

**Predictors and Pathways of Progression to Level 2  
Qualifications: A Review of the Literature**

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**Discussion Paper**

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**April-2007**

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## Introduction

The 2005 White Paper on “Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work” highlights the need to change the focus from a ‘job for life’ to ‘employability for life’ (DfES 2005, para. 3). It is argued that promoting lifelong learning is a social challenge as well as an economic one, as a more educated workforce will lead to broader social changes, such as reduced crime and better health. In order to improve the education of the workforce, the Department for Education and Skills is committed to increase the number of adults with level 2 qualifications.

Empirical evidence using the Labour Force Survey suggests that controlling for other qualifications achieved, individuals holding low level National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) have statistically significant lower wage levels than otherwise similar individuals who lack NVQs (Dearden, McIntosh, Myck, and Vignoles, 2000). This indicates that individuals will not have an economic incentive to invest in this type of qualification.

However, other evidence indicates important non-economic benefits of level 2, which justifies public intervention. Dearden, MacGranahan and Sianesi (2004) find that NVQ level 2 qualifications are stepping stones to higher levels of attainment. Chevalier and Feinstein (2006) find that individuals with at least O-levels are less likely to suffer from depression during adulthood and that the effect is similar for men and women. Sabates and Feinstein (2006) found that women with level 2 qualifications are more likely to uptake screening for cervical cancer than women without qualifications and that the estimated effect of level 2 qualifications was no different in magnitude to the estimated effect for levels 3 or 4 and above qualifications. Hammond and Feinstein (2006) found that adults who had flourished at secondary school had relatively high levels of efficacy, life satisfaction and optimism.

Although the government is targeting individuals without level 2 to undertake courses at this level (or beyond), little is known about who undertakes level 2 qualifications during adulthood. This paper focuses on the quantitative literature around predictors of participation in educational qualifications during adulthood, and describes the empirical studies on the nature of participation in educational qualifications. It also reviews the empirical literature on pathways to progression and on the main barriers to participation in level 2 courses. The paper concludes with recommendations for research based on the gaps in the current empirical literature.

## **Participation and pathways for progression**

### **How does participation vary? Current context vs. early life context**

There is limited research on participation in adult learning over the lifecourse. Gorard, Rees et al. (2001) analysed life history data in South Wales in relation to adult participation. The authors found that although gender, family background, initial schooling, occupation and motivation were significant factors, their significance lied 'as much in their interactions with the other variables as in themselves' (2001, p172). And so, 'Where and when an individual determines their structure of opportunities such as access to courses, but it also determines the relevance of gender, family background, initial schooling, occupation and motivation in mediating those objective opportunities' (2001, p172). For instance, gender might be less relevant to a young adult living in London when deciding to enrol on a course, than to an older adult with family responsibilities living in a rural area of England. For this reason, it is crucial to analyse statistical interactions in order to gain a deep understanding of why participation varies. Unfortunately, research is limited in scope in this area, and much research has been restricted to cross-tabulations.

More commonly, the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS) and the NIACE Adult Participation in Learning series of surveys take a cross sectional approach to provide an analysis of participation across different groups. Hillage et al. (2000) in their review of adult learning, argue that participation varies by demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and ethnicity, educational background, employment circumstances and different regions. The NIACE studies provide information on the extent of participation among these groups, whereas NALS also provides extra information on a wider selection of groups and the types of courses learners are enrolled on (Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002; Sargant and Aldridge 2002). It should be noted that the much broader definition of learning adopted by NALS results in higher levels of participation than recorded in the NIACE surveys. Despite both emphasising that any type of informal or formal learning should be reported, it is likely that some respondents would not have associated their type of learning as such, and hence not reported it (McGivney 1999).

The remainder of this section is divided into the main subgroups identified by research as having an impact on participation. They have been grouped into characteristics that affect the current context or the early life context.

#### **Early life context**

## **Initial schooling**

The earlier an adult initially left full time education, the less likely they were to participate in adult learning. The NALS (2002) and NIACE (2002) surveys found that adults who delayed leaving until they were at least 21 were around twice as likely to have recently participated in learning than those who left school at the earliest opportunity. However, if adults with fewer qualifications are more likely to participate in informal learning than other adults, any underreporting of informal learning may become an issue here (McGivney 1999; Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002).

## **Social Economic Group at Birth**

Gorard et al (2001) explored family background in their retrospective study in South Wales. Background, in terms of income, parents' education or parents' occupation was found to be a key predictor of later participation in adult learning. However, the size of the effect is still not clear, as well as the relative importance of each background factor.

