

WORKING PAPER 1

The significance of formal education & training in adults' lives

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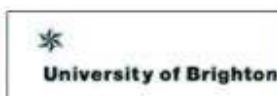
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See www.tlrp.org



The Learning Lives Research Project

The Learning Lives research project began in June 2004, and runs until the end of January 2008. The project is a collaboration between the University of Exeter, the University of Brighton, the University of Leeds and the University of Stirling, all in the UK. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of its Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). The award number is RES-139-25-0111.

The focus of the research is on the interrelationships between learning, identity and agency in people's lives. There are two strands to the data collection, involving the integration of three different methodologies. The first strand is a qualitative study of around 120 people, drawn from different walks of life, living in different parts of the country, and of different ages, gender and ethnicities. Each of the university partners has its own sub-sample, with different core interests. The Exeter team (Gert Biesta and Mike Tedder) are focused on learning, identity and agency in relation to family and the local community. The Brighton team (Ivor Goodson and Norma Adair) are focused on issues of migration, including within country migration. The Leeds team (Phil Hodgkinson, Heather Hodgkinson, Geoff Ford and Ruth Hawthorn) are focused on people engaged in adult learning and/or guidance, and on older adults. The Stirling team (John Field and originally Irene Malcolm, now Heather Lynch) are focused on work and unemployment. Of course, these issues overlap. On the qualitative strand, we are combining two normally separate methodologies: life history research and longitudinal qualitative research. Though we will have a shorter engagement with some of the sample, we are following most subjects for over 3 years, involving about six sweeps of interviewing.

The second strand of our work is quantitative. A second Exeter team (Flora Macleod and Paul Lambe) is using the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) – a data set of 10,000+ adults from across the UK who have been interviewed annually since 1991 – to develop robust measures of formal and informal learning, identity and agency in their different dimensions and to test the validity of these measures against a range of outcome variables. Once these theoretically informed instruments have been developed using BHPS variables, longitudinal data analysis techniques (multilevel models of individual change and hazard/survival models of event occurrence in both discrete and continuous time) will be applied to explore the significance of learners' identities and agency for their learning, dispositions, practices and achievements and how transformations in a given individual's dispositions, practices and achievements impact upon their sense of identity and agency and their ability to exert control over their lives.

To establish an iterative relationship between the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data we are mapping the case study participants' learning trajectories onto wider trends and processes in the UK as revealed through analysis of the BHPS.

Working Papers

This paper is one of a series of working papers being produced as part of the Learning Lives research. These papers are of very different types, and their prime purpose is to help the team with its on-going analysis and synthesis of findings. Consequently, they represent work in progress. A second purpose is to share some of our preliminary findings and thinking with a wider audience. We hope that you will find this paper, and others in the series, of interest and value. If you have constructive critical comments to offer we would love to hear from you. Please send any comments to the contact author, identified on the front cover.

The significance of formal education & training in adults' lives

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Introduction: Learning and Change

Change is central to living a life. In the stories collected in the Learning Lives project, we can see people living in different circumstances and with different needs, at different times. Their relationships with and experiences of learning also change. In this Working Paper we explore the complex nature of some of those changes, with an explicit focus on experiences of what is often termed 'formal' education and training.

The Leeds team have drawn their sample from either people engaged in adult education courses (broadly defined) or from those engaged with adult guidance. This, added to the central concern of policy makers with planned provision, led us to concentrate our first working paper on formal education and training. The fact that most of the people in

our sample are older means that we can look at formal education and training across a long period of the life course. It also means that much of what follows relates to particular generation groups - those now over 50. The exceptions are Wafa Jabeen¹ and Louise Smith, who are in their thirties.

As Colley et al. (2003) demonstrate, the terms formal and informal are very imprecise when applied to learning. There is no agreed definition of either. In practice they overlap considerably, and attributes of formality and informality occur in most if not all learning situations. Here, we are concerned with learning practices that are explicitly structured for learning, as courses or parts of courses, in locations intended for learning. They are normally led by a tutor or trainer, and would have taken place whether any particular learner joined or not. In drawing up this definition of 'formal', we are not distinguishing between education and training, but considering both.

Here we explore several issues around the changing relationship between people and formal education and training: 1) Phases of engagement, 2) Social position, 3) Reasons for engagement 4) Interrelationships between formal and informal learning, 5) Success and failure, 6) Agency, 7) Identity. These issues have considerable overlaps and interrelationships, but the first three are broadly concerned with reasons for and patterns of engagement; the next two focus on experiences of learning; and the last two begin to link our analysis to the major conceptual concerns of the Learning Lives project.

1). Phases of Engagement with Formal Education and Training

For all the people in our sample, the majority of their engagement with formal education and training occurred for sustained periods of their lives, sometimes interspersed by sustained periods of non-engagement. These patterns of phased engagement and non-engagement become visible when the whole life course (to date) is considered. They may be less obvious if the focus is only on one period of a few years. This division of lives into phases of engagement involves some simplification. Thus, a period of non-engagement may still contain isolated examples of, for example, attendance at one-day training programmes, whilst a phase of engagement will contain periods where no engagement with formal education or training took place. With these provisos, engagement normally lasted several years, and normally involved participation in several different courses. One way of understanding the differences in patterns of engagement with formal education and training is through the number and timing of these phases.

A Single Period of Engagement

Gladys Dean is a small 66 year-old woman. Widowed, she lives alone in the family home, a tidy semi-detached house. She grew up in the West Indies, where she had virtually no schooling, as was common for a girl in a rural area. She had two children before following her second partner (whom she later married) to the UK. She went out to work as soon as she arrived. She has worked in a series of low status jobs until recently, taking only short periods off to have another four children. Her children have done well at school and have decent jobs, houses and cars. Gladys has been unable to read or write for most of her life. "I always tell them [my children] to take their education

¹ The names of people in the paper are pseudonyms.

and mine, for I don't have any... they are settled, they are really good. Proud of myself for that."

Thus, Gladys did not start her only period of engagement with formal education until two years after she retired, nearly 20 years after her husband died. Encouraged and supported by her eldest daughter, she enrolled on a basic literacy course in a local community centre. At the time of writing Gladys is in her fifth year there, and attends courses on four mornings a week. Literacy is central, but she has also been encouraged to study maths, and is doing a couple of courses using practical skills which she has learned informally earlier in her life - sewing and cookery.

Her progress in reading and writing has been slow but she feels it has made a considerable difference to her life. As well as practical improvements in her ability to deal with written material, Gladys's self-confidence is growing all the time. She no longer feels oppressed. She feels independent for the first time. She is able to do things she enjoys and is eager to do more. All this is largely the result of going to college, where she has had huge support from staff and students which has allowed her to flourish. She sees continued attendance at college as central to her progress and happiness.

Derek Hutchinson, has also only had one phase of formal education and training but, more conventionally in the UK setting, this came early in his life. He did well at school, was in the 'grammar school stream' and reached county standard in athletics. However, he left school at the first opportunity for financial reasons – to help provide for the family. He went directly to a carpentry apprenticeship with a local firm, subsequently moving to a different company to broaden his experience. Neither firm offered day release to college. All the training was on the job, and he learned skills to a very high level. Derek's sustained engagement with formal education and training ended when he left school. After that he lived a life filled with learning of a wide range of types and purposes. He is now 62, and remains a highly active 'informal' learner in such areas as local history, philately and IT.

Two or more Periods of Engagement

The vast majority of our sample showed intermittent engagement with formal education and training, interspersed with periods of non-engagement. That is, formal education and training were significant at some stages in their lives but not in others. All of this group experienced schooling as children and several progressed to university. However, the nature of the schooling experience varied. For **Tony Wilf**, engagement with formal education and training fell into two periods. School brought unpleasant memories, and was largely associated with lack of success. He left without qualifications and was barely able to read or write. He spent much of his working life in a series of unskilled jobs, moving from one to another in ways he described as 'ducking and diving'. He had to leave one job as a rope maker because there was some formal training but his writing skills were too poor for him to cope. His working life included two significant periods of stability in jobs he enjoyed. He revelled in his identity as a manual worker.

Tony avoided further formal education and training until he was in his 50s. At that time his wife had just died, he was responsible for his family, and his daughter was struggling in school. He got her a computer to help overcome her handwriting problems, and then thought that he ought to learn how to use it himself in order to help her. He enrolled for a basic computer course at a local community learning centre. During the computer course he became curious about English language - for example instructions included words

like “paragraph”. He signed up for English at the same centre. This was not a success. There was a big classroom with people learning at different levels and only limited personal attention. It began to feel like school again: he was being told to do things that were relevant for the teacher, rather than being helped to achieve the agenda he had set up for himself. This revived his anger towards school and he was ready to give up. However, his sister-in-law, who had college contacts, encouraged him to try English again at a different centre. The move worked well. The tutor was much more sympathetic. He was diagnosed as dyslexic like his daughter, and the relatively simple system of using a coloured background has led to a big improvement in his reading, enthusiasm for writing and a growing self-confidence.

Like Tony, **Sergei Semenov** has had two periods of engagement with formal education and training, with a very long gap in between. Sergei’s schooling, in Estonia, was successful. After secondary education he attended the local mining college. At 19 his education was interrupted by two years national service. On his return he worked in a coal mine while studying first part-time and then fulltime at the local branch of the St Petersburg Polytechnical Institute. This lasted 6 years. He describes no examples of formal education or training for the following 20 or so years. Sergei was born in Estonia, but had Russian parents and a Russian passport. When Estonia became independent in 1991, his life became very difficult. He fled to Britain in 1999. There he went to English language and electrical engineering courses, and although he worked for two years after that, he was made redundant, and since then has been existing on occasional poorly paid casual work and low levels of benefit. His second engagement with formal education was relatively brief and has not yet led to on-going success.

