

# Skills Consultation Qualitative Research Programme

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All age careers offer

Michaela Rhode | Opinion Research and Statistics

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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# Background

- The draft 'Skills for Londoners' strategy was published in December 2017, and had a six week consultation period
- The public consultation comprised the following elements:
  - Representative polling with a sample of 1,000 Londoners
  - Surveys of the Talk London community (40,000 members)
  - Online discussions with the Talk London community
  - Focus groups and interviews with Londoners, recruited to specific criteria

# Objectives

- A programme of qualitative research was designed to inform thinking around how to develop an all age careers offer for Londoners
- This research aims to explore the mindset of C1C2DE Londoners as they make decisions at different life stages, with specific interest in:
  - Perceived barriers and opportunities to achieving aspirations in London
  - Awareness and understanding of upskilling options
  - Practicalities around upskilling e.g. where do they go for information, what is impacting decision making
  - Awareness of policy entitlements (and other sources of government investment e.g. advanced learner loans)
  - What an ideal learning offer should look like

# Methodology

- In December 2017, the Opinion Research and Statistics Team conducted 8 focus groups, and 7 interviews

4 x focus groups with 25-40 year olds

4 x focus groups with 50+ year olds

7 x interviews with adult learners

- Split by social grade and gender
  - 4 x groups C1C2
  - 4 x groups C2DE
- Split by geography
  - 2 x Local London
  - 2 x South London Partnership
  - 2 x West London
  - 2 x Central London Forward
- 3 BAME participants per group

- Participants had all recently completed a Level 2 qualification across a range of areas:
  - 2 x Graphic design
  - ECDL
  - 2 x ESOL
  - English Level 2
  - Maths GCSE

- This report also contains findings from a poll conducted on 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> December 2017, with a response of 1,088 London adults. The figures have been weighted to be representative of all Londoners aged 18+

# Executive Summary

- Participants were convinced of the important of taking up learning opportunities
  - See a clear correlation between learning and increased earnings
- Formal qualification seen as essential to getting ahead in competitive environment
  - Preference is for learning on the job, but formal qualifications seen as preferred by employers
- But qualifications not seen to offer any guarantee of progression/ success in the jobs market
  - View that as the workforce has become more qualified, qualifications have come to be worth less
  - Participants found it hard to know how much a qualification was really worth
- Cost and time the biggest barriers to taking on learning opportunities
  - Time a particular issue for young parents who are reluctant to spend time away from their children
- Uncertainty over outcome makes investment in learning less palatable
  - Participants found it hard to know how to judge quality of courses, or how well regarded a course would be by employers
  - Older participants felt that additional qualifications would not help them overcome perceived employer reluctance to hire older people
- There was low awareness of options for financial support
  - AEB policy entitlements difficult to understand, and most felt not relevant to them
  - Advanced Learner Loans popular but there was concern about taking on debt

# EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS

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# Participants felt ill-equipped to make career decisions on leaving education

- Participants criticised system for careers advice and guidance in schools
  - Overly UCAS focused, with little information provided on vocational training or career pathways
- Some expressed regret at decision to go to university, and wished they had taken a vocational route instead
  - Sense that many degrees do not lead to a clear career path/ that degrees are not valued by employers
  - Several said they wished they had known how profitable a career could be had in the trades
- Many said they had no clear plan on leaving education, and little sense of the importance of their decisions
  - Participants described 'falling into' their first job, and said that their priority at that time was to enjoy themselves

*"I wish I had done something electricals based. It's something that I always wanted to do, but they didn't give you much options in schools."*

Male, 25-40, C2DE

*"We didn't have a careers advisor at my school. They just said go to college, which I did, then go to university, which I did. I was completely lost on what to do next"*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

*"From the age of about 12 I think we should be saying to our children 'you need to start thinking about what you want to do in life.'"*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

