BASIC SKILLS AND KEY SKILLS:

A REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

FINAL REPORT

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January 2003

CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   THE SKILLS AGENDA

People need a broad range of skills in order to contribute to a modern economy and take their place in the technological society of the twenty-first century. The development of people's proficiency in basic and key skills is now a central plank of government policy in Wales and in other parts of the United Kingdom. In Wales, basic and key skills fall within the National Council ELWa's aim to ensure that everyone possesses a wide range of essential skills.

1.2   BASIC SKILLS

Basic skills are defined by ELWa as:

♦ literacy in English and/or Welsh and numeracy (in both Welsh and English), as well as English as a second language

Poor literacy and numeracy skills have been identified as being among the most serious barriers to social and economic regeneration in Wales. The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) has estimated that over three-quarters of a million people in Wales need varying degrees of support to enable them to develop their basic skills (BSA, 2001). Moreover, research has highlighted the links between a lack of basic skills and economic deprivation, social exclusion and crime. Individuals with limited basic skills are more likely to be long-term unemployed or employed in low-skilled jobs, to live in substandard housing and to suffer ill-health.[1]

The National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales states that: '*The Assembly's vision is of a fully literate and numerate Wales; a place where no one lacks the basic skills most of us take for granted*'.[2]

The strategy includes a number of key objectives such as:

♦ building on good practice in early years provision, and supporting it with a wide range of initiatives

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[1] CABINET OFFICE. SOCIAL EXCLUSION UNIT (2001). *Preventing Social Exclusion*. London: Social Exclusion Unit.
[2] NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES (2001). *The National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales*. (2001). London: Basic Skills Agency.

- family initiatives to involve parents in their children's development
- the provision of post-16 courses and programmes in partnership with schools, colleges, local authorities, employers, trade unions and the voluntary sector
- training those who provide those courses.

1.3 KEY SKILLS

Key skills are defined by ELWa as:

- Communication, Application of Number, Information Technology, Working with Others, Improving Own Learning and Performance, and Problem Solving.

Communication and Application of Number are broader concepts than the literary and numeracy of basic skills.

Support for individuals to develop key skills is regarded as a central feature of the strategy to increase national prosperity through the development of a highly-skilled and well-educated workforce which is able to play a full part in the knowledge-based economy. The Welsh Assembly Government has identified the importance of the key skills both for employability and for learning. This emphasis is part of its effort to address the serious skills shortages identified in Wales which means that according to *The Learning Country* (2001):

> *around 30 per cent of employers suffer from skill shortages with significant gaps between the skills employers need and the skills of their workforces. There is a tendency for firms to fall into a low skills trap; because they cannot readily obtain the higher skills levels they need for growth, they settle for lower skills levels and low growth*.

In the National Curriculum key skills form a cross-curricular theme presented to pupils through individual curriculum subjects. Key skills have been a focus of government-funded training programmes such as Modern Apprenticeships and they are also emphasised in the National Curriculum and in the curricula of colleges. Some Higher Education institutions have also embedded key skills components in their work with undergraduates and postgraduates. In 2000 the government introduced written tests at four levels in the key skills of Communication, Application of Number and IT.

The importance which is attached to key skills has led the Welsh Assembly Government to emphasise them in its *Skills and Employment Action Plan* which aims

to assist people into employment by raising their skills levels. Key skills also feature prominently in the proposed Welsh Baccalaureate. The work of supporting individuals to develop key skills is facilitated by Key Skills Support Programme Cymru (KSSPC).

The aims of the initiatives to promote key skills include:

♦ raising awareness and understanding of key skills
♦ ensuring that individuals have opportunities to develop key skills in a variety of learning contexts
♦ producing models to develop people's key skills that are appropriate to a variety of learning contexts
♦ developing appropriate assessment methods.

1.4   BASIC AND KEY SKILLS COMBINED

Currently there appears to be a shift, in both policy and research circles, towards the development of a closer link between the management of key skills and basic skills delivery. A joint project undertaken by the Basic Skills Agency and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (Perry and Davies 2002) examined the relationship between the two types of skills and sought '*to identify examples of good practice in creating an effective interface between the two areas of work*'.

The report found that some colleges were planning a more integrated approach to the delivery of basic and key skills which would influence decisions about the deployment of staff and use of resources. This reorganisation would produce the establishment of learning centres supporting both key skills and basic skills and the use of partnership teaching methods. However, the report also found that:

> *Fundamentally, the terms 'basic skills' and 'key skills' are not well-understood by potential learners, students, employers, managers and teachers in colleges, parents, universities.*

Thus it contended that:

> *further clarification of the overlap and alignment, as well as important differences between basic skills and key skills is needed so that centres will be better able to develop policies for progression and transfer and make decisions about accreditation.*

Additionally, other relevant issues were identified, such as, the need for staff development, better opportunities to share good practice and a coordinated approach to evaluating good practice. A key finding of the report, however, was the acknowledgement that there is a necessity for more research into the relationship between basic and key skills.

1.5   THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

In addition to the developments in Wales and in the rest of the United Kingdom, skills issues are being considered at an international level. For example, following the Lisbon Conference (2000) of the European Council it was decided that working groups of experts would be established to advise on ways of co-ordinating work to increase competence in:

♦ basic skills
♦ information and communications technologies (ICT)
♦ mathematics, science and technology.

Among the priorities were how to establish a co-ordinated set of indicators and benchmarks and how to exchange good practice.

Although the phrase 'key skills' is not applied in some countries, the development of these kinds of skills are emphasised, for example, in policy in Australia.

1.6   THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The National Council ELWa commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to conduct research into international good practice in basic skills and key skills.

The aims of the research were to identify evidence-based models of best practice in order to:

♦ overcome the barriers faced by individuals in seeking basic skills support and acquiring basic and key skills
♦ address the difficulties experienced by providers in effectively identifying basic and key skills needs and delivering appropriate provision
♦ increase the capacity and capability of learning providers to deliver and support basic and key skills

♦ produce recommendations based on learner centred choice and flexibility.

1.7 THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Phase 1: Literature review

An initial literature search was conducted by the expert staff of the NFER library who provide a specialised literature searching service. This included identifying and acquiring the relevant sources as well as conducting the actual database and web searches.

The databases which were searched included AEI (Australian Education Index); ASSIA (Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts); BEI (British Education Index); CBCA Fulltext; ChildData; ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) and PsycINFO, as well as the Library's own internal bibliographical databases, including CERUK (Current Educational Research in the UK). Internet searches were also carried out on relevant subject gateways and web-sites.

The EURYDICE Unit at the NFER also provided support for this project.

Due to the timescale of this project, the literature search was limited to articles, books and research papers published in the UK and in the rest of the world in English since 1994.

Phase 2: Interviews with key personnel

NFER researchers met with key personnel in ELWa and DYSG, to discuss research issues. Telephone interviews were also conducted with staff at the Basic Skills Agency, in LEAs and those with responsibilities for these issues in some colleges of further education.

Phase 3: Identification and description of good practice

NFER researchers undertook a desk-based analysis of the literature identified in the literature search. Definitions and descriptions of good practice in the area of basic and key skills were identified during the analysis.

A specific focus was placed on identifying:

♦ models for raising individuals' awareness of their existing basic and key skills
♦ models for overcoming the barriers which prevent individuals from developing their basic and key skills
♦ models for addressing the difficulties experienced by providers in identifying basic and key skill needs
♦ models to enable providers to address basic and key skills.

Phase 4: Recommendations

Through analysis of the kinds of models enumerated under Phase 3, the research team formulated recommendations for disseminating and/or adapting the good practice identified in Wales and in other countries.

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is divided into two sections:

♦ Basic skills
♦ Key skills

Each section contains:

♦ a bibliography of relevant literature
♦ a concise analytic framework of publications
♦ a thematic analysis of issues
♦ key findings and models of good practice
♦ recommendations for action in Wales.

2.   BASIC SKILLS

2.1   DEFINITION AND SCOPE

The Basic Skills Agency (2002) defines basic skills as:

> *the ability to read, write, and speak in English (or Welsh), and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in general*

Adult Basic Skills Education developed from the adult literacy programme of the early 1970's. This was a period of major change in further and adult education (Literacy Research Centre (LRC) 2002).

The issue of restricted basic skills has demanded attention due to its continuing impact upon individuals. For example, those with limited basic skills are more likely to end up in low or unskilled jobs, which are vulnerable to the modern economy, often leading to long-term periods of unemployment (BSA 2001).
Additionally, basic skills are prioritised as the basic building blocks on which other skills can be built (DfEE 1998).

The Moser Report (1999) revealed that approximately 20 per cent of adults in England, about seven million people, *'have more or less severe problems with basic skills, in particular with what is generally called 'functional literacy' and 'functional numeracy'.*
The report stated that:

> *It is staggering that over the years millions of children have been leaving school hardly able to read and write, and that today millions of adults have the same problems*

The report also noted that only approximately 250,000 of the seven million adults, around 28 per cent, had taken part in relevant programmes of study to improve their basic skills.

A study undertaken by Sticht (2001), with the objective of determining factors which may motivate adults with basic skills needs to improve their skills, found that the main reasons cited for participating in such programmes included the following:

- emotional – to feel better about themselves
- practical – to be better at everyday tasks that involve basic skills
- to improve IT skills
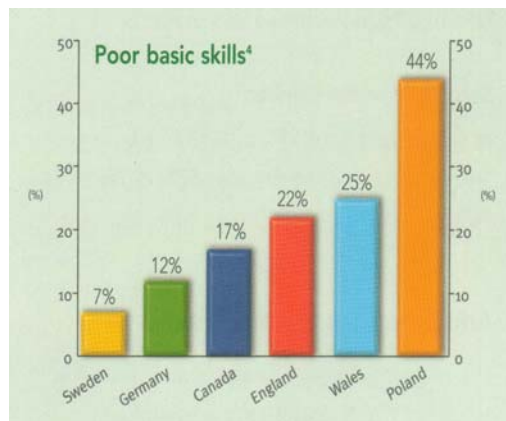- to obtain a qualification
- the course was near home.

However, as Tremlett (1995) states, individuals with basic skills problems are generally less likely to be current or past learners. For example, at any time, only five percent of the estimated seven million adults in the UK with limited basic skills receive formal assistance (Love and Banks 2001).

2.2   WALES IN CONTEXT

The National Assembly of Wales believes that around 780,000 children, young people and adults in Wales have literacy and numeracy problems which exclude them from realising their potential and from many important aspects of life (NAfW 2001).

Throughout the 1990's the Basic Skills Agency has undertaken a survey of the literacy and numeracy standards of adults living in Wales. A similar study has been carried out for England enabling useful comparisons. The conclusions of this research suggest that Wales has a greater need for support in literacy and numeracy than England. 28% of the population of Wales have difficulty with basic literacy and 32% with basic numeracy. For England, 24% of the population struggle with basic literacy and numeracy (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) 2002).

Similar results are found when Wales is compared with other industrialised countries. Data taken from the International Adult Literacy Survey indicates that Wales has a large adult population with basic skills problems (ONS 1997).

Poor basic skills[4]

Country	%
Sweden	7%
Germany	12%
Canada	17%
England	22%
Wales	25%
Poland	44%

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey ONS 1997 in Basic Skills Agency 'The extent of the problem' 2001

However, when comparing the United Kingdom as a whole to other OCED countries, the ranking for both literacy and numeracy appears favourable.

Mean Reading Literacy

Range of rank order positions for each country based on sample (with 95% confidence)

Country	Rank Highest possible	Rank Lowest possible
Finland	1	1
Canada	2	4
New Zealand	2	8
Australia	2	9
Ireland	3	9
Korea	4	9
United Kingdom	5	9
Japan	3	10
Sweden	9	11
Austria	11	16
Belgium	11	16
Iceland	11	15
Norway	11	16
France	11	16
United States	10	20
Denmark	16	19
Switzerland	16	21
Spain	17	21
Czech Rep.	17	21
Italy	19	24
Germany	21	25
Liechtenstein	20	26
Hungary	21	26
Poland	21	27
Greece	23	28
Portugal	24	28
Russian Fed.	27	29
Latvia	27	29
Luxembourg	30	30
Mexico	31	31
Brazil	32	32

Mean Mathematical Literacy

Range of rank order positions for each country based on sample (with 95% confidence)

Country	Rank Highest possible	Rank Lowest possible
Japan	1	3
Korea	2	3
New Zealand	4	8
Finland	4	7
Australia	4	9
Canada	5	8
Switzerland	4	10
United Kingdom	6	10
Belgium	9	15
France	10	15
Austria	10	16
Denmark	10	16
Iceland	11	16
Liechtenstein	9	18
Sweden	13	17
Ireland	16	19
Norway	17	20
Czech Rep.	17	20
United States	16	23
Germany	20	22
Hungary	20	23
Russian Fed.	21	25
Spain	23	25
Poland	23	26
Latvia	25	28
Italy	26	28
Portugal	26	29
Greece	27	30
Luxembourg	29	30
Mexico	31	31
Brazil	32	32

Source: PISA Report 2000

The proportion of each population with basic skills difficulties does not, however, simply vary across countries. Research undertaken by the Basic Skills Agency (1997 and 2001) and CCET baseline reports for Wales (2002), indicate that there are
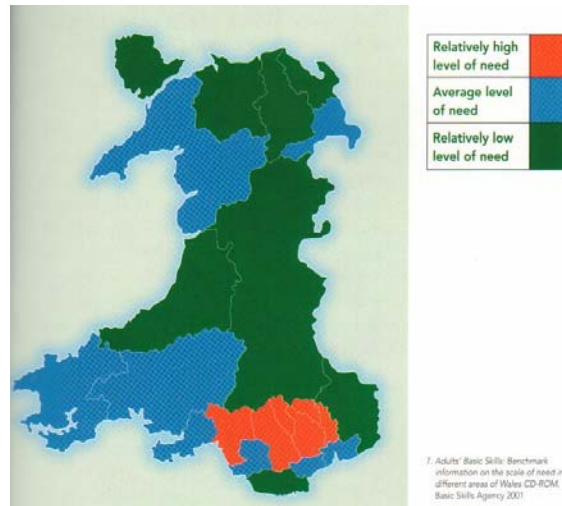
geographical/regional disparities in the percentages of those with poor basic skills and the levels of need relating to basic skills support within Wales.

CCET data provided by ELWa details variations of literacy and numeracy difficulties for each region of Wales:

CCET Region	% of literacy difficulties for working age adults	% of numeracy difficulties for working age adults
Anglesey	27	30
Blaenau Gwent	33	38
Bridgend	29	32
Caerphilly	32	36
Cardiff	26	28
Ceredigion	27	29
Carmarthenshire	29	33
Conwy	26	31
Denbighshire	26	29
Flintshire	27	28
Gwynedd	28	31
Merthyr Tydfil	33	38
Monmouthshire	24	24
Neath Port Talbot	31	35
Newport	29	32
Pembrokeshire	29	32
Powys	28	31
Rhondda Cynon Taff	31	35
Swansea	28	30
Torfaen	31	35
Vale of Glamorgan	26	27
Wrexham	29	32

Source: Baseline data for CCET statement of need 2002 – CESI/ELWa

The following chart identifies the level of need for each region of Wales based upon three levels, high, average and low.

Source: Basic Skills Agency 'The extent of the problem' 2001

Research therefore suggests that, although many countries have a significant number of adults with poor basic skills, when a cross-country comparison is undertaken with other industrialised countries, Wales has a higher proportion of adults struggling with basic skills than many. However, variations are not only between countries. Differences relating to the percentage of those with basic skill difficulties and the level of need for basic skills support exist within Wales, between different regions, with particular areas having a more significant problem and greater levels of needs.

The Assembly's targets for tackling basic skills deficits include increasing the proportion of those with functional basic skills in literacy to nine in ten by 2002 and above nine in ten by 2004 and for numeracy, six in ten by 2002, above six in ten by 2004 and eight in ten by 2007 (NafW 2001).

2.3   BARRIERS

There are a range of barriers to participating in basic skills provision and for this reason they are often categorised. An example of this is given by Sticht (2001) who suggests barriers can be divided into either situational or dispositional categories.

A more detailed categorisation of barriers to basic skills education, is provided by research undertaken by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (1998).
The main barriers to participation are categorised as follows:

♦ Dispositional   e.g. negative attitudes to education, seeing learning as
                          irrelevant

14

- ◆ Informational   e.g. a lack of appropriate information
- ◆ Institutional   e.g. the use of application forms or traditional classroom settings
- ◆ Situational   e.g. not enough time, childcare problems and expense.

Evidence of such barriers has been identified in many studies. For example, in a secondary analysis of the individual's survey, commissioned by the Employment Department, Tremlett (1995) found that the unemployed and those looking after a family were the least likely to be current learners and the most likely to be non-learners. A high proportion of those with basic skills problems were found to feel out of place and uncomfortable attending evening classes in settings such as schools and colleges and over half thought education was too expensive to afford. Research undertaken by Steele (1999) discovered that learners perceive the qualifications offered to be of no use and that the programmes would not teach them anything relevant.

A range of bodies have or are currently working towards improving basic skills in terms of, among others, awareness and delivery. An example of this is the National Support Project, being undertaken by DYSG (2002) which focuses upon basic skills support for further education colleges. It is well documented that the success of any basic skills strategy is dependent upon overcoming barriers to participation.

Although this report considers barriers to basic skills learning in general, more specific documents relating to adult education, key skills and literacy programmes, have also been utilised. The purpose of this is to highlight generic barriers.

The following report details a discussion of literature relating to overcoming barriers to basic skills participation, concluding with a summary of key points and recommendations.

2.4   MARKETING

Many, although by no means all, basic skills learners belong to hard-to-reach groups such as ethnic minorities, the homeless, and former offenders. It is therefore important that a variety of marketing methods should be used in order to contact these groups. Marketing methods are crucial factors which can often determine participation levels in basic skills programmes.

Research shows that people who take part in most kinds of continuing education are generally those who already hold educational qualifications and are aware of opportunities for lifelong learning. However, this is not true for people with basic skills needs. The issue of motivation and ensuring the participation of under-represented groups in basic skills programmes requires particular attention (LSDA 2001).

A central issue is that potential learners may not be aware of their own needs. It is suggested that these groups may be accessed through adequate publicity and marketing strategies aimed at excluded groups (LSDA 2001).

Further observations of marketing are noted by Michael (1990) who states that:

> *Marketing is an evolving practice whose definition depends upon the geographical and economic context, time, and the level of knowledge and insight of the definer*

According to Michael and Hogard (1996) effective marketing strategies should be centred upon specific market segments or targeted groups. The development of a programme and its promotional tactics must reflect the unique difference of each segment. The needs of each segment must therefore be studied and responded to accordingly. Inventive and varied marketing methods are required in order to recruit those from hard to reach groups into basic skills programmes.

Good practice in the marketing of basic skills is defined by The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) (1997) as having three main objectives. These are:

- identify under-represented groups
- identify the learning needs of these groups
- develop strategies to reach these groups.

The FEFC (1997) argues that it is the responsibility of the provider to work with local and regional partners to develop strategies for contacting under-represented groups and develop learning opportunities which lessen the barriers and appeal to target groups, such as, community based activities.

Jameson (2001) and Aldridge and Tuckett (2002) maintain that word-of-mouth through work colleagues, family and friends appears to be the most common way through which people find out about learning opportunities. For example, the NFER

(2002) highlighted that good programme coordinators advertise their provision in places such as surgeries, social security offices, community or day centres, and drop-in cafes. The agency workers are then able to inform potential learners of existing basic skills provision by word of mouth and refer them to the programme.

However, two other methods of marketing have been documented as being successful: the media and outreach. These are discussed below.