For **Joseph Pryce**, engagement in formal education and training fell into three periods. His early education was at school in the West Indies, where he remembers reaching a good standard in, for example, English literature. Despite this, when he moved to England he was put in the bottom stream of a secondary modern school. In three years he worked his way to the top stream, and took some CSE exams. Then the family moved to another city and Joseph didn’t return to school. Following his father’s wishes, he undertook a five-year electrical apprenticeship, including day release to college. He did well, and gained an OND. He believes that this classroom learning was an important addition to what he learned on the job. During the same period he signed up for an evening class in guitar playing. That didn’t provide what he wanted at the time but he now wishes he had persisted, to complement his informal learning of music.

Joseph’s second phase of engagement came after several years working as an electrician and a musician. He became progressively more involved in his local black West Indian community. He became aware of the prejudice against them, especially from the police in the ‘70s. He saw friends “picked on” apparently unreasonably by the police. As he became committed and started taking a more active role (e.g. in helping the younger generation), he wanted to know more and joined courses being organised in the community to increase self- pride and self help. He attended courses about Black History to improve his understanding of his own and the community’s roots, and courses about the British legal system to enable him to avoid trouble and help others.

There followed a long gap in formal educational engagement, as Joseph’s life progressed through a happy marriage and a successful career. He ran his own electrical business and moved into property development. Eventually, a major investment failed, leading to bankruptcy and a serious personal crisis. After a year of

withdrawal he was placed on the “New Deal” scheme for long term unemployed. This made him identify possible new routes for his career – in computers or Health and Safety Inspection, both of which related to previous experience without taking him back to his old work, which he now wanted to avoid. He was sent on college courses to develop employment skills in both these fields. He found the courses interesting and used some of the skills learned, as he started upgrading and re-selling old computers from home, for other students. He was moving on from his crisis. He feels the most important factor in his recovery was his renewed faith in God, following considerable time spent studying the Bible on his own.

During his next computer course, he was spotted by a tutor who knew him from his time in the electrical industry. This tutor suggested that he had no need to be doing such a course, but that with his electrical background he could be teaching. He was eventually persuaded to try this, found that he enjoyed teaching and was successful. His formal learning continued because it is now a requirement that college lecturers be trained. The college sent him on a part-time course to obtain “City and Guilds 731”, and then for a Certificate of Education.

Joe had been sent back to formal learning, not entirely against his will, but now, as a teacher responsible for the development of others and as an individual aware that there is so much more to know, Joe wanted to continue his own learning. He enrolled on a foundation degree. He is enjoying the course, though his current lifestyle does not allow him to spend enough time on it. He is not happy with the standard of work he is producing, but keen to continue learning.

Timothy Keane has experienced several periods of engagement with formal education and training. He was born in 1951. Early childhood problems led to underachievement at school: Timothy was emotionally fragile and had great difficulty in concentrating academically even though he had shown initial promise. He did less well than expected at A-level and, influenced by his foster family, enrolled on a business studies HND from which he soon dropped out.

This was followed by a significant gap in his formal education and training. He earned his living by doing a variety of casual jobs for two years, and then moved to London, where he became fascinated by the theatre. He got work as a film extra, then worked for 10 years for one theatre company in low-status jobs. Following the theatre company’s closure he found similar work elsewhere, and it was during this time that he re-engaged with formal education through a series of part-time Open University courses. A careers adviser suggested that he could have another attempt at higher education, and he then went to university in London. However the old problem of concentration persisted, and although he got his degree and started an MA, he didn’t finish the latter, bringing his second phase to an end. He returned to fulltime casual work, but a third phase began with evening classes in acting. These went so well that he changed his work to part-time and signed on for an acting course, which he has supplemented with private study in singing and languages. In his early fifties, he is using formal training to embark on an acting career that he has hovered around throughout much of his life so far.

Continuous Engagement

For three women, participating in formal education and training has always been and remains a central part of their lives, with no substantial periods of non-engagement.

Anna Reynard, in her 60s, describes education as 'the leitmotif of her life'. She is a learner, a teacher and someone who has always had a deep interest in education for its own sake and for all people. Her parents were forced to leave school early, and her father was determined that his children would have the educational opportunities denied to him. Anna was successful at school and then studied languages at University. She had a problematic 2nd year, but returned to complete her degree motivated by her own wish to succeed. She wanted to write after graduating, but was talked into getting a teaching qualification, which she did at a Welsh college. Anna's life since then has been committed to education, for herself and for others, especially those whose access to it is restricted. She has a joy in learning which she wants others to share.

After her first teaching job, Anna had a five year career break bringing up her children. During this time she read a lot. She took a short Preschool Playgroups Association course before running a playgroup in a neighbouring estate, and a children's library group. She moved on from her reading to do a Post-graduate Diploma in Educational Psychology and Sociology, but didn't complete the dissertation to turn it into a Master's degree, because she started looking for a job again.

There followed a long period in a series of jobs in or around education. For much of this varied career short courses were available for professional development, and Anna was always keen to learn. She focussed on those she thought would address her own perceived shortcomings and advance her understanding, as well as those required by workplace imperatives.

Later, at a time when she was finding school teaching stressful and unsatisfying, an HE College, where she had previously worked, offered a bursary for a research degree. Anna ended her teaching career and spent five years gaining a PhD, researching issues which had been a central concern to her in schools.

She is now retired but involved with U3A in her home town. She enjoys the flexibility of the organisation. It provides a varied range of subjects which she can study, and as a volunteer tutor she has more freedom than ever before to teach in way which she chooses.

Whereas Anna recognised and celebrated the significance of formal education and training in her life, for **Rebecca Wright** it is less overt. She went to school in Jamaica until she came to the UK at the age of 13. She went straight into a London comprehensive and enjoyed it, but left at 16 with no qualifications. However she carried on doing evening classes in typing, shorthand and English during her first job in a shop. When she had gained some qualifications she moved to an office job, carrying on evening classes all the time in a range of subjects, not necessarily work-related. Learning was becoming a way of life. She then tried to get into a local Polytechnic to do computing, in the early days of punch cards. Her lack of school leaving qualifications blocked that, but she signed up for a fulltime computing course in an FE college.

Rebecca then spent 25 years working in offices for various employers, during which time she continued evening classes in 'leisure' subjects such as cake decoration and flower-arranging, mostly very successfully, though she had problems studying French. She left work recently after a period of stress-related illness, and has moved into a more instrumental phase. This began with short courses in job-search skills with a local private employment agency. She attributes a subsequent career move to a confidence-building

course which she took at a local community centre. She decided to move into care work, picking up on an early life disappointment, when she had been told she couldn't go in for nursing because she was too short. The Jobcentre sent her on a three-week course in basic care skills which was followed by a short induction training course by a care agency once she had started work with them. She is now planning to take NVQ training in care, weighing up the relative advantages of getting her employer to finance it or financing it herself.

Jennifer Whitefield who has pursued formal learning all her life. She was successful at school but left in rebellious mode before completing her A-levels. After a short period of unemployment she joined the army. They provided training for all the jobs they needed undertaken but also encouraged and financed personal learning. As soon as she was established in an office job that was well within her capacity, Jennifer revived her interest in learning languages, gaining several A and O levels through correspondence courses. She'd have liked to go to university to study linguistics when she came out of the army but her A-levels weren't good enough. So she did a degree equivalent college diploma in business and languages, passing in addition professional exams in translation. Boyfriend and marriage made a move into a translation career difficult so she went on to train as an FE teacher. She is now in her late 50s, and has spent most of her life as a teacher, interspersed with periods as a translator (now her main occupation). Throughout her working life she took courses to enhance her careers and for personal interest.

2). Social Position, and Formal Education and Training

It is well known that a person's position in society influences their engagement with learning. For example, most UK university students come from the middle classes and people in higher status jobs have greater opportunities for job-related education and training than those in lower status jobs. Similarly, career and learning opportunities and experiences are gendered. There is research showing that ethnicity also relates to access to and success in education in the UK, although it is not a straightforward picture. Additionally, there are geographical influences on engagement and success in education. Many of these inter-related positional influences are visible in our data.

Gladys Dean's experiences reflect the fact that she is of Afro-Caribbean origin, female, illegitimate, and working class. Had she been a male and/or middle class child in Jamaica, she would have been more likely to have attended school. She already had two children before she came to Britain, and had worked hard caring for her extended family. When she arrived in Britain her partner insisted that she find work straight away, arranging child care for the one-year-old she brought with her. She had to raise money for her family in Britain and to send back to Jamaica. Gladys's life has been dominated by hard work. She had four more children, and at one time was doing three paid jobs as well as looking after home and family. There was no thought of or time for her own education. Her husband controlled all matters requiring reading and writing. Her marriage was initially happy but over the years her husband became abusive, to the extent that she was sometimes scared to come home. He didn't let her go out for her own entertainment. He would never have let her go to classes - not that she considered it. Her return to formal education happened long after her husband had died, after she retired from work and when all her children had left home. Her inability to read or even sign her name became increasingly problematic, but without her daughter's

encouragement she would have been too scared and embarrassed to approach a college.

