Rural learning demand and provision

East of England Development Agency

Final report
July 2008

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1 Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

1.1 In March 2008, CFE and The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) were jointly commissioned by the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) to undertake a project to investigate the true nature of rural demand for workforce skills provision and the barriers to providing this.

1.2 The research builds on the work EEDA has carrying out with the East of England Rural Forum (EERF) and the East of England Skills and Competitiveness Partnership (EESCP) to review the skills profile and participation rates of the workforce in rural areas.

1.3 The research brief was to explore workforce skills provision across rural areas and to develop proposals to address current challenges through initiatives that would help those living in rural areas access to the full range of provision.

1.4 The findings presented in this report are focussed entirely on research undertaken in rural areas. No comparisons with urban areas can be made as such research was out of the scope of this project.

Aims and Objectives

1.5 The aim of the research was to investigate the true nature of rural demand for workforce skills provision and the barriers to providing this.

1.6 The research was designed to provide overview of the cost of rurally-based workforce skills provision for both the learner and provider incorporating:

n Courses which are delivered;

n Courses for which there is an underlying demand but no current provision because it is seen as uneconomical.

1.7 The research has informed the development of recommendations and suggestions for potential pilot projects to address the current challenges faced in rural workforce provision.

Methodology

1.8 The research was carried out in four main stages:

n Stage 1 – Desk Based research

n Stage 2 – Qualitative research with:

      – **Employers**

      – **Employed non-learners**

      – **Unemployed non-learners**

      – **Training Providers**

- **Stage 3 – Stakeholder Consultation events**

- **Stage 4 – Final Report**

1.9 Three Local Authority District areas were chosen as the focus for the research. One district from each of three counties across the East of England was selected to ensure a regional spread and to explore issues in areas of the east of England with differing rural characteristics. The three areas chosen were;

- **Maldon (Essex)**

- **Fenland (Cambridgeshire)**

- **Breckland (Norfolk)**

Stage 1: Desk based research: Literature Review and Data Analysis

1.10 A review of current literature on rural workforce skills demand and provision was undertaken. The focus of this review was on research and analysis that illuminate the nature of demand for and supply of skills among employers and individuals in rural areas, and in particular on issues relating to those rural areas where low levels of skills and qualifications remain prevalent among the adult population.

1.11 Statistical and other data on the economic, social and educational characteristics of the three study areas was also reviewed, to provide background and context for the field research and recommendations. Data was accessed from a range of sources including Office of National Statistics, East of England Observatory, Nomisweb, Learning and Skills Council and Commission for Rural Communities.

Stage 2: Qualitative research with Employers, employed non-learners, unemployed non-learners and training providers

1.12 Qualitative research was undertaken with employers, employed non-learners, unemployed non-learners and training providers to explore current workforce skills provision, demand and cost.

Stage 2.1 – Employers' Focus Groups

1.13 Focus groups were held with employers from a range of sectors that represented the make up of the employment base in the respective areas. In total 16 employers were involved across the three areas.

1.14   The sample for the focus groups was recruited through a number of methods. Initial contact was made with intermediaries from employer representative bodies including local authorities, local business forums and the respective Chamber of Commerce. A number of business databases were used as a source of local employers. This use of a range of sources of recruitment ensured we were able to gain a wide range of views from employers.

1.15   Using focus groups as an alternative to one-to-one interviews offered a number of advantages, including allowing a greater number of views to be sought and analysed. An additional benefit was that bringing together employers generated debate around issues, encouraging more detailed thinking and highlighting similarities and differences in opinion.

Stage 2.2 – Employed non-learners Focus Groups

1.16   The research was based on those people who were currently in employment but were not engaged in any learning. Being not engaged in learning was defined as 'people who have not participated in learning in the last 2 months'. For the purpose of this report we will refer to this group of people as an 'employed non-learner'.

1.17   It was specifically chosen to focus this research on individuals who were not currently engaged in any learning as they would give the clearest understanding of the reasons for this disengagement and allow us to explore un-met demand.

1.18   Focus groups were held with employees from a range of sectors that represented the make up of the employment base in the respective areas. In total, we spoke to 20 employed non-learners from across the three areas.

1.19   Within Breckland it was decided through discussions with the project steering group to focus the research into employed non-learners specifically on migrant workers recruited through the Keystone Development Trust[1]. The group included individuals from six different countries and from a range of employment sectors. References to comments from employed migrants who were not currently engaged in learning will be referenced as 'migrant worker'.

Stage 2.3 – Unemployed non-learner Interviews

1.20   Recruitment for unemployed non-learners was through Jobcentre Plus (JCP). Interviews were used to overcome barriers around this client group often lacking confidence in speaking within a group situation.

1.21   Interviews were conducted with JSA claimants face to face within the Job Centres in Breckland and Fenland. In Maldon, as there is no Job Centre, JCP staff identified suitable candidates and asked for their consent to be contacted. Telephone interviews were then undertaken with this group.

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[1] www.keystonetrust.org.uk/

1.22 In total 18 unemployed people were interviewed across the three areas. Our sample included a good cross section of claimants by gender, age, duration of JSA claim and length of time since learning.

1.23 All of our focus groups and telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. To improve response rates and encourage 'harder to engage' employers and individuals to participate in the research an incentive payment was provided to all participants.

Stage 2.4 – Training Provider Telephone Interviews

1.24 We carried out four in-depth telephone interviews with training providers in each of the three areas. This enabled us to speak to a range of public, private, small and large providers that have responsibility for providing training and provision across the East of England.

Stage Three: Consultation Events

1.25 The final stage of the project comprised a consultation event in each of the respective areas on the following dates:

- Breckland - 31st of June, 2008

- Maldon - 1st July, 2008

- Fenland - 2nd July, 2008.

1.26 The events brought together private and public sector representatives to debate the research findings and discuss potential areas for action. Three scenarios informed by the research findings were developed for debate and exploration at the events.

1.27 Each of the three events were attended by up to 20 delegates respectively including employers from a range of sectors with small independent businesses alongside large national organisations; as well as representatives from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), Jobcentre Plus, LSC, local authorities and training providers.

1.28 Employers and training providers were identified through Stage Two of the research.

1.29 The consultation events fed into the final conclusions and recommendations presented within this report.

2 Literature Review

Summary

This chapter summarises findings from recent research into demand for and provision of skills in rural areas. Together with the analysis of current data in the following chapter, it provides background and context for the field research and analysis. It is also intended to complement the East of England Rural Forum's Position Paper on Rural Learning and Skills.

Research suggests that addressing low levels of skills and qualifications in rural areas poses distinctive challenges. Providers face a range of difficulties in delivering learning in the countryside linked to geographical scale and sparseness of populations, which are not currently reflected in centralised funding and planning arrangements. Learner and potential learners have access to reduced opportunities as a result. Alongside limited choice of provision, people living in rural areas may face a range of other barriers which inhibit their participation in learning.

However, the persistence of low levels of skills and qualifications in some rural areas has been traced to local economies and labour markets. Weak economic performance linked to low productivity, low skills, low incomes and low wages is evident in remote and sparsely populated rural areas. Evidence of a 'low wage, low skill' economic equilibrium has been identified. Local labour markets in such areas are characterised by: high levels of self-employment; much part time, seasonal and casual work; high levels of in-work poverty; widespread employment of migrant workers; limited choice of jobs; and restricted access to training.

These features of some rural economies and labour markets are reflected in low levels of demand for skills, qualifications and training among both employers and individuals. Enhanced opportunities for learning and skills development therefore need to be integrated into wider strategies for economic development, including better support services for small and micro businesses, and infrastructure development.

Introduction

2.1 Recent years have seen a notable growth in the literature exploring questions relating to rural economies, labour markets, skills and learning. This interest can be traced to a number of sources. Introduced in the rural white paper of 2000, the principle of 'rural proofing' sets out a government commitment to ensure that all domestic policies take account of rural circumstances and need[2]. Understanding the characteristics of rural areas, the ways in which they are changing, and their distinctive and different needs in relation to public services have therefore become important dimensions of policy development and policy implementation. The 2001 foot and mouth epidemic, and the mounting anxiety about the perceived 'crisis' facing rural communities that followed in its wake, forced a renewed focus on building an evidence base to support rural development. Defra's 2004 rural strategy, the Haskins review of rural delivery, and the work of the Countryside Agency and the Commission for Rural Communities, for example, have driven a substantial expansion in rural research. In this context, the implications of specific and inter-related policy agendas around sustainable development, sustainable communities, economic productivity, social justice and adult skills have all invited analysis from a specifically rural perspective.

2.2 The focus of this review is on research and analysis that can shed light on the nature of demand for and supply of skills among employers and individuals in rural areas, and in particular on issues relating to those rural areas where low levels of skills and qualifications remain prevalent among the adult population. Attention has been chiefly confined to materials published in the last five years, as being most relevant to the context of the present study.

Learning and skills provision in rural areas

2.3 Research suggests that people living and working in the countryside face distinctive difficulties in accessing learning and skills development, linked to their rural location.

Challenges for delivery

2.4 Providers face particular challenges in developing and delivering provision in geographically extensive areas and to dispersed populations. A number of specific delivery issues are consistently highlighted[3]:

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[2] Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (2000), *Our Countryside, Our Future* (London: DETR); Commission for Rural Communities (2006a) *Rural Proofing: a guide for the skills community* (London: CRC).

[3] Learning and Skills Council (2003) *Issues Affecting Education and Training in Sparsely Populated Areas* (Coventry: LSC); C. Atkin, A Rose and R. Shier (2005) *Provision of and Learner Engagement with Adult Literacy, Numeracy and ESOL Support in Rural Areas: a comparative case study* (London: NRDC); A. Selby, E. Tolhurst and K. McGimpsey (2006)

n The scale of operations. Numbers and class sizes are usually small, and the cost per learner of providing courses is therefore prohibitively high.

n The potential for generating income through fees may also be low.

n Colleges are often the sole provider for their area and feel that they should be offering the broadest possible curriculum, but struggle to define what this should be.

n There are difficulties with getting sufficient, suitably qualified tutors into rural communities, and this is particularly so in relation to numeracy and ESOL. Poor transport links and longer travel times to teach in rural areas mean that tutors on hourly pay may not be adequately compensated for the extra effort involved.

n Certain aspects of provision, such as outreach training in widely dispersed centres and the marketing of provision to widely spread communities, may be disproportionately expensive.

n Local facilities may be unavailable or inadequate, for example in failing to meet required health and safety standards.

n Employer involvement is low. Colleges and providers have difficulties finding local businesses to act as sponsors for, and champions of, work based learning. Specific difficulties are associated with recruiting work-based learners from small and micro-businesses, which make up the overwhelming majority of rural enterprises.

n Issues surrounding the ICT infrastructure have posed problems.

n Despite widespread recognition of these challenges, funding and delivery methodologies continue to be based on an urban paradigm, and do not take account of the distinctive rural context. The LSC appears reluctant to accept the argument that delivery costs are higher in rural areas, and resists the incorporation of a sparsity factor to reflect this.

2.5 For learners and potential learners, this more limited range of provision results in a lack of choice. This in turn can perpetuate a cycle of disengagement if people are unable to access learning opportunities that match their needs and interests. Similarly, there are often few obvious, accessible progression routes for rural learners, so that people who have participated are forced to leave learning[4].

Reaching Rural Communities: the West Midlands Widening Participation Action Fund experience (Leicester: NIACE).

[4] Atkin *et al*, *Provision in Rural Areas.*

Barriers for learners

2.6 Lack of suitable provision is not the only obstacle that adults living in rural areas may face to participation. A number of studies have now been undertaken which identify barriers to learning in rural areas

2.7 Some of these barriers are practical. Poor access to transport and childcare are consistently recognised as major barriers to learning in rural areas. Inadequate public transport services, especially in the evenings, long distances, difficult terrain and high travel costs make it difficult for many potential learners to travel to learning centres. Travelling long distances to learn is often inevitable, due to low density of population and the shortage of suitable local venues. Inadequate childcare provision also inhibits the ability of parents, and especially women, to participate in learning[5].

2.8 Potential learners may not have access to adequate information, advice and guidance (IAG) services to help them to identify what learning opportunities were available and how to access them, and to understand the potential benefits to themselves of participation[6].

2.9 Access to work-based learning opportunities is also likely to be limited. The nature of much employment in rural areas in small and micro businesses means that employees are less likely to receive training through their employer. Only half of rural businesses employing fewer than five people arrange training for their staff[7]. It is rarely possible to release staff who are critical to keeping the business running to participate in distant, college-based courses[8]. Research carried out by LANTRA highlighted the need for training provision to be in house, better linked to the workplace, not purely driven by qualifications as these are often not appropriate, and vocationally relevant at all levels[9]. Evidence also suggests that rural employers tend to underestimate the literacy and numeracy needs of their employees, and to undervalue the importance of their gaining these skills[10].

2.10 Alongside these practical barriers, attitudinal barriers have also been identified. For adults with literacy and numeracy needs, fear of being stigmatized and a lack of confidence about engaging in formal learning can inhibit participation. This is not an exclusively rural issue, of course, but

[5] *Ibid.;* J. Midgeley and R. Bradshaw (2006) *Should I Stay or Should I Go? Rural youth transitions* (Newcastle: IPPR North); Countryside Agency (2003) *The Role of Women in the Rural Economy* (Wetherby: Countryside Agency).

[6] Atkin *et al, Provision in Rural Areas*; Selby *et al, Reaching Rural Communities.*

[7] A. E. Green and I. Hardill (2003) *Rural Labour Markets, Skills and Training: Final Report* (London: CRC).

[8] *Ibid.*; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2005) *Productivity in Rural England* (London: Defra); CRC (2006) *Rural Disadvantage: reviewing the evidence* (London: CRC).

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] C. Atkin and P. Merchant (2004) *The Impact of Adult Literacy and Numeracy on Small Businesses in Rural Lincolnshire and Rutland: a case study* (London: NRDC).

evidence suggests that living in small, closely knit communities can result in a lack of anonymity which makes people particularly uncomfortable about disclosing basic skills needs[11].

2.11   In addition, research suggests that the lack of interest in literacy and numeracy often apparent among low skilled adults in rural areas is linked to specifically rural ways of 'coping'. Literacy and numeracy have not been valued within the traditional rural economy, and because people have 'coped, managed and made do,' with low levels of these skills for so long, they are regarded as unimportant[12].

2.12   Yet whilst it is important to understand these barriers to participation, it is necessary to recognise that they reveal only part of a much more complex picture. Where evidence of persistent low skills levels exists in rural areas, this is not simply because there are deficiencies in the supply of learning opportunities. Rather, it must be interpreted within the wider context of the rural economies and labour markets that tend to operate in such areas, and the patterns of skills demands that these produce among employers and individuals.

Rural economies

Differences in economic performance

2.13   Evidence on the health of the rural economy can be misleading. Overall, England's rural areas present a prosperous aspect. Levels of household income, entrepreneurship and economic buoyancy have been identified that compare favourably with those in urban areas[13].

2.14   Around one million business, a third of the country's total, are located in rural districts, employing some 4.5 million people[14]. Employment rates are high. The decentralisation of population and employment away from urban to rural areas evident in recent years has resulted in an increase in both the relative number and absolute share of jobs in rural areas[15]. More rural than urban local authority districts have already reached (and many greatly exceed) the government's target of 80 per cent employment among the working age population[16]. Primary industries traditionally associated with rural areas, such as farming, mining and tourism are no longer the major sources of employment. Manufacturing and, in particular, the service sector, provide

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[11] Atkin *et al*, *Provision in Rural Areas*; Selby *et al*, *Reaching Rural Communities.*

[12] Atkin *et al, Provision in Rural Areas.*

[13] Defra (2004) *Social and Economic Change and Diversity in Rural Areas* (London: Defra); CRC (2006) *Rural Proofing.*

[14] Countryside Agency (2003) *Rural Economies: stepping stones to healthier futures* (Cheltenham: Countryside Agency); CRC *Rural Proofing.*

[15] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets*; CRC (2007) *Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities* (London: CRC).