♦ The media

Research has shown that people with basic skills needs watch more hours of television than the average viewer (Love and Banks 2001).

The LSDA and BSA are in agreement that the media should play a role in motivating potential students (LSDA 2001). The promotion for the National Strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills utilising Gremlins, has experienced a good response in terms of potential learners making further enquiries (DfEE 2001). Research illustrated that the humour of the Gremlins was necessary in order to engage the viewer and make the 'problem' appear less serious. However, the humour must also be balanced with menace as further investigations indicated that the only way of motivating non-learners was to directly confront them with how uncomfortable it is to face life with poor literacy and numeracy levels (Barnes 2001).

Recent experience has also provided evidence that television can motivate basic skills learners into action. In 1999, a *Brookside*, (a Channel 4 soap), story line featured a character facing and overcoming basic skills difficulties. In the broadcast, contact details were provided for *learndirect* who then received 10,000 enquiries for further information (Love and Banks 2001).

♦ Outreach

Outreach, in terms of inclusive promotional programmes which reach out to provide information for perspective learners in the community via person-to-person contact, have proved to be successful (Roeher Institute 1994).

An example of such promotional methods is given by two basic skills teachers who work in the Silwood Youth and Community centre on an inner city estate. They see outreach work as a means through which they can speak to people about learning

opportunities rather than hand out leaflets which probably will not be read. Additionally, it is taken as an opportunity to review the make up of the estate, so that different groups e.g. asylum seekers, are not excluded (Deigan and McArthur 1997).

A second example highlights the effectiveness of outreach strategies when dealing with the difficulties associated with rural areas. Northumberland College has eight outreach centres which provide further education. The guidance workers liaise with community groups, assess the needs of the community and build networks in the locality (FEFC 1997).

Different groups have diverse needs, abilities and often negative attitudes to learning. Therefore, a variety of strategies are often needed. The manager of one programme said, *'If we simply asked them to come to a basic skills course they would run a mile'*. For example, a small study of adult learners with dyslexia found that the preferred method for finding out about classes was by word of mouth, the media or posters with visual content (Jameson 2001).

However, as Michael and Hogard (1996) remark 'There is no substitute to marketing knowledge'. Two case studies, outlined below, are provided by the FEFC (1997) as examples of good practice.

Example 1   A community needs analysis is undertaken on an annual basis by Nelson and Colne College, which matches its learner profile with that of the local community. Census data, employment and unemployment data is used to build up a picture and then mapped against attendance rates in order to identify under-represented groups.

Example 2   An attitude survey is undertaken by East Durham Community College who liase with community groups in order to establish the needs and a relevant curriculum for learners.

One community organisation in the North of England which intended to develop basic skills programmes organised an Open Day for the whole local community in a park in conjunction with other community groups. They arranged attractions for all ages. The organisation took advantage of the large attendance to conduct a survey of resident's needs during the day as a basis for their learning programmes (NFER 2002).

2.5   SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS OF LEARNERS' NEEDS

The screening of learners and the diagnosis of their basic skills needs is an essential process through which learners may be allocated to appropriate learning programmes in terms of a suitable difficulty level, the relevance of the curriculum content and interest. The screening may be conducted by means of a range of formal and informal methods which include personal interviews, written and oral tests, and the scrutiny of work or other materials produced by the learners. The screening process produces a baseline for each individual learner, not only with regards to attainment in literacy and numeracy but also in terms of personal development and possible health or social problems.

The screening is normally carried out by the basic skills tutor, sometimes in cooperation with a course organiser. This then gives tutors direct feedback on the learners they will be teaching.

Research literature indicates that screening and diagnosis have three main objectives:

♦   **The identification of needs**

Screening processes are developed and used in order to improve the identification of individuals' needs within communities, workplaces and post school education (Faraday 1996). Ratcliffe (2001) and Cooper (1995) both confirm that an initial basic skills screening will determine particular learning needs, which is paramount to learner success. In developing good practice in 'New Deal' Colleges, the assessment of a learner's basic skills needs before entry into a programme should lay the foundations for future learning and is considered a feature of good practice (Ratcliffe 2001).

♦   **Assessment of ability**

The assessment of a person's ability is highlighted as a '*good starting point'* (Jenkins 1995). Norman (2002) notes that although no single curricular model has emerged as the most effective, a common element exists in ensuring that all students work at the right level in an initial assessment procedure.

♦   **The identification of learner goals**

The initial screening should not only establish the learners' present position in terms of the skills and experience they possess, but also provide a formative element and identify, as far as possible, the learners' ambitions for desirable qualifications, progression to further learning, and future employment prospects. This information should then inform the design of a relevant learning plan for each individual through which clear and attainable goals can be set. This is referred to as a learning gateway process of assessment, which identifies appropriate learning goals (Scottish Executive 2002). Cooper (1995), emphasises that the screening process should include a system of identifying student goals and ensures that needs are met to achieve these goals.

Good practice in screening and diagnosis indicates that assessment has to be non-threatening and conducted through informal discussion and the observation of student performance (Roeher Institute 1994). Ratcliffe (2001) recommends that screening and diagnosis or British Skills agency testing should be carried out during the first week of any provision and the results circulated to both the learner and staff member.

Consistency in screening and diagnosis is essential in order to ensure a commonality of terminology and attainment standards across different basic skills programmes. New assessment tools emphasising the importance of consistency were set to be published in autumn 2002 (DfEE 2001). Such assessment tools need to distinguish between screening and diagnosis as some confusion can exist between them and result in the use of inappropriate assessment methods (LSDA 2001). Guidance regarding initial assessment has been provided by the DfES.

As technology advances, ICT plays an increasing role in screening and diagnosis. For example, Newcastle College used a software package entitled 'Key Skill Builder' as an assessment tool for students. The resulting assessment was used by tutors to place learners on an appropriate level of programme. It appears popular among the students because learning plans are then tailored to their abilities and their chance of achieving the most appropriate qualification for them is enhanced (Ratcliffe 2001).

Induction can act as an extended from of screening and can provide important information regarding the learner (Ratcliffe 2001). For example, Uxbridge College has run an intensive four-week induction for all New Deal students to identify barriers to learning and discuss any issues which may prevent retention and achievement. The process has also helped to build relationships, and integrate the learners into the college, leading to a supportive programme of study (Ratcliffe 2001).

The exact nature of induction varies. Some programmes merely introduce learners to other class or staff members, while others include more extensive procedures such as familiarising learners with premises and equipment, and learning skills such as the organisation of files or portfolios of work. Informal but regular 'chats' between tutor and learner to monitor the learner's well-being, progress and motivation during the initial weeks of a programme are also an important component of effective induction (NFER 2002).

Screening therefore establishes a crucial baseline against which progress can be defined and measured. Learning plans have been frequently documented as an appropriate method for achieving this.

Stephens (1993) emphasises the benefits of using learning plans as they underpin the guidance and learning support framework that providers of basic skills develop.

As suggested by Ratcliffe (2001) an individual learning plan should set specific goals and indicate what learners need to do to obtain them. The individual needs and goals of the actual learner should underpin the design of the learning plan (Roeher Institute 1994, Ratcliffe 2001).

Good practice has indicated that individual learning plans should include details of elements such as initial assessment, previous learning, and targets. Plans should be frequently updated by the learner and tutor (Ratcliffe 2001).

Active involvement of the learner in the designing of learning plans should also be encouraged. This allows learners to consider and set their own goals and gives them some ownership of the learning programme which should in turn increase their motivation for learning. An example of this is Lancaster and Morecambe College who have found the active participation of students in the design of their action programmes, to be successful (Ratcliffe 2001).

The FEFC (1997) provides a further example of a screening process which utilises learning plans. In Thurrock College screening strategies have been developed by each curriculum area in order to identify learners' basic skills needs in the context of their learning goals. A study skills learning plan, with the active involvement of the learner and agreed targets, has been evaluated as successful.

2.6 METHODS OF DELIVERY

The main theme which emerges from the literature regarding methods of delivery is that the methods should be flexible and tailored where possible to the needs and circumstances of particular learner groups. The 'relevance' of basic skills tuition to learners' needs and experiences, through a focus upon the individual learner and adaptable delivery methods, appears to be prevalent in existing documentation. The structure and setting of the provision are crucial factors which often determine the success or otherwise of learning programmes.

2.6.1 The context of learning

The context of learning refers to the 'structures' through which basic skills education is provided. Evidence suggests that the ease of access for learners to basic skills provision depends upon the nature of the structure adopted.

These structures are:

- Partnerships
- Integration of basic skills
- Situated learning
- Settings
- ICT.

Each of the structures will be discussed individually in the next section.

2.6.2 Partnerships

Surveys undertaken by the European Basic Skills Network (EBSN) (2002) have established that those adults with low basic skills are much less likely to participate in education and training programmes. Imaginative approaches are therefore required to recruit adults from this background to basic skills provision. Community-based approaches, often involving a variety of community-based organisations, have proved to be effective.

It has been recognised that, by forming and utilising a wider range of partnerships with organisations, those who are consistently excluded are increasingly likely to participate in education and training programmes (EBSN 2002). Partnerships supporting the provision of basic skills have been developed with a variety of bodies including, housing associations, health centres and family literacy programmes.

Various organisations, as well as countries, have echoed the importance of community partnerships. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (2001) stated that the infrastructure for the delivery of literacy and numeracy skills should involve coherent planning processes featuring local learning partnerships. The Basic Skills Strategy for Wales (2001) stressed that partnerships with employers, community agencies and basic skill providers, among others, are of paramount importance if the strategy is to be successful. In the European context, '*Learning for Active Citizenship'*, a paper published by the European Commission, argues that non-formal teaching and learning contexts can more readily extend the scope of learning to all groups in the community (EBSN 2002).

Two examples of basic skills initiatives involving local partnerships in Britain are documented by EBSN:

1. The 'Step to Health' Project was initiated by a partnership between a City Health Project, Adult Education Service and the Basic Skills Agency. The aim was to improve health education and basic skills by providing short courses on health related themes. This initiative was a reaction to the recognition that those who have low basic skills may have difficulty accessing health information and advice.

2. The West Midlands Community Housing Association decided that greater tenant involvement was needed and through a partnership with basic skills support and the local college, built a programme of training primarily focused upon issues concerning tenants, which included management skills and newsletter writing skills, alongside basic skills. The course was popular because it related to the concerns of the tenants and attracted those who did not see education as particularly relevant.

In both cases, participation included learners who might not have attended more traditional tuition because customised courses that related to individual interests and needs were provided (EBSN 2002).

A community development project run by Greenwich College is a further example of a partnership initiative identified as good practice. The College operated a housing estate community development programme for residents as part of the Local Authority's strategy to combat poverty and encourage regeneration. The programme

helped residents to identify their own needs and build their skills. Community development work uncovered people's interests by engaging them in informal learning, such as tenants groups, as well as more formal learning opportunities including courses in computing and basic skills (FEFC 1997).

Pathfinder projects, that is, projects to trial key elements of the *Skills for Life Strategy: the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy Skills* (DfEE 2001) which included the delivery of learning, have also been successful through, in part, local level partnerships.

In the US 'Neighbourhood Networks' have been launched by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD provides a support basis for developing networks which aims to help people from low-income families improve their basic skills.
Two examples of such networks are:

1. Wheatland Community Centre, Dallas, which provides a variety of classes, aimed at improving skills such as IT. Community organisations, employers and local residents were contacted in order to identify local needs and develop relevant programmes based upon these requirements, thereby attracting the interest of potential partners.

2. A 'Communities On Line' project was developed through a partnership between a property manager and HUD to help residents develop job skills by examining the employment needs of Baltimore. Those involved in the partnership also included the housing association and church.

Both networks utilised community meetings and resident surveys in order to encourage the development of community partnerships (Neighbourhood Networks 1999).

2.6.3   Integration of basic skills
As already suggested, embedding basic skills in wider programmes that have an appeal to potential participants, can reach those who are generally excluded from existing provision.

An EBSN (2002) evaluation of basic skills programmes undertaken in a centre run for the homeless in the UK, Big Issue, found that the success of such provision was limited by three factors:

♦ basic skills were not seen as a priority
♦ the benefits of obtaining better skills was an abstract idea for most
♦ some potential learners feared being stigmatised as illiterate if they participated.

The project was finally acknowledged as successful when basic skills were integrated into a course on publishing skills. The reduction of the emphasis on basic skills and the provision of a course perceived to be both relevant and interesting, encouraged participation (EBSN 2002).

Projects funded by the Basic Skills Agency in England and Wales have consistently found that many effective, community-based basic skills programmes attract learners through incorporating basic skills into wider programmes, specific to the interests of the learner (EBSN 2002).

Other researchers such as Norman (2002) support the view that integrating basic and key skills into broader programmes is the most effective means of delivery. An evaluation of case-study programmes provided through the Adult and Community Learning Fund found that the integration of basic skills tuition with other activities such as cooking, childcare, motor bike maintenance and riding, was considered appropriate for those learners who would not normally participate in basic skills tuition as a discrete activity (NFER 2002).

2.6.4 Situated learning

Situated learning theories hold that people can learn more effectively in situations, which are most meaningful to them. The context of learning is an integral part of what is learnt as *'…learning is not an activity separate from other activities'* (Cairns 2001). For this reason, embedding basic skills into programmes relevant to its learners has been a focus for research and policy for a variety of countries.

In Canada, the National Summit in Literacy and Productivity, recommended that adult education programmes be developed that make literacy immediately relevant to participants by ensuring they relate to adults in functional and relevant contexts, for example, family literacy, tax preparation programmes etc (Sticht 2001).

Lunenberg and Volman (1999) who undertook a small scale explorative investigation in the Netherlands, aiming to gain insight into active learning in basic education, found that ensuring programmes are relevant to participants lives, learning histories and cultural backgrounds is of significant importance to active learning.

In the US, two areas have been identified, in the emerging direction of programme development, as factors which encourage participation in literacy programmes, that is, programme content and a greater consideration of the differences among students. Programmes should reflect the realities of learner lives (Imel 1996). Ratcliffe (2001), for example, suggests that good practice requires that the learning content should relate to the world of work and a practical application of skills (Ratcliffe 2001).

The relevance of learning experiences to learner needs has also been identified as critical to learner retention, as well as recruitment (NFER 2002).

It is worth noting the following three recommendations made by Imel (1996):

♦ involve adults in programme planning and education. It is suggested that one of the most appropriate ways of understanding the learning needs of individuals is by consulting them (Jameson 2001) and involving the community in programme development (LSDA 2001). Recent survey results found that computer skills, IT and the Internet were the most popular subjects to study and would encourage participation in learning programmes (Aldridge and Tuckett 2002)

♦ develop an understanding of learners' experiences and communities, as basic skills can then be integrated into programmes of interest and relevance. For example, Stourbridge College has been planning to run courses to help former naval personnel resettle into civilian life (Arkin 1995). This particular programme is a reflection of the experiences of a particular community

♦ hire programme staff who share the culture and life experiences of learners. The use of former learners as programme providers has been a recommended strategy.

As Morgan (1995) and Merton (2001) indicate, the emphasis relating to delivery methods, has been placed upon individually tailored learning.

2.6.5 Settings

The teaching of basic skills is a complex issue because of the diverse backgrounds of the learners, including differing ages, ethnicities, circumstances etc. As a result, basic skills tuition takes place in a range of settings from colleges to prisons (Sticht 2001).

Tomlinson (1995) highlights that the use of appropriate learning settings for each group of learners is an important factor in increasing participation.

Aldridge and Tuckett (2002) argue that the most common locations for learning appear to be further education colleges, universities and workplaces. In fact, in the UK, sixty per cent of basic skills students received education and training in further education colleges (Sticht 2001). However, this is in contrast to evidence collected from both potential and actual basic skills learners, who generally prefer not to learn in formal settings.

Two studies, one aimed at reforming adult literacy education in the UK, US and Canada (Sticht 2001) and the other a NIACE/National Youth Agency investigation of the low take-up rate of basic skills provision among young adults (Merton 2001) found evidence suggesting that informal venues were more likely to motivate potential learners to take up basic skills programmes than formal settings.

Merton (2001) and Sticht (2001) discovered that many respondents found colleges and formal institutions threatening and preferred to learn in familiar places where there were other activities such as youth or community centres. Learning at home with support appeared to be particularly favoured.

Silwood Youth and Community Centre serves an inner-city estate with a large minority who speak English as a second language, high crime rates and racial tensions. Consequently, youth and community workers have found that a holistic approach has been necessary in order to create an atmosphere of inclusion. The community centre hosts many other projects, in addition to basic skills, such as playgroups, vocational guidance workers etc. The consensus is that if learners do not feel secure and comfortable in a particular educational setting, learning will neither be beneficial nor enjoyable (Deigan and McArther 1997).

In addition to the perceived importance of the appropriate setting for particular populations in increasing access to basic skills provision, there is also emphasis upon the importance of setting for particular groups of learners. The following projects are

examples of adapting the provision of basic skills to particular venues for the benefit of specific groups.

1. Denmark – refugees and immigrants often face social exclusion to a large extent, due to a lack of education and low skills. As a result NAPUT, an integration project, has been developed for those living in social housing in Elsinore. The project offers teaching of the Danish language and social affairs and more practical skills. The initiative runs in the centre of the population it wishes to involve (EBSN 2002)

2. Ireland – the Zena project, promoted by the Bosnian Community Development Project, aims to promote the participation of refugee women in a range of educational opportunities. This is achieved through, for example, outreach work and a networking of local community groups providing adult education, thus offering different access possibilities and settings for participation (EBSN 2002).

3. Ireland – the crime and crime prevention pathways project, initiated by the city of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, aims to achieve the social and educational re-integration of prisoners and ex-prisoners by developing a distance open learning programme through two open learning centres. It is suggested that an 'open' environment, that is, informal and non traditional, is the appropriate setting for such an initiative, in contrast to a more formal setting (EBSN 2002).

4. Cornwall College has a network of learning shops on the high street. These are drop-in centres which provide convenient training facilities linked to provision such as 'computer literacy and IT'. These provide learning settings for people who find existing college provision inconvenient or daunting (Ratcliffe 2001).

5. Oldham College's Community Education Unit works with a range of organisations, including the Local Authority, local schools, ethnic minority community groups, so that programmes for the ethnic minority community can be delivered in a range of settings, increasing the opportunity for participation. These settings include community centres, schools, women's centres, a bus adapted to be a travelling classroom etc (FEFC 1997).

2.6.6 The use of technology

Technology has been highlighted as a means through which learning can be freed from the traditional confines of educational institutions such as schools and colleges. That is, a means of combating social exclusion and encouraging hard-to-reach groups to participate in basic skills programmes through differing and flexible delivery methods such as distance learning (Gorrard and Selwyn 1999). The National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales (2001), for example, as part of a national promotion scheme, embarked on a multimedia campaign beginning in 2001 with broadcasting and the print media promoting opportunities to improve basic skills. Technology enables the introduction of values such as individual controls including student management of how, when and where they learn, immediate feedback and flexibility for learners (Turner 1995).

Computers

The FEFC (1997) has identified, developing the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT) for teaching and learning, as good practice.

Computers appear to be utilised in the provision of basic skills in three main ways:

- to draw people into basic skills
- to overcome traditional barriers
- to aid tuition/instruction.

Research indicates that ICT is an effective hook to draw people into basic skills provision (LSDA 2001). The result of an explorative survey undertaken by Aldridge and Tuckett (2002) found that computer skills, IT and the internet were the most popular subjects to study and would encourage participation in learning programmes.