# Now at a time when they are looking for career change

- Many were disappointed with current careers, which offered little chance of progression
  - Particularly true for C2DE participants, many of whom were working in low paid retail jobs
  - Female participants who had stopped working to have children, worried about future employment prospects
- As a result participants were looking for change, and re-training was seen as key to achieving this
  - Several had identified new career path they would like to take, and the course that would enable them to get there
- Many said they wished they could speak to careers advisor to understand what paths might be open to them
  - Women in particular were looking for advice on how to become self-employed so they could fit work around caring responsibilities

*"I've done loads of jobs- Mcdonalds, call centres, Supremo glaze. I would like to be a make up artist. If I had known about that course when I was my son's age I would totally have gone and done it and I could have done something I was really interested in but we didn't know nothing about that."*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

*"I like the idea of working for myself. I need something that can fit around the kids."*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

# But many are worried about the risk of change, especially if they have children

- Changing career seen to be a risky and uncertain process
  - Training requires investment/ loss of earning
  - No way of knowing how easy it will be to get a job
  - Have to start from scratch and accept lower earnings
- For those with children, priority is to maintain income levels and provide care
  - In both male and female groups, participants said having children changed their priorities and reduced their appetite for risk
- Mothers worried about their ability to get a job whilst their children were still young due to perceived employer discrimination
  - Perception that employers avoid hiring parents with direct caring responsibilities because it is thought this makes them less reliable employees

- Just 24% of Londoners say they think it would be easy to change the sector or role they work in, whilst 40% say it would be difficult
- Londoners in their 20s are most likely to think it's easy (43%), whilst those in their 30s are more likely to say it's difficult (41%)

*"I was going to do all these courses and then my son was born and I just thought I haven't got time. If I can pay the bills and I've got my wife at home then that's all that's important."*

Male, 25-40, C2DE

*"It's difficult to get a job because employers think you're not reliable if you've got children. And then you have a break on your CV and then they say you don't have any experience."*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

# Men and women in very different positions at this stage of their lives

- Men established in a certain line of work, and looking to consolidate experience
  - Many been through redundancy/ career change several times, giving confidence in ability to adapt
  - Looking to consolidate e.g. by becoming self employed/ gaining more secure employment
- Women looking to get back into work, but feeling insecure about professional experience and ability
  - Caring responsibilities for both children and elderly parents means many had had long periods of time not working
  - Professional experience often fragmented and out of date

*“I was working for a construction company. Got sick of it working for other people so recently became self-employed, a sub contractor and that’s working well.”*

Male, 50+,C2DE

*“Over the years I’ve had a lot of things interfering with my forward plans and mainly that’s been caring. It’s my mum at the moment but my dad was very ill for years. I think it’s stopped me from dedicating myself to other things, because I just didn’t have time.”*

Female, 50+,C1C2

# This group have a strong sense that their age puts them at a disadvantage in the labour market

- Participants felt that employers prefer to hire younger people because they think they will get more out of them
  - Also perception that younger people will have better digital skills
- Several participants had had experiences of being told that they are 'over-qualified', which they interpreted as a comment on their age
  - Perception that the skills and experience they have gained over their working lives is not valued in current labour market
- Participants saw this as a serious barrier to entering the workforce/ progressing further in their careers

- 20% of 50-64 year olds think it would be easy to change the sector or role they work in, compared to 43% of 18-24 year olds
- 17% of 50-64 year olds think it would be easy to progress in their current workplace, compared to 46% of 18-24 year olds

*“Colleagues of mine are in this position where they’re kind of past it. 45/50 so got another 15 years of work but no one seems to want them anymore.”*

Male, 50+, C2DE

# The quant suggests lack of opportunity is major barrier to progression in work, whereas lack of skills/qualification is major barrier to changing role/sector

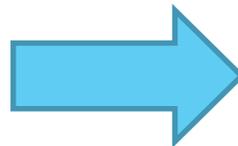
## Barriers to in work progression\*

37%

There are no roles for me to progress into

19%

I don't feel supported to progress by senior or line management



43% identified at least one of these two options as a barrier to progression in work