[16] CRC (2007) *The State of the Countryside in 2007* (London: CRC).

more jobs. Rural areas now have a mix of employment sectors similar to England as a whole[17]. However, research also suggests that the impression of general economic buoyancy can be deceptive in a number of ways.

2.15 Differences in economic performance, sometimes on a substantial scale, have been identified between rural areas. Those displaying the weakest economic performance are on a par with the worst urban areas[18]. Former mining districts, areas where agricultural production and packing continues to predominate, and coastal areas which formerly relied on fishing and tourism, are the types of area most likely to fall into this category. From the point of view of the present project, understanding these patterns is essential. In the East of England, parts of East Anglia, in particular the Norfolk fens area and some coastal localities, are well-recognised as displaying features of rural disadvantage linked to their economies, labour markets and skills profiles[19].

2.16 Spatial factors can be significant, and a particular distinction is often made between rural areas that can be described as accessible (i.e. enjoy good links to neighbouring towns) and those that are more remote or peripheral[20]. In rural towns, the growth of the service sector led to an increase in the employment rate of around five per cent between 1998 and 2001, which has been interpreted as an indication of economic dynamism and the capacity to make good, in economic terms at least, the employment opportunities lost on the land. But in rural areas away from these centres of population, the rise over the same period was just over one per cent[21]. Remote rural areas away from influence of a large town or city may have particular development needs[22]. Research into the economic performance of rural areas inside and outside of city-regions indicates that levels of productivity, earnings and skills were all higher in the former areas[23]. Developing the knowledge economy in rural areas has been identified as a fundamental driver for economic growth. Marked regional differences are apparent in the degree to which progress is currently being made in that direction. Again, it is accessible rural areas, predominantly in the southern half of England which are emerging as highly competitive knowledge economies. These are places to which knowledge workers increasingly move and start up businesses, and where knowledge intensive industries are prepared to locate. Demand for higher level skills can often not be met by the

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[17] Defra, *Social and Economic Change and Diversity;* Defra (2005) *Productivity in Rural England* (London: Defra); CRC, *State of the Countryside.*

[18] Defra, *Social and Economic Change and Diversity.*

[19] Defra, *Productivity in Rural England;* A. E. Green and D. Owen (2006) *The Geography of Poor Skills and Access to Work* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation).

[20] Defra, *Productivity in Rural England*; P. Courtney (ed.) (2004) *Determinants of Relative Economic Performance in Rural Areas* (London: Defra).

[21] Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[22] Local Government Association (2007) *Productivity and Place: economic performance in remote areas* (London: LGA)

[23] SQW (2006) *Economic Performance of Rural Areas Inside and Outside of City Regions* (Cambridge: SQW).

local population, with the result that people seeking to develop their businesses recruit from outside the area[24] .

Rural disadvantage

2.17   Linked to these geographical patterns, research confirms the fact that disadvantage is an abiding presence within rural communities, and particularly in those that are more remote[25]. Analysis undertaken by Defra mapped measures of social and economic disadvantage onto local authority areas using the classifications urban, accessible rural and remote rural.   Of the 75 rural areas that registered levels of disadvantage, 45 of these were categorised as remote rural. In other words, over two-thirds of remote rural areas had poor socio-economic conditions[26]. In terms of household income levels, evidence shows that these are higher in accessible rural areas than in either urban or remote rural areas. The lowest income levels are to be found in areas that are also classified as remote rural[27]. Over a fifth of households in rural areas have income below 60 per cent of the national median level[28].

Labour markets and patterns of employment

Rural labour market characteristics

2.18   Income disadvantage in rural areas has been closely linked to the ways in which economic structures translate into labour market characteristics. Low pay has been recognised as a prevailing feature of much rural employment. Research conducted in 2003 into the fifty local authority districts with the lowest local pay rates found that thirty-one of them were in rural areas[29]. Median annual salaries are lower for those working in rural than in urban areas, whilst rural areas show much higher rates of in-work poverty[30]. High employment rates are not necessarily, therefore, a simple indicator of prosperity.

2.19   The high incidence of low pay in rural areas has been traced to the types of businesses and jobs that tend to be located there. As was noted above, rural areas have increased both their absolute numbers and relative share of jobs. However, there are concerns that in some areas much of the growth has been in the 'wrong type of jobs'[31] . It has been suggested that peripheral rural areas in particular may exhibit features of a 'low wage, low skill equilibrium, a

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[24] M. Hepworth, L. Pickerance and B. Zemman (2004) *The Knowledge Economy in Rural England* (London: Local Futures).

[25] CRC, *Rural Disadvantage.*

[26] Defra, *Social and Economic Change and Diversity*.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] CRC, *Rural Proofing.*

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets.*

situation in which employers compete in low value-added markets and demand relatively low skills from employees, which is in turn reflected in the supply of skills[32].

2.20 A number of characteristics of rural labour markets, especially in more remote areas, have been identified which help to explain why low pay and low skills are prevalent[33]. Chief among these features are the following:

n Knowledge-intensive sectors remain under-represented relative to the national average;

n The balance of projected change is in favour of personal service occupations, rather than professional and technical occupations;

n There are high levels of part time, seasonal and casual work;

n Small and micro businesses dominate the economy (some 90% of rural businesses employ fewer than ten people);

n Self-employment is common;

n The labour market is 'thin' – i.e. fewer employment opportunities are available at any one time in the geographical locality of the worker;

n Choice of job is restricted;

n Training opportunities are limited;

n Workplaces lack unions or collective bargaining coverage.

2.21 The relatively high rates of self-employment and home-working that are evident in rural areas have attracted different interpretations. On the one hand, they have been seen as an indicator of a vibrant enterprise culture. Research indicates that in some areas many rural, home-based enterprises are high value, knowledge-based businesses[34] In-migrants from urban areas, who are responsible for starting up the majority of rural new businesses, are seen as particularly important in this respect and often possess relatively high levels of skills[35] Concerns that the full economic potential of these businesses may remain undeveloped have been linked to the lack of help which many receive from business support agencies and others[36]. On the other hand, the low incomes of many self-employed rural workers are cited as evidence to suggest that self-employment may be an indicator of poor choice of flexible, rewarded work. It is undertaken out of necessity, due to lack of suitable, well-paid local

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[32] *Ibid.*; Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[33] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets*; Defra, *Productivity in Rural England*, CRC, *Rural Disadvantage.*

[34] CRC (2005) *Under the Radar: tracking and supporting rural home-based businesses* (London: CRC).

[35] Defra (2004) *Final Report of the Learning, Skills and Knowledge Review* (London: Defra).

[36] CRC, *Under the Radar.*

jobs, difficulties in travelling to work, or the need to combine work with caring responsibilities[37] Incomes for women, who are well-represented among the rural self-employed, are likely to be especially low[38]

2.22 Green and Hardill argue that the limited range of job opportunities available 'is perhaps *the* key feature of rural areas.' This limited range of job opportunities has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Not only are there fewer types of jobs from which individuals can choose within daily travelling distance, but there are also restricted opportunities for advancement as those in 'good' jobs tend to stay in them for longer as much other work is low paid and low skilled[39] Other research indicates that wage mobility in rural areas may be lower than elsewhere due to limited training opportunities, career progression and job choice[40]

2.23 For those who are unemployed, characteristics of rural labour markets such as limited job opportunities, lack of training opportunities, reliance on informal networks to access jobs, poor public transport and poor access to affordable childcare can act as major barriers to work[41]

Migrant workers

2.24 The features described above are well established within some rural economies. A more recent development has been the arrival of large numbers of migrant workers into the rural workforce. Around a quarter of migrant worker registrations in 2004 were in rural areas[42] Whilst migrant workers are found in all sectors of the economy, they are disproportionately represented in manufacturing, agriculture and fishing, and distribution, hotel and retail[43] Many skilled migrants are doing semi-skilled or unskilled work for which they are technically over-qualified, whist employers still have skills shortage vacancies. Those who have little English face significant barriers in relation to accessing suitable employment, but lack of recognition of their existing skills and qualifications is also an issue[44].

2.25 Evidence on the true impact of migrant workers on participation and opportunities in the labour market for host communities remains limited. It has been suggested that young unskilled people are those most likely to lose out, as entry level jobs cease to be available to them. However, data also

[37] CRC, *Rural Disadvantage.*

[38] Countryside Agency, *The Role of Women*; Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[39] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets.*

[40] CRC, *Rural Proofing.*

[41] Defra, *Productivity in Rural England*; CRC, *Rural Proofing*; Midgeley and Bradshaw, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?*

[42] CRC (2007) *A8 Migrant workers in Rural Areas* (London: CRC); Audit Commission (2007) *Crossing Borders: responding to the local challenges of migrant workers* (London: Audit Commission).

[43] CRC, *A8 Migrant workers.*

[44] *Ibid.*

indicate that employment, especially of migrant workers from A8 countries, tends to be in sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties[45]. The real picture is likely to be complex, with geographical and sectoral variations. It might be the case that the arrival of large numbers of migrant workers has been important in sustaining low waged economic activity within more peripheral rural areas.

Patterns of commuting

2.26 Another important feature that has been observed in relation to rural labour markets is the high incidence of commuting. Average residence-based earnings tend to be higher than workplace-based earnings, suggesting that many highly-paid individuals commute to work outside the rural districts in which they live. If earnings can be used as one indicator of the quality of employment and skills of the employee, this suggests that higher skilled rural residents are more likely to work outside rural areas, leaving lower skilled rural residents working locally. The concept of 'two speed' or 'two tier' rural labour markets has been used to describe and explain these different levels of labour market access and opportunity available to people living in rural areas[46]. Significantly, this pattern can also serve to mask rural disadvantage where measures based on household income are applied.

Skills demand among employers and individuals

Weak demand for skills

2.27 Poor productivity performance, low incomes and low pay in rural areas tend to be associated with low educational attainment[47] However, the picture that emerges from the research is not straightforward.

2.28 In those rural areas in the bottom ten per cent of areas, as measured by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, deprivation tends to be associated with poor education. Over half of all people aged 16 to 74 in such areas do not have any formal qualifications, double the level for rural England as a whole[48]. Yet overall, school attainment levels tend to be higher in rural than in urban areas, and a slightly larger proportion of rural inhabitants have a first or higher degree[49].

2.29 The fundamental issue would seem to be that much local employment in rural areas, and especially in some peripheral rural areas, continues to require only low skills, so that demand for skills from employers remains weak[50]. Consequently, the supply of skills in these areas is also likely to be low, as

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[45] *Ibid.*

[46] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets*; Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[47] Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[48] CRC, *Rural Disadvantage.*

[49] Midgeley and Bradshaw, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?*; Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[50] Green and Owen, *Geography of Poor Skills.*

there is little incentive for the local workforce to gain qualifications[51]. Among young people, successful attainment at school is likely to translate into the decision to move away permanently to undertake further or higher level study and employment. Those who do not make the grade and remain face a limited and limiting range of employment and training opportunities. The ready availability of low-skilled work means that young adults may not have difficulty actually finding employment. However, if they subsequently wish to undertake education or training, gain qualifications, and enter skilled work with better long-term prospects, they are likely to struggle due to the limited career advice and learning opportunities available locally[52]

2.30   A survey carried out by the Local Government Association of forty-four local authority districts – representing the least productive quartile of rural areas – revealed that there is a lack of demand for higher level skills in these economies, leading to low aspirations among the local population[53]. In effect, low demand for skills from employers results in low demand from individuals. Research based on small businesses in Lincolnshire and Rutland found that concern for adult literacy and numeracy levels in the workforce among senior personnel was very limited. Literacy levels were regarded as 'poor' by only four per cent of managers, while only six per cent stated that numeracy levels as 'poor'. Employers depicted their employees as having little interest in improving their literacy and numeracy. These attitudes were attributed to cultural factors, such as rural kinds of 'coping' and a heritage of low educational aspirations[54].

2.31   Evidence from the Commission for Rural Communities' comparative analysis of the National Employers Skills Survey 2005 identified several distinctive features in rural employers' attitudes and approaches to skills and training. For example, rural employers demonstrated less commitment than their urban counterparts to formal training. Around a third of rural employers had a training plan compared with almost half of urban employers. Establishments in rural village areas were the least likely to have provided training of any sort for their staff over the last twelve months (59 per cent) compared with rural small establishments (62 per cent) with urban establishments being the most likely to have trained (66 per cent). Yet overall, the data did not suggest that securing staff with adequate and appropriate skills proved to be a more substantial problem for rural than for urban employers. Whilst rural employers reported greater numbers of unfilled vacancies, this was frequently for reasons other than a lack of suitably skilled applicants[55]. There is some evidence from other research to suggest that rural employers find it more difficult to recruit managers, and that this can act as a brake on business expansion, although it is not clear that this is due specifically to skills

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[51] Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[52] Midgeley and Bradshaw, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?*

[53] LGA, *Productivity and Place.*

[54] Atkin and Merchant, *The Impact of Adult Literacy and Numeracy on Small Businesses.*

[55] J. Shury, K. Carter., C. Smith and S. Schafer (2006) *Skills Development and Deficiencies in Rural England* (London: CRC).

shortages[56]. Skills gaps, which occur where employees are not fully proficient in their jobs, appear to be less prevalent in rural than urban areas[57].

2.32 The quality and quantity of skilled labour available in an economy are important determinants of economic performance and productivity growth. And it is certainly true that, without further research, it is difficult to know what level of latent demand for training exists among small and micro businesses, and what their potential is for development, because they currently face substantial obstacles to securing appropriate provision. However, it seems unlikely that increasingly the supply of skills alone will serve to stimulate the economies of those rural areas that are currently characterised by low investment, low wages and poor employment opportunities. As several authors observe, these areas are not experiencing market failure, but rather the effective functioning of a low value added market[58].

2.33 Indeed, the experiences of women living in such areas suggests that one probable outcome of a drive simply to raise skills levels would be a mismatch of skills and available jobs leading to under-utilisation of skills.[59] It is a feature of rural labour markets that they are often unable adequately to support dual career households[60]. Women, whilst making up half of all employees across rural England, face particular issues in relation to employment. They have fewer work choices because many experience difficulty in finding appropriate and flexible paid work locally. Combined with poor access to public transport, these issues can make it difficult for women to enter the labour market. When they do, they may have to take jobs for which they are over qualified. Research found that many rural women claimed they were not using their skills and qualifications in their current jobs, but had taken the work because it fitted in with child care responsibilities[61]. These findings would suggest that there is already a reservoir of untapped skills within rural communities that are not being harnessed to support economic development.

Increasing skills demand in rural economies

2.34 Increasing the demand for skills, among both employers and individuals, is essential for low wages, low incomes and low productivity to be effectively

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[56] Defra, *Productivity in Rural England*.

[57] Shury *et al*, *Skills Development and Deficiencies*.

[58] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets*; Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[59] Further evidence to support this view is advanced by Alan Felstead in his study of skills and productivity in Scotland. This work suggests that higher qualifications levels in Scotland have resulted in a significant degree of qualifications mismatch, as the higher skills and qualifications possessed by employees have not been accompanied by a commensurate increase in skills demand from employers. A. Felstead (2007) *How Smart are Scottish Jobs? Summary Evidence from the Skills Surveys, 1997-2006* (Glasgow: Futureskills Scotland).

[60] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets.*

[61] Countryside Agency, *The Role of Women.*

addressed. As Green and Hardill report, participation in learning and 'up-skilling' is most likely to take place when one or more of the following occur:

n The economy shifts in favour of knowledge sectors;

n Employment levels are rising or stable;

n The occupational structure shifts in favour of technical and professional occupations at the expense of less skilled manual ones[62].