Computer centred learning, that is, varied learning opportunities accessed via a computing resource, has also been documented as a means of overcoming the traditional barriers associated with post-compulsory education. ICT is featured in the comprehensive learning programme for Wales 'The Learning Country' (NafW 2001) as a means of removing physical, geographical and linguistic barriers and combat social exclusion. The Assembly's aims include making ICT more accessible to learners by establishing school and community settings. New approaches to programme delivery can provide those whose learning experiences are characterised by major care responsibilities, those with irregular attendance due to work or other

ties and those who have returned to education after a period of separation, greater accessibility to basic skills programmes (Hodson 2001). Learning providers such as *'learndirect'* offer a range of courses, primarily online, to enable flexibility of study (learndirect 2003).

Three examples of ICT being used to facilitate 'anytime' or distance learning are:

1. A Network of learning shops established by Cornwall College on the local high street, which are drop in centres providing training facilities linked into provision such as 'computer literacy and ICT' (Ratcliffe 2001).

2. A computer networking system, linking employees at several companies to an educational programme, has been developed by Mitchell Community College, New York (US Department of Education 1995).

3. The Rural Vocational Training Project run by Northumberland TEC, The Rural Development Council and Derwentside College. Those in remote rural areas who have suitable computers are provided with a modem so that they can access distance learning packages, with support from an on-line graphical bulletin board. Tutor support is also delivered electronically (FEFC 1997).

Additionally, an on-line survey and several focus groups of adult literacy practitioners from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, although limited in its sample, highlighted important uses for IT, in particular the Internet, in aiding instruction. On-line tuition, learning and skills improvements, a source of classroom ideas and materials and aiding students to be able to communicate with each other nationally and internationally, were cited as reasons for using IT and the Internet (Rosen 1998).

The development and growth of the use of electronic learning appears to be widespread and an objective of many basic skills initiatives such as:

1. The European Certificate of Basic Skills, an international pilot project being introduced into the European Union, with the aim of advancing the benefits of IT use (Boltin 2002).

2. The adult literacy and numeracy strategy in Scotland, which is intending to maximise the potential of IT by investigating how it can be used to make

learning plans accessible, provide on-line materials and information for learners and practitioners (Scottish Executive 2002).

3. A US state profile of technology applications in adult basic education and literacy programmes found that the majority of states used some form of computer-assisted instruction (US department of Education 1995).

The limitations of ICT and Computer based learning must however be noted. Hodson (2001) states that issues such as restricted access to equipment and resources, technical difficulties and motivational lapses of the users, have been well documented.

Multi-media

Love and Banks (2001) suggest that the motivation for using TV and other forms of media technology stems from the existence of evidence indicating that it is a means through which reluctant learners can be engaged in learning programmes. They offer different ways of introducing learning opportunities to potential learners.

Television

Studies have shown that those with basic skills limitations watch more hours of television than the average viewer (Love and Banks 2001). Recent experience also provides evidence that television can motivate basic skills learners into action. In 1999, a *Brookside*, (a Channel 4 soap), story line presented a character facing and overcoming basic skills difficulties. In the broadcast, contact details for *learndirect* were posted, which received 10,000 enquiries for further information. Love and Banks (2001) maintain that a conventional TV programme was successful in offering links to external basic skills support agencies.

Additionally, television broadcasting has proved popular for providing tuition through learning programmes. For example, In Britain, the BBC among other networks broadcast a series of learning programmes on a variety of subjects as part of 'The Learning Zone' and 'Skillwise' - a BBC website primarily for adults who want to improve their basic skills in reading writing and maths. In the US, several states have also found the provision of instruction through television broadcasting to be effective, including Alabama, Montana, South Carolina (US Department of Education 1995).

More recently, the provision of education, including basic skills, has witnessed a technological advance with pilot projects trialling interactive television. For example, the upgrade project undertaken in 2000, has explored how set top boxes with built in memory and asymmetric digital subscriber lines, can be used to provide interactive content (Love and Banks 2000). These programmes aimed to attract viewers and encourage them to be active learners at their own pace.

The project created ten programmes and an experimental web site for TV. Through a collaboration with Coleg Digidol, the programmes are being broadcast on S4C1 and enable the viewer to interact with 'live' broadcasts. As evidence indicates, those with basic skills needs are more receptive to education and learning if there is a link to their own interests and needs. Therefore, each programme was designed to have a main theme section, both practical and applicable to life situations, with in-context reference to basic skills materials (Love and Banks 2001).

Interactive television broadcast systems have been developed and utilised by the state of Vermont to aid adult learning. The system connects six sites through compressed video and real time audio. All sites can communicate with one another (US Department of Education 1995).

Alternatives to broadcasting

Alternatives to broadcasting include tuition through Digital Versatile Discs (DVD's) and videos. Several US states use videos for home study programmes. An example is Pennsylvania which has developed a video series entitled 'On Your Own' where a multi-cultural cast perform in vignettes depicting basic skills applications in real life situations (US Department of Education 1995).

Additionally, tele-conferencing systems have been utilised in the US, (US Department of Education). Examples include:

1. South Dakota – The development of a Rural Development Telecommunications Network has provided two way interactive audio and visual communication between sixteen sites.

2. Rhode Island – A tele-instruction network developed has the capacity to link up seven remote sites with two way audio via a conferencing telephone bridging system.

It must be noted, however, in addition to resource and technological difficulties, navigational interactivity techniques would entail technical and educational support.

2.6.7 Practical approaches

Practical approaches refer to the arrangements through which basic skills can be provided. Evidence shows specific approaches may widen access to basic skills provision.

The practical arrangements are:

♦ learning environment
♦ flexibility of provision.

Each approach is discussed individually in the next section.

2.6.8 Learning settings

As already suggested, the 'settings' in which basic skills are provided have an effect on motivating potential learners and often differing settings are required for different learner groups/populations.

Negative attitudes towards post compulsory and basic skills education often stems from bad experiences of school. Steele (1999) argues that potential learners are apprehensive that they will receive 'the same sort of rough hand' given in school. Evidence illustrates that these concerns and subsequent low confidence levels create a barrier to participation.

Studies of women (Thompson 1995) and young adults with low participation rates in basic skills provision (Merton 2001) have identified a preference for smaller classes. Learners feel that larger classes represent a more intimidating environment.
Additionally, further studies have found that comfortable surroundings and a tea/biscuit break helped distance the provision from bad memories of compulsory education (Quality in Practice n.d). An NFER study (2002) found that a relaxed approach has been identified as a means through which pressure can be taken away alongside the memories of learning at school. The social atmosphere of programmes, where friendships are developed and mutual support provided, has been identified as critical to learner recruitment and retention.

2.6.9   Flexibility of provision

Several studies have documented the importance of flexible provision. These include the following:

- open or flexible learning has been suggested as a means through which the barriers of time, disability, child care responsibilities, lack of confidence with regards to returning to a classroom situation etc, can be overcome (Warren 1994)

- it appears consistently documented that the criteria for a successful learning programme should include flexibly delivered courses (Warren 1994 and Roeher Institute 1994)

- delivery methods should be tailored to meet the needs of each segment of the population. That is, needs should be responded to accordingly (Michael and Hogard 1996)

- the development of open, distance and flexible learning has been identified as good practice by the FEFC (1997).

Flexible delivery consists of two aspects:

- Timetabling
- Duration.

These are outlined below.

Timetabling

It is suggested that flexible times should be provided for undertaking basic skills programmes (Roeher Institute 1994, DfEE 1998). Potential participants may have work commitments such as shift work or child care responsibilities and be unable to attend regularly at 'standard' times.

Duration

Although programmes need sufficient time to develop and raise learners' attainment (LSDA 2001) evidence appears to recommend shorter and more modular basic skills initiatives as a means of maintaining learners' motivation.

People with poor basic skills are often reluctant to commit themselves to learning programmes and find shorter courses more appealing and manageable (EBSN 2002). In an evaluation of the Adult and Community Learning Fund (NFER 2002) a tutor stated that with regards to basic skills instruction, *'Shorter rather than longer courses*

are better for this kind of learner. They find it difficult to plan long term'. This was also observed through the 'Step to Health Project' referred to previously, which aimed to provide health information by developing short courses on health related themes.

Bite-sized goals and modular programmes are viewed as particularly important for those who cannot attend for prolonged periods, such as the homeless and asylum seekers (LSDA 2001). An example of a modular programme has been undertaken by Colchester Institute which introduced a specific IT course, organised on a rolling modular basis, to provide as much flexibility as possible. This format gives identifiable and achievable progression (Ratcliffe 2001).

Two flexible programmes, highlighted as good practice, are

1. The 'Learning World' venture between Gateshead College and the University of Sunderland. Flexible delivery of courses includes weekend and evening teaching sessions and intensive study blocks or more traditional part-time study. As a result, many learners have enrolled who could not join more conventionally organised provision (FEFC 1997).

2. A flexible study programme developed by Dearne Valley College, which provides open arrangements and workshops for those who can not attend regular classes. It is a tutor supported, self-study scheme. Tutorials can be at home, in college, in groups or individually. Workshops are described as 'pay as you go', where learners buy tickets for £1 an hour and can use the workshops or open learning packages as convenient (FEFC 1997).

2.7   ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

The main theme which emerges from the literature regarding assessment is that the assessment criteria should include flexibility of choice (between accredited courses and non-accredited courses) in order to cater for the needs, circumstances and preferences of particular learner groups. Assessment procedures often determine learner participation levels in basic skills courses and therefore the success or otherwise of learning programmes.

Many researchers describe the positive effects of assessment and accreditation in basic skills learning. However, other evidence indicates that assessment can act as a deterrent to learners, emphasising the need for a sensitive and flexible approach.

It is maintained that learning distances travelled should be recognised by some form of accreditation e.g. national qualifications (Scottish Executive 2002) and that this official approval needs to be consistent and reliable (LSDA 2001).

The development of national assessments and qualifications, enabling learners to demonstrate their competence in Basic Skills, is currently being identified as good practice and highly recommended (DfEE 2001, Roeher Institute 1994, National Assembly - BS strategy for Wales, 2001, The Moser Report 1999).

Faraday (1996) found, in an evaluation of provision for learners with difficulties and disabilities, that there have been significant benefits for learners where their learning had been accredited. Externally recognised accreditation is perceived as 'evidence' of achievement.

An example of such accreditation is the proposed European Certificate of Basic Skills, which will demonstrate that an individual has completed a specific level in areas related to basic skills. The project's objectives include the development of assessment procedures (Boltin 2002).

However, it is well documented that a key message when considering assessment is that it should be non-threatening (Quality in practice n.d). A study undertaken by Merton (2001) concerning the low take-up rate of basic skills provision among young adults found that the majority of participants feared tests. Assessment was perceived as daunting, whereas course work and portfolio building was well regarded and a preference.

It has been suggested that a gradual approach should be taken to introducing the idea of taking part in accreditation to new learners. Havering College has developed a gradual introduction approach to the idea of exams. The college delays any mention of the subject for several weeks until students feel ready to cope with it. By this point it has been found that the mention of exams excites learners rather than frightens them (Callaghan et al 2001).

The FEFC (1997) have defined good practice, in part, as the '*introduction of new assessment procedures*'. Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education's Connections Programme, which offers a flexible curriculum, provides an excellent example of alternative assessment. Traditional tests and examinations have been replaced by continual assessment procedures.

Wilson (1999) argues that *'flexible, modular qualifications can play a significant role in measuring gain and progress, in ways consistent with enhancing rather than crushing learners morale'.*

Good practice has therefore been identified as the use of appropriate methods of accreditation and awards that register small steps, enable the transfer of credits, assess, build upon prior learning and are validated by external agencies (FEFC 1997).

DYSG (2002) is involved in a project supporting a credit and qualification framework for Wales. This type of framework is being developed in order to enable participation in small learning achievements which are recognised. Greater flexibility in learning opportunities and more manageable chunks are suggested as ways of giving potential learners the motivation needed to upgrade their skills. For example, originally the Basic Skills Agency's standards consisted of one entry level and levels one and two. Consequently achievement became a drawn out process. This was tackled by subdividing the one entry level into three, in addition to levels one and two, enabling smaller, more achievable steps.

The Open College Network utilises an official credit record strategy which records the number of credits gained and enables learners to transfer credits towards qualifications offered by other awarding bodies (FEFC 1997). There are a number of successful examples utilising a credit system. For example:

♦ Llandrillo College which is committed to widening participation and providing more flexible learning opportunities for potential learners who are traditionally excluded. This work has been integrated into the development of a credit-based curriculum linked to the emerging credit framework in Wales (Elliot and Lockitt 1994).

However, tests are seen by some as only having the ability to assess a limited range of outcomes and may decrease motivation and confidence among learners and subsequently may not always be an appropriate mode of assessment (LSDA 2001). Programmes developed through the Adult and Community Learning Fund were often found not to teach to national qualifications, that is accreditation that is nationally recognised. However, most offered some kind of accreditation for motivational purposes. For example, in a study undertaken by the NFER (2000) a course manager stated, *'Many of these learners have known nothing but academic failure…our certificate is the first qualification they have gained and they are proud of it'*. Some

designed their own specific accreditation, such as certificates for particular areas or a more general certificate of course completion. Accreditation and corresponding ceremonies have been found to inspire motivation and raise confidence levels.

A study of women undertaking basic skills tuition discovered that although accreditation was seen as a welcome result, non-accredited courses were also perceived as having a great deal of value, as achievement was not simply seen in terms of paper qualifications. Transformations in terms of personal benefits including acquiring confidence and practical benefits such as job opportunities, were highly valued by the learners (Thompson 1995). The NFER (2002) have obtained evidence identifying 'soft outcome' such as gaining confidence, taking a more active role in society and ambition to progress, as an equally important goal of basic skills instruction, as obtaining a qualification.

A NIACE survey on adult education undertaken by Aldridge and Tuckett (2002) found that 34 per cent of current/recent learners were not aiming for qualifications.

The Workers' Educational Association, in partnership with other colleges, has developed a method of assessing and valuing learners on non-accredited courses. A learning outcomes approach has been designed based around student description forms which enables learners to plan and evaluate their own learning outcomes (Daines 1996). Teachers can write plans for courses identifying intended outcomes, which reflect the requirements of the learner. During the course, teachers involve learners in assessing to what extent they have reached the agreed outcomes and identify any learning achievements (FEFC 1997).

The Roeher Institute (1994) maintains that literacy programmes are more likely to be successful and inclusive if success is not dictated by external criteria such as standardised testing. Signs of success are identified beyond the classroom in many aspects of a person's life.

2.8 CURRICULUM CONTENT – THE CURRICULUM AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS

The main theme that emerges from the literature regarding the curriculum content of basic skills provision is that, in addition to the requirement for a consistent standard, the curriculum and supporting materials should be broad, flexible and tailored to individual learners in order to provide for the needs and circumstances of all learners.

The content of basic skills provision includes factors which often determine learner recruitment and progression and the success of basic skills programmes.

2.8.1 The curriculum

Curriculum content and standard have been a significant focus for governments and professional agencies in the UK, Canada and the US (Sticht 2001).

Several documents and studies have acknowledged the importance of a curriculum as an essential tool for the success of a basic skills programme (LSDA 2001, Scottish Executive 2002 , The Moser Report 1999) and as an essential tool for improving the standard of basic skills programmes (DfEE 2001, Scottish Executive 2002).

Sticht (2001) notes that in the UK, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) have published national standards for adult literacy and numeracy. However, Jones (1996-1997) makes reference to that fact that Wales is an exception. No national standards have been produced for delivery in the medium of Welsh. The DfEE publication 'A fresh start' (1999) made clear the extent of the basic skills deficiencies within the adult population and maintained that the foundation of a strategy aimed at such limitations should entail a *'clear and coherent framework of national standards'* (QCA 2002). Separate standards for both literacy and numeracy were produced within a framework designed to recognise that each adult had different skills, experiences and aspirations. As a result, the national standards have been devised to ensure each adult can develop their skills at an appropriate level (QCA 2002).

Approaches to the development of a successful curriculum for basic skills provision have included:

- the maintenance of a broad and balanced curriculum which encompasses the needs of all learners (Faraday 1996). Needs of adult learners can very considerably according to ability level, language, personal circumstances, confidence and prior experiences
- a flexible enough curricular to accommodate those with particular needs (Jameson 2001). For example, a curriculum would need to provide for specific needs such as bilingualism or dyslexia, as well as more general needs
- an individualised method of instruction based upon individual goals of students (Roeher Institute 1994). As a result of the differences mentioned above, a curriculum which is specific and tailored to the needs of particular learners is required.

The FEFC (1997) has identified the development of a curriculum plan, which focuses on the needs of hard to reach groups, as good practice. Imaginative and varied approaches to curriculum development are therefore required to encourage and recruit adults with differing educational and cultural backgrounds, if basic skills provision is to be successful. The City Literacy Group, which designed a curriculum to meet the needs and interests of deaf learners, is an example of this. Participants can study core programmes such as English, Maths and communications, including British sign language and lip-reading.

2.8.2   Materials

Aldridge and Tuckett (2002) have highlighted the development of high quality support materials for basic needs learning as a key to providing a successful open learning programme, that is, learning in non-traditional settings.

Materials are seen as a means of providing an alternative access route to popular courses for students carrying additional responsibilities of work or family (Scottish Executive 2002). That is, they enable basic skills tuition without the presence of a tutor. Materials can be 'picked up' by the learner at a convenient time and location. Materials can also be utilised to supplement the direct support provided by a tutor through self-study (BSA 2002). Materials such as these provide support to learners both in a traditional learning setting, in addition to the tutor, and in a self-directed learning environments.

Factors to consider in the development of quality materials are:

♦   individualised resources, that is, students should be actively involved in their development and material should be adapted to student's own experiences (Roeher Institute 1994)

♦   customised instruction, that is, materials based upon functional contexts such as work (Sticht 2001). Please note, the BSA are currently developing these

♦   bilingual basic skills materials, as there is little support in the medium of Welsh (BSA 2002, Norman 2002).

2.9   STAFFING AND LEARNER SUPPORT

Effective basic skills provision cannot be delivered without skilled and well-trained staff. They must be familiar with a range of delivery methods in order to cater for the differing needs of particular learner groups, including specific teaching methodologies for literacy and numeracy. They should also be aware of the different kinds of

learning and personal support which learners require and be able to provide them. The quality of initial staff training, continuing staff development and specific training for special needs is a crucial factor in determining the success of learning programmes.

2.9.1 Staff training

The LSDA (2001) have identified the skills of the staff who deliver basic skills education as crucial to the success of the strategy. It is important that tutors/teachers have competence in alternative programme delivery and learning techniques such as interactive learning, group and individual work and on-line support, in order to meet the needs of a variety of learners. Jones (1996-7) emphasises, in addition, the importance of staff training incorporating delivery through the medium of Welsh. Different teaching methods will appeal to different groups of potential learners. Examples are the pathfinder projects, which are projects trialling key elements of the Skills for Life Strategy including the delivery of key skills instruction. They have been successful to a considerable degree because of effective professional development for tutors (DfEE 2001).

Staff training is also considered a tool through which the level of learner attainment in basic skills can be enhanced (DfEE 2001). A study on adult literacy (Brooks et al 2001) found that students made significantly more progress where the teachers had qualified teacher status. It is suggested by Warren (1994) that a learner is unlikely to derive maximum benefits without trained and committed staff providing realistic support.

Pember (2002) maintains that a shortage of adequately trained tutors has been undermining the campaign to improve literacy competence, together with other basic skills.

Several aspects have been documented in the literature as important in the training of basic skills staff. These are:

♦ **A national training programme** – the creation of a national training strategy for staff and national teaching and training standards, such as those recently published by the Further Educational National Training Organisation (2003), appear central to the success of a basic skills strategy and to the consistency of approach to staff development (Scottish Executive 2002, The Moser Report 1999).