Gender and ethnicity figure strongly in **Wafa Jabeen's** relationship with education. She is a 35-year-old British Asian from a Pakistani background living in a pleasant semi in a mixed race area. She dresses traditionally and is married with one son. Although she now chooses to stay at home and take on family responsibilities, she is a qualified teacher who saw education as an escape route from the traditional Pakistani woman's role. Gaining a high status university place and job is acceptable in families like hers. Wafa was born and started school in the south of England, where her father was a postman. She perceives her childhood as slightly unusual for an Asian girl - more child-centred than most, with toys and books and visits to the library with her father. She liked school. They moved north to be with the extended family when her father became seriously ill. Her nuclear family had high aspirations for her, and she was supposed to aim to be doctor or a dentist. Her 'A'levels weren't good enough. In her perception, although her father pushed and encouraged her, her secondary school was not a particularly good one and allowed pupils to drift. Fortunately she loved the teacher-training course which was her fallback option, and the teaching which followed it.

She started teaching in primary schools in the northern town where she lived, and then married a cousin who was working in London. Wafa enjoyed the work and the social life in London, living more freely than she had with her parents. However when she became pregnant it seemed appropriate to move back north. She saw this as a better place to bring up a child because the rest of the family were there and because the pace of life was gentler. She moved in with her husband's parents and underwent one of the most traumatic periods of her life with infighting and power struggles within the family as they sought to dominate her and later her son. Her husband took about six months to sell their London flat and find a local job, and they were then able to move into their present house. Wafa and her seven-year-old son now avoid the husband's side of the family as much as they can as she resents their treatment of her. She chooses to stay at home to look after her son while he is young and enjoys the freedom she has. In this last seven years she has been available to help her own parents and sister when they needed her, and she has time to do things for herself which includes attending courses "to keep my brain active". She has joined a number of one-session-a-week courses. She has chosen subjects she is interested in from what was available locally, fitting around her son's timetable. She has also been to courses with a view to benefiting her family and contributing to the local community, particularly her generation of British Asian women.

Social class and masculinity are central to **William Moore's** story. He is now 61 years old, having been born into a working class coal-mining family. His father worked at the coalface and was keen that his son should not follow in his footsteps. His ambition for William – as with many coalminers for their children – was that he should get a 'white-collar job' and he supported William's school career accordingly. William was the first in his family to pass the 11+ and attend the local grammar school, to the delight of his mother. William's uncle, who lived next door, was also pleased and supportive; he had passed the 11+ before the War but had been unable to take up his place at the grammar school for financial reasons.

The cultural split that the 11+ produced in the local community affected William deeply. Passing the 11+ created a barrier between himself and the many friends he had made through his other activities and who didn't pass. He was following a mainly academic

curriculum, unlike his peers who were attending the local secondary modern and being equipped for more practical careers, including following their forbears down the pit. William's studies suffered because of the difficulty he experienced trying to reconcile the two cultures.

William does not feel he received much encouragement or understanding from his teachers and achieved only three good grades in GCE O level (including art which was his strongest subject). He left school in 1960 (aged 16) to enter a white-collar job in sales and marketing. However, he did not feel suited to a career as a salesman and wanted to work in the "big city". He left sales in 1962 to become a trainee lace designer and draughtsman, a career in which he was able to combine his interests in design, machinery and production. Thus, having left coal mining behind, he entered upon a skilled working class career. However, he soon became self-employed, initially with a partner and then alone. He is still partially self-employed. As part of his apprenticeship, William's first lace production employer sent him for day release to two colleges, the local technical college and the art college. In the first he learned practical textile manufacturing techniques and in the second the principles of lace design. William feels that some of the techniques learned at the technical college were useful (for example, warp and weft knitting) and others less so. He considers the art college course was less successful because the tutor favoured a different lace manufacturing machine to the one William worked on. Those, like the tutor, who had learned the older more flexible machine looked down on those who used the newer faster one. William's learning suffered as a consequence. Neither course was planned to lead to any form of qualification, but were typical of a craft apprenticeship.

Engagement with formal education and training then stopped for William, as his workplace learning was practically based. However, William continued to learn informally, largely teaching himself to play cornet and trumpet, which has enabled him to perform to a high standard and to be paid for doing so. William and his family have also lived abroad for extended periods, and he is fluent in Spanish and Italian - again mainly through learning informally.

However, the increasing difficulties William has encountered in obtaining contracts as the industry has moved increasingly to the Far East, led him to enrol in 2004 on a college course in IT aimed at the European Computer Driving Licence, which he has now passed successfully. In common with many people of his generation, he retains strong personal and work values instilled within the tight-knit working class community into which he was born, and these have driven him in his search for further employment.

Sometimes, a change in position leads to engagement with formal education or training. Thus when **Peter Weddle** joined the army in World War II, there were many training opportunities, and he volunteered for courses that he felt would equip him for eventual civilian life. This included courses that taught him to drive a range of vehicles, a skill which Peter says was instrumental in helping him to obtain a sales representative post with a national television company (in the late 50s and early 60s driving skills were still at a premium). Peter also received formal training in gunnery and as a signaller (much of his army career was spent in this trade). Army training was formally recognised by entries in his pay book which also recorded the class grade achieved. Peter appears to have reached high grades in each trade.

3). Reasons for engaging in formal education and training

In this section we are not concerned with schooling, because school attendance was the cultural norm, reinforced by legal obligation, for all except Gladys Dean. Our interest is in the continuation of formal education and training beyond school and/or eventual reengagement with it later. The reasons for this adult engagement are often complex. However, most of the adult engagement in our sample concerned at least one of four clusters of factors: (i) responding to life-changing events; (ii) employment issues; (iii) personal interest and enjoyment; and (iv) to be able to help others.

Responding to Life-changing Events and Solving Personal Problems

For many of our sample, (re)engagement with formal education and training was triggered by a major crisis, associated with a significant life change. For many this meant that their position also changed. **Joseph Pryce's** changes of status have already been described. **Tony Wilf** enrolled on college courses following the cumulative effects of disablement, the loss of a secure and satisfying job, followed by the death of his wife and his consequent decision to give up employment and become a homemaker. It is too simple to claim that this change of position caused his engagement, but it significantly contributed to it as he wanted to help his daughter, and then found college provided the structure that his weeks now lacked. **Stephen Connor** reengaged with formal education after he had to retire following a work accident, and found that life at home seemed to be leading him to slip back into depression (see fuller story below). **Jeff James** had been made redundant because of the increasing transfer of his industrial sector to Far Eastern companies. The trauma this has caused Jeff has exacerbated an alcohol problem, which has also contributed to the break up of his marriage. Though he had engaged with formal education and training on earlier occasions, Jeff's recognition of his need to overcome his alcoholism led directly to his most recent enrolment, on a residential rehabilitation course at his own expense. **Jim Huzzar** re-engaged with formal education, as a response to boredom, loss of the wage earner role, and consequent depression after he had retired (see below).

Sergei Semenov arrived in Britain, alone as a refugee. This major life change meant that he needed to learn English to survive daily life. He opted to attend a course. He also had to learn something that he hoped would help him to get work, and took a basic electrician course.

Sometimes, reengagement was triggered by the need to overcome personal difficulties, though not directly associated with one particular life-changing event. Thus, **Gladys Dean** was struggling to live alone, following a cumulative series of changes – the death of her husband, her youngest child leaving home and retirement. These changes were separated by lengthy periods of time. There was also significant gap between the last of these and her daughter persuading her to enrol on a course. Her story also illustrates the dangers in seeing reasons for engagement purely in terms of personal agency.

Employment

As with many men, **Stephen Connor's** adult engagement with formal education and training has been primarily related to employment, though that changed after he retired. Stephen had opportunities to become either an entertainer in Blackpool or a professional footballer, but his parents insisted that he should do a 'proper apprenticeship' and he respected their wishes. He was able to choose an area he was interested in – TV

engineering, which was a growth area at the time when conversions to receive ITV were in demand. Because of inadequate schooling, he had to go to “night school” in order to “scrape through” into Technical College for his apprenticeship, although he was still behind others. During the apprenticeship he did four days a week at work, a day and a night at college plus at least two other nights. Much of this was to help him catch up in the maths required for the main apprenticeship course.

There were frequent innovations in the electronics industry and frequent courses to enable their introduction. Stephen moved into supervisory roles fairly early on in his career, becoming responsible for organizing the work, and was always one of the first to be sent on a course. He describes the courses as essential. There was no-one more experienced to learn from locally, and the skills couldn't be developed by “working it out for yourself”. The courses were organized by the national TV rental firm for whom he worked. Before the introduction of BBC 2 and colour TV he went to London for a week every month for three years. He was responsible for passing on his knowledge – acquired initially through formal learning and then through practical experience - to younger workers. He was the trouble shooter when they couldn't cope.

In the 1980s he moved on from the job he had enjoyed with the TV rental chain, now in decline, to a regional electrical chain. Microwaves were being introduced at that time and the company wanted to acquire the repair franchise for one brand, so Stephen was sent to the maker's training course and passed their exams. It led to overwork because he still had to manage the TV repairs locally, at the same time as having to travel half the country troubleshooting for industrial microwaves. He put pressure on himself because he wouldn't let colleagues down, and ended up in hospital suffering from depression. He returned to a less stressful job outside the electronics industry, but after a few years suffered a physical accident and was forced to retire.

Others, as we have already seen, have taken courses to develop skills which they hope will lead to new employment

Personal Interest and Enjoyment

Elsie Sayer had a satisfying life at work until the “Gas Board” was privatised, when the job changed and became stressful. There weren't enough staff and the rules kept changing, so she retired - “and I've been enjoying myself ever since”. When she left work she wanted time to recover and “mess about”. She didn't want to undertake anything challenging. She had plenty to do including walking, visiting friends, and a long promised holiday to the USA. A few years later, the sudden death of a friend marked a turning point. It coincided with her irritation with the misuse of English on radio and television, which made her want to learn more about the English language. She was ready to take on something new. She “went back to college”, about five years after she retired.