Conlon (2005) used the NCDS to investigate childhood determinants of attaining academic and vocational qualifications by the age of 23, in 1981. He found that although father's social class at birth was significant for females who attained academic or vocational level 2, it was not so for males. The study also found that the number of siblings at 7 and region of residence at 7 were significant for all children. However, the study did not look at predictors after the age of 7 and the variable of interest was attainment at 23, i.e. soon after leaving full time education and not adult learning.

## **Current Context**

### **Age**

An age divide is prevalent in all studies. According to the 2002 NALS and NIACE surveys younger adults (under 20) are around 3 to 4 times more likely to participate in adult education than the oldest age group (Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002; Sargant and Aldridge 2002). However, this could be a cohort effect as more respondents in each generation report staying on after school leaving age and work based training (Gorard, Rees et al. 2001). Over time the NIACE surveys (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2006) have moved away from a smooth decline in participation across age groups, and now show marked differences between those aged 17-24, other adults of working age (where levels of participation have become more uniform) and older adults. The DfES (2005) report a similar finding on work based learning in the last 4 weeks from the Labour Force Survey with slightly more modest numbers. We return to the issue of age in the next section in which we consider the changing meaning, context and purposes of learning through the lifecourse.

## Gender

Evidence on gender gaps is largely contested in surveys, although most evidence points towards some significant differences (Hillage, T et al. 2000). The DfES (2005) using the Labour Force Survey indicated that although job related learning was roughly equal overall in 1998, the overall rate of learning increased by 0.02% over 7 years, while the rate of learning for women increased by 19%<sup>1</sup>. Women were more likely to have participated in this learning whether they were employed, self-employed or ILO unemployed. The only exception was for the economically inactive, although the gap was almost closed by 2005. In support of this, the most recent NIACE survey in 2006 (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2006) also found that women are now significantly more likely than men to be participating in learning.

Gorard, Rees et al. (2001) argue that although the significance of gender changes over the lifecycle, it remains the clearest determinant of participation throughout, affecting the frequency and length of the learning episode, as well as the type and outcomes. Other research supports this theory. The 2002 NALS survey found that the significant difference in participation is largely explained by more men undertaking self-directed learning and vocational learning. However, the NIACE (2006) survey found that women are much more likely to be learning in public institutions in their own time (LSC, 2005) and more likely, when employed, to have opportunities to learn at work (ONS, 2005). And so we can expect to see significant increases in women's participation over time as more women join the labour force. (Gorard, Rees et al. 2001) also found evidence that an altruistic phenomenon is still prevalent, although less widespread, as women are moving away and giving up learning opportunities when they have children or if their husband's job moves them away. Research so far suggests that when looking at simple correlations, the nature of participation varies more than the extent of participation does.

## Region

Significant differences of participation have been found between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The 2005 NIACE survey found that England and Wales tend to have higher participation rates than Scotland and Northern Ireland (Aldridge and Tuckett 2006), although the 2006 survey showed high levels of participation in Northern Ireland. The DfES (2005) found that Northern Ireland had the lowest participation rate in work-based learning only in the last 4 weeks using the Labour Force Survey.

However, within the UK, there is little consensus on which regions have the highest participation rates. This may be due to the definition of learning used and the ways in which regional samples are constructed, and perhaps one study picking up more informal learning than another. Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. (2002),

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<sup>1</sup> Table 3.3. page 43. Data used from the Spring, learning taken as learning in the last 4 weeks.

using the NALS survey, assert that the East and South East have the highest participation rate, and the North East tends to have the lowest. In contrast, the 2006 NIACE survey shows little variation between English regions. Over its duration, the NIACE series of surveys has reported widely fluctuating regional participation rates, however the smoothing out of variation found in recent surveys may in part be a result of a stronger commitment to regional planning (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2006). The DfES (2005) also did not find large differences between the regions, using the Labour Force Survey.

### **Employment status**

Adults in work are more likely to participate in adult learning than unemployed or inactive adults ( Rainbird, 2000; Hillage, T et al. 2000; Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002; Sargant and Aldridge 2002; Aldridge and Tuckett, 2006). In the 2006 NIACE survey, slightly more part-time workers were learning than full time workers. The 2002 NALS survey distinguished between those looking after a family and those unable to work due to poor health or a disability. Those looking after a family had a participation rate similar to that of retired people, but those unable to work due to health reasons or a disability were 20% less likely to participate in learning than other inactive groups.