2.35 It has been argued that a critical factor in determining how far rural labour economies are able to undergo this transformation is the extent to which they are able to attract and retain skilled, educated and dynamic people from outside the area[63]. The role of rural in-migrants as a stimulus for economic development is well documented. A wide range of personal and professional factors influence the extent to which such individuals are able to relocate successfully to a particular rural area, of which the availability of suitably skilled local labour is just one. Transforming rural economies, and doing so in ways that will secure sustainable development, will require an integrated approach to enterprise development. For example, better opportunities for learning and skills development should be created alongside improved access to a range of business support services for rural small and micro-businesses and self-employed people, together with improvements to infrastructure[64].

2.36 Clearly, there is a need to improve opportunities for rural residents and workers to participate in learning and skills development, not only for reasons of economic productivity but also in the interests of social justice and poverty alleviation. However, the literature suggests that steps to improve access to learning and skills provision need to be taken within a wider framework for economic development that responds to the structural challenges posed by rural economies and their labour markets. Otherwise, the results are likely to include a mismatch of skills and local employment opportunities, and the loss of skilled labour from rural workplaces.

Conclusions

2.37 Providers face particular challenges in delivering learning in rural areas, linked to geographical scale and sparseness of population. These challenges are not currently reflected in centralised funding and planning arrangements, leading to reduced opportunities for learners and potential learners. Alongside limited choice of provision, a range of other barriers to participation have been identified that confront learners in rural areas in distinctive ways.

2.38 However, the persistence of low levels of skills and qualifications in some rural areas is not simply a result of limited access to provision. Rather, it must be understood within the wider context of the rural economies and labour

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[62] Green and Hardill, *Rural Labour Markets.*

[63] Courtney, *Determinants of Economic Performance*; Defra, *Productivity in Rural England.*

[64] CRC, *Under the Radar.*

markets that obtain in such areas. Weak economic performance linked to low productivity, low skills, low incomes and low wages is evident in remote and sparsely populated rural areas. Evidence of a 'low wage, low skill' economic equilibrium has been identified. Local labour market characteristics and patterns of employment include high levels of self-employment; much part time, seasonal and casual work; high levels of in-work poverty; widespread employment of migrant workers; limited choice of jobs; and restricted access to training.

2.39   These features of some rural economies and labour markets are reflected in low levels of demand for skills, qualifications and training among both employers and individuals. It is not clear from existing research that simply increasing the availability of provision would automatically increase the demand for skills. Improved learning and skills opportunities need to be integrated into wider strategies for economic development, including better support services for small and micro businesses, and infrastructure development. More research is needed on the level of latent demand for skills among employers and individuals in rural areas. This project is a contribution towards addressing that gap in knowledge.

3 Study Area Profiles

Summary

Drawing on statistical data and other research, this chapter summarises the economic, social and educational characteristics of the three local authority districts selected for in-depth study in this project: Fenland (Cambridgeshire); Breckland (Norfolk); and Maldon (Essex). It provides background and context for the field research and recommendations. Areas covered include: population; deprivation; employment and labour markets; business sectors and activity rates; adult qualifications and skills; and participation in work-related training.

Overview of the three districts

Location and population

3.1 Under the rural-urban classification methodology for local authority districts developed by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Commission for Rural Communities and Office of National Statistics, Fenland, Breckland and Maldon are all defined as Rural-80. This is the most rural of the six area types, and means that at least 80 per cent of the population lives in rural areas settlements and market towns[65].

3.2 Fenland (see Figure 1. below) is located to the east of the city of Peterborough in the north east of the county of Cambridgeshire. The district covers an area of 54,547 hectares. The market towns of Wisbech, March, Whittlesey and Chatteris are its largest settlements, and together are home to over 70 per cent of its population. Wisbech on the A47 is the largest town and a trading centre for a wide rural area with an inland port. However, the historic centre of the town has declined in recent years. March is relatively well connected to the regional and national rail networks.

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[65] www.defra.gov.uk/rural/ruralstats/rural-definition.htm

Figure 1: Map of Fenland and the surrounding area, showing principal towns and road and rail links [66]

3.3 **Breckland (see Figure 2. below) in Norfolk is one of the largest district council areas in England, at 1,305 square kilometres. It is also one of the most sparsely populated, with an average of 0.9 people per hectare. Much of the area is rural, given over to agriculture and heathland. Almost half of the population lives in the five market towns of Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton. The remainder are spread across 107 rural parishes, varying in size from 20 to over 3,000 residents. Thetford is the largest town, and is expected to account for a considerable amount of future planned growth in jobs and housing. Thetford and Attleborough are connected to the rail network.**

Figure 2: Map of Breckland and the surrounding area, showing principal towns and road and rail links

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[66] **www.nomisweb.co.uk. The data from Nomisweb in this chapter is taken from the local authority district area profiles available on the website.**

3.4 The district of Maldon covers an area of over 36,000 hectares in East Essex. The landscape and character are dominated by its 60 miles of coastline that includes the estuaries of the rivers Blackwater and Crouch. The main towns are the port of Maldon, and Burnham on Crouch.

Figure 3: Map of Maldon and the surrounding area, showing principal towns and road links

3.5 Total resident population figures for the districts, and for the East of England and Britain, based on 2001 census counts and 2006 mid-year population estimates (the most recent that are currently available) are set out in Table 1 below.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England	Great Britain
2001	83,500	121,418	59,418	5,388,140	57,103,927
2006	90,100	128,300	62,000	5,606,600	58,845,700

Table 1: Total resident populations, 2001 and 2006 [67].

3.6 As these figures show, rapid and substantial population growth has been a feature of all three study areas in recent years. In percentage terms, the growth over the five year period was eight per cent in Fenland, six per cent in Breckland and four per cent in Maldon. These figures contrast with regional population growth of four per cent and a national level of three per cent. Research indicates that the strikingly higher than average growth witnessed in Fenland and Breckland can be attributed to net migration into the districts, particularly by adults of working age with families and by older people. There

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[67] www.statistics.gov.uk ; www.nomisweb.co.uk

continues to be a net outflow of young adults aged 16 to 24[68]. In both these respects, the population growth patterns in the study areas reflects those seen in both the East of England and rural England as a whole[69]. An additional feature of the demographic experience of Fenland and Breckland during this period has been significant in-migration by migrant workers from the new accession countries of the European Union[70].

3.7   The proportion of the population of working age in Fenland, Breckland and Maldon is estimated to be lower than is the case across the East of England region or in Britain as a whole, as Table 2 below indicates.

Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England	Great Britain
58.8	58.7	60.3	61.2	62.2

Table 2: Percentage of populations of working age, 2006 [71]

3.8   Again, this pattern is typical of that found in rural areas. It has been accounted for by the greater speed at which demographic ageing is taking place in the countryside, as a result of the migration of older people from urban to rural areas[72].

Disadvantage

3.9   Analysis of data compiled for the 2007 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2007) can shed some light on levels of disadvantage within the three study areas[73]. They suggest that, of the three districts, Fenland experiences the greatest level of relative multiple disadvantage, with two of its Super Output Areas (SOAs) being counted among the ten per cent most disadvantaged nationally. These SOAs form the ward of Waterlees in Wisbech. Maldon is the least disadvantaged[74].

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[68] Countryside Agency (2004) *The State of the Countryside in the East of England* (London: Countryside Agency).

[69] Commission for Rural Communities (2007) *The State of the Countryside Report* (London: CRC).

[70] Commission for Rural Communities (2007a) *A8 Migrant workers in Rural Areas: Briefing Paper* (London: CRC).

[71] www.nomisweb.co.uk

[72] CRC, *State of the Countryside 2007*; P. Lowe & L. Speakman (2006) *The Ageing Countryside: the growing older population of rural England* (Age Concern Books).

[73] See Appendix 2 for summary tables showing IMD 2007 data.

[74] The data used here are those for Lower Layer Super Output Areas (SOAs). There are 32, 482 SOAs in England. SOAs vary considerably in geographical size, being based on size of population. The minimum population is 1,000 and the mean 1,500. The *Indices of Multiple Deprivation* measure relative deprivation, with SOAs being ranked in descending order, i.e. the lower the ranking, the more deprived an area. Deprivation is measured

3.10 However, these data need to be approached with caution as a source of information about the incidence of disadvantage in rural areas. It is increasingly well recognised that the IMD methodology is insufficiently detailed to capture the true scale of disadvantage in areas of dispersed population. The impression given by IMD 2007 is that the highest levels of relative multiple deprivation in each of three districts are found in urban SOAs, for example in Waterlees in Fenland, Thetford in Breckland, and the town of Maldon in Maldon. But it also needs to be borne in mind that relative disadvantage is measured more accurately in urban SOAs. The greater concentration of population means that they cover geographically smaller and therefore socially and economically more homogeneous areas. In contrast, in some of the more extensive and sparsely settled rural parts of the districts, the presence of multiple disadvantage may not be detected.

3.11 Research commissioned by Norfolk County Council bears out this concern. Sub-SOA level deprivation data have been analysed, and this has brought to light pockets of rural deprivation that are missed by SOA level research. The characteristics of large and sparsely populated rural SOAs is much more mixed than those in urban areas. Whilst this study confirms that deprivation is indeed overwhelmingly an urban phenomenon in the county, it also highlights many rural deprivation 'hotspots.' Crucially, many of the most deprived of these 'hotspots' are not actually within the most deprived SOAs. Twelve of the 45 hidden pockets of deprivation identified in the report are in Breckland. As the report observes, there is a persistent problem of 'invisible' deprivation in rural districts, because 'most deprived people do not live in deprived areas[75]. It seems likely that some sparsely settled areas of both Fenland and Maldon also contain pockets of rural deprivation that the IMD 2007 data do not reveal.

3.12 Where rural disadvantage does show up more clearly in the IMD 2007 is on the sub-domain which measures barriers to accessing housing and services. The factors on which results in this sub-domain are based include difficulty in accessing owner occupied housing and road distance from a general practitioner's surgery, general shop, primary school and Post Office or sub-Post Office. Of the top ten per cent most deprived SOAs nationally for this sub-domain, ten are in Fenland, four in Breckland and six in Maldon. All have at least one SOA in the most deprived two per cent nationally. Of the SOAs in question, all are classified as the area type 'Village, hamlet and isolated dwellings[76]. Deprivation in relation to access to housing and services may be regarded as something to which rural areas are vulnerable. Barriers to accessing learning provision are also likely to be acute. It is important to stress that this kind of deprivation is not necessarily associated with economic

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across a range of sub-domains: housing; income; employment; health; education and crime. IMD 2007 data is available at:
http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/deprivation/deprivation07/ .

[75] OCSI (2007) *Deprivation in Rural Norfolk* (Brighton: OCSI).

[76] See Appendix 3 for district data on this sub-domain.

disadvantage. Yet clearly, people on low incomes will experience greater difficulties in overcoming these barriers.

Economy and labour markets

Economic activity rates

3.13   Data on economic activity rates are problematic. NOMIS provides data based on national sample surveys and although they are relatively current their reliability diminishes at local authority district level. These data should be regarded as indicative. As Table 3 below shows, they suggest that economic activity rates among the working age population in the study areas are at or above that for Britain as a whole. Fenland records the lowest level of economic activity, but rates in both Breckland and Maldon are reported to be above both the regional rate and the government's target of 80 per cent.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England	Great Britain
Economically active	78.2	83.9	81.9	80.5	78.5

Table 3: Percentage of the population that is economically active, aged 16-59/64 (July 2006-June 2007) .[77]

3.14   More reliable data are available on the proportion of people within the study areas claiming key out-of-work benefits. These figures are set out in Table 4 below.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England	Great Britain
Total claimants	14.5	11.0	9.2	10.7	13.9
Job seekers	1.9	1.5	1.2	1.5	2.0
Incapacity benefits	7.4	5.6	4.4	5.2	7.2
Lone parents	1.9	1.3	1.2	1.6	2.0
Carers	1.4	1.1	0.9	0.9	1.0

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[77] **www.nomisweb.co.uk**.

Others on income related benefits	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.5
Disabled	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.9
Bereaved	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3

Table 4: Proportion (%) of the resident working age population claiming key out of work benefits (November 2007) .[78]

3.15 In Fenland, the proportion of the working age population claiming key out of work benefits is nearly four percentage points above the rate for the East of England, and slightly above the overall national rate. Nearly 15 per cent of the population is claiming benefits. This contrasts with Breckland and Maldon, where claimant levels are at or below that for the region as a whole. Indeed, in Maldon, the rate is 1.5 percentage points below the regional level, and nearly five per cent below the national level.

Employment: occupations and sectors

3.16 The data in Table 5 below show the occupational structure of the workforce in the three study areas. They suggest that distinctive labour market structures exist, especially in Fenland and Breckland. In all three districts, the proportion of people employed in higher level managerial, professional and associate professional jobs is substantially below both regional and national levels. The figure for Fenland (31 per cent) is particularly striking, at some 13 percentage points below that for the East of England as a whole. At the other end of the occupational scale, in both Fenland and Breckland (although not Maldon), over a quarter of people are reported to be employed in operative and elementary roles, a markedly higher proportion that is the case either regionally or nationally. It is, of course, not possible to tell from these data whether significant numbers of un-filled higher level jobs in fact exist in the three districts. However, this seems unlikely as the figures strongly suggest that the labour markets in Fenland and Breckland are characterised by a disproportionate high volume of low skilled jobs.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England	Great Britain
SOC 2000 major group 1-3	**30.8**	**38.3**	**35.5**	**43.1**	**42.5**
1 Managers and senior officials	14.5	17.4	15.1	15.6	15.2
2 Professional occupations	#	9.9	10.5	13.0	13
3 Associate professional and technical	12.5	11.0	#	14.5	14.3

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[78] www.nomisweb.co.uk.

SOC 2000 major group 4-5	**24.5**	**22.7**	**26.5**	**22.9**	**22.9**
4 Administrative and secretarial	9.2	11.6	9.2	11.4	12
5 Skilled trade occupations	15.4	11.1	17.2	11.4	10.9
SOC 2000 major group 6-7	**16.8**	**13.4**	**18.4**	**14.8**	**15.7**
6 Personal service occupations	6.7	6.4	12.0	7.7	8.1
7 Sales and customer service occupations	10.1	7.0	#	7.1	7.7
SOC 2000 major group 8-9	**27.8**	**25.5**	**19.6**	**19.0**	**18.6**
8 Process plant and machine operatives	16.3	13.7	#	7.4	7.2
9 Elementary occupations	11.5	11.9	14.5	11.7	11.4

Table 5: Employment by occupation, as a proportion (%) of all persons in employment . [79]

3.17 **Table 6 below shows data on the distribution by sector of employee jobs (i.e. excluding self-employed, government supported trainees, and members of HM Forces) in each of the three districts. A clear pattern is suggested by the figures, with Fenland, Breckland and Maldon all registering substantially higher levels of employment in manufacturing, and lower levels of employment in the service sector, than regional or national levels. Almost 20 per cent of jobs are in manufacturing, nearly double the regional and national rate, while the proportion of jobs in services is over ten per cent below regional and national levels. In the latter category, the imbalance is particularly marked in the finance, IT and business sub-sector, where much high value added, dynamic economic activity is likely to be located.**

	Fenland	**Breckland**	**Maldon**	**East of England**	**Great Britain**
Manufacturing	18.4	19.7	19.1	11.0	10.9
Construction	5.7	5.8	8.3	5.3	4.8
Services	69.6	69.4	68.3	82.1	82.9
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	23.3	24.4	24.0	25.0	23.5
Transport & communications	5.3	6.0	4.6	6.3	5.9
Finance, IT, other business activities	13.6	13.7	15.4	20.3	21.2
Public admin, education & health	24.3	21.0	19.2	25.5	26.9
Other services	3.1	4.3	5.1	4.9	5.3
Tourism-related	4.8	7.2	9.8	7.8	8.3

Table 6: Employee jobs by sector, as a proportion (%) of all employee jobs . [80]

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[79] www.nomisweb.co.uk. **Symbol # indicates that the sample size is too small to provide a reliable estimate**

3.18 Another sub-sector worth commenting on is public administration, education and health. Although this accounts for a lower share of employee jobs than the national or local rates, particularly in Maldon and Breckland, it is a major source of employment across the study areas. As the literature review in the previous chapter shows, the main focus in studies of the rural labour market tends to be on the high number of small and micro businesses in the private sector. This interest overlooks the degree to which larger public sector organisations form an important source of rural jobs. They are likely to rank highly among employers demanding skills and qualifications, and providing structured training to at least some of their staff. Thus, the loss of services such as hospitals and Jobcentres in market towns removes key employment opportunities and sources of skills demand from rural areas. The extent to which these larger public sector employers could act as hubs for the delivery of training to a wider network of local employers may be worth further consideration.