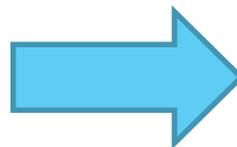
## Barriers to changing role/sector\*

24%

I don't think I have the right skills

24%

I don't think I have the right qualifications



35% identified at least one of these two options as a barrier to changing role/sector

# ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING AND PROGRESSION

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# Learning and upskilling an accepted part of working life

- Participants felt that it was inevitable that they would need to learn new skills to remain relevant and active in the labour market
  - Older participants remarked on the huge technological changes they have had to adapt to over their working lives
  - Younger participants speculated on what trends such as the decline of the high street and automation would mean for the future labour market
- Participants also saw a clear correlation between learning and progression/ increased earnings
  - But felt that it was not always easy to know how to convert learning into higher earnings

*“You’ve got to keep up with everyone, and because everything is changing so quickly these days you just have to keep up. I was doing a full time job in retail and with the internet and people shopping online things change. So you have to keep re-educating.”*

Female, 50+, C1C2

*“You always want to earn more money. To earn more money you need to get a better job and to get a better job you need to upskill or train yourself.”*

Female, 25-40, C1C2

# Preference is for learning on the job

- Real world, practical experience seen as the best way to gain new skills
  - Self teaching e.g. through YouTube also seen to be effective- men more likely to have done this than women
- Formal training courses criticised for being disconnected from practical application
  - Participants had had experiences of taking courses and then finding that some of what they had learnt had no practical application/ was out of date
  - Formal courses also thought to be of varying quality, with some having little true value in the labour market
- Older women the only group to consider volunteering as a way of gaining new skills
  - Several said they had used this as a way of transitioning back to work after having had children

- 39% of Londoners say that learning on the job is their preferred way of developing new skills for the workplace
- A certified course or formal external training is favoured by 12% or 11% of Londoners respectively

*“I did the practical side of electricals first and then I went to college and I actually knew more than the guy teaching the practical side. I would say ‘no we don’t do it like that anymore’”*

Male, 50+, C2DE

# Formal qualifications seen as essential to getting ahead in competitive environment

- Participants had a sense that in the past it was possible to move casually through the labour market
  - Perception that employers were less likely to insist on formal qualifications
- London's hyper competitive labour market means this is no longer the case
  - London attracts highly qualified people, driving up competition for jobs across all levels of the economy
- Having the right formal qualifications seen as essential to getting ahead in London
  - Participants felt that employers want to see proof of all skills, and that self taught/ informal skill acquisition is not recognised

*"Hundreds of applicants for one job. Companies have got the pick of people haven't they? They don't have to compromise now."*

Female, 25-40, C1C2

*"It's a way of sieving out people so they see if you're able to study then it means you can focus on something for a certain period of time."*

Male, 25-40, C1C2

# But participants felt that qualifications offered no guarantee of progression

- View that as the workforce has become more qualified, qualifications have come to be worth less
  - Participants felt that whereas in the past a qualification was a sure path to getting a job/ a promotion, today there is no such guarantee
  - University degree a key symbol of this
- Several participants had had experiences of gaining a qualification, but finding themselves unable to get a job due to lack of experience
  - Real world experience and personal contacts seen as just as important to success as formal qualifications
- Participants said they found it hard to know how much a qualification was really worth
  - Perception that employers only care about degrees, and that that will always trump any other kind of qualification

*“Now there is this whole thing of come to higher education, spend all your money, and we will just see what happens. It’s not worth anything.”*

Male, 25-40, C2DE

*“It’s just the thing of is this going to be a waste of time? Is this going to directly give me a salary raise or is this going to give me a promotion, or is it just going to be a nice little certificate that doesn’t get me anywhere?”*