Over time, the NIACE surveys have found that while participation has increased for workers, the unemployed and those 'not working', participation has remained constant while it has decreased for retired adults. This is likely to be due to the increased emphasis on accredited courses, and is likely to reflect the heavy focus on working age learners improving their productivity as oppose to helping older people live healthier, more active lives.

The NIACE (2002) survey found unemployed adults were less likely to be participating in learning than employed adults. However, on further inspection, it is clear that although significantly fewer unemployed adults were current learners compared to employed adults, there were in fact proportionally more unemployed recent learners than employed recent learners. It could be that these particular unemployed recent learners have taken a course and are now looking for a new job. Thus, it would be useful to distinguish between the long term unemployed and short term, which may have different characteristics. Furthermore, the survey also showed a difference (although much smaller) between current and recent participation among all 'not working' adults, with more adults having recently undertaken some learning, even if not currently participating. This strengthens the arguments for using longitudinal data which can track adults over time and help to differentiate between the long and short term unemployed. The argument is supported by Jenkins (2004) study on Women, Lifelong Learning and Employment, who found that after using a number of controls, there was still a strong association between adult learning and the probability that those women who were out of work in 1991 returned to work between 1991 and 2000.

Finally, statistics on work based training show that training varies by occupation and industry. Worryingly, the rate of training in public administration, education and health grew to almost 3 times the rate of learning for agriculture, forestry and fishing between 1998 and 2005. The gap between professional occupations and process, plant and machine operatives has narrowed, although the former occupations are still over 3½ times more likely to have undertaken training (DfEE 1998; DfES 2005).

### **Current Socioeconomic factors**

As expected there is a strong correlation between socioeconomic group and lifelong learning (Hillage, T et al. 2000; Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002; Aldridge and Tuckett, 2006). Professionals and non-manual workers are over twice as likely as unskilled or 'other' workers to have recently participated in adult learning (Aldridge and Tuckett, 2006). Since 1996, the survey has shown consistently higher levels of participation among adults in the top SEG. In 1996, participation among white collar workers was at a similar high rate but has failed to keep pace since 1999. Since 2005 participation among skilled manual workers has begun to increase, although participation rates among those in the lowest SEG has remained broadly unchanged over time.

Bynner and Parsons (2006) used the 1970 British Cohort Study to investigate the relationship between changes in cohort members' literacy and numeracy skills during adulthood and their subsequent adult outcomes. They found that although adults with poor entry level skills were associated with lack of qualifications, improving skills between age 21 and 34 had a substantial impact on achieving some form of formal qualification by the age of 34.

### **Religion**

Gorard et al (2001) suggest that religion potentially determines participation, as a non-conformist chapel background from South Wales or a non-Christian family religion are both predictors of greater participation. However, religion has not been explored in depth in other literature or national surveys. Analysis of the 2004 Labour Force Survey data into participation in learning by religion showed that over two-thirds of Jews, Christians, Hindus and adults with no religious affiliation report participation in learning compared with just over one half of Muslims and Sikhs (Aldridge, Dutton and Tuckett, 2006).

### **Ethnic Minority**

There is limited research on ethnic minorities, mainly due to the lack of data. In a study by IFF Research Ltd (2005) involving about 9,000 FE learners in Learning Skills Council-funded provision, 17% of learners were non-white, with 9% Asian

and Black. The proportion of whites to non-whites ranged from 3.5 amongst those aged 19-20 and 21 for those aged 60 plus<sup>2</sup>.

Although the NALS (2002) survey collected information on ethnic groups, there were only a significant number of adults in the Asian group, and thus could not be compared to other groups.

The size of the NIACE survey also precludes from disaggregating findings by ethnicity, however using 2004 Labour Force Survey data, NIACE have been able to make a more detailed examination of participation in learning by adults from minority ethnic groups (Aldridge, Dutton and Tuckett, 2006). The data shows that while the participation rate of ethnic minority groups as a whole is within a single percentage point of the UK's population, these overall figures, ask marked differences between different minority ethnic groups. Adults, and particularly women, from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds fare dramatically worse than all other groups.