3.19 Data compiled by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) estimate that in 2006 nearly 17,500 new businesses were started in the East of England region. This figure includes an estimated 295 new businesses in Fenland, 340 in Breckland and 230 in Maldon. The net change in the number of VAT registered businesses in each of the districts in that year is estimated to have been an increase 100, 95 and 40 respectively[81]. Comparisons with the regional and national picture are shown in Table 7. below.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England	Great Britain
Registrations	9.4	7.7	8.1	8.9	9.4
Deregistrations	6.2	5.6	6.7	7.1	7.4

Table 7: Vat registrations and de-registrations (2006) as a proportion of stock .[82]

3.20 In each district, the largest number of new businesses was established in the real estate sector. Other sectors also registering relatively high levels of business start-up were construction; wholesale, retail and repairs; and hotels and restaurants, and this pattern is common to all three study areas. No businesses were established in the financial intermediaries sector, and few in education, health and social work[83].

3.21 Several parts of the study areas have been singled out for inclusion in national government-led strategic growth initiatives. These rationale of these strategies includes a concern to address the perceived economic under-performance associated with certain rural economies, and a focus on the development of new sectors. Part of Fenland is located in the London, Stansted, Cambridge, Peterborough Growth Area, and the persistence of traditional industries such

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[80] www.nomisweb.co.uk

[81] http://stats.berr.gov.uk/ed/vat/index.htm

[82] www.nomisweb.co.uk

[83] http://stats.berr.gov.uk/ed/vat/index.htm

as manufacturing, agriculture and food production is identified as a drag on the area's economic performance. Thetford New Growth Point in Breckland is similarly identified as an area of regeneration, and a key weakness of the town and its hinterland is associated with its dependence on agriculture, food processing and manufacturing. In Fenland, supporting enterprise, business development and the growth potential of sectors such as the environmental sector is highlighted as critical for the future. In Thetford, business and tourism are seen as key[84].

Earnings

3.22 Table 7 below shows data on average weekly pay in each of the three districts. The figures given are for average earnings by workplace, and therefore provide an indication of the relative wage levels that are paid by employers in the study areas.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England	Great Britain
Full-time workers	421.9	372.6	448.2	450.0	458.6
~ Male full-time workers	450.2	406.9	469.4	498.7	500
~ Female full-time workers	361.8	292.9	343.5	382.9	394.8

Table 8: Gross weekly wages (£) by workplace .[85]

3.23 These figures indicate that in all three districts workplace wages are below the regional average for both men and women. In Breckland, there is strong evidence to suggest the presence of a low wage economy. For both male and female full-time workers, average workplace earnings are around £100 below the regional average. This picture is consistent with that which would be expected in an areas with continued reliance on agricultural production and food processing.

Migrant workers

3.24 A striking feature of the recent labour market experience of both Fenland and Breckland has been the high level of migrant workers arriving in the districts from overseas. At the time of the 2001 census, the proportion of the population from ethnic backgrounds other than White British in these two study areas was just 3.1% and 4.7% respectively[86]. In Breckland, we know that most of that figure was accounted for by people from the established Portuguese migrant worker community[87].

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[84] Learning and Skills Council (2007) *East of England Regional Strategic Analysis* (Coventry: LSC).

[85] www.nomisweb.co.uk

[86] www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/

[87] C. Schneider and D. Holman (2005) *A Profile of Migrant workers in the Breckland Area: summary report* (Cambridge: APU).

3.25 However, evidence suggests that since the census was taken has been a dramatic increase in both the numbers and proportion of non-British residents in these districts, due chiefly to the arrival there of migrant workers from the new accession states of the European Union since 2004. Data analysed by the Commission for Rural Communities on Worker Registration Scheme registrations of migrant workers from new accession countries of the European Union (so-called A8 countries) in the 29 months between May 2004 and September 2006 indicate that both districts experienced considerably higher than average numbers of registrations. The area of Lincolnshire and the Wash, within which the districts of Fenland and Breckland lie, recorded some of the highest rates of registration in the country. Migrant workers account for up to ten per cent of the working age population in these areas [88].

3.26 Research has been undertaken for Breckland District Council on the experiences of migrant workers in the district. This study found that the majority of migrant workers, and especially women, significantly downgraded their employment once they arrived in the UK, even though they had experience and qualifications in skills shortage areas such as business and construction, and possessed the generic and soft skills valued by employers. The levels of formal qualifications among migrant workers were considerably higher than among the indigenous population. Twelve percent of migrant workers surveyed in the study were graduates, and around 15 per cent held management and professional positions in their home country. However, a range of barriers prevented their obtaining equivalent positions in Norfolk. In particular, it was found that employment agencies were not interested in the specific skills of individual migrant workers, there was no system for recognising their qualifications, and migrant workers had unmet ESOL needs[89].

3.27 It is impossible to predict accurately what future migrant worker numbers are likely to be. A8 migrants do not generally intend to settle in the long term in the areas where they work, and a range of factors are likely to affect their decisions, such as the establishment of local ties and economic development in their country of origin. What is apparent is that they provide a ready source of labour for the low skilled jobs that abound in the district, yet also represent an untapped reserve of higher skills on which other employers in skills shortage areas could draw, if support mechanisms were in place.

Adult learning and skills

Young people's attainment

3.28 Attainment by young people at Key Stage 4 has important implications for subsequent demand for learning and skills development among the adult

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[88] CRC, *A8 Migrant workers.*

[89] Schnieder and Holman, *A Profile of Migrant workers in Breckland.*

population. Table 8 below shows the pupil achievement in schools in the three districts at this critical point[90].

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England
Pupils achieving Level 2 (%)	42	53	40	58
Pupils achieving Level 1 (%)	90	93	86	93
Pupils achieving at least one qualification (%)	97	98	97	98

Table 9: GCSE attainment of KS4 pupils at local authority schools, as a percentage of all pupils at the end of KS4.

3.29 Level 2 is the critical measure in public policy terms, being the government's target qualification level for the adult population. All three study areas have Level 2 attainment levels that are below the regional average, and in the cases of Maldon and Fenland, the difference is considerable. For Maldon, the gap of seven percentage points between district and regional performance measured as attainment at Level 1 is also marked. Fenland and Maldon have the lowest rates of Level 2 attainment at KS4 in their respective counties, suggesting that a culture of low expectations and aspirations is evident within large parts of the state school system in these districts.

Adult literacy and numeracy needs

3.30 Data on adult literacy levels in the three study areas derived from the 2003 *Skills for Life* survey is set out in Table 9 below. The figures suggest that the proportion of adults in the three study areas with only Entry Level literacy skills is at or just below the rate for the region as a whole. In both Fenland and Breckland, the proportion of adults with Level 1 literacy skills is above the regional level, whilst a the proportion with Level 2 literacy skills is six percentage points below that for the region.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England
Total Entry Level	13	10	9	12
Level 1	47	49	44	40
Level 2 or above	41	41	47	47

Table 10: Proportion of adults aged 16-65 with literacy skills at each level (%)[91].

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[90] LSC (2007) *Local Needs Analysis: Cambridgeshire;* LSC (2007) *Local Needs Analysis: Norfolk;* LSC (2007) *Local Needs Analysis: Essex.*

[91] *Ibid.*

3.31 Table 10 below suggests that levels of numeracy skills in the three districts under discussion are also below the rate generally measured across the region. However, the differences in relation to numeracy are much greater, particularly for Fenland and Breckland. In both these districts, over half the adult population is reported to have only Entry Level skills. Less than a quarter of adults in the three districts has numeracy skills at or above Level 2, and the proportion drops to under a fifth in Breckland and Fenland.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England
Total Entry Level	54	55	45	41
Level 1	29	27	32	29
Level 2 or above	17	18	23	30

Table 11: Proportion of adults aged 16-65 with numeracy skills at each level (%) .[92]

Adult qualification levels

3.32 Levels of qualifications among adults of working age in the three study areas are set out in Table 11 below. These data suggest that in both Breckland and Maldon, the proportion of working-age adults with no qualifications is substantially higher than is the case in the East of England as a whole. Moreover, for all three districts, the proportion of adults qualified at NVQ Levels 1, 2, 3 and above compares unfavourably with the regional figures. Less than a third of adults of working age in all districts have qualifications at or above NVQ Level 3, markedly lower than the regional figure of 42 per cent.

	Fenland	Breckland	Maldon	East of England
No qualifications	10.4	18.2	18.7	13.2
NVQ 1+	73.8	71.5	76.0	78.9
NVQ 2+	56.6	53.9	57.2	62.6
NVQ 3+	32.2	30.9	31.9	42.4

Table 12: Proportion of working age adults qualified to different levels (%) .[93]

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[92] *Ibid.*

Participation in work-related training

3.33 Data from the Annual Population Survey indicate that opportunities to participate in work-related learning are not evenly distributed across the districts. Examination of 2006 data suggests that adults aged 16-64 in Maldon are more likely than their counterparts in Fenland and Breckland to take part in job-related training (thirteen per cent compared to 9.4 per cent for Fenland and 9.8 per cent for Breckland). That said, participation levels in Maldon remain below the average for both the East of England (13.8 per cent) and England (15.3 per cent).

3.34 Furthermore, analysis by gender suggests that there are marked differences in levels of participation amongst men and women, as Figure 4 below illustrates. 15.6 per cent of men of working age in Fenland participated in work related training, compared to just six per cent of women. This difference is in contrast to Breckland and Maldon, where the reverse is true. Whilst the gap between men and women is marginal for Breckland at just over three percentage points, it is more pronounced for Maldon at 8.6 per cent.
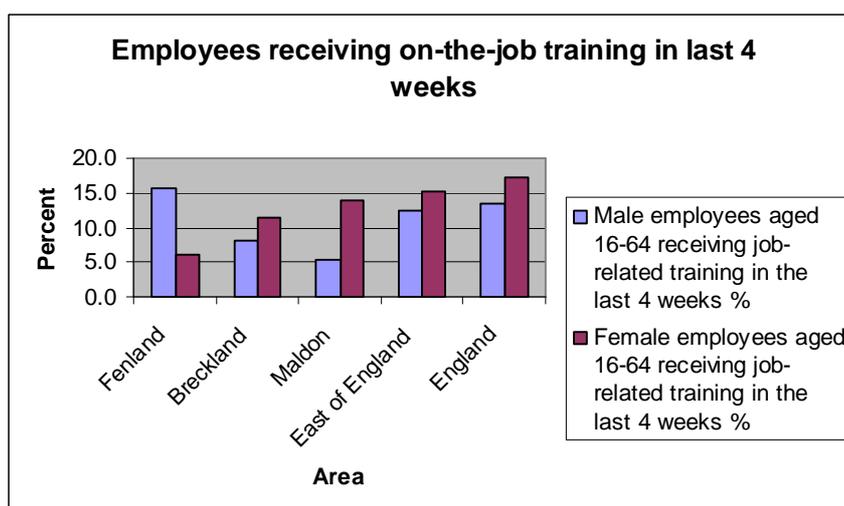

Figure 4: Employees receiving on-the-job training in last 4 weeks (Source: Annual Population Survey (APS), 2006 [94]

Conclusions

3.35 The three districts exhibit a number of characteristics in common in relation to their social and economic profiles. All have experienced substantial population growth. They have levels of adult qualifications and skills that are below those for the region as a whole, and higher levels of basic skills needs. Their economies show a continued reliance on traditional sectors, such as manufacturing and agriculture, with correspondingly weak knowledge economies. Low pay is a feature of all three study areas. Data from the Indices

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[93] *Ibid.*

[94] **www.dcsf.gov.uk/**

of Multiple Deprivation suggest that in parts of each district, residents face considerable barriers in accessing key services.

3.36 At the same time, it is possible to draw some distinctions between them. Fenland and Breckland have experienced high levels of in-migration by migrant workers from overseas. Breckland in particular exhibits classic features of a low wage, low skill rural economy. Fenland, meanwhile, registers lower levels of economic activity and a relatively high proportion of working age people dependent on benefits.

4 Current Provision

4.1 **This section of the report gives an overview of each client group's views and experiences of current training provision. The findings presented here are based on individual's perceptions and therefore conclusions cannot be firmly drawn as to if this is individuals lack of awareness or a lack of local provision.**

Summary

Awareness

n **Awareness of training is generally low and the main routes to accessing information on current provision differ by client group as summarised in figure 5.**

n **The majority of employers look directly to training providers for information on external training provision, with some relying on website searches.**

n **Employed non-learners are very reliant on their employer for information and workforce skills provision. This issue is more complicated for migrant workers as they are mainly employed through a recruitment agency and do not have a direct link to their employer and feel they have inadequate support from either recruitment agencies or employers.**

n **Those who are unemployed look to the Jobcentre as their main source of information on training. Many feel that there is inadequate information available. Very few individuals mentioned the use of mainstream IAG (Information Advice and Guidance) services.**
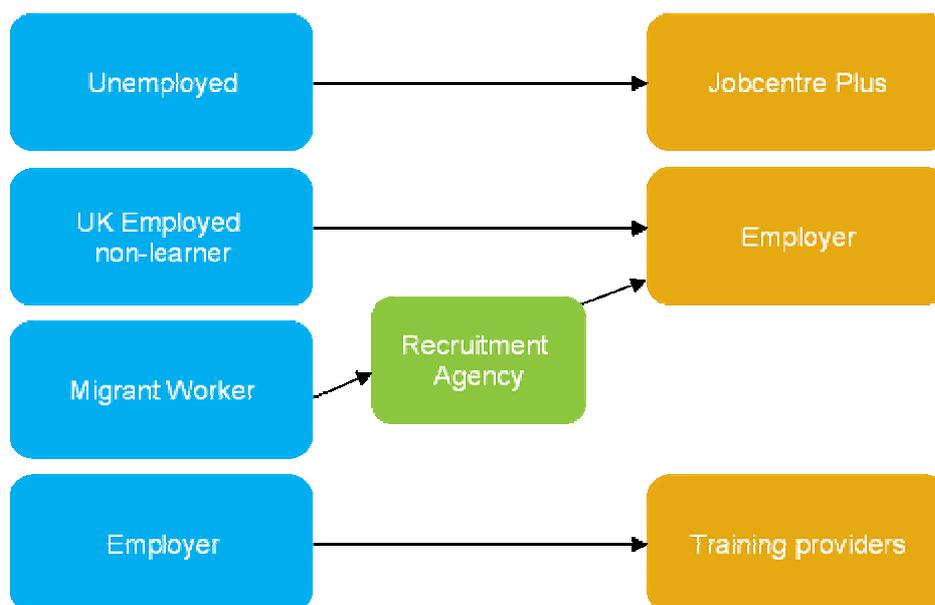

Figure 5: Main Source of information on learning provision and advice

Experience

n **There is a range of experiences of internal and external training provision on the part of employers, employed non-learners and the unemployed with some of the negative aspects of these based on perceptions of poor provision whilst others related to individual learning styles/preferences.**

n **Employers are particularly positive about experience of training that is**

tailored to their needs and delivered by tutors with business experience.

n Individuals liked practical learning and for employed non-learners there are positive experiences of 'work shadowing' as a learning style.

n Employers and employed non learners have negative views about the quality of many of the courses and the quality of much of the tutoring they have experienced.

n Employed non-learners believe there is a lack of appropriate local provision.

n The range of negative experiences has led to some loss of confidence in the system of training provision on the part of both employers and non-learners.