Female, 25-40, C1C2

# Employers seen to play an important role, but experiences were mixed

- Employers seen as a source of training and learning, but experiences of this were very mixed
    - Most said they had only ever had 'tick-box' training such as health and safety
    - A minority had had internal training which had led to progression e.g. management training
    - A small minority had had their employer pay for them to do an external course and given them paid time off to complete it
  - Most felt that their employer was not interested in helping them to progress
    - Perception that competitive labour market means employers can treat employees as 'disposable'
    - Perception that employers do not invest in employees for fear that they will leave and go to a rival
- Just 20% of working Londoners say that their employer offers all the opportunities for progression or continuing professional development (CPD) in the workplace they would want
  - 27% say there are no opportunities for CPD in the workplace
  - Young Londoners are more likely to say they have been offered opportunities for progression, whilst C2DE Londoners are much more likely to say that they don't know

# There were some clear trends in the type of skills participants were interested in

- Digital skills were top of mind for all
  - Nearly all of the older participants had undertaken some kind of digital training over the course of their career e.g. Excel, PowerPoint courses
  - Younger participants already felt that they were at a disadvantage compared to their children when it comes to technology
- Vocational skills also very popular
  - Several participants had done courses in areas such as beauty, accountancy, electrician, which were seen as offering a clear path to future employment
- Business and employability of interest
  - Young mothers were interested in learning how to start your own business e.g. web design, social media marketing
  - Older women looking to return to work interested in general employability skills e.g. presenting, social media skills
- English and maths not valued highly
  - Participants did not identify proficiency in English and maths as important to career progression, with many saying that literacy and numeracy were irrelevant in their work

*"It's changing all the time and if you don't use those skills then you lose them. I did a course on Excel and PowerPoint just to remind myself."*

Female, 50+, C2DE

*"Algebra. You don't use that unless you're a physicist or something."*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

# BARRIERS TO LEARNING

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# Londoners are convinced of the importance of taking up learning opportunities

- Participants clearly felt that gaining qualifications/ engaging in learning was important to career development

- Only 14% of Londoners say they don't think taking on learning opportunities is necessary to progressing in their career
- Londoners aged 50+ are more likely to say that they don't think it's necessary to progressing (22% of 50-64 year olds)

*"Because what happens is you leave yourself in a vulnerable position if you're standing still. People just come up and take over."*

Male, 25-40, C1C2

*"I think it's really important in this day and age. It's not like before. 60 years ago you could have the same job for a really long time. The children these days who are going to school they will probably be working on things that aren't even created today."*

Female, 39 years old, Adult learner studying graphic design

# Cost is by far the biggest barrier to uptake

- All participants identified cost as a barrier, both in terms of cost of the course and loss of earnings if time is taken off work
  - Young, female participants flagged childcare costs as a major barrier
- Not seen to be such a barrier for the unemployed, but there was some confusion around how funding system works
  - Some C2DE participants were unsure whether going on a course would make them ineligible to receive JSA
  - Several female participants had had experiences of being refused funding on the basis that their partner's income was too high for them to qualify

- 49% of Londoners identified cost as a barrier to taking on learning opportunities
- Younger Londoners, ethnic minorities and women are most likely to say that cost is a barrier

*"But then you're studying, so then you're not entitled to Job Seekers because you're not looking for work."*

Female, 25-40,  
C2DE

*"I'm 34 and I can't imagine now going back to study a trade. I would love to but the idea of having to miss out on my income. I would miss the money."*

Male, 25-40, C1C2

# Added to this, participants said that uncertainty over outcome was a barrier to investing time and money

- Participants felt that cost would not be such a problem, were they sure of where it would take them
    - Many said that not knowing what career path they want to take was the main barrier they faced
  - Participants thought it was difficult to judge the quality of courses, and to know how much a qualification is worth to an employer
    - Participants had had experiences of doing courses with very low pass rates, which they felt undermined the value of that qualification
    - Many doubted whether a qualification would actually lead to a job
- 24% of Londoners said they did not know what type of training would help them progress in their career
  - 20% of Londoners said they were not motivated to take up learning opportunities
  - 13% of Londoners said they did not have the confidence to take up learning opportunities

*“The web design course I did, there were a couple of guys on there who were absolute rubbish but they still got the certificate because the pass rate was so low. So if me and this other guy went for a job, he has got the exact same qualification as I’ve got, but he is rubbish at it.”*