This first venture back into formal education was an English Language course. She enjoyed the experience: “She was a smashing teacher and ... a small class ... And we had some smashing times there, it was a lot of fun. ... She grabbed us all – you know, she grabbed us kicking and screaming through the exam.” Elsie achieved an A at GCSE. “The following year I went to her at a different college and we did creative writing.” Elsie is happy to go to different locations for courses she chooses. In the third year she studied English literature, in which she got a B in spite of not liking

Shakespeare. Since then she has also studied Sociology and History gaining a C for each at GCSE. She utilised the life of her older sister for her course work in Sociology. Elsie is happy to argue with teachers, and was inspired by one teacher to develop a deep love of history which leads her to visit to mills, stately homes and other places of historical interest.

A course in photography failed to fulfil her needs as she spent long periods waiting for technical assistance and to use equipment. She stopped attending but still signed in to stop the course closing for others. Another “failure” was a computer course, though she didn’t regret trying it. “I made a monkey of myself every bloody week but that’s beside the point. It wasn’t for me wasn’t that, but I wanted to tackle it to say I’d tried.”

She studied local history, focusing on churches and education in a geographical area of relevance to her personal history. It involved research in the library in the city centre as well as local libraries, and asking people, since she had local contacts. She solved some puzzles from her own past by following up leads, and effectively organised her own mini-research project.

On choosing courses she said,

“I did maths last year, ‘Return to Learn’ Maths... and I’ve just come back this year to do a bit more. I might go in for my O level next year, but I don’t know, I might do something totally different. Apart from anything else, somebody goes “well why do you do this class or that class?” I says “because it fits in with whatever else I’m doing”. I never do a class on a Tuesday because I go walking on Tuesday.

Most recently she has enrolled on a General Studies course which leads to AS level after one year and A level after two years, if she chooses to continue. Qualifications are not important to her but it pleases her that she can tackle them and succeed.

Jim Huzzar also pursued courses which make retirement more tolerable and enjoyable. He retired at 63 with an enhanced pension deal, but after a couple of years began to get bored with household tasks (“There’s only so much decorating you can do.”), and being always in his (much loved) wife’s company. He now admits this led to clinical depression. A neighbour suggested the courses at the local college community centre to him. He hadn’t even known they existed, but was encouraged by his grandsons to share their enthusiasm for computers. Also he liked maths but had only previously done basic arithmetic. Thus he started with computer and maths courses, but now does four or five courses a week, is interested by a wide range of subjects some of which he never thought he’d tackle, and loves the company of the other students and the tutors at that community college. Unlike Elsie, he enjoys the familiarity of one centre.

As we have already mentioned, once she had left employment to become a fulltime homemaker, **Wafa Jabeen’s** main reason for engagement was personal interest, and keeping her brain working.

“a couple of years ago I did a beauty course, ... it’s just something I wanted to do. I used to take my child to playgroup, and they had a crèche, and then we could do that as well. And I did a counselling course, which I found very, very helpful, ... and it’s something that I wouldn’t actually mind going into as another career... And now I’m actually doing the Arabic [course]. ...and that’s given me the opportunity to learn

about my own faith, with other people ... Because my child is at school, I don't have any other children at home, I can go and commit myself to something else, learning something new."

Learning for the benefit of others

Classrooms had been antithesis to **Tony Wilf** - something to be avoided. As we have seen, what finally persuaded him back into the classroom was his youngest daughter's problems at school, when he was the only person there to help her.

Peter Weddle has devoted much of his life to helping others. When he was in his early teens his mother died and, during the period before his father remarried, Peter helped to run the family and bring up his younger brother. He then joined the Army during the Second World War and served as a sergeant. Peter's story suggests that he was sensitive to meeting the needs of the men under his command. In his subsequent civilian career he became the regional Trade Union representative, travelling wide distances to look after the interests of his members. Now, aged 78, he works as the caretaker in a City-centre learning and guidance agency and with responsibility for health and safety, which necessitates attendance at updating courses.

Peter is heavily involved in voluntary work. He is a practising Roman Catholic and has received formal training from the Church to qualify him to administer the Mass. He attends an annual conference at the local university for members of the Church who administer Mass to the house-bound; this included introductory training in such areas as Christian listening and pastoral care. The training has led to opportunities to help the elderly and housebound, including befriending those who are lonely, providing practical assistance with household tasks, doing shopping and collecting prescriptions.

Peter's voluntary activities are a practical expression of his own inner convictions and intrinsic to his altruistic personality. Peter is widowed, and the training he has recently received in volunteering skills has enabled him to continue to lead a rich and fulfilling life, as well as providing practical opportunities to help others which extend beyond the immediate objectives of the training.

Mixed and changing reasons

In most cases a person's reasons for engaging with formal education and training were compounds of several of the categories. For example, early retirement through ill health was a major blow to **Stephen Connor**. It was particularly distressing for someone who had been very active - keen on sports and dancing. He went from earning a good wage to just £58 a week, until his disability allowance finally came through. He found the experience of going to "the social" depressing, perceiving disrespect on the part of officers and many claimants. Immediately after retirement he was "vegetating", and felt on the verge of slipping into depression. His wife and the regular presence of his grandchildren kept him going. As well as the need to solve this personal crisis, wanting to help his granddaughters was a significant inducement to return to study. Because of their parents' broken marriage the girls spend a lot of time with Stephen. He was aware that when his granddaughters asked for help with maths he was confusing them because he had learned to do things a different way. When their school advertised sessions for parents to find out what the children were being taught, he decided to attend. This provided him with the learning necessary to help his younger granddaughter, but not the older one who was approaching GCSE. The tutor gave him

information about other classes in the area, which he decided to follow up. As well as the maths, he chose a history course because he was interested in researching his family tree, then a computer course because it also related to his grandchildren's activities. Computers were completely new to him. He is proud of having obtained the European Driving Licence for computers and a pre-GCSE in maths. He is now considering studying for maths GCSE.

His decision to go to classes was both for himself and for his grandchildren. It was a deliberate move to take on a new interest and stop the slide into depression, and it has been a success. Meeting a lot of "nice people" at the classes is important, but so is the interest in the subject matter. He would rather be at work and able to go dancing with his wife, but the classes are providing a compensatory activity.

Jennifer Whitefield, as we have seen, is a person for whom engagement in formal education and training has been continuous throughout her life. There has always been a mixture of reasons for her engagement and choice of courses, around interest and career progression. Even at school, Jennifer's interest and flair in foreign language work was apparent, although she left early for complex personal reasons. As soon as the army gave her the chance she pursued her foreign language interests again. She wanted to continue what she had failed to complete at school. She wanted to pursue her interest in learning more languages, but in addition, having discovered linguistics through her wide reading, she wanted the qualifications to study it at University. At that stage of her life languages were important, as a passionate interest and as a hoped for basis for a career. Even now as a professional translator, she is learning yet another language mainly from interest, but also because it might add to her CV.

Having failed to get to University and done the three year degree equivalent certificate, her next course was FE teacher training. She has continued to attend courses related to languages and teaching throughout her career, but also has a wide range of personal and leisure interests (architecture, archaeology, local history) which are sustained by attendance at courses.

For **Rebecca Wright**, the reasons for engagement in formal education and training altered at different stages in her life, related to her changed position and circumstances. For a few years after leaving school she focussed on courses that would help her gain employment. Then during a period of 25 years when she was comfortably employed doing office work, she took a series of courses mainly related to her leisure interests, such as flower arranging and cake decoration. Then, after leaving work following a period of stress-related illness, she reverted to courses that helped her develop a new career in social care work, partly as a response to a personal crisis. Her story is another example of the significance of gender, in her choices of employment and leisure-related courses.

Reasons for not engaging

For many people, periods of non-engagement arose because the value of attending courses was not apparent or not important, and/or because the availability of courses was not known. For these people, there was no conscious decision not to engage. Rather, formal education and training was never considered at all. For others, there was a strong resistance to formal education and training, for example based upon unhappy

experiences of schooling, or on a strongly held belief in learning through practical activity. In our sample, this view was most common amongst working class men.

Despite going to grammar school, **Derek Hutchinson** left at 16, to work in the building trade. He learned through an entirely work-based apprenticeship, involving the practical experience of doing the job and learning from other craftsmen. Through his experiences in the trade Derek has developed a deep distrust of off-the-job training unsupported by a varied programme of on-the-job work experience on real projects in which one has to resolve real-life problems, and sees college as a protected and unrealistic environment. He associates the growth of college-based training with an on-going decline in standards of craftsmanship, which he deplores. His considerable knowledge and expertise in philately, postcard collecting and local history were also learned informally.

Tony Wilf developed an aversion to teachers and classroom learning at secondary school, and is still bitter about that experience. He describes many ways in which he felt badly treated. Tony was prepared to challenge teachers about what he saw as injustices but it got him into trouble. He feels that no-one bothered to listen and no-one understood his problems. He was frequently sent to the headmaster for caning and doesn't see that it did him any good, though he gained kudos from public punishment. He was unfavourably compared with his brother, and to this day is only willing to engage in education so long as it doesn't make him "posh" like his brother. Family connections mean he has long been aware that there were courses available from which he might benefit, but he never seriously considered taking part. There were other ways to spend his time, and he enjoyed his practical working class identity, which he saw as at variance with "classes". It took 30 years and the traumatic life change before Tony reengaged with formal education and began to enjoy it and appreciate its benefits. Many others never do, and even for Tony the ghosts of school can be resurrected only too easily.