Trends in provision

n Providers outlined two trends in the way in which their provision has changed to support the diversification of the rural economy.

  (i) An overall broadening of the provision to meet the needs of a diversifying rural economy and in particular provision for the service sector.

  (ii) A decrease in recreational type courses and an increase in the amount of provision which was vocational in nature and/or aimed at employers.

n Providers feel that provision is heavily influenced by employer demand and identify three key factors which determine their provision: stakeholder engagement; government priorities; and needs/ labour market analysis.

n Local training providers in the East of England have rural support strategies in place to combat the challenges they face in operating in a rural area. However, overall there is seen to be a mismatch between local demand and current provision.

Local Employer's Perceptions

4.2 The training that employers supplied for their employees was provided both in-house and/or via an external training provider. Some employers used a combination of the two, but overall they favoured in-house training and many were not well engaged with external training providers.

4.3 From our research it was clear that employers valued training and thought that it was an important factor in running their business. Employers stated that that training was important for a number of reasons including: increasing productivity; raising staff moral; improving staff retention; for their employees' personal development and to improve staff's ability to do their job.

4.4 The following section explores employer views on:

n In-house training

n External provision accessed

In-house training

Use of in-house training

4.5 The majority of employers who provided training for their employees used some form of in-house training. The in-house training that took place was generally focussed around the use of machinery or specialist technical skills (where staff knowledge was shared). Internal training was also delivered in customer service and company standards (including ways of working).

4.6 In-house training that employers provided was generally informal in nature and took the form of shadowing or mentoring with other members of the workforce. This was particularly the case for smaller firms who used this process to build staff capabilities whilst minimising loss on production time. One small employer explained:

> *'It's shadowing. They come in for a week and watch someone doing their job and then* [are] *gradually…given more time on their own and they're continually assessed as they go along.'*

> Employer, Electronics Manufacturer

4.7 When providing internal training, larger employers were able to utilise skills within their wider organisation by using experienced members of the workforce who were not based at that site to come in and train staff:

> *'Within the company* [outside of Fenland] *we have specialists with 40 years of knowledge who will come in and train groups.'*

> Employer, Food Manufacturer

Why in-house training?

4.8 Evidence from employers suggested that there were three main reasons why they choose to provide in-house training, these were;

n Matching the needs of their workforce

n Cost saving

n Lack of external provision due to specialised nature of work

4.9 There was a feeling that their workforce benefited from training being provided internally because it was more tailored to the company and both the trainer and trainees learnt more about how the business functioned. One employer commented:

> *'I do the training and I find it fun. I think the employees get something out of it too and get a feel for what the business is about.'*

Employer, Leisure and Tourism

4.10 The cost savings of providing training in-house was mentioned by a number of employers as a key factor:

> *'It would be prohibitively expensive* [external provision] *if you can do it yourself why get someone in to do it?'*

Employer, Business Services

4.11 A number of employers also felt that they had no choice but to offer in-house training as they perceived there to be no external provision (in the local area or anywhere that they knew of) to meet their needs, often because employers felt their work to be of a specialist nature. It is not known if this was due to poor IAG or a genuine lack of provision in the area.

> *'I don't think anyone else would be able to offer it, it's such a complex business'*

Employer, Leisure and Tourism

External Provision

Access to external provision

4.12 The main route for employers to access external provision was directly via training providers. A number of employers were members of groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or the REV (Rural Enterprise Valley) through which training was advertised, or they accessed training through other organisations such as Business Link. Employers also mentioned the use of the internet to search for information on provision. However there were a number of employers who did not know how to access training or where to look. Awareness was generally low:

> *'I don't know where we would look for training'*

Employer, Electronics Manufacturer

4.13 Employers were more likely to have taken part in external training where external funding was available to support this. A number of employers mentioned Business Link funding as being very useful in assisting them to purchase external training. Other funding bodies such as the European Union (EU), East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and the Essex Tourism Board were also mentioned.

4.14 Some employers offering external training opportunities had dedicated training budgets attached to their staffs' career development. As one employer said:

'Different businesses have different training budgets for different people. [The company has] *been happy to spend up to £1000 per…employee.'*

Employer, Marketing

4.15 Many employers had some experience of engaging with external training providers and there were mixed views from employers on their experiences of training and how well it had met their needs. There were a range of courses that employers had accessed, for themselves and for their employees, from basic skills, IT training, technical HND qualifications, business improvement courses and high end Leadership and Management courses.

Positive experiences of external training

4.16 The opportunity to access training free or very cheaply, was mentioned as a positive factor in choosing a provider; although cost was not always an issue if an employer could see a clear benefit from taking part in training. One employer, for example, mentioned having some higher-end training that was expensive but beneficial to their company:

'We actually had some fairly expensive training for the top end of the company recently. It's very expensive but it's been hugely beneficial.'

Employer, Manufacturer

4.17 In terms of the delivery of the provision, employers liked training that was tailored to their business and that was delivered by trainers with business experience. One employer summed this up with their experience of a management training course funded through Business Link:

'I did the management training. I found it excellent. Good trainers being brought in from outside and they were people who have business experience. They were not theoretical trainers. They were people who had run companies themselves and it works because you are talking to people who know what you are talking about.'

Employer, Electronics Manufacturer

Negative experiences of external training

4.18 Many employers had been through a negative experience with external training. The majority of negative comments were related to the fact that the content of the course was not relevant to their business or of the required standard.

4.19 There was often a view that the training was too basic and the people running the courses were not sufficiently knowledgeable in the subject area:

'Some of the sales and marketing stuff we have been on has been a total waste of time so that puts me off. The right people aren't

*running the courses. For the more advanced course, I don't think the
skills are there, from a training point of view, to deliver those courses.'*

<div align="right">**Employer, Marketing**</div>

4.20   Also, there were several opinions that the training was not delivered by a tutor
with business experience. This was summed up by one employer who stated:

*'The problem we have found with other training locally is that the
person training you is 3 weeks ahead of you on the same course…It
only works if the trainer has the level of experience to pass it on,
reading from a crib sheet doesn't work.'*

<div align="right">**Employer, High Tech Manufacturing**</div>

4.21   There were examples of employers who had previously had a bad experience
of external training which had put them off investing in further training.
Employers also reported negative effects on their employees, in that they were
then less likely to want to go undertake training in the future.

4.22   Comments from employers included the course being far too basic or not
covering the right topic areas so employees gave up or felt they had gained
nothing from the courses. This final opinion was particularly a feature of IT-
related training:

*'We sent one of our guys on a computer skills course and he got half
way through it, said it was a load of rubbish and gave up because it
wasn't the right [information]. It's harder to get this particular
person to do training as a result. It would be difficult to convince him
he's [going to be] doing anything useful.'*

<div align="right">**Employer, Electronics Manufacturer**</div>

4.23   Many of the poor experiences of training were also linked to provision being:
difficult to understand or not presented in a user friendly way. Further
experiences included courses being stopped halfway through, and in the case
of the following employer their employee was then put on an alternative
course which was irrelevant:

*'One of the guys was in Norwich city and they just dropped it (the
course he was on), and they put him on fabrication well we don't do
that, I can't fund him for doing that which is no use to us'*

<div align="right">**Employer, Engineering**</div>

Employed non-learner perceptions[95]

4.24 Employed non-learners in the three areas tended to access workforce skills provision through their employer; although migrant workers expressed deep frustration at the lack of workforce skills provision available to them through their employment. This section will focus on how employees access training, their experiences of training (in-house and external provision) and their overall perception of local training provision.

4.25 As with employers, all of the employed non-learners who we spoke to recognised the importance of learning.

Accessing training provision

4.26 All of the employed non-learners looked to their employer to provide access to the majority of their training; although there were differing experiences for UK employed non-learners and migrant workers.

UK employed non-learners

4.27 UK employed non-learners were encouraged to learn at work through their employer via their respective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes. The process worked as below for a number of employed people:

> *'We have an appraisal system by which we have a line manager … and we have an appraisal process where the manager says how they think we are doing…and together we talk about where things can improve, if there are areas of interest* [for training]*.'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

4.28 By and large, this route to training was an annual process and linked to work-related learning that would enable the employee to better fulfil their current role or to progress in their career. However, employed non-learners recognised the important role of the employer in promoting training in general to enable them to further benefit from training. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'It's very much work-related but at the same time it can encourage people if they want to improve their skills. A lot of people do it as well.'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

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[95] This section will focus on employed non-learners. This is based on the views of two UK employed non-leaner focus groups and one Migrant Worker group.

Migrant workers

4.29 Migrant workers also looked to their employer as the main route to training. However, in contrast to UK employed non-learners, migrant workers found it very difficult to access training opportunities via this route. One of the reasons for this was the likelihood of migrant workers being employed via a recruitment agency; therefore they felt the company for which they were working did not feel responsible for their training needs. Migrant workers did not see themselves as having a direct relationship with their employer or as having access to the same development opportunities as UK employed non-learners.

4.30 They also felt that employers had a perception of migrant workers as suitable for doing low skilled jobs. As one said:

> '[Employers]*…see us migrant workers as factory workers. It's hard for us to improve our English and find better jobs in administration.'*

> Migrant Worker, Breckland

4.31 For a number of the migrant workers the jobs they were currently undertaking did not reflect their skill level; they wanted to improve their language skills to enable them to move into a different career. Therefore migrant workers felt that this further disincentivised employers from offering them training as they knew that once they had trained them they would leave the company to move to a different job.

> *'Giving training in English classes is not really an advantage for the employer as far as he wants to keep the employee with him.* [They think] *If I don't teach English, he will stay here because he is dependent on this job. If I teach him English, he will have choices.'*

> Migrant Worker, Breckland

4.32 The feeling among the migrant workers was that the training opportunities they were allowed to access were exclusively concerned with legal obligations on the part of the employer rather than any of the CPD training afforded to UK employed non-learners. As one of them said:

> *'Most of the training that factory employers put on are health and safety and food hygiene…This is not really because they are good employers, [it's] just because they are afraid to be penalised. For example, why didn't* [they] *offer forklift training? It's because it gives the privilege to the employee. For health and safety and food hygiene, the employer is obliged to…for the forklift he isn't.'*

> Migrant Worker, Breckland

Awareness of local training opportunities

4.33 Employed non-learners (UK and migrant workers) accessed further information about workforce skills provision from a wide range of sources.

The two most common methods were via the internet and word of mouth. Other sources included: approaching local colleges; libraries; specialist publications; HR staff at work; course brochures; flyers in newspapers/supermarkets; and shop windows. There was no mention of employed non-learners accessing mainstream IAG such as Nextstep or Learndirect.

4.34 Amongst non-learners, there was a feeling that learning providers were very reactive rather than proactive when it came to advertising. They believed that the onus was on them to find out about workforce skills provision rather than the provider approaching them. As one non-learner said:

> *'I think generally they expect us to approach them. Not saying we're doing this, would you like to be part of it?'*

> **Employed non-learner, Maldon**

Experience of training

4.35 The employed non-learners to whom we spoke had accessed a wide variety of training in the past; spanning both work-related and recreational courses, although the majority of training focussed on work-related training.

4.36 The types of external courses that had been previously accessed by employed non-learners were work related courses such as: Contract Law, Commercial Negotiations, Functional Safety Course, Crane Driving, Short-hand, HR qualifications, Health and Safety, IT skills, Book-keeping and English language. Recreational courses included: Singing, Orchestral Conduction, Rescue Boat Operation, French, Guitar lessons and Keyboard lessons.

4.37 A number of employed non-learners felt that they were learning from being in employment and from carrying out new tasks at work. They felt that this was an important part of their personal development in the workplace (they did not class this as training, but felt it was just part of the experience of being employed). As one individual outlined:

> *'I would say that I'm two years into my role at work and I'm still learning. So, for me, you could say I feel like I've been on a two-year training course and I've probably got two more years to go because much of what I've picked up I've got on the job.'*

> **Employed non-learner, Fenland**

4.38 Those who had accessed external training mentioned a variety of venues that were used such as colleges, universities and churches. This did vary across work-related and recreational courses. Employees felt that it was much easier to access recreational courses locally than work-related courses due to the high number of recreational courses available.

4.39 Due to a lack of choice in the local area they were more likely to have travelled further to access training that was work related, by going for instance from Maldon to Colchester or Chelmsford or by travelling to London. Those who

took part in recreational learning travelled less usually within their local districts, or within nearby areas such as in Maldon or Thetford.

Positive experiences of training

4.40 A number of employed non-learners said that they liked internal training as it did not require time to be spent out of work. Informal mentoring, such as work shadowing that took place in the workplace was seen as positive. One migrant worker felt that this practical aspect of training was increasingly beneficial for those who did not speak English:

> *'My factory showed me more by practical…it's a better way because most of the people who came here, they don't speak English. They don't study before work. They go straight to work'*

> **Migrant Worker, Breckland**

Negative experiences of training

4.41 There were also a number of aspects that employed non-learners did not like about external training that they had experienced such as: tutors not turning up; courses being badly organised; being too intensive; poor quality of teaching and the increased travelling time to training due to the rural nature of the area.

4.42 Negative experiences of in-house training were mainly held by migrant workers who, because of language barriers, had not been able to understand it. As one migrant worker said:

> *'When I started here in England in the factory, we had health and safety training…they didn't allow me to translate for them* [the other Migrant workers]...*without English language, it doesn't make any sense for them to hear training...if they can't understand what is talking to them.'*

> **Migrant Worker, Breckland**

Overall Perceptions of local provision

4.43 Employed non-learners across the three areas did not hold local training providers in high regard. There was a general belief that there was a lack of local provision. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'There's nothing there at all, is there? I have been on a couple of courses in Chelmsford but they were few and far between.'*

> **Employed non-learner, Maldon**

4.44 They also felt that there were a lack of qualified tutors in the area:

> *'What we want is someone who's sh*t-hot. Someone best practice who's gonna come in and say 'this is what you do to wipe the floor*

with everyone'. We can read the manual and achieve that. That's where you come to expectation and actually getting a trainer in or getting a trainer in and thinking, well, they don't know much more than we do.'

Employed non-learner, Fenland

4.45 A number of participants perceived that local training providers had increased the number of recreational courses and had decreased their high quality work related training:

'The level of expertise we're looking for, we don't currently find locally… I tend to think of college education as almost hobby-type things or the language thing will be available [now]*...I can think back to a time when the college here did graphic design … and were churning out very high standard students.*

Employed non-learner, Fenland

'The courses at ….. used to be more about the electrics or manual skills but now they tend to be more the basket-weaving or the flower-arranging and aren't doing any of the core skills that people might want to learn.'

Employed non-learner, Maldon

4.46 Employed non-learners felt that training providers were out of touch with the learning demands of local people and the supply of workforce skills provision did not match the demand for courses. One non-learner explained the situation in Fenland:

"It's no good someone sitting at ….. and compiling a list of courses and saying actually, I think the community might want this, this and that and then putting them on and no one attends...I went on a belly dancing course, they ran it for a term, they put in on the next term, 3 people turned up, they cancelled it...It seems that events are put on with no consideration or thought."