Male, 50+, C2DE

# Parents worry about how the course will fit around their children

- Men and women said they worried that doing a course would mean time away from their children
- Women said they thought timing of course could be a barrier, if it interfered with pick up times for kids
  - Also commented on lack of after school clubs for children as a barrier, especially during school holidays

- 40% of Londoners identified 'not having free time at the times of day I would need it' as a barrier to taking up a learning opportunity
- This rises to 47% amongst 25-49 year olds

*"You've got to look at the times because you've got to drop the kids off at nine but then classes might start at nine."*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

*"As soon as my son was born I thought I would rather spend time with him than go and do all these courses."*

Male, 25-40, C2DE

*"The minute you have a child that's when everything gets complicated."*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

# Case studies\*



*"I've got three children so I'm thinking...I've got friends who are hairdressers or do eyelashes. Things that are easy that I could do part-time from home."*

Female, 25-40, C2DE

- Aditi is 33 year olds, has three kids and lives in East London
- She is not working and has little professional experience
- She wants to train in something that will allow her to be self employed e.g. beauty
- She's found a course on how to become self employed that she is interested in, but it's an all day course and the times clash with when she needs to pick up her kids



*"I'm attracted by a trade, being self employed. Some of my mates who did gas and electric are earning stupid money. I think to do that I would have to go through the whole process of going to college or do an apprenticeship"*

Male, 25-40, C1C2

- Samuel is 34, doesn't have any kids and lives in South London
- He is currently working as a store manager. He has good IT skills, which he updates through self teaching on YouTube
- He is interested in re-training to go into a trade, as he thinks he would have higher earning potential
- But he is worried about the loss of earning that would come with doing this, and the chance that he would have to start again on a low salary

# Older participants were unconvinced that qualifications would help them

- Older participants felt that the main problem they faced was that employers were reluctant to employ older people
  - Most did not think that additional qualifications would solve this issue, and so did not think there was much point in investing time and money into them
  - Older women in particular lacked confidence in their ability to re-join the workforce after extended periods of not working
- There was also some concern, particularly from the women, that they would be the odd one out in an adult learning class, as everyone would be younger than them
  - Participants liked the idea of mixed age classes, but were nervous at the thought that they would be the only older person in a class

- The quant shows that older people are less likely to identify cost or time as barrier to taking up opportunities
- 21% of 50-64 year olds chose 'other', compared to 14% of Londoners (analysis of responses to follow)

*"It is not only the course cost. It is actually being taken on and being employed by someone. I don't think that people want to actually employ someone who is going to be beneath them and they are younger than the person they are employing."*

Female, 50+, C1C2

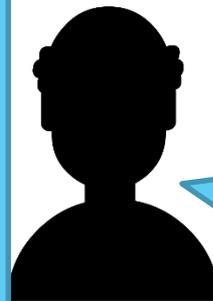
# Case studies\*



*"I wanted to get back into accountancy. I have been unemployed for way longer than I ever intended. I've just got this job in the sandwich factory. It's not what I wanted but I need the work."*

Female, 50+, C2DE

- Sarah is 58, has grown up kids and lives in Croydon
- She has a professional background in accountancy. She took five years out to look after her kids, and then tried to go back into it but found she couldn't make work fit around caring responsibilities so took part-time work instead.
- She recently did a Level 3 accountancy course to try to get back into office work. She spent six months trying to find an office job without success.
- She has recently started a job on the assembly line of a sandwich factory.



*"My contract means I never know how much work I'll have from one month to the next. And it's too much standing outside in the cold. I want to make a change. Become self-employed. I'm saving up to buy a car so I can do delivery driving."*

Male, 50+, C2DE

- Ahmed is 62, has grown up kids, and lives in Bexley
- He is currently working as a security guard at a football stadium, and finds the work is becoming more difficult as he gets older.
- He is on a zero hours contract and worries about his future security. He wishes he had gone to university as he thinks he would be in a better position now.
- He wants to become a self employed delivery driver and is saving up to buy a vehicle