As it is widely recognised that ethnic background affects school results, staying on rates and higher education achievement, there are likely to be underlying characteristics that affect the probability of learning. The DfES (2005) reported differences between ethnic groups for work-based learning. Asian or Asian British had the lowest reported participation of 13.5%, 16.1% of Whites participated, but 22.2% of other ethnic groups had undertaken learning in the last 4 weeks<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For 7% of this sample, information was collection from the Individual Learner Record, rather than from the interview

<sup>3</sup> Other ethnic groups do not include White, Mixed, Asian / Asian British, Black / Black British, Chinese

## **What is the nature of participation over the lifecourse?**

Despite lifelong learning being encouraged throughout the lifecourse, there is ample evidence to show that younger adults are more likely to engage in learning than older adults. Although there is some research looking at the learning of specific age groups, there is little research that brings evidence together to look at how learning varies over the lifecourse. Furthermore, there is little literature that is able to distinguish between age and cohort effects. For this reason, this section will first look at evidence from the NIACE and NALS surveys and then look at research that focuses on adults at different stages of the lifecycle.

## **What do we know about learning over the lifecourse?**

Respondents to the NIACE (2002) survey were more likely to cite all work related reasons for learning than educational/progression reasons throughout life. In a qualitative study of adults with learners below level 2 qualifications, Morrell, Chowdhury et al. (2005) found that younger learners were more focused on outcomes, in that they used learning to help them change their circumstances. On the other hand, older learners (over 55 years) were more recreational in focus, and used learning to help them deal with changed circumstances, such as bereavement.

More than double of 20-34 year olds compared to those over 55 cited work reasons as their motivation to learn in the 2002 NIACE survey (Sargant and Aldridge 2002). It is therefore unsurprising that the majority of respondents aged 25 to 64 named their workplace and work mates as their main sources of information on learning. Friends and family was the primary source for 20 to 24 year olds and those aged 55 and over, whereas further education or technical college was important for 17-24 year olds.

The majority of education for those aged 17-19, 25-34 and over 55 takes place in a further education, tertiary or 6<sup>th</sup> form college. University is the most common location for 20-24 year olds, and work for 35-54 year olds.

## **What is the nature of participation of younger adults?**

Much of our knowledge in this area comes from Joan Payne's (2003) study using the Youth Cohort Study to analyse trends in participation for 16-19 year olds. It was found that prior attainment (GCSE) had a strong impact on whether the young adult took a vocational route or not. Within this study, 41% of adults reported that their main study aim was academic, 34% vocational and 35% were not learning. For those studying vocational subjects, 11% were working towards level 3 qualifications, 14% level 2 and 6% towards level 1 (Payne 2003).

The majority of those studying for vocational qualifications were in full time education (77%), with another 18% in Government Supported Training (GST). Qualifications studied varied depending whether the students were in full time education or GST; while the most common qualification in full time education was AVCE/GNVQ, less than half GST students worked towards this, and instead over 55% worked towards a NVQ.

Despite the majority of vocational students studying in full time education, they were in the minority within these institutions. Only 36% of those in full time education reported vocational qualifications as their main study aim, half the proportion of students in GST.

Payne (2003) also analysed data on drop out rates. Although 14% who started working for a vocational qualification after the end of Year 11 gave up by the following spring, it was found that the lower the qualification rate the higher the drop out rate, with almost a fifth of all vocational students studying for level 1 quitting within a year. Alarmingly, most who gave up at this stage stopped studying altogether (although the data set only followed them for 2 years). Females were more likely to drop out of a vocational qualification, as well as those who had a history of truancy or unfavourable attitudes to school, and young people from lone parent families. Students from ethnic minorities and those living in the North East were less likely to drop out of education. There was no difference between drop out rates for full time education and GST, and other things being equal, Year 11 GCSE results and careers guidance made no difference to vocational students staying on. Finally, AVCEs/ GNVQs had higher drop out rates than NVQs or City and Guilds.

## **What is the nature of participation of working adults?**

There is little research in this area, particularly for non-job related learning for working age adults. However, the DfES (2005) released some findings from the Labour Force Survey about job related training, by people of working age in 2005. In terms of length of training, the majority of workers undertook training for less than a week. A third of economically inactive adults were studying for 3 years or more, however this was mostly made up of under 25s. In terms of length of training by industry, the majority of training is under a week. For agriculture, forestry and fishing, construction, and distribution, hotels and restaurants, over 15% of their training is for 3 years or more.

Most training takes place in further education colleges or universities, or the employers premises, depending on whether the adult is economically active or not and their age. The main place of training does not vary greatly by region. Distribution, hotels and restaurants are most likely to undertake learning at a FE college or university in terms of industries, as well as sales and customer service occupations.