Employed non-learner, Fenland

4.47 Employed non-learners believed that certain workforce skills provision could only be delivered externally, and out of the local area. As one said:

'There's a difference between general business skills that anyone will have (IT or accountancy) and the very technical skills. You know, there might be one place in Britain that develops that skill and you can't expect to get them to come to Maldon.'

Employed non-learner, Maldon

Unemployed Perceptions

4.48 This section considers the experiences and views of unemployed people. It explores what problems they have accessing IAG, the diversity of training they have taken part in and what they liked/disliked about the courses they had been on.

4.49 In line with the opinions of employers and employed non-learners, there was a high level of importance placed on training by the unemployed. It was seen as important to acquire workforce skills, to learn further basic skills and to increase confidence.

Accessing training

4.50 The principle source of information and support for unemployed people came from the Jobcentre. This group relied on this method as for some it was the only place they knew they could get information from (although within Maldon there was no Jobcentre within the district, thereby limiting their opportunity to gain information). Although this was often the first point of call, respondents outlined that the Jobcentre held little information on training outside of Jobcentre Plus training courses.

4.51 The next most common methods used to find training courses was the internet or going directly to a college, followed by looking in the local newspapers and seeing advertisements on T.V. Other methods included the library, word of mouth, specialist magazines, Learndirect and Connexions. No individuals mentioned using Nextstep.

4.52 Overall individuals felt that their awareness about training courses was low and a number of them were unsure how to find information, or felt advice they gained was inadequate:

> *'not in this area it isn't, if there was more about it, it would be quite good help really, for the older people and adults it would be a great help. They ….. down there but half the time it is closed and when it is open it's kind of like a push and a shove'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

Experience of training

4.53 We spoke with a diverse range of unemployed individuals in each of the three areas who all had differing experiences of training.

4.54 The last time individuals had taken part in some type of training varied greatly, from those who had just finished a training course in the last couple of months, to those who had done no form of training since leaving school (which was over 35 years ago for one respondent). The majority of people had done some form of training within the last five years.

4.55 A large number of respondents had previously taken part in some form of training which was work related such as: Fork Lift Truck Operator Licence; Manual Handling Training; Nails and Beauty; Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card; Food Hygiene; and Learner Disabilities.

4.56 Smaller numbers had taken part in training to improve their basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and IT.

4.57 Some had also taken part in C TEC provided through the Jobcentre to assist them to search for job vacancies and to secure a job through learning to prepare CVs and develop interview skills.

Positive experiences of training

4.58 Because of the diverse range of provision experienced, views on this also differed. A high number of people had generally enjoyed the training they had received.

4.59 The flexibility of drop-in provision was liked by a number of individuals. They felt that this reduced the pressure on them to go on certain days:

> *'I liked the fact that it was just easy, you weren't pressured into going for a set amount of hours each day you could go in your free time'*

> **Unemployed, Maldon**

4.60 Some individuals preferred training that was in a group setting to enable interaction between members, they felt that more would be learnt this way:

> *'it was informative it … it was nice to be in a group so that you can ask questions, and sometimes someone else might ask a question that you think, yeah why didn't I think of that [it can be] more informative with different people, and you have one another in weaknesses or strengths and you're bouncing off one another'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

4.61 A number of respondents enjoyed learning in a practical setting and enjoyed this style of learning:

> *'It was more practical, you learn more in practical than you do sitting there reading a book, because it's in front of me I can mess around with it, you can learn the insides and outs just by playing around with something you see'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

4.62 C TEC (delivered through the Jobcentre) was mentioned by a number of unemployed people. There were mixed opinions surrounding this but benefits included: that they had the opportunity of gaining an ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) and, in some cases in the past, they had been helped to secure a job.

Negative experiences of training

4.63 There were parts of the training courses which were not liked by individuals. It was felt that there was sometimes a mismatch between the level of the learner and the course, with some commenting that the training was too intense and involved for them to cope. Others, conversely felt that it was too basic and that they were forced to start at the introduction level, therefore they found it too easy and lost interest:

> *'I don't know, the trouble with some of these courses I find is, like, I'm quite computer literate but they don't seem to like you to jump in at the top, so I find that a bit mind numbing to have to identify computer parts and write them on a piece of paper, like what's a CDU and things like that, you have to do the basics, so I did start that computer one and lost interest because of that, I think people should be grouped on their level of understanding and be taught like that.'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

4.64 Another aspect of training which led to individuals having a negative experience was the course being stopped before completion, or courses being cancelled before they had started due to the low number of people attending, as one individual outlined:

> *'I went to college to do mechanics, but then halfway through the college course it got stopped because half the people were leaving because it was getting boring so there were only around 5 of us left…there were 27 of us* [to start with]*.'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

4.65 A further negative aspect of training experienced was course overcrowding:

> *'they were a bit overrun with about 60 people in at one time, and stuff so it was hard to get help when it was needed, but what I was there for you just knuckled down and did it yourself anyway* [it would be better to have] *smaller groups.'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

4.66 Overcrowding and other aspects of the delivery methods led to a lack of support for the individual when on the course. Individuals sometimes felt that there was not enough help available when parts of the course were not understood. As one individual outlined:

> *'It was only a part time course and I was doing it as a home base I couldn't understand some of it and I couldn't get in contact with the training lady and it was hard to understand some of the stuff so I didn't finish it off within the time, I finished it off, but I couldn't send it back.'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

4.67 A number of people who had been on the C TEC course outlined a number of negative aspects of the training. Some people felt that C TEC did not provide support to people in terms of helping them with CV writing or interview skills, and that it did not offer them anything that they could not do at home:

> *'There was a chap there who'd been a forklift truck driver and he didn't know anything about admin. He didn't know how to do his CV and he wanted help. He was about 55 and the guys over there said 'you need to learn how to do it yourself, there's no point us doing it for you'…It was just a question of going in, using the internet, and going through newspapers but they get paid for you being there.'*

> **Unemployed, Fenland**

Views of local provision

4.68 There were a number of respondents who felt that the provision locally which they could access was biased towards recreational courses, or focused on basic skills, beginners' courses or administration. They felt that if they wanted to study specific courses then this would not be possible:

> *'There is Learndirect which is basics really or if you are interested in computers they can help you with that, and there is the Adult Education Learning Centre but again you can go and learn Spanish or, they offer sort of short courses two days or something, so beginners Spanish and things like that but generally you have to go out of town* [to study what you want]*'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

4.69 This lack of local provision will be outlined further in Chapter Six in relation to unemployed people, and employed non-learners.

Local Provision - Training providers

4.70 Having considered people's views and experiences of training, this section analyses responses from training providers, around the range of provision and recent changes to this. It will focus on:

n Local Provision

n Changes to Provision

n Factors influencing provision

Local Provision

4.71 A number of providers interviewed felt that their core catchment area was the local authority district in and around the area in which they were based. The smaller private providers felt their core catchment area was much more restricted than some of the larger public providers (who felt they had a regional and in some cases an international presence).

4.72 The larger colleges had a very broad curriculum covering a wide spectrum of provision. In many cases, it covered all vocational areas and ranged from 14-19 provision through to foundation degrees. A number of providers were more specialist such as those focussing on the land based sector, Manufacturing and Agriculture (although their provision extended beyond this).

Changes to provision

4.73 Over the last five years, providers identified two clear trends in changes to their provision. There had been an overall broadening of provision and, with larger public sector providers in particular, there had been a clear shift in the focus of their provision.

4.74 To meet the diversification of the rural economy, provision had grown to support the service sector and growth had particularly been seen in courses for Sport, Public Services, Corporate Retail, Contact Centre, Customer Service and Hospitality.

4.75 Other growth areas for providers had been higher-end IT related provision. This had been set against a decline in the numbers taking up basic level IT training as proficiency had increased as had the demand for more in-depth IT provision such as New Media (Blogs, Facebook), Movie Maker and digital photography and imaging. One provider summed up this change:

> *'We've found that IT courses are falling away whereas previously we were going hand over fist with IT courses for people, a lot of them were called 'computing for the terrified' things like that* [for] *people whose first step to learning is computers. Because people have become more literate now we've moved onto doing things like digital photography, imaging.'*

> **Provider, Maldon**

4.76 The second overall trend emerging from providers was that over the last five years there had been a reduction in recreational/community courses and an increase in the amount of provision which was vocational in nature and/or aimed at employers. A number of providers commented that they had to reduce the number of recreational classes that they offered and had switched provision much more to the work-based or work-related provision.

4.77 In particular, providers reported having to cut back on provision where people had come to them for personal development rather than a vocational qualification. These were often unaccredited courses. Examples given by providers included First Aid, Safety, Art and Design and basic IT courses. In one case, the recreational/community provision had been cut back to the extent of closing out reach centres within market towns.

4.78 When looking at the unemployed, and employed non-learners' views of local provision, they felt that there had been a decrease in work-related provision and their perception was that in their local area there was more of a focus on

recreational/community provision. This contradicts the views of providers which could highlight a lack of suitable IAG.

4.79 A provider from the Fenland area (who mainly supported the land based industries) had also seen a reduction in the demand for 'softer', business improvement related courses. The provider commented:

> *'Pretty type courses, those business improvement skills, management skills the ones where there is no push (legislation, insurance) are the ones they are not doing and they are the ones they desperately need to do.'*

> **Provider, Fenland**

Factors influencing provision

4.80 The reasons given by providers as to why they had made changes in their training provision were based around two main areas; changes in government policy and/or legislation and funding changes.

4.81 Some providers felt that changes to the LSC funding methodology meant that they had reduced the amount of recreational provision because they were no longer adequately funded to provide this. One provider commented:

> *'It has moved with the funding stream. Because the LSC has changed its funding methodology of late, its meant that we've had to reduce the amount of purely recreational classes that we do that aren't as fully supported as they used to be…We've had to switch our curriculum much more to the work-based or work-related.'*

> **Provider, Maldon**

4.82 Nearly all providers commented that the key factor that influenced their provision was understanding and responding to employer demand. Training providers across the East of England mentioned three main mechanisms that they used to understand demand and determine the make up of their provision. These were:

n Stakeholder engagement

n Government priorities

n Needs/labour market analysis

Stakeholder engagement

4.83 Many of the providers we interviewed involved a range of stakeholders in developing their provision. They did this through visits to employers, focus groups with groups of industry specialists, surveys and visits to schools.

4.84 In some cases providers work directly with an organisation to develop provision in direct response to their need. One provider highlighted this:

'[we design] *very specialist provision for working in the Broads which we have done jointly with the Broads authority. This was in response to a very specific labour market need.*'

Provider, Breckland

Needs analysis

4.85 Providers also noted that decisions on the provision that they offer were informed by local needs analysis. This process involved the reviewing of key literature such as the Sustainable Community Strategy, the Regional Economic Strategy and any local economic strategies. This process was added to by employer surveys and liaison.

Government priorities

4.86 Providers took into account central and regional government priorities when making decisions on their provision and the views of a range of organisations including;

- EEDA

- LSC

- National Farmers Union

- Health and Safety Executive

- LSC

- HM Treasury

5 Understanding the level of demand

5.1 **This chapter of the report focuses on the demand for training in the East of England. It analyses the views of employers, employed non-learners, unemployed non-learners and training providers to understand the level of demand for workforce skills provision. The chapter explores the following issues:**

n **Types of skills demanded**

n **Gaps in provision**

n **Delivery methods**

n **Assessing demand**

Summary

Types of skills demanded

n All of the groups included in this study placed a high value on training and showed a keen interest in accessing workforce skills provision, but this has to be the right training for them. This suggests that there is a high demand for effective provision in the areas covered by the research.

n Several employers experience difficulties in recruiting young people whom they feel are employable and in attracting technically skilled staff into rural areas. Because of this employers in rural areas are very reliant on workforce training to develop the skills needed within their business.

n Migrant workers demonstrate a high demand for the provision of ESOL training but feel that they have little support from their employers in accessing this and therefore needed support from other organisations.

n There is a distinct split between those unemployed people who know what career they want and therefore have specific training needs and those who just want to access training that will enable them to get in a job – this group needs much more support in identifying skills relevant to opportunities within the rural economy.

n In many cases unemployed non-learners often have clearer ideas about what training they want but experience a range of barriers that stop them from accessing this provision and need much more tailored support.

Gaps in provision

n Employers in particular feel there are gaps in the provision of specialist/technical skills specific to a range of industries. In rural areas there are difficulties in attracting sufficient numbers of qualified tutors in technical subjects which creates a challenge in providing this type of technical training for employers.

n A number of smaller employers in particular feel there is not enough management and leadership training or, where this does exist, it is prohibitively expensive. Local training providers, on the other hand, identify the provision of leadership and management training and of short courses in vocational subjects as areas of un-met demand but feel that there is insufficient funding to allow them to meet this need.

n The need for management and leadership provision is a more important issue in rural areas due to the increased number of small/micro employers and the diversification of the rural economy.

n Employed non learners identify a lack of provision that is practical and vocational in nature. For migrant workers gaps in the provision of ESOL

training represent the biggest challenge they face in advancing through the local employment market.

n Both employers and employed non-learners voice a demand for higher quality training in rural areas. There are clear calls for the quality of the tutoring to be higher and this is linked to the fact that people prefer trainers to have the business experience and practical knowledge to share with learners.

n Unemployed non-learners are much less likely to identify gaps in provision and for this group the issue in accessing provision was much more about providing them with the support to overcome the complex range of barriers that they face.

Delivery methods

n The key features of the demand for workforce skills provision in rural areas are for training that is practical in nature, delivered by people with business experience and in venues that are within the community or the workplace.

n Employers want training that has as little impact as possible on their working day and is offered at little or no cost to them. This is particularly the view of small employers researched.

n Employers and non-learners feel that distance learning is not their preferred delivery method. They would like elements of group interaction, practical learning and the use of local venues blended into any distance learning programme. Meeting these needs will be important in rural areas where the use of distance learning could have clear advantages in reaching a larger number of learners.

n Providers do use a range of strategies to meet the needs of learners in rural areas with the main basis of these being the ability to be flexible and to adapt to individual need.

n However, the tools providers used to meet needs of learners in rural areas, such as the provision of transport and innovative methods of delivery all have much higher financial costs associated with them.

n We would conclude that there is a mismatch between local demand and current provision, resulting in a level of un-met demand in those rural areas of the East of England covered by this study.

Assessing demand

n Providers identify four key challenges in terms of assessing and meeting the needs of local employers:

   (i)   Engaging with a large number of small rural employers,

   (ii)   A lack of flexibility in funding meant that they cannot always fund

what employers asked them to deliver.

(iii)   Having to pass the course costs on to employers in some cases

(iv)   Making employers understanding the benefit of training

n Providers felt the biggest challenge they faced when engaging individuals across a rural area was the low level of aspiration amongst some sections of the population.

n Providers felt that direct links with Jobcentre Plus and subsequent training provision for unemployed non-learners was minimal because it was difficult for them to compete with large national providers who they felt usually won regional Jobcentre Plus tenders for training provision.

Types of Skills Demanded

Local Employers needs

5.2 **This section of the report looks at the type of skills demanded by employers both from their current workforce and the wider labour market.**

Views of the Local Workforce

5.3 **In all three areas, employers believed there were fundamental challenges in relation to the local workforce available to them, particularly young people. A characteristic of rural areas is a movement of young people with higher skills into urban areas meaning that the stock of available labour is lower for employers in rural areas.**

5.4 **There were a range of comments from employers that young employees (and potential recruits) lacked basic skills in numeracy, literacy and communication. In these situations, employers felt this was an additional challenge that they faced when attempting to recruit a qualified workforce. As one employer said:**

> *'If you haven't got the basics, where do you move on from? You're effectively sending these kids back to remedial education in order to get them up to the standard where you could give them training.'*

> **Employer, High Tech Manufacturer**

5.5 **Some employers believed that even those young people who were academically skilled were not ready for the vocational pressure of work. As one employer commented:**

> *'There is a gap in our education provision that allows people to leave education at 18 who are quite bright but…* [that] *have no idea how to do any job of work whatsoever.'*

> **Employer, Public sector**

Recruitment Difficulties

5.6 **When understanding the nature of employer demand, it is important to look at what positions employers had difficulty recruiting to and the reasons they gave for this.**

5.7 **Many employers had experienced difficulty in their recruitment. In part, this could be said to be due to the rural nature of the areas making it harder to attract employees. In many cases, the positions were 'specialist' (such as printers, electricians or skilled engineers). Employers indicated that there was less of a problem in recruiting for support functions (such as administration). As one of them said:**

'We can find people with accountancy skills to be our buyers, quoters and all the people on the paperwork side. We find them everywhere we look. But people who have practical skills, we can't find them anywhere at all.'