4). Interrelationships between Formal and Informal Learning

Learning through engagement in formal education and training is often closely bound up with informal learning taking place outside those courses. Where learning is perceived to be successful and valuable, there is usually a synergy between the two. This is the intention for most apprenticeships, and **Joseph Pryce** and **Stephen Connor** found this to be the case. Joseph describes in some detail ways in which he learned practically on the job but insists that the college work was also necessary if he was to have a full grasp of the subject and go beyond being a jobbing electrician. Stephen's similar beliefs have already been described. **Derek Hutchinson**, however, believed he learned the job better without attending courses.

The nature of the synergy between formal and informal learning varies from person to person. We have summarised **Jennifer Whitfield's** prolonged period of formal education around foreign languages. Throughout this period, informal learning was also very important. At various periods, when she had no specific occupation, Jennifer spent much time reading diversely. She discovered linguistics through reading, and improved her languages by reading foreign language books. Having failed to get a place to study linguistics, Jennifer looked for work abroad, partly to further develop her language skills. She obtained a Swiss hotel job. It wasn't helpful for improving her French or German as they wanted her to speak English, but she started to learn some Italian from a boyfriend.

This initial interest encouraged her to seek a formal course a few years later. When working as a receptionist between teaching jobs in England she found herself translating for a group of Italian workmen fitting some new equipment for the firm. The time she spent with them resulted in her becoming quite fluent, and it is now the language for which she gets most work as a translator.

Timothy Keane's acting and drama courses had been preceded by over 10 years hovering around the world of drama, especially working front-of-house for a theatre company. He always watched the actors on stage, and later realised he had learned a lot about how they did the job. This learning through observation went alongside a strong sense of personal exclusion from the profession, but he benefited from that learning during his later acting training, when it was blended with formal instruction and lots of actual practice.

Colin Farmer comes from a small town in SE Scotland. His mother was from a middle class background and wanted Colin to go to university. His father was a rabbit catcher who was later put out of work by myxomatosis and got a job with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Colin became a lifelong informal learner, starting at home picking up gardening and motor-cycle maintenance from his father. Colin got good enough Highers to go to Edinburgh University, but the choice to study agriculture was more his mother's than his own, and he dropped out at the end of his first year. His informal learning approach stood him in good stead in the long series of labouring, pyramid-selling and other casual jobs that took up the next period of his life.

In some examples, valuable informal learning preceded formal learning. **Joe Pryce** for example "taught himself" to play the guitar, using books, trial and error and help from work colleagues, before enrolling on a course. For other people or at other times, things were at least partly the other way around. Later in his life, when unemployed after a period abroad, Colin went to the Jobcentre and got onto a training scheme for carpentry. He gives a vivid description of the training, including the attitude and style of the trainer, which he disliked. In spite of this, the formal training helped him find something he was good at. It led to a job with his local council for 6-7 years as a carpenter, and in 1986 he began to work for himself. Throughout this time Colin learned informally at work, including learning how difficult he found it to work as an independent freelancer.

The relations between formal education and training and informal learning were very complex for **Jane Eddington**. She is remarkably well read, with considerable expertise in European ancient and medieval history, including an unusual power of memory for places and historical facts.

Jane engaged in formal education and training in several phases in her life. She left school at 18 with A-levels, and a place to do an ordinary degree at a west London College for Arts and Technology. She failed two out of three subjects in her first year and had to leave. The one subject she passed was in art history. However, she returned to HE two years later having met a girl with a classics degree, which determined her to have another try. She went to university to read ancient history and archaeology with Italian as a mature student aged 23. Her first year went well, particularly in Italian, and she felt she had found her feet. However, in the summer holidays she inadvertently took LSD, was ill for six months and dropped out of the course the following Easter.

Her next engagement with formal education was acting classes. It was the 1970s, and she had been to Istanbul and back, had a baby with an American, tried living with him in the US but returned, and was living in council accommodation when she enrolled on an acting course. Jane had been interested in the idea of acting since she was a child. She had also worked as a volunteer with a theatre group before she had her son. She did well in the classes this time, and began to take exams, but ultimately failed by two marks. She says she missed one entire element of the exam because she “got in a muddle about the times”. She did not resume the classes, partly because she was too discouraged, but also because of the time required to earn money to look after her son.

Later, life improved and she bought her council house and sold it; but then she lost the capital through a horrendous confidence trick. She moved to east London and then her health collapsed. In a courageous attempt to start to put the pieces together she did a computer course with a local women’s centre, and started on work experience with them, but again disaster struck as the centre suddenly closed down. She went to an FE college in east London and did an NVQ in Advice and Guidance and this was followed by an ESOL teaching course at another FE college, but she withdrew because she found it too theoretical (the other trainees were graduates or teachers). She then applied to her first college again for an ESOL/CEUTA course but missed two interviews because of ill-health. She is currently waiting for them to run it again whilst also doing a drop-in programme on use of computers in photography.

Her informal learning, which is equally important, runs parallel with this changing succession of courses, being closely integrated in her early years, then separated, and now integrated again. Her informal learning started in early childhood abroad, which helped her develop an interest in other languages and culture. Her Father, who was in the Forces, wanted one of his children to learn Italian. He had done so in the war, and peppered his speech at home with Italian phrases. He left a copy of *Teach Yourself Italian* lying around and Jane was the one who picked it up and had a go. She saw languages as something to be spoken, and although she only had school French she got a job as a bi-lingual telephone operator in the years between HE courses. Jane also taught herself speedwriting over a weekend because she wanted a better job.

There were many struggles throughout her son’s primary and secondary education about how best to support his development, and Jane speaks happily about taking him to Restoration Comedy and Shakespeare during his teen-age years. She makes no particular mention of the vocational classes she has done recently, but the photography course has become part of her lifelong enthusiasm for the archaic; currently she is spending many happy hours tinkering with a photo of a Greek statue in the Louvre. Her enthusiasm for the archaic seems to be traceable to a special subject on the Crusades and Byzantium that she took as part of her A-level in History, and may be connected with her early life in Malta. Since then she has simply picked up an enormous amount of information, through reading, travelling and visiting museums and art galleries. Since her son became financially independent and she had her major financial disaster she seems to spend what little money she has on going to Sicily. This appears to build on the art history in her first HE course and her formal learning of Italian in her second, but she does not herself relate this back to her classroom experiences. For her it is living excitement for the places and the stones and their history.

Other facets of Jane’s informal learning – for example about work, how to look after her son, and dealing with her own illness - are sometimes connected to episodes of formal

learning, but often are not. For her, much of the formal education and training engagement was concerned with either employment or personal needs. Her leisure interests and much of her art and ancient and medieval history education have been informal, until her recent course on photography. It is noticeable that this reconnection occurred during the period of rehabilitation and after her son left home. She is still technically looking for work in her mid-fifties, but is not very steady in her physical health. So though not formally retired, she does not seem strongly committed to getting back to work, and some previously important reasons for engaging in formal education and training may have ceased to be relevant.

5). Success & failure in formal education and training

Jane Eddington's engagements in formal education and training are interesting for another reason. They entail a complex and changing pattern of relative successes and failures. Though highly intelligent and academically able, Jane passed some courses, but either failed or dropped out from others. In one case, her acting course, she had two marks too few to pass and progress – a timely reminder of the significance of qualifications and pass thresholds. The reasons for Jane's success or failure are complex, and are rarely attributable to one factor, such as the quality of the teaching. Her own actions and dispositions, her position, events and sometimes crises in her life outside education and training, as well as factors to do with the nature of the actual provision, all contributed in ways that were interrelated. One thread that may be present in her story, and certainly is in those of **Timothy Keane** and **Colin Farmer**, is the part played by mental ill-health and depression in particular. Learning can be undermined by it, but can also play a major role in rehabilitation.

For most of the others in our sample, a particular phase of engagement with formal education or training tends to be either broadly successful or broadly unsuccessful, and the former are far more common than the latter. Thus, for **Gladys Dean**, the decision to actually go through the door into the community centre where she had enrolled on a basic literacy course, began an ongoing period of positive engagement with learning, that she feels has helped transform her life for the better. However, her story illustrates the need for subtlety in determining what counts as 'success'. The currently dominant view is that success in formal education and training equates to achievement of qualifications. Yet Gladys never discusses this, and seems unconcerned about certificates. For her, success takes at least three interrelated forms: she enjoys learning on courses and wants to do more; she can see her skills, knowledge and understanding increasing; and, perhaps most important of all, she feels that her education is changing the way she sees herself and the way she conducts her life. After five years she can sign her name, read simple text, and tell her daughter enough from a letter for the daughter to decide how urgent it is. This may not seem like rapid progress according to FE quality assurance targets. However, for Gladys herself, her achievements are huge.

For **Tony Wilf**, secondary schooling was a period of failure. Once the negative trajectory had become established, a series of factors combined to reinforce it. However, his second engagement late in life has produced a sustained period of success, similar to that of Gladys, but with more obvious and conventionally recognised achievements. He was delighted when he received the first certificate of his life for a computer course. But again the certificate is not the most important thing. Being able to

read more, being *almost* able to read a book, being able to indulge in writing childhood reminiscences on the computer, being aware that he now appreciates most things in more depth, and the structure the courses provide in organising his life: these are the measures of success valued by a man who has neglected reading and writing for most of his life.