## **What is the nature of participation of older adults?**

Dench and Regan (2000) revisited a sample of adults over 50 from the 1997 NALS survey after 2 years, in order to explore the nature of participation of older adults in more detail. Using the relatively broad definition of learning adopted by NALS, Dench and Regan (2000) found that although vocational learning ranged from 82% for 20-29 year olds to 28% for 60-69 year olds, non-vocational learning remained constant at around 29% for all ages. Thus, it would be useful in further research looking at lifelong learning over the lifecourse to distinguish between vocational and non-vocational learning.

The difference in motivations is also apparent in older learners. Both within their literature review and their findings, (Dench and Regan 2000) found that those in full time employment were more likely to be motivated by work-related reasons, whereas retired adults were learning out of personal interest and fulfilment. Learners were also more likely to have rated their health as excellent/very good and not to have a disability or illness that limited their normal activities.

Two-thirds of learners, over a 5-year period, remained learners. Only 10% became learners during this period and 14% dropped out, (these were more likely to be retired people), and 16% never participated in learning.

New learners were over 3 times more likely to pick a non-taught course than a taught course. Despite this difference, there is limited information on non-taught courses (Dench and Regan 2000), and this is a substantial evidence gap in that the information would be very useful for policy makers aiming to attract new learners. It is generally well acknowledged in the field that once adults start learning, they tend to stay interested and engaged in learning, and thus most current learners have learnt in the past (McGivney 1999; Dench and Regan 2000). Understanding these trends could enable the government to focus resources more efficiently.

The study gives us extensive knowledge on accreditation, timing of courses, location and fees. Most importantly, accreditation was not found to be very important within this sample, with only ¼ of courses leading to a qualification. Although this is likely to be because many are motivated by self interest and the interviews showed that many did not want any qualifications, it could also be because short courses from an employer are less likely to lead to a qualification (Dench and Regan 2000).

Although most of the learning took place in the workplace or employer's training centre, those over 60 were more likely to learn in an adult education institution or further education college. Very little of the measured learning took place in other local and community-based locations, and this could be a reflection of

respondents disassociating this type of learning from adult education (McGivney 1999). While a third of learners did not pay any fees, one third did and for 22%, the employer paid.

Analysis of large data sets can allow us to distinguish between the retired and working age population throughout the analysis, instead of simply looking at those under and over 60 years old. This is especially important as Dench and Regan (2000) highlight that retirement act as a trigger, with many quitting adult learning, and others moving into participation. However, the ones that moved in tended to have an earlier interest in learning.

## **What are the pathways for progression?**

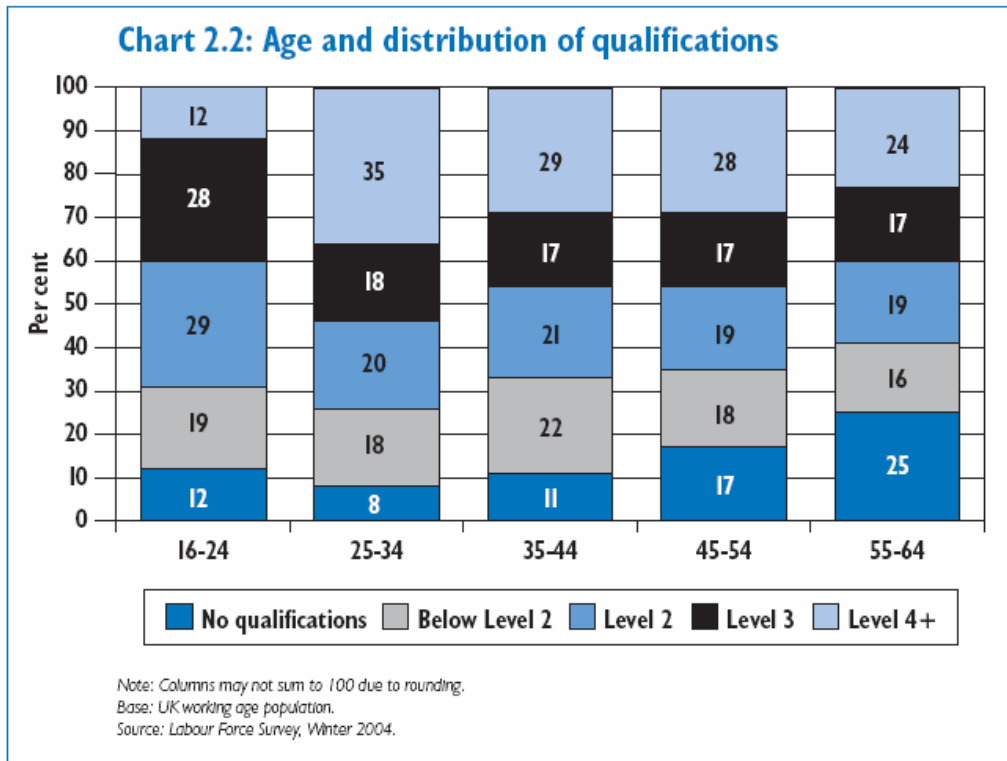
There is limited literature on who gets to level 2 later in life and the pathways they have taken. Before looking at some research it is useful to look at the current qualifications of the population and consider who is engaging in learning.