# Participants were confident that they knew where to go to find opportunities

- Participants said they would go to their local college\*, or look online for information
  - Participants remarked that courses run by local colleges were well advertised on billboards and buses
- Older participants said they would go to their local library\*, and a small minority of younger participants said they might look on LinkedIn
  - Most participants said they would not use social media

*"I always get 'people want to add you on LinkedIn' and I'm like 'No! I don't know what that means.'"*

Male, 25-40, C2DE

*"I live very close to Stanmore College and the adverts are all hanging out there all the time. And on the back of the bus"*

Male, 50+, C2DE

- 52% of Londoners say they know at least a little bit about the learning and training opportunities available to them, while 27% say they don't know anything
- The most popular place to go for to find out more about developing new skills in the workplace is internet searches (30%), followed by talking to the employer (13%).
- Only 2% would use LinkedIn, 1% would use Facebook and less than 1% would use Twitter
- 18% said they did not know where to go for information, rising to 24% amongst C2DE

\*Neither local college nor local library were provided as options in the quant

# Participants were sceptical as to the efficacy of online courses

- Online learning seen to offer a potential way of overcoming barriers of cost and time
  - Open University a well trusted brand, with several participants saying they had either done a course or considered doing one
- But most said they did not think it was an effective way to learn
  - Online learning requires high level of self motivation, which is challenging especially in a distracting home environment e.g. with young children
  - Online learning dependent on ability to self teach, which many find difficult
  - Online learning not as fun, and does not offer same benefits of confidence building/ communication skills as classroom learning

*“With the Open University I did a study at home, and you do have to be extremely motivated to allocate yourself the time to get on and do the work. Especially if you are a woman that has got an existing family.”*

Female, 50+, C2DE

*“In terms of like knowing what something is really about, it kind of needs to be shown to you. Like it needs to be seen. I don’t think you get that with an online course.”*

Male, 25-40, C1C2

# Participants did not see the job centre as a source of support

- Participants had had a number of negative experiences of job centres
  - Told to apply for unsuitable jobs e.g. older, female who had just been made redundant by a travel agent told to apply for bricklaying
  - Force you to go on 'employability' courses, which are shambolic and offer no real value
  - Force you to 'volunteer', when in actual fact you are working for free and not gaining any meaningful experience
- As a result most felt that the job centre was there to catch people out, rather than support them in achieving their goals

- Only 3% of Londoners said they would go to the job centre for information on learning and training opportunities

*"There was this one admin course they made me go on. It was kind of laughable in the end. Our group had to be split up into different rooms because we couldn't work together. We all knew damn well they just you no matter what or they give you the answers to the questions so you pass a certificate."*

Female, 50+, C2DE

# POLICY ENTITLEMENTS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

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# There was low spontaneous awareness of options for financial support

- Many participants were aware of funding provided by local authorities, but thought this was only given to those on benefits and even then not guaranteed
    - Perception that there is a lot of inconsistency in what is provided between boroughs
  - No awareness of government policy entitlements
    - Strong perception that if you are over 25 and working then you will not be eligible for any government support
  - Very low awareness of Advanced Learner Loans
    - 2 participants had heard of this- 1 through advertising, and 1 through searching online for information about funding
    - None of the adult learners were aware of advanced learner loans, and all said no information on this had ever been provided by colleges
- Just 6% of Londoners are aware of and know something about government support to undertake training
  - 55% of Londoners have not heard of any government support to undertake training
  - ABC1 Londoners are slightly more aware of support, but are no more likely to know what it offers
  - Most Londoners say they would not be eligible for government support (54%), or that they don't know (32%)
  - 15% think they might be eligible for government support, with C2DEs and under 25s more likely to think they are eligible

# We tested the following with participants

## Adult Education Budget (AEB)

1. English and maths, up to and including Level 2 :
  - Fully funded for individuals aged 19 and over, who have not previously attained a GCSE grade A\*-C or grade 4, or higher
2. First full qualification at level 2:
  - Fully funded for 19-23 year olds
  - Fully funded for 24+ unemployed
  - Co-funded for 24+ other
3. First full qualification at Level 3:
  - Fully funded for 19-23 year olds
  - Loan funded for 24+ unemployed
  - Loan funded for 24+ other