Jim Huzzar's two main encounters with formal education were successful in his terms, but would not fit current policy approaches to educational success. Schooling was happy but undistinguished. He went to a primary school "just around the corner" from the council house where he lived. He describes it as "quite a good school" and remembers "some of the nicer teachers". Like several others from the same sort of working class background he emphasises the good family values within which he was brought up. This included back up for teachers in the form of reinforcing school punishments at home – something which he says kept him largely on the straight and narrow at school. His mother provided encouragement as well. She interested him in reading, taking him to the library when he first started to read, and he has been going ever since. At 10 he had to travel to the nearest catholic school some distance away. It seems to have been a small secondary modern school, with no academic intentions. Two teachers and a headmaster taught 100 boys. Sometimes the classes had to double up, in which case the teacher was extra strict and the 'lesson' was likely to be the reading of a story. He remembers the stories, and he remembers singing times tables. His overall impression is that "I had a pretty good time at school", that it was "a pretty good school in the circumstances". He left without any qualifications but a good grasp of reading writing and arithmetic. School was followed by a happy working life. National service interrupted an apprenticeship in upholstery, but when he returned he moved from job to job at will seeking more money or more interest. He eventually settled with a national engineering company, and in time was elected union convenor. When that works closed, he found a second niche at the local sewage works, progressing from odd job man to considerable responsibility, and eventually taking a profitable early retirement deal at 63. His schooling had been good enough to lead to a satisfactory working life leaving him comfortably off in retirement.

When Jim went back to formal education, it was to deal with boredom and depression in retirement.

[Someone] told me about this place, so I thought fair enough I'll come, so I booked for maths and computers and I've got myself an old computer that I messed about with at home and I found I really enjoyed doing it and the maths. Me basic maths were ok but I've never done algebra in me life, we never did anything like that at school... So I thought I'd have a go. I've been coming about 5 years now and I've been lucky enough that I've gone in for exams I've got through most of 'em which is fair enough and I've got to admit I feel a bit chuffed myself...

He has recently undertaken a creative writing course. 'I've always been a reader, and they said "would you like to try this creative writing class." ...I've never written owt in me life apart from betting slips...' He tried it, and developed a good relationship with the tutor, who not only provided interesting ideas for them to write about but allowed Jim to go off and write whatever he wanted when he felt inspired. "And I really enjoyed it, and I've got to admit I like coming down here, I like the people, I like the tutors, there's nothing I can say that I dislike."

He now does five courses a week, and his wife does a different one. They have various separate activities sorted out through the week, and their relationship is the better for it.. Jim has progressed as far as he can with the maths locally, but doesn't want to go elsewhere to reach a higher level. He wants to stay at this local centre where he knows people. He has completed and passed several exams but doesn't know what they all are. He is happy to do the exams and get certificates but not really bothered. 'I'm not worried about going in for exams but obviously the lass [tutor] has a job to do so if nobody went in for exams they'd say "what the hell is she doing here?"' He also doesn't enter if he thinks he might fail. "If I fail I feel as if I've let the girl down." "*Do you feel you've let yourself down as well if you fail?*" "Oh no I'm not bothered." To Jim, the success of these courses is in keeping his mind active, engaging in interesting activities, learning new and interesting things, having a social life outside the family.

Others do want qualifications especially if the qualification is vocational and necessary to obtain a job. **William Moore**, finding fewer and fewer opportunities for work contracts, valued qualifications which could lead to alternative or additional employment. He was delighted to gain the ECDL qualification, and has now gained permanent paid employment in a sheet music company with an international customer base. Terms have been negotiated so that he can also continue his own business. Computer skills are required for the work, but his success in obtaining this job at the age of 61 also reflect his well developed interpersonal skills, musical abilities and fluency in languages – skills learned informally across his life.

Rebecca Wright is another who will need qualifications to pursue her new ambitions to be a care supervisor.

6). Agency and Formal Education and Training

In what follows, we do not engage with debates about the nature of agency. Here, we are concerned with two related issues. The first is the extent to which people are proactive in relation to formal education and training, and the second is the extent to which formal education and training influences a person's ability to be proactive in other parts of their lives. However, agency can only be fully understood in relation to a person's positions and dispositions, and their sense of identity. Some of this complexity can be hinted at here, but will be addressed more explicitly later.

Pro-activity in the process of engagement

Many of our subjects have been proactive in engaging with post-school formal education and training, to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, with the exception of compulsory training, for example as required for work or by schemes such as 'New Deal', nearly all involvement with adult formal education and training requires a degree of pro-activity on the part of the learner. However, actions to bring about engagement can only be understood in relation to the life circumstances of the person concerned, and may also entail agency by others. Thus, **Gladys Dean** might not have ever engaged with adult education had it not been for her changed position after her husband died, her children left home and she retired. Her need for literacy increased, and the determined intervention of a daughter was decisive. But Gladys was not passive in this process. Having been persuaded to go, she forced herself through the college doors although

terrified. Then encouraged by the friendliness of tutors and fellow students, decided to increase engagement once the process of formal education had begun.

At one level **Sergei Semenov** was proactive in enrolling on two courses, when he was newly arrived in England. However, newly-arrived asylum-seekers only have limited options: although technically he could have declined, he may not have understood what his options were either as a result of his lack of English or his lack of understanding of the legal implications of his status. Also his pressing need for employment limited his freedom of choice. In his case, it makes more sense to see the move to England as being agentic, and the engagement with learning a corollary of that decision. However, the move to England was also largely forced, as a result of his unhappy situation in Estonia, where as a Russian he felt deeply alienated, yet Russia was not 'home' either and never could be. This situation pushed him out from Estonia, and the decision to come to England, rather than go somewhere else, was largely a matter of chance, based on little knowledge. He had intended to go to Germany for which he was more prepared.

Others were more clearly responsible for their engagement with formal education and training, though again this stronger proactivity was located in their situation. Thus, **Wafa Jabeen** chose to go on courses that interested her because she wanted to learn, but this happened once she had stopped her employment and had time. But the courses have to fit conveniently with family and home responsibilities. **Jim Huzzar's** post-retirement story is similar. He was proactive in engaging with formal education, though only following advice from a friend. This pro-activity was made possible by his retirement circumstances, and by the availability of a range of courses at his local community centre. Wise investment, two works pensions and the state pension mean Jim can easily pay for his courses. It is a fairly high priority for his spending, He can continue even now the charges have increased. His determination is demonstrated in the active stance he is taking in fighting potential closure of the centre. He has written letters (which he could not have done as well before his writing classes) and organised meetings with local and national politicians, and education managers.

Timothy Keane decided to enrol on an English degree, following completion of several Open University courses. His agentic move into a fulltime degree course was linked to a lack of job-satisfaction, and rooted in his disappointment at A-level as a teenager. He hoped that he could overcome the deep insecurities that had prevented his fulfilling his potential earlier. But as already explained, it only took him part way as he met similar problems when he moved on to his MA. Agency can be aided: Timothy sees the trigger for this return to HE as being the encouragement from a careers adviser. He did not achieve full agency and overcome his insecurities until the later death of his foster mother and a successful period of group psychotherapy. At that point he enrolled for the drama training he had long aspired to. Like Rebecca, he needed formal coaching to overcome his lack of self-confidence.

Where Wafa, Jim and Timothy were largely pulled by what formal education might offer, others, like Sergei, were pushed. **Tony Wilf** also felt it necessary to engage, following a traumatic personal crisis. He was managing the home after his wife's death and his own decision to leave work. However, he was drifting on the edges of depression, and alcohol abuse. When his daughter came home unexpectedly and found him drinking he was shocked into realising that his life style risked harming her. He took action instead to have a positive effect on her life and enrolled on the computer course.

Pro-activity in disengagement

Many of our sample made the decision to disengage with formal education and training after leaving school. Often this was merely the side-effect of other life choices, for example moving into employment that did not require and did not provide formal training, and/or living within a culture where attending classes was not the norm. **Derek Hutchinson** was born in 1944. Following his family tradition, almost all of his life has been spent in the building industry, though as a carpenter rather than a bricklayer. Although Derek did well at school in the grammar school stream, he left at the first opportunity (for financial reasons). His position in a working class family, where skilled practical work was a deeply engrained part of their culture and values, meant that leaving school was the appropriate thing to do. The lack of money was a trigger for what would probably have happened anyway. In that working class culture, it was natural for Derek to leave school to earn money to help support his family. Staying on would have required a determination and agency on Derek's part beyond the prevailing culture and community expectations, as well as a strong desire to do so. He was happy to leave. On the other hand, **Tony Wilf** strongly disliked school, and made a conscious decision to disengage from formal education long before he actually left.

Sometimes a person's actions resulted in disengagement without this being the intended outcome. **Louise Smith** grew up on a council estate with very little money, but education was an important part of her family's culture. Mother stayed home to look after her two daughters and provided "educational activities" for them later becoming a classroom assistant. Her sister, Louise's aunt, was a teacher. Overall, schooling was a positive experience for Louise. She remembers playschool and early years at school with pleasure. She described her senior school as a place where she felt safe, somewhere where pupils fitted in with the system without the problems that she perceives in secondary schools today. Nevertheless school was not all plain sailing, with a strong but, as she sees it now, misguided self-will causing Louise problems.

When her parents' marriage broke up when she was six, Louise became rebellious, sometimes refusing to go to school, and for the first time she received criticism instead of praise from teacher and headmaster. She settled down again, with a particularly sympathetic year 7 teacher. Louise was strongest at art and music. At middle school she learned the violin, her father having saved up to buy her one. But her strong-willed preference for art blended with her rebellious agency. Violin lessons were set against either art or maths and Louise was set to miss her favourite lesson rather than her weakest subject, maths. She had a teacher that she did not get on with in that year, which made her believe that making her do maths and miss art was deliberately vindictive. She started finding excuses not to go to school on violin days "just to show them", and carelessly damaged her violin. Within a short time she gave up violin, but regrets it now, recognising the validity of the setting and that she "cut of [her] nose to spite [her] face".