The Interim Report of the Leitch Review (2005), which sought to provide a summary of the UK skills profile reported that in 2004, more than one quarter of the working age population was qualified to a Level 4 or above, 20 per cent had a highest qualification at level 3, 21% were qualified to level 2 and one third (33%) held less than the equivalent of a level 2 qualification.

Over the past decade, the level of qualification of the working age population has improved, much of which has been brought about by improvements in the qualifications held by young people flowing into the working age population, and older, less well qualified people, retiring. For example, in 2004, 35 per cent of 25-34-year-olds had at least a level 4 qualification, compared with only 24 per cent of 55-64-year-olds. Only 8 per cent of 25-34-year-olds had no qualifications, compared to 25 per cent of 55-64-year olds (Leitch, 2005)

Figure 1 shows that, although having no qualifications increases by age, at least one quarter of all age groups do not have a level 2 qualification, Younger adults, particularly those aged 25-34 are most likely to have achieved a level 2 qualification.

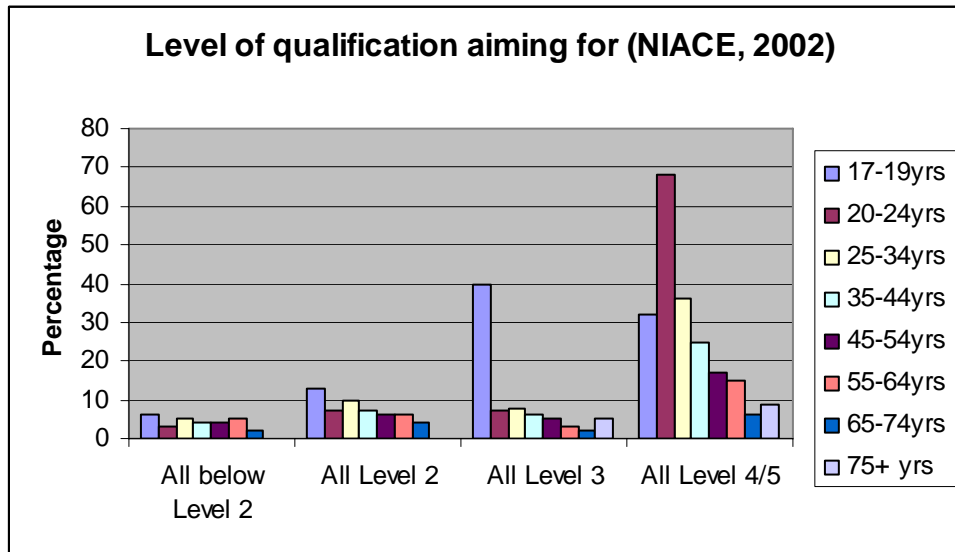
Figure 1: Age distribution of qualifications (LFS)



The NIACE (2002) survey provided some data on the qualifications that adults were working towards (Figure 2). Unsurprisingly, the 17-19 year olds stand out as either studying for level 2, 3 or 4/5 qualifications. A large percentage of 20-24 year olds are studying for level 4/5, which is the expected age to attend university. From this graph we can see that for all ages, most learners on accredited courses are likely to be working towards levels 4/5, i.e. degree level. This is in line with research that shows that learners tend to be more highly educated than other adults (Ferri, Bynner et al. 2003).

Less than 1% of over 75 year olds were working towards a qualification of below level 3. However, adults aged over 75 were almost 3 times more likely not to be aiming for a qualification, which would explain the lack of participation in lower level qualifications. Those aged 20-74 and working towards qualifications are all most likely be taking level 4 or 5 qualifications, and slightly more likely to take level 2 qualifications compared to level 3.

Figure 2: Level of qualification aiming for (NIACE, 2002)



Morrell, Chowdhury et al. (2005) revisited almost 1000 respondents from an earlier study looking at those who had taken adult education courses provided by their LEA. A qualitative exercise involving 20 in-depth interviews also took place involving learners with below level 2 qualifications.