   The creation of training workshops (BSA 2002) and staff handbooks (Ratcliffe 2001), alongside the development of a professional qualification (Scottish Executive 2002), have been suggested as means through which good teaching standards and a common approach can be obtained.

In order to facilitate improvements the BSA has established a series of national support projects to assist with developments (2002). However, initially, it is suggested that a training needs analysis should be undertaken (Brooks et al 2001)

♦ Continuing staff development – the concept of continuing professional development for basic skills staff links closely with a national training programme.

A questionnaire survey of adult literacy teachers in England and Wales revealed that overall professional development and management support for tutors was patchy (Brooks et al 2001), even though evidence emphasises the importance of continuing staff development (Stephens 1993). The professional development of staff contributes significantly to the effective delivery of a basic skills programme (Ratcliffe 2001) and enables flexible delivery of programmes (Warren 1994).

♦ Specific training for specific needs – initial and continuing professional development is highlighted as important in enabling providers to deal with learners with particular needs. Emphasis should be placed upon specialist information, advice and training (Scottish Executive 2002).

Particular needs requiring specialist attention include learners who might normally be excluded from basic skills provision, such as people suffering from mental illnesses, or victims of domestic violence. Deigan and McArthur (1997) found that many tutors have to deal with a range of such issues, but receive little or no guidance. One example of a particular need is dyslexia. Jameson (2001) states that only classes designed specifically for dyslexics, with tutors trained in dealing with dyslexia, were considered satisfactory. An evaluation of programmes initiated through the Adult and Community Learning Fund (NFER 2002), emphasised the importance of tutors supporting learners with particular needs in ways apart from actual teaching. A learner recovering from drugs misuse stated, '*The staff are magic…they'll take us out of the office and such, help us fill in forms and do anything for us'*.

♦ Networking practitioners – the networking of practitioners is considered to be an effective aspect of training and development (Scottish executive 2002).

The sharing of ideas and strategies with colleagues and regular meetings will enable consistency in the delivery of basic skills (Roeher Institute 1994).

♦ Greater Professionalism – a number of findings have suggested the need for greater professionalism of the basic skills teaching force (Brooks et al 2001). Impressions of teaching have been mixed. A study relating to adult literacy undertaken by Brooks et al (2001) found that teaching methods were flexible, demonstrating individual initiative. However, this could be perceived either as professionalism or as 'winging it'.

The Scottish Executive (2002) has considered 'professionalism' to be one of four critical factors for an enduring and successful strategy.

♦ Help in the classroom – The use of classroom assistants has been documented as an important issue factoring in the success of basic skills programmes.

A study of adult literacy undertaken by Brooks et al (2001) found that students made significant progress when tutors had help in the classroom. Where there was no assistance, students generally made less progress. As a result, a micro-study of the use of classroom assistants has been recommended.

♦ Observations – The quality of teaching can be improved by classroom observations and feedback. Fircroft College of Adult Education uses lesson observation to focus on the cultural diversity of courses and teacher attention (FEFC 1997).

Ratcliffe (2001) defines good practice in relation to staff training as the following:

♦ professional development
♦ production of booklets to inform staff
♦ regular meetings between training providers and staff
♦ teaching materials produced by staff
♦ identification of staff training needs.

2.9.2 Recruitment of tutors

Research indicates that the majority of basic skills tutors have obtained initial professional qualifications and are employed by organisations such as LEAs or colleges. Basic skills providers which need to staff their own particular courses often buy in their tutors from the organisations that employ them. The tutors' conditions of work may be full-time or part-time, but many work on a flexible basis for more than one provider.

However, some voluntary organisations have used imaginative methods to expand the pool of tutors available to them. For example, a church in the North of England was able to offer basic skills provision to the community by using its own church members as tutors. These attended training at a local college before proceeding to teach learner groups and individuals on a voluntary basis (NFER 2002).

2.9.3 Staff support of learners

Although it is suggested that learners' experience, temperament, resolve and age will affect the amount and duration of the learning support and tutorial assistance which they need (Willmot and McLean 1994), the success of a programme and learners' progress are in part dependent on the type and amount or tuition available. The support offered by tutors can act as a motivating force for participation and progression.

Five aspects of good practice concerning the effective support of learners were highlighted by The Further Education Funding Council (1997). These are:

- ensure learning support is available for the needs of learners from under-represented groups
- support effectively learners with learning difficulties/disabilities on mainstream and separate specialist programmes
- create a tutorial system, which meets the needs of all learners
- provide access to professional counselling
- monitor the effectiveness of learning support.

Studies have identified that student gains have been found to be statistically related to the amount of tuition received before and after testing and post-testing (Brooks et al 2001) and that learners have benefited considerably from improved guidance and support (Faraday 1996).

Components of a successful programme and effective practice, maximising student benefits, have included:

- trained and committed staff (Aldridge and Tuckett 2002)
- supportive instructors and tutors (Roeher Institute 1994)
- increasing time for personal tutors as support structures for learners (Norman 2002).

Learners' preference for a particular type of support has been consistently documented. These have included individual and personal tuition, mentoring and small learner-teacher ratios (Jameson 2001, Norman 2002, Merton 2001 (Quality in Practice n.d). Programmes will usually be more successful where these preferences can be met.

The personal commitment of tutors and the interest showed for each learner has been identified as a key factor for heightening students' commitment and motivation to some courses (NFER 2002). The tutor–learner relationship has been found to encourage 'soft outcomes' such as the development of confidence, improved social skills, and the will to succeed, which are also seen as valuable outcomes of basic skills tuition.

An example of a mentoring service is provided by City College, Manchester, which has a mentoring service to support learners from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Mentors are staff or community workers who work with learners to identify barriers to study and achievement. Potential problems are diagnosed and support is mobilised (FEFC 1997).

A further example of such support has been given by an evaluation of programmes initiated through the Adult and Community Learning Fund (NFER 2002). Support workers or volunteers were allocated to basic skills programmes by some organisations. The support workers were available to discuss personal issues in addition to possible problems arising from the programmes themselves. Their help was thought to be crucial in keeping some learners on basic skills programmes.

Many learners are motivated by studying interesting subjects guided by an effective and supportive teacher (LSDA 2001).

2.10   FUNDING

The main themes that emerge from research literature on the funding of basic skills provision, excluding self and independent support, focus on both external and internal funding processes. Externally, there appears a preference for a single budget allocating funding in terms of appropriate programme length and even distribution. Internally, the development of funding procedures which take into account the needs and circumstances of particular learner groups in order to ease financial burdens on them, have been identified as good practice. Both are crucial factors which often determine the success or otherwise of learning programmes.

2.10.1 Funding arrangements

In a secondary analysis of the Individual's Survey Tremlett (1995) found that various funding sources tended to support different kinds of learning. That is:

- self-funded learning was more likely to be aimed at achieving a qualification or module and conducted in the respondent's own time

- employer-funded learning and joint funded learning were more likely to be about administration management or teaching, conducted in work time and undertaken because required by the employer or to make work more satisfying

- public authority funded learning was more likely to be aimed at achieving a qualification or module, conducted in the learner's own time and undertaken to help obtain a job or a future learning course.

However, excluding independent funding, financial mechanisms appear to be largely based on the principle of delivering basic skills education through a single budget (LSDA 2001) allocated through Local Authorities (Scottish Executive 2002) or a funding source established specifically to support basic skills provision such as the Adult and Community Learning Fund in England (NFER 2002).

UK funding for basic skills is a central government responsibility, allocated through different avenues. In Wales funds are in part allocated through the Basic Skills Development Fund. The strategic aims for the use of this fund are set within the context of the National Assembly's National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales (ELWa 2002). It must be noted, however, that the Development Fund is subject to separate ELWa evaluation.

There is considerable debate on approaches to the allocation of funding. For example, the National Strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills suggests that funding should be directed towards those providers who are successful in raising levels of attainment and away from those who are failing to do so. However, the LDSA (2001) warn that the allocation of funding according to learner attainment could lead to providers 'picking off' the better learners and excluding those who may take longer to achieve. Any evaluation of provider performance needs to take into consideration learner starting points and local situations.

Another key issue in this area is the length of any funding arrangement. Building capacity, trust and effective projects take time and for that reason long-term funding is a preference (LSDA 2001). Where the funding of programmes can only be short-term a number of problems emerge for both providers and learners:

♦ **staff insecurity** – tutors may seek other situations if their position with the programme cannot be guaranteed for future months or years

♦ **loss of premises** – where the programme providers are leasing teaching premises, these may be offered to other tenants if the future of the programme is unsure; even within a permanent institution such as a college, teaching rooms and facilities may become earmarked for other classes

♦ **inability to plan ahead** – forward planning of all kinds becomes very difficult when funding is uncertain

♦ **difficulties of resourcing** – the teaching resources necessary for a programme may not become available or not be ordered if future use is uncertain

♦ **breakdown in learner progression** – progression for the learners may break down if future provision cannot be ensured well in advance, and learners may lose motivation

♦ **search for new funding** – programme staff have to invest time and effort in attempting to obtain new funding and this can affect the quality of the programme being delivered.

Uneven funding across the basic skills sector is often a problem. Deigan and McArthur (1997) argue that community centres often lack the funding and resources of FE colleges and for that reason may be unable to provide similar quality of staffing and facilities.

2.10.2 Funding support for learners

An FEFC (1997) review of the literature suggesting good practice in providing financial support to learners entails:

♦ providing hardship funds
♦ using access funds fairly
♦ making links with educational charities and other external funding sources
♦ devising policies on the purchase of text books
♦ waiving course fees
♦ paying examination fees for learners.

Many learners with basic skills needs would have difficulty in affording the fees for the provision they receive, while transport costs to the teaching centre can also deter potential learners. Because of this, many basic skills programmes are financed in such as way that no charge is made to the learners, while special arrangements are often made to provide free transport or reimburse learners for the transport costs they may incur.

Working examples of funding support include the following:

Nottinghamshire County Council have been able to support learners financially through an initiative entitled 'Fast Forward'. The programme has been designed to encourage and support those with low or no income to participate in education and training. The project has provided a maximum of £100 for childcare, transport, course costs etc to those learners who live in Nottingham, whether they study there or not (FEFC 1997).

An evaluation of the Adult and Community Learning Fund, undertaken by the NFER (2002), found that programmes often adopted policies that included paying for the cost of learners' travel and providing the basic tools for learning such as books and

writing materials in order to remove barriers to recruitment and retention of learners. In a particular basic skills programme run in Liverpool, all learners were provided with free bus passes, while learners undertaking a programme in Cornwall were reimbursed for their travel costs after arriving at the teaching centre. These costs had to be included in financial considerations when the initial applications for funding were submitted by the organisations involved.

2.11   KEY FINDINGS: BASIC SKILLS

2.11.1 Overcoming barriers to the effective delivery of basic skills provision and learner participation

A number of key findings have been identified relating to overcoming the barriers to attaining basic skills. These are presented below.

2.11.2 The recruitment of Learners and marketing

It is suggested that adequate marketing and strategies aimed at specific groups can reach potential learners traditionally excluded from basic skills provision. It is maintained that underrepresented groups are often excluded because of informational barriers, that is, a lack of appropriate information detailing basic skills provision.

Many people with basic skills needs belong to marginalised groups such as the unemployed, youth offenders, people with health or drugs problems or the homeless. Attracting people from these groups to classes or programmes which teach the skills they require is difficult because of the very literacy and numeracy needs which they need to address. For example, they often lack the skills to read publicity materials for courses or are unable to write letters to seek information.

Although studies have indicated that a large proportion of basic skills learners obtain information relating to basic skills courses through word-of-mouth, different groups have diverse needs and a variety of marketing methods including outreach and use of the media are often needed.

Successful basic skills programmes have overcome these problems by means of a range of flexible and often innovative methods. If potential learners cannot seek out the programme, the programme will seek out the learners. This is often achieved through the agencies which have contact with them. Good programme coordinators advertise their provision in places such as surgeries, social security offices, community or day centres, and drop-in cafes. The agency workers are then able to inform potential learners of existing basic skills provision by word of mouth and refer

them to the programme. It is therefore essential for basic skills providers to build close relationships with referral agencies of the kinds mentioned above.

Physical barriers or situational barriers to recruitment have also been identified. For many people, lack of easy access to the basic skills centres, prevents participation in such programmes. This can be addressed by providing or arranging transport for the learners, often free of charge. Programme administrators are sometimes able to access various social funding sources to cover these transport costs, otherwise the programme budget itself must include travel for learners.

2.11.3 Screening and diagnosis

Effective programmes invariably operate a screening and diagnosis procedure through which learners are allocated to appropriate learning programmes in terms of difficulty level, relevance and interest. This is identified as crucial for learner recruitment and retention and maintaining consistency of standards, as well as overcoming dispositional barriers.

Non-threatening and informal methods of screening and the use of inductions to broaden the information obtained relating to the learner are considered good practice.

Screening and diagnosis establish a baseline against which progress for learners can be defined and measured. They are also a way of identifying the learner's needs and explaining the aims of the teaching provision so that a purposeful individual learning plan can then be devised.

2.11.4 Delivery

A range of barriers to the effective provision of basic skills and to learner participation can be overcome by using flexible approaches to delivery.

Three categories of barrier, dispositional, institutional and situational, can be addressed by adapting the structure of basic skills provision and the teaching methodology according to the need.

Developing partnerships through which basic skills can be provided, integrating basic skills into wider programmes, recognising the importance of relevant learning and creating appropriate learning settings and environments, could assist in overcoming negative attitudes towards education and the belief that learning is irrelevant.

For example, dispositional and institutional barriers often occur when learners have had unfortunate experiences of learning at school which have resulted in negative attitudes towards education and the belief that learning is irrelevant for them. This has been addressed by not locating basic skills teaching in a traditional classroom environment, but rather in more informal settings. Non-judgemental, informal teaching styles are also important in producing more positive attitudes to learning.

A second example highlights the barriers to access as a result of child or work responsibilities or specific disabilities faced by a number of potential learners. Programme providers have used a range of effective strategies in meeting the challenges of situational barriers. Childcare for learners can be funded or arranged with other organisations. Flexibility in the length and time-tabling of programmes will facilitate participation. Alternative forms of delivery including imaginative use of technology make distance or on-line learning possible for many.

2.11.5 Assessment

Assessment and accreditation may have positive effects on a learner, in terms of confidence building, but can also act as a deterrent to attaining basic skills.

Assessment is often feared and obtaining qualifications through accreditation is not always the main goal of participants. However, many programmes have developed methods of non-threatening assessment, such as monitoring progress through observation of work and continuous assessment, rather than through more formal testing. It has been documented that flexible assessment criteria is more useful in order to cater for the needs of all learner groups and overcome the feelings that assessment is irrelevant for them.

On many basic skills programmes, especially where the learners have fragile backgrounds, it is reported that the main gains for participants are the soft outcomes of increased confidence, ambition, desire to progress to further courses, and general social reintegration. These gains cannot be measured by traditional academic means, and providers must devise new criteria if they are to be recorded.

Research has found that many basic skills courses are short. This has the advantage that attendance and effort are more manageable and less daunting for learners. However, the downside is that teaching time during the programme is too brief for much measurable progress to be made in literacy or numeracy. In such cases, the measurement of success in terms of learner progress in these skills may be

discouraging, and course evaluation needs to include consideration of the soft outcomes

2.11.6 Curriculum content

The National Basic Skills Curriculum is now being implemented in many programmes and is generally viewed as a practical and useful basis for teaching. There is great support for a clear curriculum and its role in establishing consistency in standards. Accompanying written support materials are seen as valuable, but the curriculum and supporting materials should be broad, flexible and tailored to individual learners in order to provide for all learner groups. It is crucial that the content of each programme reflects differing learner interests, abilities and needs. Furthermore, supporting materials, as well as building learner confidence through the provision of additional assistance, can give learners who may have difficulty participating due to situational barriers the freedom to learn anywhere and at any time.

2.11.7 Staffing

Adequate staff training is identified as crucial in providing effective basic skills programmes and aiding learner progress. A variety of teaching methods will appeal to different groups with varying needs and help to distinguish basic skills provision from negative school experiences, that is, dispositional barriers.

It is maintained that important aspects in the training of basic skills tutors entails a national programme, continuous staff development, more specific training for particular groups, including people with different ability levels, disabilities, languages etc, and greater professionalism.

Staff support of learners is also vital to the success of a basic skills programme, particularly for traditionally excluded groups.

2.11.8 Funding

There appears to be a preference for external funding to be delivered through a single budget allocated through the LEA or a funding source established specifically to support basic skills provision. There is, however, considerable debate on approaches to funding distribution, for example, the length of funding arrangements and funding provision for particular settings. It has been suggested that traditional venues such as schools and colleges receive uneven funding in their favour leaving, for example, community centres under funded, even though a range of venues is vital for providing increased access to basic skills provision.

Accessible venues and programmes which are provided in non-traditional centres assist learners in overcoming institutional and situational barriers. By moving away from more traditional settings that provide basic skills and by providing local venues for courses, potential learners may be more encouraged to participate.

Additionally, by applying different methods of distributing finances in order to support learners including paying for tuition fees and transport and providing learning resources, situational barriers, created by limited income, can be avoided.

2.11.9 Basic Skills in Welsh

Providers in Wales have identified a demand for basic skills education to be delivered through the medium of Welsh in certain areas where some employers and their workforces feel that they need to improve their Welsh literacy in order to conduct business bilingually. Family Welsh literacy projects have also been launched to support parents who wish to help their children with Welsh-medium school work.

However, two problems facing the Welsh-medium sector are lack of funding to produce resources and inadequate assessment materials leading to qualifications, for example, *Grym Gair*, the Welsh version of Wordpower, currently only exists for Foundation and Stage 1 while the English version has four levels.

Over the past few years some materials have been produced in Welsh, but by no means all. This can, in part, be contributed to the publishers. Although bilingual materials continue to be created, for example, 'making the most of your money' which is nearing release, and the Assembly supports the development of bilingual education and training materials (NafW 2001), they are still in short supply and are often not standardised across Wales. An example of this is the original assessment tools produced by the Basic Skills Agency. Many colleges such as Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor have a local version of these tools. Alternatively Nottinghamshire have designed their own, in this case entitled 'Skills builder'

2.12   RECOMMENDATIONS: BASIC SKILLS

2.12.1 Learner involvement and consultation

- Potential learners should be involved in the development of basic skills programmes in order to identify needs, interests and preferences. Local residential or population surveys are considered an effective method of obtaining relevant

information including preferences for particular learning settings, appropriate times, preferred approaches towards assessment and accreditation and most importantly, the identification of barriers to learning

2.12.2 Delivery

♦ Different groups of potential learners are restricted by a range of barriers and have varying needs. Basic skills programmes should therefore be flexible in terms of delivery including structural aspects such as the length of courses, time-tabling, settings and the provision of modular programmes and practical aids such as the use of technology

♦ Those who are excluded from basic skills tuition are often people who have had negative experiences at school. To overcome this, basic skills education must distinguish itself from compulsory schooling. Socially relaxed environments and informal screening and assessment procedures can help this process

♦ Local learning partnerships should be encouraged in order to develop a range of delivery methods. They should be seen as a means of including hard to reach groups through non-traditional learning avenues

♦ The perceived stigma attached to basic skills learners could be addressed by embedding basic skills into wider programmes of interest that learners consider more appealing and relevant

♦ Basic skills programmes and supporting materials should be learner based. They should take into account different learner needs, abilities and routes of progression. This should be a consideration in the design of curricula, learning plans and methods of assessment. That is, they should be built around the learner

♦ Consistent and coherent frameworks for all aspects of basic skills provision, as contained in the National Basic Skills Curriculum, are necessary for producing and maintaining standards for screening, assessment and accreditation procedures. However, flexibility is also crucial in order to provide for local and learner variation

2.12.3 Provision through the medium of Welsh

♦ A balanced bilingualism requires people to have literacy and numeracy skills in both Welsh and English. Therefore, basic skills instruction should be provided in Welsh for all Welsh speakers or learners who desire it. A Welsh curriculum and national standards should be designed and providers trained to deliver basic skills courses through the medium of Welsh. Energetic marketing and recruitment strategies should be adopted to overcome any lack of confidence Welsh speakers may have in their linguistic competence

2.12.4 Marketing

♦ Successful marketing entails directing strategies at particular, often marginalised, groups of potential learners. An effective marketing strategy should utilise a

variety of marketing methods, including word-of-mouth, outreach and the media as well as making use of referral agencies

2.12.5 Staff training and support

♦ A national and consistent training programme, specific training for groups of learners with specific needs and continuing staff development should be considered in order to develop a skilled and sufficiently numerous teaching force.