Obstinacy plus her artistic identity caused more problems over GCSEs. Being in the top set for English she had to study literature and language in the same amount of time that others had for language alone. She resented the extra work and put in little effort in subjects other than art and textiles. In projects for these she found that concentration and hard work provided her with a mental release as she channelled her frustrations into making beautiful things. She was shocked when she failed all subjects except these

two, which meant she couldn't fulfil her ambition of progressing to art college. She took a job in the printing industry which appeared to offer artistic scope and financial freedom.

The printing industry proved less ideal than she'd hoped. She found relationships difficult in the male dominated industry and perceived her progression as being blocked. After several years and three jobs she got out and moved into educational support work with her mother. This was a positive and enjoyable career move, and reawakened her desire for education and qualifications. There has been training available to go with the work, though she has had to fight for financial support and time off. In addition she has studied part-time and passed the GCSEs she failed at school, working particularly hard at maths. In all of this she has shown considerable agency and self will. She had to persuade her employers to give her rights to work-related training. She also had a partner who mocked her attempts to return to education. Her new partner is supportive both financially and emotionally, in spite of his own low level of education. She has moved on to university level work, with a possible view to becoming a teacher, but also spurred on by the thought that her own mother gave up all such aspirations to look after her children.

Formal education and training develops agency

Many of our stories show formal education and training can be helpful in developing agency. This can be for specific purposes related to the content of a course. **Stephen Connor's** electronics training helped him rise to the new demands in his industry. For **Colin Farmer**, a carpentry course contributed to similar agency within his chosen field, despite the fact that the course was not especially enjoyable. For **Joseph Pryce**, courses in Black History and in English law arose from and further enhanced his agency in working for young people in his local community. In a number of cases, successful learning in formal courses leads to growing confidence in the learner's own achievements and ability. This in turn can lead to them taking greater control over aspects of their own lives. However, our data suggests that even this sort of agency is context-related. **Tony Wilf** now has the confidence to work with people he would once have seen as 'superior', for example he is a comfortable and useful member of the committee of his daughter's youth organisation. **Gladys Dean's** education meant that she was able to be more proactive in dealing with some of the paperwork central to modern living. She also became more proactive in enrolling on other adult courses in the same centre without needing her daughter's support. Thus far, her increased agency does not relate to engaging beyond this local and familiar setting. However she, and people around her, are aware that her growing confidence may lead her further. Finally, for two of our sample, **Timothy Keane** and **Rebecca Wright**, formal courses developed agency when other factors in their lives were in place, and in addition, it had helped resolve personal problems. Group therapy and a course explicitly aimed at increasing personal self-confidence proved directly helpful in leading to a greater sense of control over their own lives.

Formal education and training restricts agency

Sometimes, engagement with formal education and training works to restrict some forms of agency. The most obvious examples result from partial failure. Several of our sample had an educational or career trajectory derailed because they failed to get the necessary grades. **Louise Smith** and others were unable to pursue their early ambitions because of exam failures at school. **Tony Wilf's** scope for agency in his adult life and

work was severely restricted by his lack of any qualifications or basic literacy skills when he left school, although he was agentic in working around these problems.

More subtly, formal education and training can close down some agentic options as a consequence of developing others. This is what happened when **Timothy Keane** and **Colin Farmer** dropped out of education after leaving their initial HE courses directly following secondary school. The courses (an HND in Business Studies in Timothy's case and a BSc in Agriculture in Colin's), chosen in both cases to please parents, conflicted with their still developing sense of their own interests and values. It took Timothy 15 more years before he felt able to reengage with education in the arts again. However, a comparison between him and **Jane Eddington** shows that such restrictions on agency are not the result of education and training alone. For, as we have seen, Jane sustained a lifelong interest in mediaeval and ancient European history despite two catastrophic failures in relevant formal education courses.

There is also a deeper sense in which formal education and training can serve to restrict the scope and possibilities of agency. When such education and training contribute towards a significant identity change, this may also bring changed opportunities for agency. It is to this issue of identity that we turn next.

7). Formal Education and Training and Identity

Formal education and training can contribute to changes in identity and can be triggered by such changes. It can also reinforce identities that are already formed. **Sergei Semenov's** complicated life reflects a kaleidoscope of fractured identities. However he only re-engaged with formal education and training when his flight from Estonia entailed another identity change. In fact, like many migrants, Sergei continued to struggle with changes that conflicted with significant aspects of his former identity, such as that from professional to casual labourer. In this complex and stressful process, formal education has only been a bit part player: he maintains some of his self-esteem through informal cultural activity, struggling with understandable periods of inactivity due to depression.

Though not an immigrant, **Wafa Jabeen** also faces a cross-cultural struggle about who she is. She grew up in a family where she was valued as an individual, and well as a part of the family. She was expected to bring credit to the family by reaching a high status job through education and/or by marrying satisfactorily. A key tension lies between her values and the more traditional values in her husband's family where she was expected to behave in a subordinate way. During an unhappy period in their house she refused to submit, perhaps because of the strength of her previous identity, engendered partly through education. A combination of her own agency and the opportunities presented now that she has her own home again, have opened up new opportunities for her. She is currently happy with her role as mother and home maker provided that she can keep her brain active, which she has done by reengaging in part-time formal education. This is a part of her identity as a British and partly westernised Asian Muslim woman.

For some working class men, not doing formal education and training is a significant part of their identity – as practical men and 'doers'. For **Tony Wilf**, this means not being 'posh' like his brother, despite his recently found love of education. For many of these

men, like Tony earlier in his life and **Derek Hutchinson**, part of this strong identity was a degree of hostility towards engaging with formal learning. For a number of others especially working class men, the idea of formal learning was simply not part of their working lives. However for several of the over 50s in our sample, later engagement with formal education and training has resulted in a new and developing identity, to which learning is central. **Gladys Dean** has embarked on this sort of path, as have **Tony Wilf**, **Jim Huzzar** and **Elsie Sayer**; also in different way Joe Pryce.

For **Anna Reynard**, formal education has always been central to her identity. Anna is middle class by birth, from a politically liberal family and did well at school and university. She also perceived herself as creative and wanted a career in writing. She initially resisted the pressure from family and tutors to train as a teacher, wanting to do more than just “complete the circle” by teaching people like herself. But her first serious job was in a direct grant school where she worked across the full age range, until eventually specializing in A-level German. Her marriage and five year career break allowed her to tap into her commitment to work for the less fortunate in society. Her husband was a “well educated labourer” who later became a social worker. They lived in a poor area surrounded by educational deprivation, which she could overcome for her own children. She read a great deal on the subject and followed it up with a university course, which reinforced the social purpose in her identity. When they moved to a council estate in the north of England she was able to take on voluntary and low paid roles with young children in the local area. Her husband had expectations that she would stay at home with the children, but he eventually recognised that homemaking was not enough for her. They came to a mutual agreement that when their children went to school she would earn some proper money, which she did by working very successfully in a primary school in another deprived area.

It was only a temporary post, but her employment career continued through a series of educational and social work jobs. On several occasions she chose to work in difficult circumstances. She left an HE job in teacher training, believing she needed to prove herself in schools before returning. The next few years were demoralizing. First she deliberately took a temporary job in comprehensive school in a deprived area. The head of department gave her no support and she found it very difficult to cope with the classes. She then moved to a comprehensive school 80 miles from home, in an equally deprived area but which had an ethos of support for staff and pupils which attracted her. She fitted in well but still struggled with the difficult pupils. Her failure to live up to her own ideals, plus the 160 miles a day round trip, led to a near nervous breakdown. She finally got a job in a comprehensive school in “nicer area” nearer home, where she did well with the top stream, but less so with the pupils she really wanted to help.

Despite these career setbacks, Anna retained her sense of social purpose and her sense of education as central to her identity, but the difficulties in living up to her high ideals led her close to the nervous breakdown. The research degree helped by allowing her to explore her own and other people’s problems with teaching and identity. She was able to publish a book about it, and has followed that up by starting to write a novel, proving to herself that she really does have a creative side.

Even in her childhood, education, agency and identity were interwoven for **Louise Smith**. Her love of art from a young age, and her determination to hold out for what she at the time saw as her rights dominate her early life history. Her return to part-time formal education in her mid 20s went alongside a recognition that she was unable to fit

into the printing industry, and a recognition that she had missed out on her earlier education.

And I've sort of gone back into education probably 10 years ago nearly now to re-sit English and Maths at night school, so I've now got a grade C in both of those. Um, and I found that because I wanted to learn it was different to being at school ... And I found that I put the time and the effort into studying and I studied a hell of a lot for my Maths more than I did for my English, I really studied hard. And I went to extra classes like workshop classes and things in evenings in different centres to try and make sure, and I got a lot of support from the other students.

This new engagement with formal education became an integral part in a significant identity shift. After several job changes and changes in educational course, including a second failed attempt to go to art college, Louise now has a strengthening identity as someone who works in education helping children, and she is studying on a foundation degree for educational support workers. She now sees what she calls academic learning as very important to her sense of who she is.

"I suppose initially it wasn't academic learning that was important. It was more kind of hands on and learning through sort of experience and what I did... Certainly I have done a lot of that I think. ... But I must say that I'm getting more out of the academic stuff now because I want it rather than because somebody's telling me to do it, because I won't do what somebody else tells me to do - I won't do it and that's perhaps down to my star sign, I don't know, Sagittarius. I won't be told, I have to do it for myself and I have to decide for myself."