Employer, Electronics Manufacturer

5.8 Employers who had difficulty in recruiting staff gave two main reasons for this:

n Lack of skills amongst applicants;

n Overall package to attract new staff.

Lack of skills amongst applicants

5.9 Where employers did have difficulty in recruiting they mentioned a lack of skills in the local area, one employer said:

'We have had difficulty in the past recruiting for a skilled electrician. We did get there in the end. There is a lack of people with those skills.'

Employer, Food Manufacturer

Overall package to attract new staff

5.10 Some employers found it difficult to attract suitably qualified staff from outside their immediate locality. For example, within Fenland, the difficulty in recruitment was linked specifically to the rural nature of the area, which acted as a barrier in attracting people. As one employer commented:

'I have worked here for 20 years and this is the only place that you have that problem of recruiting on a constant basis. It is because when you are trying to attract young, well qualified staff, they don't have the additional links that they might have in London, Cambridge, Birmingham, Manchester... in terms of the social life that goes alongside work. That balance for a lot of people is very important.'

Employer, Public Sector

5.11 The difficulty that employers faced in attracting suitable staff meant that a number of rural businesses were reliant on internal training to develop their existing staff.

"The only way we are going to get the staff we need is to train them ourselves".

Employer, High Tech Manufacturer

5.12 The section points to the fact that in rural areas employers have difficulty in recruiting good young people to their workforce and in attracting qualified skilled recruits from other areas. This analysis shows that for employers in

rural areas there may be a much higher reliance on accessing training provision to develop their workforce and their business.

Skills Gaps within the Existing Workforce

5.13   Employers from across the three areas were less likely to identify skills gaps within their existing workforce. Where employers did highlight skills gaps, they mentioned two specific areas of demand for training: specialised, technically-specific training and leadership and management.

5.14   One small employer identified the lack of leadership and management skills within the company as a gap but didn't feel they could access provision to improve this. As they said:

> *'We could do with team leadership type skills. There are only 16 of us and the four highest on the rung are the family…We're very technical and do that sort of developing…but* [we're] *not necessarily business people…We could do with some help to turn us from technical geeks to business people and that's the expensive stuff, so we muddle along....'*

Employer, Electronics Manufacturer

Employed Non-learners

5.15   This section of the report looks at the demand for skills from employed non-learners. The demand for skills covered a dispersed range of skills spanning both work-related and recreational courses. Demand for skills was much higher among migrant workers than UK employed non-learners.

Work-related Skills

5.16   Demand for work-related skills varied greatly across employed non-learners. The biggest demand for skills from UK employed non-learners was for job-specific skills to progress in their career. The biggest demand from migrant workers was English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training to enable them to work in the field in which they were qualified, this included medicine and law.

5.17   UK employed non-learners demanded a number of specific skills. These skills were split into industry-specific skills, leadership and management skills and expert IT software package skills, for example.

5.18   Industry-specific:

> *'When the part B wiring certificate came out for electrical wiring, I thought I'd get into that…'*

Employed non-learner, Maldon

5.19   Leadership and management skills:

'CID management diplomas. I've not been and done it but they keep pestering me...'

Employed non-learner, Fenland

5.20 Examples of expert IT software package skills were largely Microsoft Office-based and the demand specifically was for expert training in these areas rather than basic skills as an employed non-learner highlighted:

'I mention IT because a lot of people at my age would like better EXCEL skills.'

Employed non-learner, Fenland

5.21 There was also a high level of demand for skills from migrant workers, by far the biggest demand was ESOL training. As one migrant worker commented:

'You have to teach [migrants] English but then taking advantage of the skills they have. Teach them how to make the best fit.'

Migrant Worker, Breckland

5.22 The provision of ESOL training in rural areas was still an issue that needed to be overcome. There was a strong demand from migrant workers for this training.

5.23 For migrant workers other, more specific, workforce skills demands were IT or administration-based. As this migrant worker said:

'IT courses are...useful. [The] internet for example: to send emails, database. Excel. Microsoft - to write a letter.'

Migrant Worker, Breckland

Recreational Skills

5.24 Demand for recreational courses was relatively low. One example was music courses:

'I've gone to music courses before at ..... but I think it was only an experiment. I didn't actually attend that one but I was looking at attending...that was playing the keyboard but going a bit into computers and stuff.'

Employed non-learner, Maldon

Unemployed Non-learners

5.25 The majority of unemployed non-learners interviewed wanted to take part in training and demand was high compared to the employed groups. Most had been actively seeking training opportunities. However, many of these had found it difficult to access training due to a range of barriers (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six).

5.26 The training demanded by unemployed non-learners was work-related. There was a distinct split between those who knew what career they wanted and therefore had specific training needs and those who just wanted to access training that would enable them to get in to a job but had less of a clear idea of the specific job or type of training required.

Job-specific Training Opportunities

5.27 Unemployed non-learners who had a clear career in mind demanded a range of work-related courses including: Forestry, Mechanics, IT, Nails and Beauty, CSCS Card, Counselling, Survival, Care Work, Music and Production, CAD, Fork Lift Truck licence, Psychology and Business Management.

5.28 Some individuals knew that there were jobs and training opportunities available in their chosen career area but were unable to access the training to enable them to apply for the jobs. As one unemployed non-learner commented:

> *'For the majority of the jobs at the moment, a forklift licence or driving licence would be very handy. Ninety five per cent of the jobs around here are based on those two things, which I haven't got…I nearly got on a fork lift course but funding fell through for that. I would have been well on my way then'.*

Unemployed non-learner, Breckland

General Training Opportunities

5.29 Other unemployed non-learners did not have a preference as to the type of training they wanted to do, but they wanted to learn something to enable them to get into a job:

> *'Unfortunately at the moment I'm not working so I'd like to do courses and things like that, even if it's a possible career change, because I'm struggling to find work'.*

Unemployed non-learner, Breckland

Gaps in Provision

5.30 Building upon the previous analysis of the types of skills demanded by employers and non-learners in rural areas, a range of gaps in provision were identified.

Local Employers views

5.31 In some cases, employers were happy with the local provision. However, employers from specific sectors (especially the manufacturing sector) identified gaps in terms of sector-specific provision. Examples included: high-end IT (maintenance, construction and networking); specialist printing; electronics; and flexigraphic training:

> *'There don't appear to be any courses covering our area. We had a 17 year old out of school and we thought we'd send him off to college day release to get him trained up. The closest course we could find was washing machine repair which isn't anything like we are doing.'*

> Employer, Electronics Manufacturer

5.32 Other employers believed there was a lack of leadership and management opportunities locally:

> *'We train accountants and build those sorts of skills but they're not actually managers and there's nowhere around here to do courses to help them to become managers.'*

> Employer, Finance

5.33 Employers felt that local provision was too basic for their needs; forcing them out of the local area to access training:

> *'IT training is very end user orientated. Can you type a letter? Can you fill in a spreadsheet? Not much training is hands on or practical. As a result, I have sent one of my staff ….. to get trained because there was nothing locally doing the quality of teaching that I need.'*

> Employer, High Tech Manufacturer

5.34 In rural areas local employers identified gaps in sector-specific and Leadership and Management training. They also felt that the level of training generally was too basic for their respective companies. These findings indicate that within the rural areas researched there was a perception that there was not the depth and quality of provision available to employers that leads them to conclude that gaps in provision exist.

Employed Non-learners views

5.35 Employed non-learners identified a range of gaps in current provision covering four main themes:

n Lack of training opportunities in specific skills;

n Lack of quality local provision;

n Lack of ESOL training;

n Lack of recreational provision

Lack of Training Opportunities in Workforce Specific Skills

5.36 Employed non-learners highlighted a number of course subjects where they felt local provision was lacking. They felt this made them travel outside their locality to access training. This perceived lack of training opportunities is these rural areas is linked to a number of factors including IAG:

> *'I think there's very little business-related training in the Maldon area. If there is, it tends to be low-focused…usually around IT …rather than other business related courses. You get the flyers that come through the post…about specific business subjects. That's how* [I] *know about it [*but*] it's invariably going to be in London'.*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

5.37 Some employed non-learners felt that there was a tendency to focus too much on academic rather than manual skills. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'You don't get manual skills advertised anywhere. Most kids come out of school and just want to sit in front of a computer for the rest of their lives.'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

5.38 There was also a frustration that local training was targeted too heavily on IT skills and thus more traditional vocational skills were being neglected. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'There are no trades at all you see. If you want to be a builder, what are you going to start with? It's all computers.'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

Lack of Quality Local Provision

5.39 As well as a gap in the quantity of training opportunities, employed non-learners felt there were inadequacies in relation to quality. This issue was usually related to tutor quality rather than course content. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'There's a group of businesses who came to our chair woman and said that the Corgi training locally was disgusting. They were telling the instructors the way to do stuff.'*

> Employed non-learner, Fenland

5.40 Some employed non-learners reported having experienced such poor quality training that they had dropped out of the course. As one of them commented:

> *'…My teacher didn't teach me anything. She was only convincing me that my English is so good that I don't need to learn anything else…so I said I don't want a certificate in that. It was a waste of time…I didn't learn anything. I already know how much I have to learn or I wouldn't be attending those lessons…[I] never went back…'*

> **Migrant Worker, Breckland**

5.41 The literature review (Chapter Two) and the analysis presented in Chapter Six highlight the difficulties that providers have in obtaining sufficient numbers of qualified tutors in rural areas. This may be a factor in the range of negative views that learners in rural areas have regarding the lack of choice and quality of workforce skills provision available to them.

Lack of ESOL Training

5.42 For migrant workers, the lack of ESOL provision represented a huge gap that meant they were unable to use their existing skills effectively. It also meant they were severely restricted in terms of the training they could access (i.e. because they could not understand what they were being taught) and, more importantly, the training that employers were prepared to afford them (this issue is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six):

> *"The government stopped funds for ESOL and said…we will stop paying the officer…If someone is a doctor, give him training in English according to the jargon of medical science. If they are a hairdresser, teach them that. Provide ESOL to everyone."*

> **Migrant Worker, Breckland**

Recreational Gaps

5.43 Employed non-learners were also frustrated by the lack of recreational/community courses available locally:

> *'I get the impression that the colleges and universities are quite reluctant to do the recreational stuff. I think that they find is that it's not economical, so they just won't do it.'*

> **Employed non-learner, Maldon**

5.44 The gaps in provision that were highlighted were very specific courses including: stage work; music workshops; and practical and manual skills. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'There's nothing round here for stage work; theatre work. You have to go to London.'*

> **Employed non-learner, Maldon**

Unemployed Non-learners views

5.45 Unemployed non-learners accessed training primarily through Jobcentre Plus. A number of unemployed non-learners believed that there were gaps in the provision they could access via this route. As one unemployed non-learner said:

> *'There's not as much as you want it to be. If you wanted to do certain things, you probably wouldn't be able to do them.'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

5.46 Another unemployed non-learner didn't think that Jobcentre Plus linked up with the training needs of the local area:

> *'There are plenty of facilities around for training. Apparently we need IT people. All sorts of computer engineers, IT, whatever, yet the job centre won't do anything about it. Won't say 'right, we will get you into* [IT]. *They want us out, off the unemployment register and records, but they wont do anything about it.'*

> Unemployed non-learner, Breckland

Local Training Providers Views

Gaps in Provision – Unmet Demand

5.47 There were a range of areas where providers thought that they were not currently meeting demand from employers and non-learners. These areas were:

- n Gaps in management and leadership skills;

- n Gaps in vocational/ short courses;

- n Funding for outreach centres;

- n The inflexibility of the Train to Gain system in terms of retraining;

Gaps in Leadership and Management Skills

5.48 In line with gaps identified by employers, providers identified a gap in the provision of Leadership and Management training. This was training that was aimed at rural businesses who were diversifying within the rural economy so this gap in provision could have a major impact on the development of these businesses. Providers felt they were unable to fully meet this demand because of inadequacies of the funding methodology when applied in rural areas.

> *'I would like to do more on developing the business skills of people* [but] *because it's not full level 2 or 3 there is no funding for it. I ran a short course for 10 weeks for those running diversified farm businesses.* [I] *had 20 people. They thought it was valuable, but* [there

was] *no funding. Could I charge full cost? No.* [So] *they wouldn't come.'*

<div align="right">**Provider, Breckland**</div>

Gaps in Vocational/Short Courses

5.49 A few providers also mentioned the increased demand for vocational courses such as Car Maintenance. In some cases, providers did not have the infrastructure in place to provide this. In others, there was a lack of tutors and the funding system did not allow them to run short courses that did not offer full qualifications:

> *'We know if we could offer short courses for motor vehicles I know in one area I could recruit 40 people today. But we struggle to recruit tutors and also there is no qualification that they can do.'*

<div align="right">**Provider, Fenland**</div>

5.50 Providers also believed that as a result of funding policy there was a mismatch between the accredited training they had on offer and the business-specific, tailored training that employers demanded. As one provider explained:

> *'Sometimes employers don't want full qualifications and our sector is funded to deliver this. When an employer wants something specific we have to offer that at full cost.'*

<div align="right">**Provider, Fenland**</div>

Funding for Outreach Centres

5.51 Providers also commented that cutbacks in funding which have caused the closure of outreach centres will have a big impact on their ability to meet the needs of the community in the future. This is especially a major issue in rural areas where the populations are dispersed:

> *'People can't just pop into the college; they all live or work easily within a 50 mile radius of this college and our other campuses…that is a long way to expect people to travel for a short evening class. So we won't be providing what the community wants.'*

5.52 The likely impact of any reduction in outreach provision will be increased expenditure elsewhere in terms of travel expenses for the learner and therefore there would be no overall reduction in costs; merely a transfer from the LSC to the individual learner.

The Inflexibility of the Train to Gain System in Terms of Retraining

5.53 A number of providers commented that the existing funding structure for Train to Gain didn't allow those individuals with an existing Level 2 qualification to retrain. One provider commented:

'Someone who happened to get a level 2 NVQ for basket weaving 15 years ago can't get another NVQ for his job. That doesn't go down too well with employers. There's a need there, but it can't be funded.'

Provider, Breckland

5.54 Providers were keen to overcome this issue and provide more flexibility in the workforce, particularly in rural areas that had undergone significant structural employment change. One provider felt this would be a key feature of meeting demand in the long-term future of the rural economy. As they said:

'Of those people who will be in employment in 2020, a large proportion will have level 2 but in a completely different industry…We have to deal with this workforce flexibility issue.'

Provider, Fenland

Delivery Methods

5.55 The following section examines the respective demands for delivery methods by employers and non-learners, exploring the broad issues of: timing; venues; delivery style; and other issues.

Local Employers Views

5.56 In all three areas, employers had clear demands about how they wanted training to be delivered. Their preferred model of training was delivery on-site, with as little impact as possible on their working day and with little or no cost to them. This was particularly the case for small employers where any time lost out of the working day was severely damaging.