2.12.6 Funding

♦ To achieve an expansion of learning provision and enable greater learner choice, even funding for traditional and non-traditional settings is crucial. Long term funding should also be considered in order to enable planning to ensure continuity of provision and the development of relationships between provider and learner. Additionally, since many basic skills learners would be unable to attend provision without financial support for, for example, transport costs, providers should develop ways in which they can financially support potential students.

2.13 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE LITERATURE: BASIC SKILLS

ALDRIDGE, F. and TUCKETT, A. (2002). *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: The NIACE Survey on Adult Participation in Learning, 2002.* Leicester: NIACE.
This survey documents participation in adult education in terms of specific groups, trends and future intentions to learn.

BARNES, S. (2002). *Why Gremlins?* Available: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/get-on/docs/11gre10.doc [21 November, 2002].
This article discusses the reasons behind low participation rates in basic skills education, why the gremlins' campaign was developed and evaluates its effectiveness.

BASIC SKILLS AGENCY (2001). *Adults' Basic Skills: Benchmark information on the scale of the need in different areas if Wales.* CD-ROM. In BASIC SKILLS AGENCY (2001) *The extent of the problem: Basic skills in Wales.* London: Basic Skills Agency.
This document details basic skills difficulties in terms of Wales.

BASIC SKILLS AGENCY (1997) *Literacy and Numeracy Skills in Wales: A survey of the reading, writing and numeracy skills of people between the ages of 16 and 64.*

In BASIC SKILLS AGENCY (2001) *The extent of the problem: Basic skills in Wales.* London: Basic Skills Agency.
This document details basic skills difficulties in terms of Wales.

BOLTIN. M. K. (2002) *European Certificate for Basic Skills.* Andragoski Centre Republike Slovenije.
Provided by ELWa.

BROOKS, G., DAVIES, R., DUCKETT, L., HUTCHISON, D., KENDALL, A. and WILKIN, A. (2001). *Progress in Adult Literacy: Do Learners Learn?* London: Basic Skills Agency.
This book discusses a two-year study undertaken by the NFER, which aimed to investigate the progress in literacy made by adults in mainstream basic skills provision in Wales. Previous national studies of progress in adult literacy are detailed as well as the findings from the study. The study focused upon issues such as teachers and teaching, student progress and factors associated with progress.

CAIRNS, T. (2001). 'How acquiring basic skills should be part of everyday life', *Adults Learning*, 13, 3, 20-2.
This paper suggests that, in the context of basic skills development, learning is not an activity separate from others. It is both situated and has a social context.

CALLAGHAN. G. et al (2001). *Adult and community learning: What? Why? Who? Where? A literature review on Adult and community learning.* London: Department for Education and Skills.
This literature review summarises the literature on adult and community learning.

CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION. (2002). *Baseline data for a national statement of need.* ELWa
This report details an overview of Wales in terms of participation, patterns of employment and the demand for skills.

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DEIGAN, M. and McARTHUR, T. (1997). 'Teaching basic skills and ESOL in non-traditional venues', *Adults Learning*, 8, 8, 210-11.
This document details a working example of basic skills provision in a community centre in an inner city estate and discusses issues associated with learning with regards to their individual settings and population. The paper provides a good example of a non-traditional learning setting in practice.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT (2001). *Skills for Life: the National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills*. London: DfEE.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT. NATIONAL SKILLS TASK FORCE (1998). *Towards a National Skills Agenda: First Report of the National Skills Task Force*. London: DfEE.

DYSG. (2002). *Programmes and projects.* [Online] Available:
www.lsda.or.uk/dysg/programmes.asp?lang=25
This website details past and present projects undertaken by DYSG

EDUCATION AND LEARNING WALES. (2001). *Basic Skills Support Development Fund.* Cardiff: ELWa.
A progress report on the Basic Skills Support Development Fund, established in 1999/2000.

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FARADAY, S. (1996). 'Assessing the impact: provision for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities', *Developing FE*, 1, 3, 1-51.
This paper discusses the key aspects involved in providing basic skills for those with disabilities and difficulties which include an inclusive curriculum and supportive, well trained teachers.

FURTHER EDUCATION NATIONAL TRAINING ORGANISATION. (2003). [Online]. Available:
www.fento.org/fento/fento_home.html

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This document discusses the challenges of, and the ways in which, participation can be widened. The book also contains case studies of good practice in action.

GORARD, S. and SELWYN, N. (1999). 'Researching the role of digital technology in widening participation.' Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the British Educational Research Association, University of Sussex, Brighton, 2-5 September.
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JAMESON, M. (2001). 'Delivering basic skills to adults with dyslexia', *Adults Learning*, 12, 9, 25-6.
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identify the learning needs of adults with dyslexia. Identifies gaps, with regards to groups with specific needs, within present provision.

JONES, E. (1997). 'Basic skills education through the medium of Welsh in Gwynedd', *Language Issues*, 8, 2, 8.
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This site provides a brief introduction to and summary of the Moser Report.

LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (2001). *Skills for Life: Statement on the National Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills: The Agency Responds.* London: LSDA.
The LSDA welcomes the introduction of a coherent national funding and delivery strategy for adult literacy and numeracy. This paper details its comments upon the strategy statement.

LEARNDIRECT. (2003). [online] Available:
http://www.learndirect.co.uk/

LOVE, M. and BANKS, S. (2001). 'Using interactive digital television to support basic skills learners', *Journal of Educational Media*, 26, 1, 35-48.
This paper discusses the merits of using television and the media for reaching groups traditionally excluded from basic skills provision. Projects trialling new technologies are also discussed. The use of television is deemed as effective in reaching particular groups, but has associated difficulties which relate to the use of technology.

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MERTON, B. (2001). 'Encouraging interest', *Adults Learning*, 12, 5, 7-10.

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A review of the field of adult basic education, carried out by a consultative group led by Claus Moser, which was a vital report in terms of basic skills provision. A range of issues are discussed including the scales of need, current provision and issues which need to be addressed, such as, for example, increasing participation. *"To address these issues, national awareness of the extent of basic skills problems will have to be raised."* The recommendation was for a national adult basic skills strategy.

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3.   KEY SKILLS

3.1   DEFINITIONS OF KEY SKILLS

3.1.1   Definitions

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, key skills are defined as:

♦ Communication
♦ Application of Number
♦ Information Technology
♦ Working with Others
♦ Improving Own Learning and Performance
♦ Problem Solving

Key skills are delineated as skills that can be applied (and assessed) in a variety of settings which are relevant to an individual's circumstances. They are assessed at four progressively difficult levels.

The introduction of key skills in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was largely the response of central government to complaints from employers that the school leavers they employed lacked the skills to do their jobs competently. Key skills evolved through a series of initiatives during the 1980s which sought to develop a range of generic competencies which it was believed that those entering the workplace should possess. During the early-1990s key skills were formally introduced by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) into their courses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and they were later extended into a broader range of qualifications, partly as a result of the recommendations of the Dearing Report published in 1996. In 2000 key skills were included as a component of 16-18 courses of study at schools and colleges.

3.1.2   Definition issues

A number of commentators, both in the United Kingdom and further afield, have drawn attention to continuing uncertainty about the definition of key skills. Commentators such as Lawson (2000) have referred to the confusion which has arisen between 'key skills' and 'basic skills' despite the difference between the standard definitions of the two terms (as specified in section 1). Uncertainties arise particularly when international comparisons are sought. Terms such as key skills, generic skills, key competencies and life skills are often applied to similar concepts and even terms

such as 'literacy' and 'numeracy' are interpreted differently in various contexts. For example, Sanguinetti and Hartley eds. (2000) note that in Australia:

> *There is a degree of confusion over what literacy actually means in the context of training packages. At times it is understood as the functional reading, writing, speaking and numeracy skills required by workers in order to be assessed as competent in industry standards.*

These are aspects which would normally be associated with Basic Skills. However, Sanguinetti and Hartley eds. (2000) continue: '*at other times, literacy is understood as broad generic communication skills including skills of negotiation and critical thinking*'.

3.1.3   International comparisons of definitions

The OECD's project 'Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (OECD, 2000) seeks to define the competencies on the basis of what is required in order to lead to ensure:

> *successful participation in the labor market, in the political process, in social networks and interpersonal relations including family life, and general personal satisfaction.*

They maintain that this will lead to social and economic benefits including the ability to respond to new challenges. They also note, however, that:

> *the definition and selection of key competencies is still – and even perhaps foremost – a process of negotiation among various policy-makers, and not simply a question of scientific reflection.*

Nevertheless, specific definitions are increasingly being used when referring to the competencies defined as key skills. Kearns (2001) provides a useful summary of the range of definitions used in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. These are presented in the next sections.

United States

In the United States, the American Society for Training and Development and Department of Labor (ASTD/DOL) in its *Workplace basics: The skills employers want* (1988) and SCANS Commission Framework of Workplace Know-how (1992) developed a broad framework of skills which are at least partly reflected in the definitions of key skills used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Kearns (2001)

cites Carnevale's definitions for ASTD/DOL which include sixteen '*job skills for the contemporary workforce*':

- Learning to learn
- Academic basics
- Communication
- Adaptability
- Personal development
- Group effectiveness
- Influencing skills

The SCANS '*workplace know-how*' are summarised as falling into two categories. They are the 'workplace competencies' of:

- the ability to use resources
- interpersonal skills
- the ability to apply information
- the ability to understand social, organisational and technological systems
- the ability to select and use technology.

The SCANS commission also identified 'workplace know-how' as including the 'foundation skills' of:

- The basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, speaking and listening
- Thinking skills – the ability to learn, reason, think creatively, make decisions and solve problems
- Personal qualities – individual responsibility, self-esteem and self-management, sociability and integrity

Australia

Kearns (2001) then refers to the key competencies defined in Australia by Mayer (1992). These he identifies as being the ability to:

- collect, analyse and organise information
- communicate ideas and information
- plan and organise activities
- work with others and in teams

- use mathematical ideas and techniques
- solve problems
- use technology.

Kearns (2001) argues that the way in which these different definitions are applied has profound implications for the way in which key skills are perceived and he contrasts the notion of key skills which has emerged in Britain and Australia with that which has emerged in the United States. This he believes has given rise to two distinct models:

> *a United States model* [which] *involves a broader more flexible, and more holistic set of generic skills, which include basic skills, personal attributes, values and ethics, learning to learn, as well as workplace competencies of the Mayer type.* ... [and the] *Anglo/Australian model* [which] *has resulted in more narrowly focussed and instrumental set of key skills/key competencies which are broadly similar. In both countries personal attributes and values have been excluded from the identified key competencies.*

Europe

Shaw (1998) notes the European Training Foundation (ETF)'s Advisory Forum's definition which was based on its belief that:

> *a market economy requires people to develop 'key competencies' in addition to occupationally specific skills. These key competencies include teamwork, planning, problem-solving, communication skills, information technology skills, the ability to cope with uncertainty, creativity, foreign languages, leadership, entrepreneurial behaviour, management skill and organisational understanding.*

The ETS research identified eight categories of skills which together form the 'core skills'. These are listed as being:

- Basic skills
- Life skills
- Key skills
- Social and citizenship skills
- Skills for employment
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Management skills
- Broad skills

Of these, key skills, as defined in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were rated in a study undertaken by the ETF as the most important (Shaw, 1998). Shaw concludes:

> *Key skills emerged in this study as the most important category of core skills. This is because they are seen as the basis for efficient learning as well as for effective performance both in further education and employment.*

The way in which key skills are defined varies considerably across countries in Europe. Ireland's definition is similar to that used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland although it also includes specific references to features such as '*learning through experience and from previous experiences*' and '*establishing directions for future employment and lifelong learning*'. (INCA, 2002). In France the definitions which have been adopted include concepts such as the ability to '*develop logical thought*' and '*the acquisition of culture within the modern world*' as well as the ability to undertake specific tasks. The development of these skills are seen as the work of all education providers although in technical education, there is a greater emphasis on a practical approach. (INCA, 2002). In Germany, the emphasis is placed on the skills of:

- effective communication
- planning of learning
- teamwork
- decision-making
- awareness of responsibilities
- lifelong learning
- self-assessment.

In Spain, the learning of a foreign language (together with Spanish and the co-official language of the autonomous community) is a requirement alongside the skills of using Information Technology, health education and inter-personal skills. As in France, there is also an emphasis on skills such as acquiring '*an understanding of values*', and '*knowledge of one's cultural heritage*'. (INCA, 2002). Although countries such as Italy, Hungary and Sweden do not define specific 'key skills' concepts similar to key skills underpin the mission of learning providers.

Denmark is currently developing a 'national competence account' which will seek to address the needs of the economy and individuals. It is envisaged that this will include:

a broad spectrum of individual competencies, spanning right from environmental and natural competencies, through physical competence, to social competence and learning competence.

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

The issue of how to define key skills has been highlighted by research in the United Kingdom as a factor contributing to the difficulties which have been experienced in developing learners' key skills. This was especially the case before the *Review of Key Skills* (2001). In an evaluation of the experience of delivering key skills in the former county of Avon, Kodz, Dench, Pollard and Evans (1998) suggested that key skills are defined in a way which includes too many different elements and they questioned whether it was appropriate to include all of the key skills in one framework of learning. Their study found that employers had revealed a widespread view that the skills of written Communication, Application of Number and IT skills '*fell into a slightly different category*' to the other key skills because:

> *whereas the former category was seen as all generally teachable, albeit with the right aptitudes and basic skills, the latter* [the wider key skills] *was less so.*

Their report noted that what are defined as the broader key skills and oral communication:

> *depended more on personal disposition, personality and natural ability. General life experiences, family background and socialisation were also seen as having a particular influence on these three key skills.*

3.2   BARRIERS TO LEARNING

Several factors have been identified as barriers to effective key skills provision and barriers which prevent learners from accessing that provision. These comprise barriers faced by providers, barriers to effective delivery and barriers faced by learners. Each of the barriers is discussed in turn.

3.2.1 The barriers faced by providers

a) Attitudinal barriers

Despite the importance attached by central government to the development of key skills, it is clear that a significant body of opinion remains unconvinced of the merits of this strategy and that negative attitudes towards key skills remain an issue. According to Unwin and Wellington (2001) The:

> *determination by successive Conservative and Labour governments to raise the profile of key skills had occurred despite considerable criticism from academic researchers who question, firstly, the extent to which such skills can be separated out from context, and, secondly, that the concept of skill transfer can be verified.*

Doubts about the wisdom of the notion of key skills have also been voiced by Hodgson and Spours (2002) who note that many education institutions do not believe that key skills, especially the broader key skills, were appropriate or relevant to their learners. Kelly (2001) describes how a number of providers considered key skills to be an unwelcome encroachment on their teaching time which they felt should be devoted to what they considered were more relevant and important aspects of learning programmes.

Surprisingly, since the introduction of key skills was in part influenced by concerns voiced by employers, according to Kodz et al (1998) the evidence collected in their evaluation indicated that many employers also need to be convinced of the importance of key skills. They found that:

> *more than half of the* [training] *suppliers ... were dissatisfied with the support and understanding employers were able to provide. For some, the issue was a lack of understanding of the key skills on the part of the employer.*

The research did not reveal any substantial evidence that employers are hostile to the notion of providing learning opportunities in the workplace, although the *Annual Report of the Adult Learning Inspectorate 2001-02* expresses concern that many employers lacked a commitment to key skills, which meant that they are not emphasised adequately in Modern Apprenticeships and are often only addressed at the tail end of a programme, concerns which were also raised in the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee's report *Modern Apprenticeships: the way to work* (DfES, 2001). However, the reluctance of some employers to 'upskill' their

workforce remains a matter of concern to policy makers. The *Draft Skills and Employment Plan for Wales* (2002) noted fears among employers that increasing the skills of employees would lead to problems such as a high turnover of staff, as better qualified workers sought better remunerated employment. This suggests that an important attitudinal barrier on the part of employers, not only to the development of key skills but also to other aspects of lifelong learning, remains to be addressed.

b)   Barriers to effective delivery

A review of recent literature highlights a combination of management, capacity and pedagogical issues which act as barriers to the effective delivery of key skills programmes.

Management issues

The *Review of Key Skills* (2001) highlighted poor management of the introduction of key skills training as one of the obstacles preventing their effective delivery. The problems encountered included a lack of clarity about how key skills were to be introduced, a feeling that not enough time had been devoted to planning their delivery and confusion regarding the aims, objectives and assessment criteria that were to be used. In addition, it was found that in many instances responsibilities for delivering key skills had been allocated to staff without reference to the additional workload which the responsibility would entail. Similar conclusions were drawn by the Education Support and Inspection Service (ESIS) in its review of the implementation of key skills. (ESIS, 2002)

Confidence of trainers

This evidence is echoed by the findings of other researchers such as Allen (2000) who notes that not enough time was allocated to train providers. According to Kelly (2001) these factors meant that many learning providers lacked confidence in delivering key skills, which affected the early years of their introduction. These problems continued, however, after the key skills content of training had time to bed down. For instance, the *Annual Report of the Adult Learning Inspectorate 2001-02* records that several learning providers continued to lack confidence when delivering the key skills elements, even though providers had had some time to become familiar with the concept.

Assessment

The methods used in assessing key skills have also been highlighted as barriers confronting learning providers. The *Review of Key Skills* (2001) found that many providers had found difficulty in understanding and implementing the criteria used in assessing key skills, especially when they were integrated in other assessments, and the report found evidence that the assessment arrangements were seen as bureaucratic by providers. This led to a review of the assessment methods which sought to overcome the difficulties arising from the assessment methods (*Review of Key Skills*, 2001). A further issue which has been highlighted by some providers in Wales has been the fact that test results were sometimes published after the closing date for candidates to be registered to sit tests for a second time due to the delays caused by need for a number of different awarding bodies to agree on a common pass mark. However it is too early to assess the impact of the changes made to the assessment methods and procedures and this is an area which requires further research.

Pedagogy

In addition to the difficulties outlined above, the *Review of Key Skills* (2001) identified pedagogical issues which it considered affected their delivery. The way some learning providers used what it considered to be inappropriate methods of approaching the task of delivering key skills, including the reluctance or refusal of some learning providers to undertake an initial assessment of learners was noted. At the same time, it was found that learning plans were sometimes inappropriate not least because some providers sought to develop learning plans which attempted to address the needs of whole groups of learners rather than those of each individual.