## Advanced Learner Loans

- The government offers Advanced Learner Loans to help adult learners manage the costs of further education and training in England. These loans cover tuition fees for a range of Level 3 to Level 6 courses including:
  - A-levels
  - General and vocational qualifications
  - Access to Higher Education diplomas
- Anyone aged 19 or over and living in England is eligible to apply. The amount you're eligible for depends on the course you want to study and the fees charged by the college or training provider.
- You don't have to pay back any of your loan until you've started earning over £21,000 a year.

# Participants found the AEB policy entitlements difficult to understand

- Participants said they found the language around 'Levels' confusing
  - Participants said that in general they found the variety of different types of qualifications confusing, and that this made it difficult to judge the suitability of courses
  - Particularly true for older participants
- Wording reinforced preconceptions that funding is only available for the unemployed and the under 25s
  - Older participants said they found the wording around '19+' off-putting, as it suggested to them that this is aimed at younger people
- Most participants dismissed this as 'not for me'

*"There are so many different types. GNVQs, NVQs, BTECs- I don't know what any of these things mean."*

Male, 25-40, C2DE

*"If I want to do a course I could get help even though I am working? I thought you had to be signed on to get that sort of stuff? ."*

Male, 50+, C2DE

*"As soon as I see that and I see those ages, I automatically switch off."*

Female, 50+, C1C2

# There was a high degree of interest in Advanced Learner Loans

- Real interest in this, with many saying this could be relevant to them
  - Some confusion over difference between this and a student loan- assumption on first reading that this could only be used to fund a 2-3 year degree
- Older participants were not convinced that they would be eligible
  - Wording of '19+' off-putting as it made them think that this was aimed at younger people
- Many worried about taking on debt
  - Older participants in particular said they would not be comfortable with this
  - All wanted to know what the level of interest would be on the loan

*"I've been looking for something like this because I want to do a course in plumbing. I've been looking on forums but everyone on there says they got it paid for because they were on benefits. I didn't know you could get a loan."*

Male, 25-40, C1C2

*"I am 58. If I wanted to go and say the ACCA course I could get the funding. Realistically though at my age I am probably not going to get a job paying over £21,000. Will I still get funded even though they know I am probably never going to be able to pay that back?"*

Female, 50+, C2DE

# IDEAL LEARNING OFFER

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# Overall adult learners were positive about their experiences

- Motivation for wanting to go on course was primarily employment related, but there were also other reasons:
  - Get a job/ improve employment prospects
  - Gain confidence after a period of not working
  - Meet new people/ do something interesting
- All said they found out about the course through local college
  - Advisors said to be helpful in guiding people to the right course for them
- Nearly all said they really enjoyed their experience
  - Courses engaging- group exercises appreciated
  - Flexibility in timing of classes appreciated
  - Class sizes at the right level
  - Combination of offline and online learning appreciated
  - Several said it had boosted their confidence and given them improved communication/ presentation skills

*“The class was under 10 people and one tutor. We helped each other which I found useful. We all got along well and that made it enjoyable. We asked for more homework because we were so keen to learn!”*

Female, 44 years old, Adult learner studying ECDL

*“We had to do presentations to each other and I really enjoyed that. I think it helped my confidence.”*

Female, 38 years old, Adult learner studying graphic design

# However there were some criticisms

- Funding options not well communicated
  - Participants who were not eligible for full funding were not told about Advanced Learner Loans
  - This caused particular difficulty for two female participants who had husbands whose salaries meant they were not eligible for funding, but who had no money of their own
- Mixed ability classes
  - Criticism that people are able to take classes in subjects such as accountancy even if they don't speak English/ can't use a computer
  - Several said they thought there should be some form of basic assessment before allowing people onto courses
- High turnover of teachers
  - One participant on a year long ESOL course said he had had five teachers in one year and thought that this inconsistency had seriously impeded his ability to learn