She knows that her parents and husband, who all had limited education themselves, are proud of what she's doing.

Paddy Hammond's sense of identity has been strongly influenced by a series of difficulties in his early life, and subsequently by the training he has received in cartography, navigation and (eventually) flying, and more generally by his life and career in the Forces - a notably parental, life-shaping and all-encompassing employer. Paddy was born in 1944 into a family of small farmers on the Celtic fringe of Britain. The farm was remote and isolated and, although Paddy had an older brother and younger twin sisters, his relationship with them was not close and he grew up virtually as an only child. The only friends he made were at school and he had to leave these friends after school had finished, to work on the farm.

Paddy's mother, who was the dominant figure in the household, was a committed and somewhat forbidding Christian. Paddy was not allowed to bring anybody home or to visit the houses of friends until he was at least 18. Paddy considers this has resulted in his having difficulty developing friendships and feeling at home in public gatherings. He has had to learn how to act a part and put up a social front. Paddy cannot recall ever receiving any encouragement from his parents or praise for achievements. This lack of encouragement continues to be a source of regret. He feels that, despite his many successes, his life generally has been a failure because he has not achieved his primary objective, which was to be a pilot.

From an early age Paddy, who has always read widely, was aware of his own intelligence and potential. He passed the 11+, but his secondary education coincided

with a change in the external examination system which involved an additional year at school. The family could not afford to keep him at school to take A-levels in order to enter University.

The Boys' Brigade provided Paddy with a life-shaping alternative avenue of learning, as well as an escape and compensation for home life. It was here that he developed his love of outdoor pursuits and desire to fly, as well as gaining experience as a trainer and instructor. The leaders also provided Paddy with much needed encouragement.

After leaving school Paddy wanted to escape from home by joining the RAF, but his family embargoed this. Against his Mother's wishes, he applied for jobs in the home counties and was successful in being selected, via examination, for the Land Registry. He was eventually accepted by 'Surveys' and received formal training in cartography and surveying.

In the same year he succeeded in a highly competitive selection procedure for the RAF. He joined for officer training but found that, despite his understanding that he would be trained as a pilot, the RAF wanted to make use of his cartographic experience as an instructor. His first posting was to a navigational school as a trainer in map-making. Paddy's subsequent RAF career is the story of his generally unsuccessful attempts to become a pilot. At the age of 38 he eventually learned how to fly, taught unofficially by other pilots, then qualifying while still in the RAF by arranging private training and gaining a private pilot's licence. He has not continued to fly since leaving the RAF because of the expense.

Paddy's RAF career was long and varied, and in preparation for leaving he took a four-week course in small business ownership at an FE college, but left the RAF feeling "like a fish out of water". The RAF was his primary and defining career, and the one which has come closest to satisfying his sense of vocation. Paddy feels that he has not settled properly since, and this is confirmed by his story. His further engagements in formal education and training have been directed at his employment needs and ambitions, which are largely IT-related.

In these and other stories, we can see the complex interrelationships between both informal learning and more formal education and training and the sometimes changing identities of the people concerned. However, it is impossible to focus on this relationship without drawing in aspects of all the other six issues, described earlier in this Working Paper. We turn briefly to some of the interrelationships between these issues, next.

Conclusion: Drawing the threads together

The seven themes addressed in this working paper need to be understood more **holistically**. What follows is a preliminary and partial attempt at making some overall conceptual sense of the findings. In some ways the most significant finding is that engagement with formal education and training is phased over the life course, interspersed with significant periods of non-engagement. Furthermore, a major phase of engagement tends to involve several courses. The nature of these phases, the reasons for their occurrence (or non-occurrence), the nature of the learning experienced and the extent of success or failure link back to: the relationship with social (and geographic)

positions; the dispositions and identity of the learners including their self-confidence and their related mental health; the agency of the learners; and the learners' interactions with others. All of these factors interconnect.

Horizons for Learning

Our data suggests that a person's opportunities to learn through engaging in formal education and training are consistent with a modified version of Hodkinson *et al's* (1996) concept of 'horizons for action'. This was originally developed as a way to assist understanding of career decision making, and combined two alternative types of explanation that are often seen as opposites.

The first of these was Roberts *et al.* (1986) who argued that career and learning decisions were determined by the opportunity structures within which people lived. So, in our slightly different usage here, engagement with formal education and training are determined by the structured opportunities to take such courses. At its simplest, this means that engagement depends upon there being courses available to a person in relation to their geographical location, their ability to pay, and the willingness of admissions staff to allow them to enrol. Just as Roberts pointed out in relation to jobs and careers, these opportunities for engagement with formal education and training are structured, not haphazard. That is, the nature and extent of those opportunities are strongly influenced by social class, gender and ethnicity, prior educational achievement, the employment a person has (or does not have), the sort of neighbourhood where they live, and the resources available to them.

However, if this was the only way in which we understood career choice or engagement with formal education and training, the result would be too deterministic. What Hodkinson *et al* (1996) saw was missing was the alternative explanation – that a person's career decisions, or their engagement with formal education and training, were the result of a person's own perceptions and actions, i.e. their agency.

Following Bourdieu, Hodkinson *et al* (1996) argued that this sort of personal agency was also located in wider social structures. That is, whether or not a person has opportunities to engage in formal education and training also depends upon their own dispositions, i.e. whether or not they see formal education and training in general, or specific courses in particular, as relevant, interesting or attainable. Furthermore, these dispositions, which can be largely tacit and often deeply rooted in a person's habitus, are themselves related to social structures which are reproduced through the person. That is, their gender, ethnicity and social class, with many other factors, strongly influence the ways in which they see and understand the world, and the place of formal education and training within it. Together, structured dispositions and opportunity structures interact to construct a person's horizons for action or horizons for learning – the boundaries within which engagement with formal learning is possible, and beyond which it is not. The horizons are thus as much internal as external, subjective as much as objective. They are both structured and structuring. There are, of course, close relationships between a person's dispositions and their sense of identity.

The metaphor of 'horizon' reminds us that what we can do is also heavily influenced by where we are positioned. Climb a hill, and you can normally see further. Thus, as we have explained earlier, engagement with formal education and training, within a person's horizons for learning, may change if a person's social economic or geographical position

changes; and one of many reasons for differences between the engagements of different people lies in the fact that they occupy different positions.

Within their horizons for learning, people may or may not engage with formal education and training, and any such engagement may be more or less successful. Put differently, the horizons for learning define the scope within which a person can be proactive – through exercise of their agency - in participating in education and training. Of course, that participation will also depend partly upon the actions of others – partners and relatives, friends and colleagues, employers and course tutors. Participation will also partly depend upon the relevant resources a person possesses. One way of thinking about these resources is as economic, social and cultural capital. Again, following Bourdieu, we would argue that capital is relative to the field in which it is deployed. The capital needed to obtain work-related training in TV repairs is very different from that needed to be accepted on a degree in English literature, or to obtain training as a care work supervisor.

Learning and Change

All the factors associated with a person's horizons for learning and for their engagement within those horizons are subject to change. None are permanently and irrevocably fixed but, as well as change, there are significant degrees of stability. The dispositions that make up a person's habitus are deep-seated and often difficult to change, as are some aspects of social structure. This means that in understanding the significance of learning, including formal education and training, in people's lives we have to be concerned with both continuity and change. As we have argued, engagement with formal learning is often triggered by a significant change in a person's life, and in the situation in which they find themselves. This can happen when changes to their position, dispositions or external conditions modify their horizons for learning.

In addition, learning can contribute to continuity, or change, or both. Continuity and change are not absolutes and therefore not always opposites. Learning can help a person change in some ways, whilst reinforcing dispositions, identity and position in others. Thus, learning may help to increase the cultural and social capital a person possesses, in relation to: desired employment; life in the family and community; and/or leisure. It can contribute to a sense of wellbeing and fulfilment. It can be enjoyable and stimulating. A combination of some of these can contribute to changing dispositions and a changing identity or, for example, to confirming an identity where learning is seen as a significant part of who a person is. However, successful learning in one area may make actions in other areas less possible. More apparently, educational failure can: close doors; reduce cultural and social capital; lower morale and a sense of wellbeing; and develop and/or confirm a person's identity as someone who cannot do school or college work, or for whom a university degree is too difficult. Engagement with formal education and training can challenge or reinforce social structures and inequalities, which are themselves related to issues of identity and agency.

Brief Implications for policy and practice

1). Formal education and training can have highly beneficial effects on a person's life and sense of well-being. However, no educational provision can be guaranteed to be beneficial in all cases.

- 2). The qualifications gained through formal education and training, and the lack of them, have been important for many of our sample, most obviously in relation to gaining desired employment.
- 3). For a significant numbers of people, the main benefits of participating in formal education and training were largely unrelated to gaining a qualification, even when that learning was employment –related.
- 4). Though many people do engage with formal education and training for reasons directly related to employment and employability, non-vocational provision - for example related to leisure activities and interests in culture, history and the arts - is also very important, and can have significant outcomes in terms of self-confidence and a sense of well-being.
- 5). Access to formal education and training is relevant at all stages in a person’s life, not just while they are young.
- 6). For potential learners who lack confidence or relevant economic, social or cultural capital, educational provision in a local, known community centre is of vital importance. Several of our stories demonstrate an on-going need for such provision, over a long period of time.
- 7). Whilst many of our sample could afford to pay fees to attend courses, others could only take up subsidised or free provision, or were unable to consider courses at all.
- 8). Professional guidance had helped some of our sample, and we can identify occasions in other stories where it could have been beneficial.

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