Funding

Research in England has identified aspects of the system of funding for key skills as an issue preventing their effective delivery. Munday and Faraday (1999) refer to difficulties experienced by providers and they note that some colleges '*have found interpreting the funding methodology challenging*'. They maintained that there was a need to ensure that the regulations were as clear as possible and that all deliverers had the capacity to manage the scheme effectively. Research into adult learning in other parts of the world, notably in Australia (ANTA, 2001) reinforces the message of the importance of appropriate funding mechanisms, particularly in relation to work-based training. However, the evidence obtained in the literature review does not permit any firm conclusions about the effect of funding systems. Further research, examining the

individual experiences of different types of providers within Wales would be required in order to establish whether funding arrangements can constitute a barrier to effective learning, and to identify good practice in the use of funding.

3.2.2 The barriers faced by learners

A range of factors have been identified as preventing learners from accessing key skills provision.

Attitudinal barriers

As in the case of learning providers, attitudinal barriers have been identified in relation to learners. Low attendance at key skills classes is highlighted by writers such as Kelly (2001) as being symptomatic of a wider disregard for key skills especially among school sixth form pupils. The *Review of Key Skills* (2001) found that A and AS level students had negative attitudes towards key skills and were '*only doing the qualification because it attracts UCAS points*'. The report found that key skills were regarded by many sixth formers as '*an imposition*' which distracted them from their main studies, and that a significant number of pupils did not take the assessments seriously. These findings are echoed by ESIS (2002) which referred to problems which had been encountered whereby '*A lack of enthusiasm from staff and pupils caused ...* [a] *school to abandon key skills post 16 altogether*'.

This has been attributed partly to the perception that higher education institutions do not consider the key skills qualification to be of great value. The *Review of Key Skills* (2001) stated:

> *it is clear from the review that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) do not have a uniform policy of recognising achievement in the key skills. This has had a negative effect on candidates' perception of the value and usefulness of the key skills*.

Learner apprehension

While the barriers noted above can be attributed to the perceptions of the value of key skills, other barriers have also emerged which can be attributed to the backgrounds of learners, their previous negative experiences of learning, and their lack of confidence in their own skills (*Review of Key Skills* 2001; ESIS, 2002). The *Review of Key Skills* (2001) found that many learners, particularly those pursuing NVQ and GNVQ courses, were fearful of the key skills elements in their learning programmes. One

issue which was highlighted was the apprehension many felt at being required to undergo a formal assessment of their key skills.

3.2.3 Integrated or discrete delivery

Methodologies for the teaching and assessment of key skills have been described as contradictory. National Curriculum planning documents proposed that key skills should be integrated into other learning as cross-curricular themes, and that learners should demonstrate their proficiency in the various key skills through work arising within subject programmes of study. However, in 2000 written national examinations for the discrete key skills of Communication, ICT and Application of Number were introduced. The *Review of Key Skills* (2001) found that many learners, particularly those pursuing NVQ courses, believed that the questions set in the key skills assessments were not relevant to their courses.

Moreover, Unwin and Wellington (2001) have detected a workplace culture in which many employers retain a narrow concept of key skills based on the ability of workers to perform a limited range of tasks. They found that '*the gap between the rhetoric of key skills and employer practice would still seem to be large*'. They point to a study by Dench et al (1998) which '*found that demand for such skills was strong but only if specified at the lowest levels*'.

The issue of relevance is not confined to the United Kingdom. Sanguinetti and Hartley eds. (2000) note that efforts in Australia to develop similar work-based learning have been hampered by a reluctance on the part of potential learners to engage with a form of learning which was not considered relevant to the work that they were doing. They refer to a culture in which workers regard '*experience as more important than credentials*', noting that many employees remain to be convinced that certain skills are essential attributes for the workforce as a whole, and that generic skills were not awarded a high priority by employers in Australia who instead focused on the skills required to complete specific tasks in the workplace.

3.3   OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO DELIVERY AND LEARNING

This section of the report examines the evidence on current practices which seek to overcome the kinds of barriers described above. It examines practices which are applicable in a variety of contexts and also good practice identified in the particular circumstances of a school context and in the workplace.

3.3.1   Overcoming attitudinal barriers

Promoting a positive agenda

Evidence from the United Kingdom emphasises the importance of reinforcing an appreciation of the importance of key skills among all learning providers, including employers, training providers and education institutions. In some instances, it has been found that considerable effort is required to convince providers that key skills are relevant, important in themselves, and of value both to learners and also to the providers. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) report *Adding Value: Integrating the wider key skills* noted that *'promoting a positive agenda'* was a pre-requisite of effective delivery. Significantly, the report made specific reference to the attitudes of some higher education institutions and concluded that although

> *there does appear to be a consensus of opinion amongst HEIs welcoming the notion of key skills.*

It was suggested that some further work was required to overcome the negative perceptions which were evident in some institutions. Norman (2002) notes the need for senior managers and teachers to demonstrate a positive attitude towards key skills and the need to ensure that students have positive experiences of developing their key skills. Encouraging evidence of a growing recognition of the value of key skills was noted by the *Review of Key Skills* (2001) which found evidence of effective delivery in contexts where providers had taken a positive attitude towards the issue of the key skills, and where time and effort had been devoted to implementing the programme.

In England and Wales considerable support for the development of the notion of key skills has been provided by the Key Skills Support Programme (KSSP) in England and Key Skills Support Programme Cymru (KSSPC) in Wales. For example, KSSP provide numerous support materials including guides to good practice free to all state-funded post-16 schools in England. Specifically in Wales, KSSPC have launched initiatives to '*promote the value of key skills in the community*'. Grants are available

to encourage a broad range of organisations including businesses, community organisations and others in the voluntary sector to work with education institutions to develop new ways of promoting key skills. KSSPC is also engaged in a broad range of activities to support providers in Wales to deliver key skills learning. The goals of KSSPC are identified as:

♦ to help state-funded post-16 schools and colleges in Wales implement high quality, effective key skills programmes

♦ to raise awareness and understanding of key skills

♦ to provide advice and models of curriculum organisation

♦ to produce materials on teaching and accessing the key skills qualification

♦ to organise training in Wales through conferences, workshops and courses.

The services which are provided include the Training Task Force which provides '*training on many different topics*', a one-to-one support service which assists providers to evaluate their key skills provision, a range of development projects and conferences and networking opportunities which seek to share good practice and to develop innovative ways of delivering key skills.

Distinctive definition

As is noted above, Hodgson and Spours (2002) found that some learners did not consider key skills to be an important part of their learning, an issue which was particularly true of sixth form pupils pursuing A and AS level courses during a period of substantial change. Their research also highlights a wider problem arising from the confusion in some minds between key skills and Basic Skills. (Lawson, 2000) Hodgson and Spours (2002) believe that key skills would '*gain a greater currency with learners*' if a sharper distinction was created between key skills and basic skills. However, these issues are not limited to those pursuing 'academic' qualifications. Unwin and Wellington (2001) note the need to ensure that all learners are encouraged to consider how they would use key skills and how they would be useful in the future as a means of reinforcing the message that they are relevant and useful skills.

3.3.2   Overcoming Structural Barriers

Measures which have been identified for effective delivery of key skills include planning, support from institutions and appropriate use of personnel and resources. In addition, considerable evidence indicates that effective strategies for implementing programmes including key skills require them to be integrated and delivered through

partnerships across institutions, between staff and, often, between learning providers with differing experiences, backgrounds and priorities. Norman (2002) notes that key skills delivery is most effective in cases where it has been embedded:

> *into the centre's normal activity in management and organisation, administration, teaching and learning and staffing structures and staff development.*

Norman also notes that:

> *Effective delivery of key skills is more likely to be sustained if they are embedded. Centres with a lower degree of embedding had more difficulty in maintaining their areas of effective practice over time and in some cases lost momentum.*

Provider confidence and capacity

Developing the confidence of learning providers to deliver key skills in their programmes has been identified as one of the most important factors enabling providers to address the challenge of delivery. According to Kodz et al (1998) providers' willingness to engage with key skills increased as they became more confident and experienced in their delivery. This suggests that a focus should be placed on building the capacity of providers to deliver key skills training, a conclusion which is echoed by Unwin and Wellington (2001), who emphasise that a great deal rests on the capacity of individual providers and their commitment to key skills.

The Key Skills Support Programme (KSSP) in England and the KSSPC in Wales have developed programmes to address these issues. These include training opportunities involving distance learning and group sessions examining issues such as the origins of key skills, the rationale which underpins them, their relationship to broader questions relating to education and training, pedagogical issues and examples of good practice. A particular focus is placed on supporting work-based providers.

Ensuring appropriate training and support for providers

A considerable amount of literature emphasises the need for those responsible for delivering key skills provision to have gained a thorough grounding in the range of issues related to key skills through appropriate training programmes. This was one of the factors highlighted as essential to success in the evaluation of the delivery of key skills programmes in the former county of Avon undertaken by Kodz et al (1998).

Munday and Faraday (1999), in a survey of Further Education colleges suggest that the most effective method of training requires the adoption of a 'whole college' approach whereby a significant proportion of each institution's training budget is devoted to training providers in key skills. Opportunities to share good practice should, they believed, be integral to this process. They refer to the effectiveness of a training model which gave providers opportunities to develop their skills and which required them to consider issues such as:

♦ *How to develop learning materials in underpinning skills*

♦ *The different techniques for teaching key skills in large classes, mixed ability classes, small groups and to individuals*

♦ *The techniques for teaching key skills to 16-18 year olds, adults, and mixed classes*

♦ *How to identify the strengths, weaknesses, levels of motivation of learners and the barriers to teaching key skills*

♦ *The need for careful planning and monitoring, including an understanding of the review and evaluating processes*

♦ *How to communicate to key people and get the commitment of others*

The importance of appropriate training is not limited to college or school contexts and it is clear from the literature that a particular focus should be placed on ensuring that those responsible for workplace delivery are given initial training and also access to on-going professional development opportunities. These views are also expressed by researchers in Australia. Kearns (NCVER, 2001) expresses concern that some teachers and assessors:

> *lacked an enlarged perspective or 'big picture' and had a limited understanding of the context of training packages and the role of key competencies*.

According to Rumsey (1997) there is a need to ensure that trainers and supervisors in industry gain an appreciation of teaching methodologies and the '*process of the transfer of learning*' as a means of improving the quality of the teaching experience and providing more effective delivery.

In the United Kingdom there is a growing network of support for those responsible for delivering key skills. In Wales, the KSSPC undertakes development projects to highlight evidence of good practice. It has also developed a support and training service which provides networking opportunities and other forms of support for those involved in delivering learning involving key skills. The training includes specific

modules for senior and middle managers, key skills coordinators and teachers and lecturers relating to issues such as:

♦ strategic and operational management
♦ policy development
♦ curriculum models
♦ staff development
♦ assessing to national standards
♦ delivery of the different key skills
♦ internal verification
♦ portfolio management, recording and tracking
♦ assessment
♦ the role of personal tutors

The KSSPC also offers the services of dedicated support staff to assist providers to deliver key skills and a considerable amount of material to support the delivery of key skills has been developed. For example, the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) has produced support booklets including:

♦ Guidance on introducing key skills into the post-16 curriculum
♦ Diagnostic assessment of student competence levels
♦ A guide for students

Management of learning provision

Very often, the institutions delivering key skills are complex organisations which are required to adapt quickly to changes in the areas of education and training. For the delivery of programmes including key skills to be effective, it is important that they are seen as an integral part of the mission of each institution and not as the responsibility of individuals, departments or sections. For instance, Munday and Faraday (1999) maintain that all staff should be encouraged to regard key skills as part of their responsibilities and to seek ways of promoting and developing key skills among learners. They document the whole-college approach and refer to the way the approach was implemented in one college on the basis of eight principles:

♦ *The college should provide a planned programme to meet the needs of full-time students*
♦ *The programme should cover syllabuses and achieve standards set by awarding bodies*

- *The programme should use a range of appropriate teaching methods*
- *There should be close liaison between the key skills team and course teams, particularly with regard to assessment*
- *Appropriate attention should be paid to equal opportunity issues*
- *Students should be given access to: a comprehensive key skills induction; initial assessment and guidance in key skills; identification of additional support needs; a key skills handbook; fair and regular assessments*
- *Tutors delivering key skills should have appropriate qualifications, up-to-date knowledge and suitable opportunities for professional development*
- *Students should have access to appropriate accommodation and equipment*

Shaw (1998) cites another example of a college in England where key skills are delivered through a whole-college approach:

> *The college has a 'cross-college' delivery and assessment policy to ensure high quality, consistent and explicit delivery of key skills by specialist staff drawn either from the vocational areas or from the college's learning support unit.*

In order for delivery to be effective each provider needs to establish appropriate and effective methods of measuring and monitoring the quality of the delivery and learning experiences.

Leadership

Strong leadership and clarity in administrative arrangements have been identified as critical in the process of delivering key skills. Warren (1994) and Norman (2002) identified the importance of a wholehearted commitment from senior management and the need for strong leadership at the centre of each institution. Kodz et al (1998), Norman (2002) and ESIS (2000) argue for the need for each provider to designate responsibility to a dedicated **key skills co-ordinator** and according to Norman (2002), it is important that those who perform this role should enjoy sufficient authority within an institution or organisation to be able to provide other staff with appropriate support. Simmons (2002) in a study of the role of key skills co-ordinators has identified characteristics of effective co-ordinators. These include:

- commitment
- adequate time to undertake the tasks
- the ability to work effectively with colleagues
- awareness of effective management procedures

- being available to support staff in person

- not relying solely on the provision of written advice

- a willingness to draw on the expertise of other colleagues, particularly their subject knowledge as a means of developing the key skills aspects within different subject areas

- a willingness to learn

According to Simmons (2002)

> *Several co-ordinators commented that a lot of their knowledge was absorbed via osmosis, working alongside other tutors, particularly those with a similar background. For this type of co-ordinator colleagues inside the organisation were a key source of knowledge. Others, particularly those early in their role, relied on colleagues outside the organisation: either trainers at events or colleagues met at training events'.*

Simmons' research found that these events had proved to be highly effective in developing mutual support and as a forum to discuss the effectiveness of various approaches.

The need to avoid over-burdening teaching staff is, according to Kelly (2001), an important feature of effective delivery and one which is likely to reduce any opposition among staff to the concept of providing key skills as additional elements in their teaching load, a conclusion which is echoed by Norman (2002). Kelly (2001) emphasises the need for administrative arrangements to ensure that the delivery of key skills does not become seen as an encumbrance by tutors and other learning providers. This means, for instance, ensuring that administrative and management tasks and responsibilities are allocated appropriately, including ensuring that support is provided by non-teaching staff. In addition, Munday and Faraday (1999) emphasise the importance of planning the structure of the delivery to ensure that arrangements are in place for internal verification and so that assessments are conducted on a standardised basis. They also emphasise the need for institutions to ensure that the procedures for communicating information are clear and that all staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Harnessing expertise

The need to provide appropriate teaching support to tutors has also been identified in the research in the United Kingdom (Warren, 1994, Norman, 2002) and further afield, (Sanguinetti and Hartley eds, 2000). Norman (2002) emphasises the importance of

ensuring that key skills specialists are on hand to deliver additional support to providers. This requires identifying individuals who have expertise in key skills and ensuring that they have the time and resources to enable them to support other staff. This could mean that those with the expertise would be included in discussions about the planning and delivery of each learning programme. Munday and Faraday (1999) found there was considerable variety in the way the talents of key skill specialists are being used by various providers. For example, some were involved in both planning and delivery; others were involved in planning but not in delivery; while others were not involved in the planning of delivery but were expected to support actual delivery. They maintained that good practice depended a great deal on the impact of the key skills specialists. Simply asking a key skills specialist to comment on existing learning programmes has not proved satisfactory.

Shaw (1998) identified a college in Wales which sought to support staff in delivering key skills by harnessing the expertise of support staff:

> *Key skills staff attend assignment development days with the vocational course team and are able to include relevant and appropriate tasks as a result. One member of staff is allocated for each programme area for each of the key skills. This means that at all levels there would be an input from a communication specialist, a numeracy specialist and an IT specialist ... All these skills have the additional backing of workshop facilities which provide reinforcement.*

The effect, according to Shaw, is the sharing of expertise and the development of a better understanding of key skills among staff delivering vocational courses while key skills specialists gain an understanding of vocational provision.

Cooperation in delivery

Cooperation between institutions has also been highlighted as an important contribution to ensuring that providers are able to overcome barriers to key skills delivery. Kelly (2001) notes that schools with a sixth form often lacked the resources to deliver key skills training with the result that they adopted a '*minimalist approach*' which proved unsatisfactory. Moreover, Unwin and Wellington (2001) argue that because the teaching styles which are traditionally associated with 'academic' courses taught in school sixth forms and college provision are different, some school sixth form pupils were disadvantaged. This was attributed to the way in which:

the philosophy of active learning promoted by BTEC and GNVQ had created a far more conducive environment for the achievement and recognition of personal effectiveness than appeared to be the case in the 'A'-level classes, in which traditional didactic modes of teaching dominated.

Kelly (2001) recommends closer cooperation between deliverers, notably between schools and Further Education colleges as a means of addressing these issues. This approach is advocated by the KSSPC which seeks to encourage co-operation between providers.

However, there is some evidence that some private training providers are reluctant to share teaching and learning materials which they have spent time developing with other providers with whom they are in competition.

Another issue which has been highlighted is the need to develop institutional capacity by strengthening the links between work-based training and education institutions. Although this is a matter which requires careful planning because of the demands of workplaces and employers and also the reluctance of some workers to study in an unfamiliar environment, the research suggests that there is considerable scope for developing links between college-based tutors and their counterparts in schools and in the workplace. Networking opportunities are therefore suggested as a means of sharing good practice and developing new approaches as well as ensuring that those who are responsible for provision with a key skills element develop mutual support systems.

3.3.3   Delivery

Ensuring appropriate levels of study

The question of ensuring that learners who pursue courses including a key skills element are able to study at an appropriate level is one which has been highlighted by some works considered in this review. Kodz et al (1998) refer to the need to ensure that trainees:

have an understanding of what is expected of them, they have a sufficient level of Key Skill on recruitment, they are motivated, they have the opportunity to operate in their work at a level appropriate to their training, and they have the support of their employer.

Timing of delivery

The importance of introducing key skills at appropriate times in the learning process is also advocated. Kodz et al (1998) stressed this as an important factor for success in their evaluation of the delivery of key skills in the former county of Avon. Research by the LSDA also urges that they should be introduced earlier in schools as a means of developing pupils' familiarity with the notion of developing these kinds of skills (see below). Cole (n.d.) believes that the delivery of provision involving the development of skills such as key skills in a workplace context should be flexible enough to address the specific needs of learners such as shift workers and those who cannot be released by their employers at certain periods. Similarly, the need for careful timetabling of key skills sessions has been identified (Norman, 2002).

3.4 OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO LEARNING

As in other forms of learning provision, effective delivery of key skills depends on the ability of institutions and other providers to employ effective teaching and learning strategies that meet the needs of learners. The research highlights the importance of detailed planning involving diagnosis of learners' needs, the use of learner-based delivery methods and the need for appropriate methods of delivery. These are discussed in the next sections.

3.4.1 Diagnosis

A great deal of research argues that the need for effective planning is heightened by the fact that key skills are not intended to be a separate course but as skills to be developed while pursuing an array of other learning programmes. Thus learning providers need to identify the opportunities within programmes for learners to develop and demonstrate their proficiency in key skills in a way which is appropriate to each individual. In order to do so, several commentators have highlighted the importance of developing effective diagnostic procedures at the start of the learning process. For example, the Adult Learning Inspectorate contend that the use of individual learning plans (which they regard as essential) are ineffective unless accompanied by a means to establish a baseline for each learner which may be used to identify appropriate goals and learning strategies. This, it is argued, will lead to the development of more effective learning plans which, according to several commentators, should be based on a negotiation with learners of appropriate learning methods and outcomes (Poole, 2001).