The study found that 73% of respondents had engaged in subsequent learning since their last interview, and those for whom the education provided by the LEA was their first learning experience are less likely to have continued working. Of those that studied the same subject, 32% moved to a more advanced level and 30% changed provider. Almost 60% are studying different subjects to that covered in their 2001/2 course and 28% have gained or are expecting to gain a qualification. Furthermore, those with less than level 2 qualifications are more likely than others to have moved up a qualification level, 20% and 13% for those with no or level 1 qualifications. Those who had not participated in any learning since the last interview attributed it to time pressures and course availability.

## What are the barriers to participation?

Barriers to participation have been classified in a number of different ways. Cross (1981, cited by NIACE, 2002) identified situational, institutional and dispositional barriers. Hillage et al. (2000) chose similar types but named the groups physical or material, structural and attitudinal barriers. Taking Hillage et al. (2000) classification, practical or material barriers refer to the personal or family situation. These barriers include financial and time constraints, lack of good, affordable childcare, lack of information, geographical isolation. Structural barriers relate to the unresponsiveness of the institution, also including lack of local learning opportunities, availability of work-related training and benefit disincentives. Attitudinal barriers relate to attitudes, perceptions and expectations of adults. Here, obstacles include lack of confidence or motivation, negative attitudes to education and training, peer group culture and perceptions of irrelevance.

However, some important barriers do not clearly fall into either of the types or fall into more than one group. For instance, access to a course could be a structural barrier if there is not any local provision or the course is being run in an isolated area without any public transport. However, it may become a practical barrier if there is public transport but the adult cannot afford to get there, or there is no way to access the transport. Alternatively, it may be an attitudinal barrier if the government expects people to travel up to half an hour to attend a course, but an adult is unwilling to travel further than 15 minutes.

For this reason, we shall refer to demand side barriers, where they are individual barriers, and supply side, where they reflect institutional barriers. Not only does this classification ease understanding as to where there is a demand and supply mismatch, but it also enables policy makers to see how demand and supply side factors interact, and how a possible solution to a supply side barrier may help alleviate a demand side problem. This places a new emphasis on both types of solutions, as many campaigns tend to focus on demand side factors, such as the adult literacy TV commercials encouraging people to overcome their 'gremlins' and return to education. It also addresses the issue of deciding whether to use a demand side or supply side solution, depending on the responsiveness of all the factors.

Table 1 describes the types of barriers and where the demand/supply mismatch lies. By viewing the obstacles in this manner, it is possible to form demand or supply led solutions to the barriers. In order to create solutions, we will need to know who the courses are being targeted at and also whether the demand or supply side is more responsive.

*Table 1: Types of barriers and the demand/supply mismatch*

| <b>Type of barrier</b> | <b>Demand Side Factors</b>  | <b>Supply Side Factors</b>  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Financial              | Income, preferences (value of education), extra costs e.g. childcare; owning car  | Fees, indirect costs e.g. books, travel   |
| Psychosocial           | Attitudes and expectations to learning; disengagement from learning; lack of motivations                                    | Unresponsiveness of institution to match individual's needs.  |
| Cultural               | Cultural factors: preconceived image of education; social construction of opportunities                                     | Campaigns to target learners  |
| Time                   | Work, family pressures, home support  | Timing/length of courses, amount of extra work given  |
| Information            | Awareness of and access to information gateways e.g. internet & TV/radio commercials, social network, interest in education | Learning campaigns and other initiatives, and their success at targeting both learners and non-learners |
| Geographical           | Distance and willingness to travel  | Insufficient local provision, problems with transport   |

Financial barriers encompass fees of the course, indirect costs, such as books and travel, as well as other costs, such as childcare. In the NIACE (2002) survey, 10% recent learners cited cost as a barrier to learning. However, only 5% of those who had not participated in learning since initially leaving full time education cited this as a barrier. On the other hand, in the NALS (2002) study, 25% reported that it was hard to pay the course fees. Half of these respondents reported that they would only learn if someone else paid the fees. With further research, we would be able to identify whether a supply led solution, of perhaps reducing the fees, or a demand led solution, such as a campaign to increase the value of education among adults, would lead to the greatest increase in participation in adult learning.

