision rather than vocational learning or training, and it is comfortable with the predictable information that comes in the form of a brochure.
- Learning can come in different course shapes: e.g. short courses/long courses, audio/visual tapes, workshops, discussion groups.
- Generally they prefer local provision.
- There is enormous potential in negotiations between adult learning providers and Social Services to develop programmes for adults attending Day Centres.
- One person explained why learning for its own sake was often more effective learning than vocational training.

***"An opportunity to do something which you want to do and this is life enhancing and that is why this is better. So much of the stuff one has at work is necessary in someone's eyes and possibly that person is a trainer and they are being paid to make them think it is necessary and all of these things become self-fulfilling and they are not very relevant, not very interesting and they are not very well done. And you know it is a waste of time. But with this sort of thing it shouldn't be a waste of time, it should be what you want to do because you have the motivation to do it and you spend your time, your money and your efforts."***  
*(Retired person in Haslemere)*

## 11. TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES

Key observations provided by learners (14 Traveller women on two sites)

- On both sites the women have a strong sense of their domestic and family responsibilities and their learning interests are linked to those.
- On Site A, it was difficult to engage the group specifically on learning and training because the received wisdom was that 'it was too late for them'. This is partly because of the strong emphasis upon the children coming first. Learning means school and getting children to read and write, and then prepared for adult employment.
- They are averse to paper-based tasks and exercises, each preferring practical activities. These women lack basic skills and that makes them reluctant to begin any learning or training.
- The warden has worked hard to get women to attend regular health checks for cervical cancer and breast cancer. She is thinking how men can be persuaded to attend check-ups for prostate cancer - difficult because of the absolute reticence between the genders to discuss their health problems.
- But this form of learning makes sense to the warden. Where the reason for learning has been established it is a matter of getting the propaganda to come from within. The warden says that the first few years after the establishment of the site she worked hard to build bridges between the newcomer Travellers and the Council services, including the participation of children in school education.
- At Site B, there is a strong preference for learning venues either on the site, close by, or in the women's homes because of childcare and domestic commitments around which learning have to be slotted. At Site A there is a preference for going to a learning centre in the local town where they feel safe and are not seen to have literacy problems in front of their children.
- The Site B group think that computers will be well suited to home-based learning. These women are keen to develop their IT skills.
- It is suggested that the Councils donate second-hand computers to borough residents and that this might be an option for Travellers at Site B. Apart from the convenience some of the women acknowledge feeling apprehensive about venturing outside their own environment to learn. That apprehension seems partly to stem from the women's sense of a culture of suspicion towards them from outside the site. The Site A women also feel that they are fighting against unthinking prejudice.
- In the face of rapid changes to the world outside the site, there is interest in discussing change. But this is mixed with apprehension. It is felt that their children are in danger of picking up bad habits from their schools: in the primary school the danger is picking up jack-the-lad attitudes and talking back to their parents; in the secondary school, added to this is the appalling prospect of taking up with banned substances or becoming pregnant.

***"You do feel a dodo when you can't fill a cheque in properly.  
You say, You fill it in, mate, and I'll sign it."  
(Traveller in Elmbridge)***

- Formal learning is therefore a double-edged sword. If it means learning to read and write, and picking up a trade, then it is fine. But the Gorgias (i.e. Non-Travellers) are not as in control of their children as they should be and so bad influences abound.
- The Travellers we spoke to are proud of the achievements of their community and trust the work of the staff from the Traveller Education Service. They also have well known role models within the Traveller community in Surrey who have considerable influence.

## **POSTSCRIPT ON DIFFERENCES BY DISTRICT/BOROUGH**

It was not a part of the brief of this Survey to identify differences between districts and boroughs. Surrey adults do not bring up differences between internal areas of Surrey; though there were comparisons about the cost of learning between Surrey and neighbouring local authorities.

Adults who are interested in taking up a learning course are likely to mention transport difficulties. Though this was common to all areas of Surrey. It is bound to affect people living in the more rural areas south of the M25. However people living on estates in Elmbridge, for example, certainly mentioned transport as a problem.

Anyone who knows Surrey well will not need this Survey to reveal that relative disadvantage exists only at street level and in small estates spread throughout the eleven districts and boroughs, and not significantly in contrasts between wards. This Survey cannot throw any particular light on how experiences of learning or lack of it compare between these small areas, only to say that experience is bound to be dependent upon fortuitousness: whether you live near to the Mini-Sure Start programme, for instance, or whether your local college has a community education strategy, or whether you are fortunate enough to have a family literacy/numeracy programme at your local primary school, and so on.

There are ten Community Learning Partnerships in Surrey, their Community Learning Advisers helped in the conduct of the Survey, and its results have been received and considered in these fora. According to their responses and the nature of the partnerships in each area, people in each borough or district will find that their experience differs from those in their neighbouring borough or district.

It is the responsibility of each area to consider these findings and decide which issues particularly apply to their adult populations.

### **Question: "What do you think of when you think about learning?"**

**Answer: "A fantasy. A closed door."**  
(Part-time working woman, Godalming)

**Answer: "I'll let you know when I am doing it."**  
(Registered unemployed man, Esher)

**Answer: "We've got to so we can keep up."**  
(Resident of Chertsey St Ann's)

**Answer: "A green light."**  
(Adult in receipt of healthcare, Molesey)

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