3.4.2 Addressing individual needs

Hodgson and Spours' (2002) research reflects the conclusions of other research which emphasises the need for the learning activities associated with key skills to be based on the individual needs of learners so that they feel a sense of ownership of the learning and are active participants in the development of appropriate learning strategies. This approach was advocated by Kodz et al (1998), and in Lankard's study (1995) of the SCANS programme in the United States, which argues that involving learners not only enables appropriate (and relevant) goals to be established but that the exercise is itself a means of developing an individual's capacity for learning. This learner-centred approach is supported strongly in the international literature as the most effective means of encouraging adults to engage in learning experiences. For example, Buchanan and Egg (nd) provides a theoretical justification which argues that it is important to recognise '*that education and training is a cultural response*' and that if effective learning is to take place, providers need to be sensitive to different interests, backgrounds, the contexts in which individuals are able to learn and the speed at which they are able to develop or demonstrate the use of new skills. Similarly Hirose-Wong (1999) refers to the need for learning providers to focus on developing each individual's capacity by building their confidence and self-esteem and basing every decision on the needs of the individual learner.

3.4.3 Delivery of key skills – integration issues

A significant amount of literature focuses on how key skills can be integrated into learning programmes in contexts which are seen as relevant by learners, thus overcoming learners' attitudinal barriers. For example, Kodz et al (1998) stress the importance of ensuring that the key skills are delivered in contexts which are seen as relevant and similarly Poole (2001) emphasises the need to ensure that key skills ar seen as '*relevant and meaningful from the start ... part of the course not add on*'. Similarly Shaw (ETA, 1998) noted that key skills '*tended to be taught in combination with other subjects rather than in classes on their own*' although it is unclear to what extent that research had examined the experience of countries outside the United Kingdom.

Key skills are currently being delivered by learning providers through a variety of means. (Munday and Faraday, 1999). These include timetabled key skill sessions and units within learning programmes that are specifically focused on key skills. Research by the LSDA outlines examples of effective practice in delivering key skills which include:

- *instances whereby the development of key skills has been integrated into citizenship activities through the work of a Student's Council and its campaigning activities*
- *instances where the development of key skills was integrated into out-door extra curricular activities*
- *instances where key skills had been developed through enrichment programmes*

The LSDA report found that to be successful the activities had to be enjoyed by both the participants and providers and detailed planning had to be undertaken beforehand to identify the key skills which were being developed.

However, a number of commentators have argued that some care has to be taken in integrating key skills delivery into other forms of learning or other activities. It has been found that embedding key skills in other learning activities has proved difficult in practice (Unwin and Wellington, 2001), and Kelly (2001) maintains that some programmes are more suitable than others to 'host' key skills learning.

Unwin and Wellington (2001) identified evidence that teachers responsible for school sixth forms had found that a '*transfer of skills will only occur if they are 'brought out' and made explicit*' and they suggest that this was instrumental in heightening pupils' awareness of key skills. They go on to suggest that because '*students do not conceptualize or recognize the curriculum in the same way as teachers*' a situation has developed whereby learners do not recognise the opportunities to transfer the skills acquired under a particular set of circumstances into a different context. They maintain that:

> *The ideas and philosophy associated with any new programme need to be cross-referenced with other related existing initiatives in an institution to lessen the potential for confusion in the minds of students, otherwise there is a danger that all these activities will become yet more bricks to add to the pile rather than the mortar that binds the bricks together. The comments made by students when recollecting their past experiences of personal and cross-curricular skills lessons suggest that these lessons become confused in their minds, resulting in a dilution of effectiveness.*

Similarly Kelly (2001) suggests that rather than attempt integration in all circumstances, efforts should be focused on delivering the key skills elements in contexts which are relevant to the learner.

ESIS (2002) noted that a learning provider/employer from the armed forces:

achieved good results during the first year mainly by insisting that all attend formal key skills level 2 lessons. All were entered for the external assessment irrespective of 'proxy' exemptions.

Although this approach may be more appropriate in some learning contexts than in others, ESIS (2002) highlighted the need for key skills to be '*addressed throughout the programme and cross-referenced accordingly*'.

Shaw (1998) also refers to European comparisons and identifies examples in the Czech republic where '*students are given projects which they solve using a combination of occupationally specific and key skills*' as part of an emphasis to ensure that the development of key skills moves away from the narrow context of the immediate skills required to perform particular tasks. According to the research, these methods have proved effective in developing proficiency in communication and interpersonal skills. The research argues that:

> *there are always likely to be tensions between core skills and occupationally specific skills, and ways must be found of resolving these tensions if the two types of skills are to be properly integrated.*

There is insufficient evidence to support adopting one approach in all contexts. Considerable care would be required before making the key skills an explicit feature of certain types of learning, given the reluctance of some learners to engage in activities which they do not consider to be directly relevant to them. This is an issue which requires further evidence based on empirical studies of the delivery of learning programmes designed to develop key skills.

3.4.4 Providing support to learners

Key skills are available at four different levels and are studied by learners with very different needs and experiences. Those who study for key skills qualifications will have had different experiences of learning and have varying records of educational attainment. This requires providers to adopt a range of approaches to deliver learning activities. Norman (2002) refers to effective teaching and learning strategies which have been developed in delivering key skills. Positive results have been achieved where

> *teachers use imaginative and sometimes unconventional methods to develop skills and adopt an approach that enables students to become responsible for their own learning of key skills and to have ownership of their progress and achievement.*

Specifically, it is argued that '*self-directed project work by students has been a useful vehicle for key skills development*'. For this to be effective, students need to be provided with adequate support, including personal tutorials. Developing a sense of responsibility among learners while they were developing key skills was also emphasised by an evaluation of the LSDA Part-time Work and Wider Key Skills Project. The report on a project which worked with part-time learners at Gateshead College (LSDA 2002) identified the use of workshop-style sessions. It was found that:

> *This formal 'adult' environment together with the informal open discussions has given the project a 'special' feel. The session format encouraged feelings and past experiences to come to the forefront for discussion and some major issues have been aired. The sessions can be compared more to workplace team meetings than formal classes.*

It was found that this had encouraged peer support and a collaborative spirit among learners which had contributed to the learning process.

Other research indicates that the amount of support given to some learners is often crucial if they are to be enabled to develop existing skills and to acquire new ones. Some providers have devoted considerable time and effort to the development of systems to support learners who are apprehensive or who have been identified as having particular needs. However, commentators such as Kelly (2001) have found that for many learners supported delivery is a sign of failure and that there is evidence that learners are reluctant to ask for support due to a fear of being stigmatised, especially in the workplace. Similarly, a study of the New Deal by Ratcliffe, Atkinson, Burgess and Cartner (2001) noted that it is important that all support is provided in a way that does not 'stigmatise' learners who may already lack confidence and may feel uncomfortable about seeking support.

Related issues are also considered by Stern (2001) who refers to the problems encountered by some learners in the United States when entering a new environment. Stern cites work by Enright (1997) which advocates providing an 'anchor' for learners who are not familiar with a learning environment where they could access support from providers and also from other learners. Stern had studied the use of Learning Assistance Centres in the United States which have a particular focus not only on issues such as counselling and advice but also on peer tutoring and improving study skills and learning strategies. The notion of providing an 'anchor' for learners in a new environment is one which clearly has implications for all learning programmes

involving people who may have had negative experience of school or training and those who may be apprehensive about re-entering a learning environment.

3.4.5   The use of Information Technology

The use of Information Technology is one of the key skills and it is also seen as a means of delivering the other key skills to learners. For example, Poole (2001) refers to the need to harness learners' enthusiasm for information technology in order to encourage them to develop their key skills. This could include, for example, developing a broad range of skills through using the internet by searching for information which the learner needed in other learning activities.

The use of Information Technology to enable learners who may have had negative experiences of traditional forms of learning has also been considered extensively in the research examined for this review. However, a cautionary note has been voiced by some commentators who argue that a lack of access to technology can cause a barrier which excludes some groups of learners and the importance of ensuring access has been emphasised. Grabill (1998) notes that expanding the use of Information Technology in traditional learning environments is likely to have little impact on adult and work-based learners and that in any case the quality of the Information Technology services available in many schools and colleges mean that delivery is often poor and '*some students became frustrated and quit*'. Although improvements in Information Technology since that research was published need to be taken into account, the issue of access to facilities which are easy to use is one which clearly has a bearing on overcoming barriers to learning.

3.5   GOOD PRACTICE IN SPECIFIC CONTEXTS

3.5.1   Good Practice in a School Context

In addition to good practice which can be applied generically, practice in specific learning contexts has also been identified as having a positive impact.

Examples of good practice in delivering the wider key skills in a school context showed the same characteristics as those in other contexts, namely the need to ensure that key skills are seen as part of the responsibility of the school as a whole, support from senior management, appropriate administrative support and ensuring that learning activities are relevant and appropriate for each student (LSDA 2002, Norman, 2002 Simmons, 2002).

The importance of a whole-school approach was also emphasised by the School Inspectorate in Wales which noted that:

> *in the 30 per cent of schools where the quality of provision for the development of key skills development is good, successful whole-school initiatives have resulted in consistent approaches to the teaching of key skills* (OHMCI, 2002).

They identified evidence of good practice where schools had reviewed their existing provision thoroughly and where departments had taken time to consider how the delivery of each of the key skills appeared within the departmental scheme of work. The report identified four aspects of the teaching which it believed had contributed to the successful delivery of key skills. These were:

- *ensuring that lessons were structured*
- *ensuring that there was a sequence of learning activities*
- *involving pupils in learning activities*
- *ensuring that there was regular feedback to pupils.*

At the same time, the report highlighted the need to provide pupils with opportunities to interact in groups, to stimulate discussion, to encourage the use of a broad vocabulary and to ensure that pupils were required to use '*high-order reading skills*'.

ESIS (2002) referred to evidence that many schools believed that key skills should be introduced to pupils much earlier:

> *A number of schools were of the opinion that key skills qualifications should be delivered lower down the school. If the learner aimed to work towards level 1 key skills at the end of key stage 3 and level 2 at the end of key stage 4 the percentage of 15 year olds achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C grades or equivalent would increase and key skills post 16 would not be such a major issue.*

A similar approach is also cited by Shaw (1998) who found that in Poland, there was an effort to introduce 'pre-vocational' skills during the primary phase of education, including the provision of training opportunities for primary school teachers. In Wales the work of KSSPC has been extended to include support for programmes which support key skills provision in schools during the compulsory phase of education, which could result in the development of learners' ability to manage their own learning. However, further research is required to establish the effectiveness of this approach.

The LSDA (2002) provides examples of good practice in delivering the wider key skills in the context of schools and colleges including the following:

Example 1.

A school delivered the wider key skills through the ASDAN Award Scheme to pupils who took eight rather than the usual eleven GCSEs taken by pupils at the school. At the start of the programme pupils were introduced to the methods of handling information by working on their own in accessing IT facilities. Evidence of the development of key skills was collected from pupils' work in different curriculum subjects. The school had also introduced a system of pastoral monitoring and advice involving weekly meetings with each pupil.

It was found that the benefits included greater self-esteem and confidence and contributed to pupils' attainment, skills development and employability. The benefits for the school included improved attendance and results.

The critical success factors were listed as being:

- the need for staff to understand the learning style, aims and philosophy underpinning key skills development
- a whole school approach based on support from senior management
- appropriate training for learning deliverers

Example 2.

A college integrated key skills into activities related to the Student Council and community activities, including campaigns such as road safety and anti-racism as part of students' entitlement to Citizenship education.

The critical success factors were listed as being:

- reinforcement of the links between citizenship and key skills
- active teaching and learning styles

ESIS (2002) note that targeting particular pupils had proved effective. They reported that

One school recorded success with learners who had not achieved a grade C in their GCSE English and mathematics. By promoting the key skills qualification and enthusing students, a number passed key skills level 2 in Communication and Application of Number.

3.5.2 Delivery in the workplace

As is noted above, the need for commitment from employers is essential if workplace learning is to be effective. According to the *Future Skills Wales* report developing a broad range of skills is seen as vital for economic competitiveness and to enable individuals to be able to meet the varied needs of employers. *Future Skills Wales* found that skills such as communication, the ability to learn, team working, showing initiative literacy and numeracy were given a high weighting by employers.

The value of key skills was reiterated by the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee's report *Modern Apprenticeships: the way to work* (DfES, 2001). The report's conclusions included the need to establish an Apprenticeship Diploma and emphasised the value of key skills. It identified issues such as the need for '*measures to ensure the continuation of aspects of general education through demands for key skills within apprenticeship*' and for key skills to be included alongside NVQ and technical certificates within the Apprenticeship Diploma. Significantly, the report recommended that the criteria for recognition as one of the two types of apprenticeship agents (programme-led agents) should include that a provider should '*have the capacity for intensive support in key skills*'.

In England the delivery of key skills in the workplace is supported by Learning for Work which has been set-up '*specifically to act as the Managing Agent for the Key Skills Support Programme in the work-based route*'. A range of services are provided including information, resources, and training opportunities.

Kodz et al (1998) found that there was considerable goodwill towards key skills in the part of many of the employers they visited. Where the commitment was not present, research has found that many learners show little interest in the learning process. For instance, Unwin and Wellington (2001) who noted in their study that

Three engineering apprentices we spoke to ... were more sceptical about key skills, particularly because their employer appeared less than enthusiastic about the concept and the time spent collecting evidence.

A number of researchers have highlighted the need for training in the workplace to be organised in a way which ensures that those who have responsibility for delivering the

training enjoy 'credibility' in the eyes of learners. For example, evaluations of New Deal programmes (Ratcliffe, et al 2001) has highlighted the effectiveness of workplace mentors who themselves have had appropriate training in delivering and assessing key skills.

This point is highlighted by Unwin and Wellington (2001) who note the importance of training work-based providers. They emphasise the need for providers to be trained to ensure that they have a thorough understanding of the standard of competence required and the methods of assessment which are used, and their research also notes that learners should be given time out of the workplace, when appropriate, an issue which would require a significant commitment from employers.

Kodz et al (1998) refer to the evidence that the most effective form of work-based training had occurred where a mixture of training methods had been used including formal and informal training and on and off the job approaches. In addition, it was found that the process should be a continuous one whereby learners were given constant encouragement and opportunities to learn from others in the workplace. Giving trainees responsibility was also identified as an effective means of enabling them to demonstrate and develop key skills.

Good practice to enable learners who are working part-time to develop their key skills has also been noted. An evaluation of the LSDA Part-time Work and Wider Key Skills Project in Gateshead (LSDA, 2002) examined the experiences of college students who worked part-time at weekends or when they were not in college. Those learners believed that collecting evidence from workplace-based situations was the most appropriate method of developing and assessing key skills:

> *This has helped learners to identify what happens in everyday life using their natural workplace jargon and then make links to the specifications when portfolio building.*

The evaluation emphasised the need to engage with employers and found that they had been keen to co-operate when they had been approached in the right way. For instance: *'employers have been keen to adapt their in-house materials to accommodate the timing of the project'*. In some cases employers had also: *'set targets and created responsibilities for learners that they may not have without the promotion of the project'*.

The report found that:

> *using situations (such as part-time work) that are familiar to learners presents an excellent starting point for further skills development and achievement of certificates/qualifications.*

According to the research the programme had a number of benefits including securing better links with local employers, generating a more positive attitude towards key skills and that it had benefited learners by encouraging them '*to think independently and critically*'.

Issues relating to wok-based learning are also discussed in work undertaken further afield, notably by Sanguinetti and Hartley eds. (2000) in their research into vocational training in Australia. They emphasise the importance of learning providers who understand the context in which the learning is delivered, including where appropriate '*specialised industrial knowledge*' and for there to be greater recognition that the training provided is an essential part of a company's future development and success and not regarded as 'down time'.

In Wales, a number of practical difficulties have been experienced when delivering learning including key skills in a workplace context (ESIS, 2002). For example, it has been found that it is sometimes difficult to conduct assessments in the workplace because of logistical problems in small companies. Among the suggestions which have been offered as a means of addressing these issues are:

- increasing the number of trained invigilators to enable training providers to be more flexible, such as offering the tests in the workplace and at varying times throughout the day
- increasing the use of laptop computers to train and assess candidates, particularly in IT
- the use of incentives to increase employers' commitment to key skills, such as charging them when employees are prevented from completing the key skills and subsequently the framework
- paying candidates for each test they undertake or the introduction of a bonus scheme where candidates pass all three tests
- payment of overtime to candidates who sit tests outside of normal working hours.

3.6   PROVISION THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WELSH

Very little research has been published concerning the delivery of key skills through the medium of Welsh. A number of issues arise where learners' first language is Welsh or where they choose to pursue courses in Welsh either in schools (where the provision of post-16 courses through the medium of Welsh is extensive) or in college or work-based settings (where the availability of Welsh-medium provision is more limited).

3.6.1   Barriers to Welsh-medium provision

Attitudinal factors

Where a choice exists between studying the key skills elements in learning programmes through the medium of Welsh or English, some Welsh-speaking learners, particularly in colleges, choose the medium of English. The main reason for this is a lack of confidence in writing and reading Welsh. This has meant that overall, few college-based learners have chosen to pursue key skills programmes through the medium of Welsh, when offered the choice. However a significant number of post-16 learners in Welsh-medium schools are pursuing programmes in Welsh.

3.6.2   Provision of courses through the medium of Welsh
Another barrier which has been identified preventing effective Welsh-medium provision is the shortage of tutors who are able to deliver key skills learning provision. This is especially true in colleges where the number of courses through the medium of Welsh is limited, and where the majority of coursework is written in English. Many of those who currently deliver college courses in Welsh face a considerable workload and regard key skills as additional burdens on their time.

3.6.3   Overcoming barriers
KSSPC has developed a broad range of materials in Welsh including resources, guides to good practice, introductory information, details of assessments, support materials and outlines of what is required in each learning programme. They have also produced very detailed material outlining how key skills activities can be integrated into various subject areas. Some of these are Welsh versions of similar materials which are available in English. However, some of the providers who were interviewed as part of this research, while welcoming this support, believed that more was required to deliver key skills through the medium of Welsh. During the past year

assessment through the medium of Welsh has been extended significantly and 'assessment windows' are now available in Welsh. However, further research is required to assess the impact of these changes.

Developing Welsh diagnostic and support materials has been identified as one of the main factors in overcoming the barriers to the development of key skills through the medium of Welsh. At the same time, it has been argued that attitudinal factors are often crucial given that the most successful examples have been seen in cases where providers and learners are committed to developing key skills in Welsh. Nevertheless it has also been suggested that delivering key skills learning in Welsh has to be seen as part of a broader strategy to extend the range and the extent of Welsh-medium post-16 courses provided in colleges not least because of a reluctance among learners to complete the key skills elements in Welsh when their programme of study is delivered through the medium of English. In addition, the need to nurture confidence among individuals who pursue non-academic courses to read and write Welsh is another issue which needs to be addressed.

3.7   KEY FINDINGS: KEY SKILLS

Overcoming barriers to the effective delivery of key skills provision and learners' participation

This chapter summarises the good practice identified in the literature search as promoting the effective delivery of key skills provision and encouraging learners' participation.

3.7.1   Awareness and attitude
Providers of successful programmes are able to distinguish between basic and key skills and the different rationales for them, and are aware of the content of what they are teaching. A prerequisite of most effective learning is that learners are also aware of the skills they are gaining and are encouraged to think how they would use them in different contexts.