More men than women reported work or other time pressures in the 2002 NIACE survey. Work pressures were more likely to be reported by current/recent/past learners (25%), with the figure decreasing by 40% to those who have never learnt. The NALS (2002) survey reported slightly higher figures again for this obstacle, with significantly more learners reporting time pressures than non-learners. In addition, 1/5 of respondents report lack of time due to their family (Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002).

Almost a quarter of respondents report difficulties in knowing of learning opportunities (Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002). Only 1% of adults reported this as a problem in the NIACE (2002) study. Almost a third of respondents would rather

do other things than learn and 13% are not interested in learning (Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002).

A significant number of respondents reported being unable to find local opportunities and problems arranging transport to a course, 12% and 8% respectively (Fitzgerald, Taylor et al. 2002). The NIACE (2002) survey shows that only 1% cited transport or too far to travel as a problem.

In the NIACE (2002) survey, 25% reported that they were not interested in learning, with the figure increasing to 37% for those who have never learnt since initially leaving full time education. In addition, more than 1 in 7 are nervous about returning to a classroom, are worried about keeping up and have difficulties with literacy and numeracy. Increased information on the types of courses or support available may alleviate worries and encourage non-learners to take up a new course. Gorard, Rees et al. (1997) argues that although there may be opportunities for learning available, it may be the individual's social construction of those opportunities that are more important. In this case, it may be that institutions must work on new methods of networking, such as word of mouth or through informal settings.

Marks (2000) argues that the British working class has a set of values which deny the value and significance of education. Generally, the critique has 3 elements; firstly, education is effeminate and not 'real' work, secondly, education is boring and does not lead to better things, and finally education is controlled by the state and is a form of social control. These values are very hard to break down and only with a dramatic reorganisation of universities will the image held by the working class alter.

It is clear from these studies that the NALS (2002) survey tends to have much higher percentages reporting obstacles than NIACE in 2002, with the exception of those not interested in learning. This exception may be because the NALS surveys offer a broader definition in learning, and so respondents in the NIACE surveys are more likely to disassociate informal learning from learning, and thus be less interested in any type of 'learning'. Interestingly, financial worries and work pressures are more likely to be reported by learners than non-learners. This ties in with research from the Campaign for Learning (2004) that produced some qualitative research looking into motivations and barriers with learning rejecters among mothers, young people and most-nesters. They concluded that genuine motivation comes from intrinsic motivation, and 'removal of functional barriers will not equate to motivation to learn; barriers are, often, merely excuses for not learning, and there are no cultural or societal pressures to challenge that "excuse making"' (p4).

In summary, it would seem that very prevalent demand and supply issues are causing substantive barriers to participation. However, financial and time barriers are more likely to be cited by learners than non-learners and thus it would seem

that they are not the main reason for non-participation. It may be that with further research, similar to the Campaign for Learning (2004) report, we would find that demand led barriers, such as preferences, are the most important barriers in terms of finance, time and access to the course, and supply led solutions may be more important for information services. Nevertheless, this is not to say that supply barriers should mostly be ignored, as they will help to ease the transition into participation and encourage other learners to participate again in the future. The response to the problem thus depends on the target audience, and on this basis whether it is a demand or supply led approach that would lead to the most effective solution.

## Discussion

There is limited research on participation in adult learning over the lifecourse. This is because most of the literature in this area is based on cross-sectional studies, which have limited information about the life histories of individuals. Results from these studies suggest that the following factors are most strongly associated with progression to level 2 qualifications: age, gender and ethnicity, region of residence, staying on in education post compulsory schooling, and current socioeconomic status. It also depends on the learners' motivations and opportunities for learning. All these factors are interrelated.

There are several shortcomings from the results obtained so far. First, most studies are based on cross-sectional data which contain detailed information on participation but define socio-economic status in a very broad way. Whether it is class, education or income that dominates as cause seems to be of little importance. Yet, there are complex interactions between socio-economic status, education, income and other background variables. For the task of understanding the determinants of participation in courses leading to qualifications it is important to be able to distinguish between these different socio-economic factors.

Second, results from cross-sectional data limit the scope for inference from the results. Longitudinal studies contain a wealth of information on individual histories, as well as information on survey members' parents and on their children. Therefore, it is possible to utilise a more long-term approach to understanding the factors that affect progression and the relative strength of these factors. Lastly, qualitative inquiry provides detailed information on the mechanism and processes underlying the decision to participate in courses and the benefits of these courses, but due to their commonly small sample sizes such results do not provide information to be able to generalise and externally validate for more general populations. Addressing these issues is important to inform current public policy which focus on accreditation and investment on attaining level 2 qualifications.

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