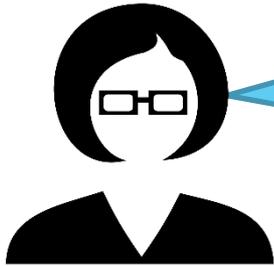
*"In regards to funding, I had to look everywhere to even see about the advanced learner loans. The information is just not out there."*

Female, 25-40, C1C2

*"The only thing I didn't like is that it was meant to be advanced level but not everyone at the class was advanced so it was difficult for us to have conversations."*

Female, 35 years old, Adult learner ESOL

# Case studies\*

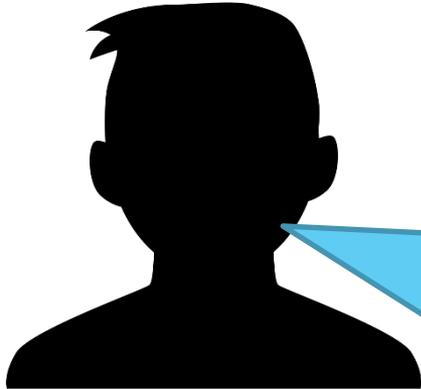


*"I wasn't working at the time. My boys were getting older and didn't need me like they used to. I wanted to do something that would look good on my CV. But I was also looking forward to meeting new friends and thought it would be useful to engage myself in something."*

Female, 44 years old, Adult learner studying ECDL

- Anna is originally from Japan. She is 44 years old, has two teenage sons and lives in New Malden. Before having her children she did some odd jobs, but never had a steady career.
- She decided to do the European Computer Driving License course as a first step towards preparing herself for returning to the world of work
- The course was subsidised so she only had to pay £250 in deposit and fees.
- She really enjoyed the course, and felt that it not only gave her new skills but boosted her confidence and led to her meeting new people.
- At the end of the course the tutor suggested she volunteer as a helper in the college. After a year of volunteering, she applied for a paid position and today works as a learning support assistant at Kingston adult education college

# Case studies\*



*"I think it's a little bit easier when looking for work, just having those basic GCSEs. I've always avoided interviews. I've worked mainly as self employed. Working at the margins. I think this will help me be more expansive in what I could look at in terms of employment."*

Male, 45 years old, Adult learner studying Level 2 English and Maths GCSE

- Tom is 45 years old, and works as a gardener and a cleaner
- He is severely dyslexic and left school without any qualifications. He has always avoided applying for any jobs that require an interview because he is worried about his lack of qualifications.
- He recently decided to take English and Maths GCSEs because he thought it would help boost his confidence, and might help his employment prospects
- Last year he did a Level 2 English course, but did not feel it was useful because he was the only native English speaker in the class and there was a high turnover of teachers. He hopes to go on to study GCSE English this year, but this will depend on his ability to pass the preliminary assessment.
- He also did a Maths GCSE which he felt was well taught but he is unhappy with the grade he attained, so he thinks he will do it again.

# Participants had a clear sense of what an ideal learning experience would look like

## The ideal course...

- ✓ Should be free or subsidised, with clear information on funding options provided by the college
- ✓ Classes should be mixed age, with a balance between younger and older
- ✓ There should be screening criteria where appropriate e.g. basic computer skills for accountancy class
- ✓ Courses should aim to build confidence and communication skills e.g. through group exercises, as well as provide specific skills
- ✓ Should be delivered in a classroom environment, and supplemented with online exercises
- ✓ Should offer a range of options in terms of timing of classes to fit different needs
- ✓ Should provide a meaningful qualification that is a true reflection of your ability
- ✓ Should have links with employers/ include a work placement

*"I think it would be nice if it was varied in age, because everyone brings something different to the table. I was on one where one young girl was on the phone complaining to her friends that everyone on the course was really ancient."*

Female, 50+, C2DE

*"Basically if you went for an interview and you told them you have this qualification in IT, you want their eyes to light up and be like 'oh really?'. You want it to be not just a piece of paper."*

Male, 25-40, C2DE