Ensuring that learners and providers have a positive attitude towards key skills is essential. This requires a learning environment in which key skills are valued and seen not only as being an important part of learning activities but also as being applicable and useful in work and other everyday situations.

3.7.2   Management of key skills

Successful key skills provision is invariably the outcome of a team effort by the provider. Where the key skills tutor or coordinator works largely alone and independently of colleagues, effective learning does not often occur. The delivery of key skills requires a coordinated approach from the provider organisation which involves input from a range of staff. The support of senior managers is essential as this can help overcome organisational difficulties such as timetabling and providing premises or resources. It is also important for ensuring a high profile for key skills generally in the provider organisation.

One factor which helps providers overcome many obstacles to setting up and delivering key skills provision is the appointment of a dedicated key skills co-ordinator. This person will be able to devote sufficient time and energy to key skills management, but must also enjoy enough authority within the institution or workplace to instigate and implement changes when necessary. However, coordinators require support from specialist staff and administrative assistance to ensure that their workload does not become excessive.

3.7.3   Staff training

One factor which frequently impairs the effective delivery of key skills is the inadequate training or preparation of tutors and other staff. The most successful organisations ensure that they develop the capacity to deliver key skills through promoting the professional development of their teaching staff. They view the financial implications for themselves as an investment, not a cost. This ensures that all key skills tutors are confident in their own key skills and have a clear understanding of the purpose of including key skills in learning programmes.

Difficulties can arise in organisations or on programmes when teaching staff not specifically engaged in key skills do not appreciate how or why those skills are being delivered. Learners may then perceive different emphases in the teaching of different staff members which can prove confusing and hinder learner progress. Effective training in a provider organisation therefore ensures that all staff are made aware of the importance of the skills and of the strategies being used by other tutors for their delivery. All teaching staff are then also aware of how key skills fit in with the broader aims of the organisation.

A feature of many effective programmes is that their staff devise their own teaching materials. Good training therefore reflects this, and equips staff with the skills to

recognise learner needs and prepare materials to address them. It also prepares staff to identify the best ways of presenting learning activities to learners of different ages and aptitudes.

The context for acquiring key skills evolves constantly as technology moves on and economic circumstances change. Successful providers therefore arrange that the teaching skills of their staff are regularly updated through in-service training for them. This, too, has cost implications, but also brings benefits as greater staff expertise is reflected in higher learners' attainment.

3.7.4   Policy and Planning

The creation of a clear institutional policy on key skills is an essential basis for providing effective key skills instruction. Where all members of staff and management have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the policy, the general feeling of shared ownership of the policy and commitment to it is invariably reinforced. This in turn leads to a greater readiness to implement that policy on the part of all staff. The absence of a clear policy often results in the confusion of teaching aims and strategies and, consequently, poor learning gains.

Effective planning of the delivery of key skills is required. In colleges, for example, this requires the inclusion of opportunities in all departmental schemes of work for learners to develop their skills. Employers will plan opportunities for key skill enhancement in the tasks and activities they expect their learners to undertake. The development of better co-ordination of basic and key skills provision is an issue which is currently being analysed.

3.7.5   Partnerships

Providers sometimes find that they lack the resources, staff or adequate facilities to teach key skills as effectively as they would like. A potent method of overcoming these constraints is the formation of partnerships with other organisations. Although providers need to be able to respond to the distinctive needs of the context in which they deliver key skills learning, provision is most effective when providers cooperate to share expertise and resources. This includes co-operation between schools and colleges and between workplace providers and colleges to draw on the expertise of providers. Providers need to be able to share good practice through appropriate networking opportunities.

3.7.6 Delivery

Learners develop their skills best when the methods of delivery are learner-centred. This has two main implications. Firstly, the curriculum content needs to be relevant to learners' own experience in life and the workplace. Secondly, the arrangements for delivery need to be designed for the convenience of learners rather than providers. For example, learning opportunities will be available at times which are convenient to learners. Successful programmes use diagnostic procedures as a means of planning learning programmes and of identifying appropriate goals. Moreover, there are clear benefits when learners themselves are involved in the process of setting targets and developing their own individual learning plans.

One crucial strategic decision is whether key skills should be integrated into other learning activities or taught as discrete subject areas. Both approaches have been successful, although the more specific skills such as Application of Number and ICT are more difficult to integrate into certain other activities than the more generic ones such as problem solving. On the other hand, the more generic skills such as team working and problem solving are unsuitable for teaching as discrete subjects or areas. However, all the skills need to be embedded in tasks and contexts which learners can recognise as relevant to their experience.

3.7.7 Support for learners

Provision is most effective when learners are provided with appropriate support including through well-organised tutoring and mentoring. Where specific support is required this should be done in a way which meets learners' needs in a sensitive way. For example, prudent providers ensure that training support given to workplace learners does not stigmatise them as backward in any way. The importance of supporting college-based learners who may be unfamiliar with the environment, particularly those who have negative experiences of learning, has also been emphasised.

Good providers try to identify possible personal barriers to learners' participation in learning programmes and take measures to address them. For example, parents may be unable to attend provision if they have young children, but providers can remove this barrier by ensuring that childcare is available. In the workplace, effective provision is often only possible where employers release staff to attend training during hours of work. The costs of such measures are offset by the improved skills and increased productivity of staff after the training.

3.7.8 Information and Communication Technology

The potential for the use of Information Technology in the delivery of learning has been emphasised in the research. However, there is also a need to ensure that a lack of proficiency in the use of IT nor problems of access to IT do not become a barrier to the development of key skills.

3.7.9 Delivery in schools and colleges

Some staff and students in schools and colleges remain to be convinced of the value of a specific focus on key skills. This can lead to a lack of commitment by both groups during learning activities. Some institutions also find it difficult to timetable key skills sessions because of the demands of other examination courses and this sometimes leads to students being underprepared for the written key skills papers. However, many institutions try to address problems of motivation and preparation through appropriate training for their staff and ensuring explanations to students on the meaning of key skills and the rationale for the emphasis on them. The delivery of key skills can also be integrated into extra-curricular activities in schools. Some educationalists would also wish a discrete emphasis on key skills to be introduced earlier in the school curriculum.

One constraint on sixth form and college students' motivation for developing key skills, particularly in attempting the written key skills examinations, is that some universities in the UK still set little store by those qualifications, although they can provide UCAS points for students. Building on more positive attitudes within higher education institutions would contribute to raising the status of key skills.

Appropriate internal verification and quality assurance procedures should be in place in schools and colleges as a means of monitoring and planning delivery.

3.7.10 Delivery in the workplace

The level of employee involvement and interest in improving their skills often reflects that shown by the employer, and many employers show commitment to the development of key skills through workplace learning. At the same time it is clear that workplace learning has to be delivered by trainers who command the respect of the learners. This requires training those staff who deliver key skills provision in the workplace. There is also evidence to suggest that workplace learners benefit from an approach which combines a work-based element with other delivery methods. There is a need to address the issues which arise when assessing candidates in the workplace, including examining ways of overcoming the lack of suitable venues in

some workplaces and increasing the use of laptop computers in the assessment process.

3.7.11 Provision through the medium of Welsh

The development of key skills through the medium of Welsh, particularly in the workplace, remains underdeveloped. The national written key skills tests in Communication, Application of Number and IT are available in English and Welsh, and pupils in Welsh-medium schools invariably attempt the papers through Welsh. In colleges and the workplace, however, many Welsh-speaking students take the key skills examinations through the medium of English.

One reason is a shortage of tutors able to provide key skills instruction through the medium of Welsh in some colleges. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of new teaching and other materials to support the delivery of key skills learning through the medium of Welsh. Some of those who are delivering key skills learning in Welsh feel that the support that they receive is not adequate.

Another important factor is that there have been five annual opportunities to sit the English-medium key skills tests, but only one opportunity per year to attempt the Welsh-medium papers. Many Welsh-speakers therefore prefer to take the papers in English, with the possibility of resitting in the event of failure, rather than wait several months to sit the tests in Welsh. Ensuring the same number of opportunities in both languages would certainly increase the number of Welsh-medium candidates.

There is also evidence that many learners in colleges and the workplace who are fluent in spoken Welsh lack the confidence in literacy to use Welsh for written key skills work and assessments, usually because of their greater exposure to written English. This situation can be expected to change as more school pupils receive a fuller education through the medium of Welsh and have more opportunities for reading and using the language in everyday life.

3.8 RECOMMENDATIONS: KEY SKILLS

3.8.1 Training Needs

- Efforts should be made to raise the awareness of learning providers, including schools, colleges and employers, of the nature and value of key skills, for learners, employees and employers. To this end, bodies such as ELWa and ACCAC should produce simple but clear information material, including posters. Training courses for teaching staff should include units on key skills.

- The distinctions between key skills and basic skills should be made more explicit for education and training providers to ensure that training providers understand the difference. Information material should again be produced to promote this, and training courses should clarify the distinctions. Further research should also be undertaken to see how basic and key skills are related and whether students can progress from basic to key skills.

- Senior managers in education and training institutions and management staff in the workplace should receive more information on the value of key skills and their role as managers in the promotion of those skills.

- Methodological training for developing key skills through pedagogic activities should be provided for teaching staff in education and training institutions, including the workplace. This should include staff not directly involved with key skills development in order to ensure a holistic approach from the whole organisation. Networking opportunities with other organisations should also be promoted for the dissemination of good practice.

3.8.2 Delivery Arrangements

- Each provider should undertake an audit of how key skills development features across the range of activities they undertake, and how they might feature in other activities. The outcomes should then be used to inform future planning.

- Dedicated key skills coordinators should be appointed or nominated in all organisations which deliver key skills, including the workplace.

- Where appropriate, providers should be supported to develop learning materials which are appropriate to their own contexts and which are of acceptable quality. Development grants from bodies such as ELWa and ACCAC should be available for this to enable providers to build on existing good practice.

- Key skills provision should be learner-based. Learning activities should derive from the needs of individual learners. Arrangements for delivery, such as timetabling, should be flexible and structured for learners' convenience wherever possible. Learners should have an input to the planning of teaching programmes and individual learning plans.

- Employers should be supportive of key skills and prepared to release learners in the workplace for specific periods to attend training in key skills.

- IT should be used in a way which promotes the learning.

3.8.3 Welsh-medium Provision

♦ Diagnostic, assessment and teaching materials should continue to be developed through the medium of Welsh. Bodies such as ELWa and ACCAC should consider commissioning more resources. There should be greater co-operation between Welsh-medium providers to avoid duplication of effort, and networking opportunities should be extended to enable them to share good practice.

3.9   ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE LITERATURE: KEY SKILLS

The NFER library conducted a comprehensive survey of the following databases.

AEI
BEI
CBCA
ERIC

The key words and phrases used in the search included:

Access to Education and Adults
Adult Basic Education
Adult Learning and Access
Adult Learning and Barrier(s)
Basic Skills
Basic Skills or Adult Basic Education and access
Basic Skills or Adult Basic Education and barrier(s)
Basic Skills or Adult Basic Education and delivery
Basic Skills or Adult Basic Education and flexible and providers
Basic Skills or Adult Basic Education and learners or learning
Basic Skills or Adult Basic Education and providers
Competence
Competency Based Education
Essential Skills
Flexible Scheduling
Functional Literacy
Generic Competencies
Key Competencies
Key Skills
Learner Support

Learning Support
Provider Capacity.

In addition, the NFER's EURYDICE unit provided additional material on the European context, including information from the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Archive (INCA). This database provided detailed information on the definition and implementation of key skills in European countries.

United Kingdom official publications.

Important information about the context in which key skills provision is delivered and the aims of including key skills in other courses was gained through papers produced by the National Assembly for Wales, including *The Learning Country* (2001) the *Future Skills Wales* report (1998) and the *Draft Skills and Employment Plan for Wales* (2002). Other official reports produced in the United Kingdom included the QCA *Review of Key Skills* (2000) which provides extensive consideration of the issues which have arisen through the delivery of key skills. Evidence about key skills in modern apprenticeships was included in the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee's report *Modern Apprenticeships: the way to work* (2001). The *Annual Report of the Adult Learning Inspectorate* provided information on good practice in delivering key skills learning to adults. The LSDA *Adding Value: integrating the wider key skills* (2002) report provided exemplar models of how the broader key skills could be introduced in a variety of contexts. LSDA *Gateshead College – Final Report* (2002). London: LSDA provides an evaluation of the part-time work and wider key skills project where students who are working part time have been able to develop key skills in their workplace. Other publications by the LSDA (KSSP) have also been examined in this research. These include NORMAN, L. (2002). *Profiling Effective Practice in Key Skills*. London: LSDA. This study sought to identify practice in a sample of schools and colleges from October 2000. SIMMONS, J. (2002). *Researching Key Skills Co-ordinators: a report for the Learning and Skills Development Agency*. London: LSDA focuses on the role of key skills co-ordinators and identifies effective practices and characteristics. GLOVER, L. (2002). *Key Skills and Inspection in Colleges*. London. LSDA gave details of various approaches to the delivery of key skills in colleges. The relationship between key skills and basic skills and the interface between them is examined by PERRY, L. and DAVIES, K. (2002). *Basic Skills and Key Skills: making the relationship work*. London: LSDA.

Books, articles and research papers

RATCLIFFE, M., ATKINSON, J., BURGESS, C. and CARTNER, N. (2002). *Developing Good Practice in New Deal in Colleges*. London: LSDA.
This work examines the experience of attracting new deal students to colleges and includes valuable information on good practice in overcoming generic barriers to learning.

LAWSON, L. (2000). 'Basic skills and key skills –how do they fit', *Language Issues*, **12**, 2, 22–4.
This article considers the definition of 'basic skills' and 'key skills' and the confusion in their meaning.

KODZ, S., DENCH, S., POLLARD, E. and EVANS, C. (1998). *Developing the Key Skills of Young People: an Evaluation of Initiatives in the Former Avon Area*. Brighton: Institute of Employment Studies.
This work provides a valuable evaluation of the delivery of courses including key skills in Avon. The study examines their delivery in a variety of contexts by a broad range of training providers.

UNWIN, L. and WELLINGTON, J. (2001). *Young People's Perspectives on Education, Training and Employment: Realizing Their Potential*. London: Kogan Page.
This work includes a chapter examining young people's attitudes to the inclusion of key skills in the learning programmes which they were pursuing and contains informative interview evidence about learners' perceptions of key skills.

HODGSON, A. and SPOURS, K. (2002). 'Key skills for all? The key skills qualification and Curriculum 2000', *Journal of Education Policy*, **17**, 1, 29–47.
This article examines the debates concerning key skills and the way in which they are defined in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The research questions some of the principles which underpin the notion of key skills and suggests ways in which the definitions could be changed to provide more meaningful learning experiences.

KELLY, A. (2001). 'Selecting a key skills delivery mode: thinking about efficiency and effectiveness', *Oxford Review of Education*, **27**, 2, 227–38.
This article argues that there is a need to consider whether integrating key skills into other programmes of study is the most effective means of delivery. The article notes

that some subjects are more suitable to 'host' key skills than others and advances a case for the 'conteztualisation' of key skills in learning programmes.

ALLEN, M. (2000). 'Key to what? Key to who? New Labour, key skills and the post-16 curriculum', *Education and Social Justice,* **3**, 1, 27–33.
This article discusses some of the practical problems which have been encountered in delivering key skills within learning programmes in school and workplace contexts and the wider policy issues which arise from these experiences. The article raises issues about the validity of the approach currently being adopted and concludes that '*Key skills may prove to be another (expensive) cul-de-sac in the maze of post-16 reform*'.

MUNDAY, F. and FARADAY, S. (1999). 'Key skills: strategies in action', FEDA Report, **2**, 9, (whole issue).
This article examines the delivery of key skills to learners in different contexts based on a study of the experiences of nine colleges. The study includes considerable information about the implications for staff and students and identifies the factors which the authors believe need to be in place in order for delivery to be effective.

WARREN, J. (1994). 'Designing for flexible learning' *Aspects of Education and Training Technology*, **27**, 67–8.
This article notes the importance of developing flexible learning approaches which involve the learner and of giving trainees control over their learning, including the responsibility of managing their learning. The research also emphasises the need for high-quality teaching materials and effective strategies for delivery.

NORMAN, L. (2002). 'What's working well where?, *Key Skills Programme News.*
This brief article draws together evidence about good practice in a variety of contexts and identifies some of the structural, management and pedagogical factors which need to be in place if key skills are to be delivered effectively.

COLE, L.T. (n.d.) *Mining Sector: Basic Skills Needs*.
This report examines the basic skills needs of workers in the Canadian mining industry. This work concentrated on basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, it also considered how barriers to learning could be overcome and made important comments about the need for learning provision to be delivered flexibly in order to accommodate factors such as shift working.

ESIS (2002). *An All Wales Perspective on the Implementation of Key Skills 2000*. This report examines the issues which have arisen from the delivery of courses including key skills in schools, colleges and in the workplace.

SANGUINETTI, J. and HARTLEY, R. (Eds) (2000). *Building Literacy and Numeracy into Training: a Synthesis of Recent Research into the Effects of Integrating Literacy and Numeracy into Training Packages*. (ED445274) This report is a valuable summary of the evidence from Australia which contains information about the delivery of the kind of learning examined in this research in workplace contexts.

KEARNS, P. (2001). *Review of Research: Generic Skills for the New Economy*. Leabrook, SA: National Centre for Vocational Education. This report provides an extremely useful overview of the changing definitions of 'essential generic skills' and discusses their implications for teachers, learners and employers.

RUMSEY, D. (1997). 'The changing workplace of the 21st century: implications for educators and trainers.' Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education. This paper demonstrates the way in which changes in the working environment and in the wider economy will impact on employers and employees and considers how this will impact upon issues such as vocational training and workplace training.

LANKARD, B.A. (1995). *SCANS and the New Vocationalism*, ERIC Digest No. 165. This article examines the impact of the SCANS report in the United States and the way this led to the adoption of a different approach to some aspects of vocational and technical education.

BUCHANAN, M. and EGG, M. (n.d.) *Culture Matters: Community Report. Reporting on a Research Project to Explore Factors Affecting the Outcomes of Vocational Education and Training for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander People.* This research focuses on the way in which Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes were delivered to groups of learners in Australia. The research highlighted a number of cultural issues which arose, and emphasises the need to adopt methods of delivery which are relevant and appropriate to learners.

SHANNON, M. and WONG, H. (1999). *Gateways to Democracy: Six Urban Community College Systems*.
This report considers the practices of community colleges in the United States which work with 'educationally disadvantaged' learners. The research contains valuable evidence about the approaches required to ensure that they have access to appropriate learning opportunities and emphasises the need for a learner-centred approach.

STERN, S. (2001). *Learning Assistance Centres: Helping Students Through*.
This research considers the impact of learning assistance centres where they have been established in parts of the United States and the importance of providing learners who are entering an unfamiliar environment with appropriate support.

GRABILL, J. (1998). 'Utopic visions, the technopoor, and public access: writing technologies in a community literacy program', *Computers and Composition*, **3**, 15.
This article raises important questions about the use of information technology and reliance on that technology in the delivery of courses to adult learners.

SHAW, S. (1998). *Development of Core Skills Training in the Partner Countries*. European Training Foundation.
This report gives an outline of various definitions used by a number of European countries which can be regarded as falling under the description of key skills. This work also demonstrates the aims and objectives of policy-makers in those countries and their motivation for promoting the inclusion of those skills within the education and training system.

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (2000). *Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations Background Paper*.
This report gives details of a major research programme which seeks to provide a better theoretical understanding of key competencies and a framework for validating competence.

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APPENDIX

The NFER undertook informal interview with the following agencies:

The Basic Skills Agency

Elwa

DYSG

Colleges in Wales