5.57 One employer summed up how they wanted training to be delivered:

> *'I personally would like to see somebody putting a trainer at somebody else's expense into our workshop. That would be ideal; bringing the trainer into the workplace but at no cost to the employer.'*

> **Employer, Engineering**

5.58 Whilst this model is maybe unrealistic in practice it does highlight in some cases the high expectations that employers in rural areas have, and the low employer commitment in terms of providing resources to support training.

5.59 Some smaller employers felt that they could not afford for staff to be out of work during the day therefore their demand was for training outside of work hours. However, employers were willing to be flexible, if courses were realistic in the time expected of employees:

> *'Because we're very small we'd like evening courses so we can continue running the business. With the shop floor, the best thing would be a day release college-type course (if they're happy to do it but keep working as much as possible).'*

> **Employer, Electronics manufacturer**

5.60 Employers noted that the style of the training should be practical, hands on and delivered by individuals with real business experience. They did not want training delivered from a manual. As one employer highlighted:

> *'Where training does work is where you have somebody with 40 years experience to hand out. It only works if the trainer has the level of experience to pass it on; reading from a crib sheet doesn't work.'*

> **Employer, High Tech Manufacturer**

Employed Non-Learners Views

5.61 Employed non-learners identified a wide range of times, venues and delivery styles highlighting that training needs to be delivered in flexible ways that accommodated them.

Timing

5.62 Both migrant and UK non-learners preferred to train during work hours. This was not a particular rural issue but given the lack of local provision and the resulting reliance on internal training, it is not surprising. This was a particular issue for migrant workers because they tended to work very long hours and therefore had little free time in which to train:

> *'If you work for an employment agency, you start at 5am and you work until 12 midnight and you get home at 3am. You can't embark on training. This is the problem. The best way to teach the migrant workers is in their workplace. They are paid so they will come to the training...because they are not out of work. Out of normal working hours, they have to travel, they have to spend time...which makes it a little bit complicated.'*

> **Migrant Worker, Breckland**

Evening Training

5.63 Some UK employed non-learners preferred to learn in the evening after work. Many valued their weekends and were unwilling to sacrifice the time for training. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'In that way, evening training's much better than weekend training because you don't have a weekend if you're not careful…you won't be able to spend any time with your children.'*

> **Employed non-learner, Maldon**

Training at the weekend

5.64 Migrant workers were more open to the idea of learning at the weekends, largely because they didn't have time during the week. As one of them said:

> *'Usually they offer courses during the week. They don't offer on a Saturday. I think it's quite hard to connect it with work because the employer doesn't want to let them go during the week.'*

> **Migrant Worker, Breckland**

Venue

5.65 Employed non-learners said that they would always start looking for local training opportunities. As one of them said:

> *'I always start locally whether it's recreational or business. I want to do it as close as I can rather than relying on public transport* [to London].*'*

<div align="right">Employed non-learner, Maldon</div>

5.66 However, there was an acceptance among employed non-learners that they would have to travel further a field as they believed that local training opportunities were not available to them.

5.67 Employed non-learners felt that providers in the rural areas should use local venues as training delivery locations. However, they believed these venues were not currently being fully utilised by providers. As one said:

> *'I think it's a bit of a shame that we've got all the facilities for doing* [training] *in the schools and they're all closed. They're just not using the facilities they have.'*

<div align="right">Employed non-learner, Maldon</div>

5.68 Using local community venues to provide training opportunities isn't exclusively a rural delivery method but it is a staple part of how providers deliver training in rural areas to meet the needs of dispersed rural populations. However cuts in funding have made it more difficult for providers to meet the demands learners have in relation to using local venues for outreach provision (Chapter Six explores this issue in more detail).

Delivery Style

5.69 The preferred method of learning for UK employed non-learners was classroom-based; with a tutor at the front of the class and contact for the duration of the course. As one employed non-learner said:

> *'I like to do it in a classroom. Not necessarily one-to-one but with somebody to actually talk to and interact with...'*

<div align="right">Employed non-learner, Maldon</div>

5.70 In contrast, most migrant workers preferred to learn in practical ways; being physically shown how to do things. As one of them said:

> *'My factory showed me more by practical...it's a better way because most of the people [who] came here, they don't speak English. They don't study before work. They go straight to work.'*

<div align="right">Migrant Worker, Breckland</div>

5.71 Employed non-learners highlighted a dislike of IT based learning as a single source of delivery. It was felt this was not a very effective method of learning. As one employed non-learner said:

'You can't really achieve very much with a screen. It's all very well working through a full page of information…but when it comes to a discussion, the classroom is the best place.'

Employed non-learner, Maldon

5.72 The preferred delivery methods above show that employed non-learners want training to be delivered 'in person' by a tutor. This is a particular challenge in rural areas where the use of distance learning could have clear advantages in reaching a larger number of learners than is possible in any one venue. Distance learning isn't a preferred method for employed non-learners and this represents the need to use a mixed method approach with distance learning as part of any delivery which should also include tutor contact and provision in local venues.

The Accreditation of courses

5.73 Accreditation of courses was an important issue for employed non-learners for work-related skills. However, it was generally believed that recreational/community courses did not require certification as such. As one employed non-learner commented:

'You don't always need a certificate. I wouldn't expect a certificate if I did a course making fairy cakes. I probably would if I was doing a Microsoft Office course.'

Employed non-learner, Maldon

5.74 Migrant workers believed that accreditation was vitally important. This was because they had existing international qualifications that were difficult to compare to UK qualifications. As one migrant worker said:

'In Portugal there is nothing called a forklift licence...People are coming with the skills. They can perform much better in the forklift than anything else, but they need a licence…'

Migrant Worker, Breckland

5.75 The accreditation of courses would allow them to prove to employers that they had accredited skills that could be recognised in the UK.

Unemployed Non-learners Views

5.76 Unemployed non-learners also wanted a wide range of times, venues and delivery styles, again highlighting their desire for training to be tailored to their needs. Some wanted one-to-one training; others enjoyed the group environment; whilst others preferred distance learning.

Timing

5.77 There was little consensus as to how long a course should last or how often individuals thought they should attend. A number of respondents felt that a

course should last until the student had gained the knowledge, therefore training should be flexible around learners' needs:

> *'[Training should last]…until the student is proficient. Until he is ready to not train anymore and he's got that label for whatever he wants… It would be much better for them people who are slightly slower, take their time or don't grasp things as quickly as others. All people are individuals and it's hard to cater for everyone as a group.'*

> Unemployed non-learner, Breckland

5.78 A number felt that the more frequent the course, the quicker they would be able to use the skills they had learnt to get a job. However, it was noted by some that crash courses, or day courses, could be quick but that the information may not be retained:

> *'Because it's all fresh in your mind that day, it maybe makes the certificate easier to obtain at the end of that day. It doesn't necessarily mean that you've absorbed it all…so you could forget things the next week because it was so intense.'*

> Unemployed non-learner, Breckland

Venues

5.79 The majority of people were happy for training to be conducted in any type of venue. Individuals mentioned colleges, the workplace, in a practical setting or in a community hall or centre.

5.80 The main driver for the venue chosen was its suitability to the course being taught:

> *'It depends on the purpose of the training and why you're there. As long as the environment fits the purpose. If you're doing first aid, it's a good idea to do that somewhere like the ambulance station… because they've got all the equipment needed for that job. There's no point doing IT in the job centre because the computers are for a specific reason, while if you go to an IT place you've got the availability of the computers and you can actually have the practical experience.'*

> Unemployed non-learner, Fenland

Delivery style

5.81 Unemployed non-learners demanded a wide range of learning styles, each tailored to their individual needs. Of the range of learning styles mentioned the key features for provision in rural areas are that training for unemployed people needs to have practical elements and any forms of distance learning need to include group work.

Academic Versus Practical Training

5.82   Unemployed non-learners favoured job-specific training that was practical rather than academic. They felt it was a better way to learn as it ensured that they gained experience whilst learning new skills. Some respondents favoured mixed method training, recognising the importance of practical training mixed with academic aspects. As one of them said:

> *'I like the practical (being able to do it and see what's happens when you do it) but I think you need the academic and theory stuff to understand why you're doing it.'*
>
> **Unemployed non-learner, Fenland**

Independent/distance learning

5.83   Unemployed non-learners were keen to take advantage of distance/independent learning but felt group interaction was an important part of learning and needed to be included. One individual pointed out that mixed method learning was a way to overcome this issue:

> *'Distance learning courses where you can do it at your own pace but you still get that opportunity to meet up in groups and talk about things* [would be a good method].*'*
>
> **Unemployed non-learner, Fenland**

5.84   The adoption of distance learning is a key issue in rural areas and non-learners have noted that although they are not fundamentally opposed to this style that would like there to be features of group interaction and practical learning blended into any distance learning programme. Another issue mentioned that has an impact on distance learning in rural areas was access to a computer to complete the course at home.

The accreditation of courses

5.85   As with employed non-learners, unemployed non-learners felt that accreditation (formal or informal) for work related skills was essential when seeking employment. Unemployed non-learners felt that when going for as job accreditation was needed as proof of their having undertaken training, whilst others saw it as important as a morale boost:

> *'I think it's good for you as it gives you a feeling of achievement. From childhood, you get a reward for doing something and in some ways just having a certificate is a reward because it gives you something physical to say 'yes, passed that'.'*
>
> **Unemployed non-learner, Fenland**

Volunteering

5.86 As was the case with migrant workers unemployed non-learners were enthusiastic about volunteering as a method of learning new skills in a less formalised way. For the unemployed, it was also seen as an activity to show that they had been active whilst being unemployed:

> *'I would do it if it was something to do like gardening or something because it helps you put something on your CV for the time I've been out of work.'*

<div align="right">Unemployed non-learner, Maldon</div>

Local Training Provider Views

5.87 Having analysed employer and non-learner views on preferred delivery methods in rural areas, we can contrast this with the views of local training providers on the methods they choose to use to deliver provision in rural areas.

5.88 Providers used a range of methods to deliver skills provision. They highlighted a number of these as being part of specific rural support strategies.

5.89 The main basis of these strategies was the ability to be flexible and adapt to individual need. Training providers combined many different delivery methods in order to be '*flexible*' and '*provide whatever works best*'. The tools providers used were choosing a central venue, the provision of transport to bring learners together and innovative methods of bringing learning to the learner (e.g. distance learning).

Transport Provision

5.90 The provision of transport to and from training was a method that some providers used to get sufficient numbers of students to their site. This was not used by the majority of providers because it was seen to be an expensive process. However, the reliance on offering transport is a specifically rural issue and significantly adds to the cost of providing training in a rural area (this issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. One provider noted:

> *'We run a lot of transport ourselves. So what we run are buses from various stations and places to bring students in. It's quite an expensive process. We need to do that to allow students to come to us…The funding is provided by us.'*

<div align="right">Provider, Maldon</div>

Use of central venues

5.91 To meet the specific demands of the local communities in rural areas, (which are often dispersed across large areas), providers said they provided training in the community. This involved choosing venues that were centrally located

and near to the majority of learners and being flexible enough to deliver in these venues:

> *'We use community groups. We deliver Maths, English and ESOL in the community. We use community halls, mosques. Anywhere that will let us in.'*

<div align="right">Provider, Fenland</div>

5.92 Of the delivery methods that were mentioned, the most common was the provision of training in the workplace in response to employer demand:

> *'A lot [*of training takes place*] in the workplace; engage with the employer in the workplace at a time to suit them.'*

<div align="right">Provider, Fenland</div>

Distance learning

5.93 Other, more innovative, delivery methods mentioned were the use of technology and distance learning. Where distance learning was offered, it was in combination with tutor visits to an employer and a responsibility on learners to undertake learning independently:

> *'We do distance learning - so we go to the employer - such as a care home, hospitals, Primary Care (we deliver some of the course, and some they do on their own.'*

<div align="right">Provider, Maldon</div>

Assessing Demand

5.94 This section of the report is focussed around understanding how demand is assessed by training providers in rural areas by analysing how providers engage with employers and non-learners.

Determining the Level of Demand

5.95 Providers played a role in assessing levels of demand for training from employers and individuals and responding to this through a range of delivery methods. Providers were asked what challenges they faced in engaging with employers and supporting the needs of individuals in rural areas.

Engaging with employers

5.96 Providers identified four key challenges in terms of engaging local employers:

- The difficulty of engaging with small rural employers

- Funding

- Passing course costs on to employers

- Employers understanding the benefit of training

5.97 All four factors were interrelated and providers said that they made the process of engaging with employers more difficult.

The difficulty of engaging with small rural employers

5.98 The three rural areas have a high percentage of 'micro businesses' (i.e. with 1-5 employees). Providers found it difficult to engage these small employers because, unlike larger employers, they did not have designated training officers. It was also difficult to run viable courses for these groups:

> '[We encounter] *massive challenges working with [*the*] micro small business population that is exaggerated by the rural location. [*It*] means that you just can't get volumes in any particular location, which means moving people and staff around, working with uneconomic groups of students.'*

> Provider, Breckland

5.99 Providers also felt it was more difficult for smaller employers to release staff:

> *'Larger businesses are easier because they can release people. In a small company of three, you can't take them all away.'*

> Provider, Fenland

Funding

5.100 Providers in rural areas were, to an extent, reliant on public funding to provide their training opportunities. However, the lack of flexibility in funding meant that they could not always fund what employers asked them to deliver. For example, a provider commented relating to funding for Train to Gain:

> *'Train to Gain funding is there if the employees meet the criteria. But when you go to employers, some employees meet the criteria and some don't so it is difficult to convince them to part with their cash.'*

> **Provider, Fenland**

Passing course costs on to employers

5.101 Following on from difficulties in relation to Train to Gain funding providers felt the challenge in the future would be passing on costs to employers for training where previously it had been funded. With the large number of small employers, this was felt to be a big issue:

> '[This] *will be a huge challenge, particularly in this geographic area, where there are a lot of very, very small businesses employing less than 10 people. Where you talk about some of the fees we would have to charge, some of the provision it will become a very big hurdle for them.'*

> **Provider, Breckland**

Employers understanding the benefit of training

5.102 Providers also felt there was a challenge in making employers appreciate the benefits of training, especially when there was a higher cost applied to this:

> *'Actually getting people to understand the need for training in the first place is the main challenge. When people look at their bottom line, they don't always value training as a way to improve their bottom line. '*

> **Provider, Maldon**

5.103 Some of the difficulties providers have in convincing employers to contribute towards the cost of training may be due to the message that Train to Gain funding sends to employers that training is fully funded. The commitment of resources towards training is a bigger commitment for the many smaller employers which characterise the rural business population.

Engaging Individual Learners

5.104 Providers felt the biggest challenge they faced when engaging individuals across a rural area was the low level of aspiration amongst some sections of the population. For example, in Fenland, providers perceived a high level of apathy amongst families that was passed on through generations:

> *'There is a big apathy to overcome in families where there is not a strong tradition of education and training. There is an attitude of 'I got by okay' and getting into rural areas in particular that is our biggest challenge.'*

<div align="right">Provider, Fenland</div>

Engaging with unemployed people

5.105   Providers felt that direct links with Jobcentre Plus and subsequent training provision for unemployed non-learners was minimal because it was difficult for them to compete with large national providers who they felt usually won JCP tenders for training provision.

5.106   Of those providers who had engaged directly with unemployed people there was a mixed experience. One provider had previously held a contract with Jobcentre Plus but found it was difficult to deliver as it was focussed exclusively on the long-term unemployed. The provider commented:

> *'We'd found that the funds weren't just sufficient for what we were trying to do. We were battling to engage with people who had been out of work for years and years and years. We were making appointments to go to job centres to see five people and if we were lucky, one of them would turn up…It got to that stage when we said that this project is not feasible to deliver…so we stopped doing that.'*

<div align="right">Provider, Breckland</div>

5.107   It is likely that this issue is compounded by the fact that the unemployed are dispersed in rural areas and there are fewer Jobcentre Plus locations. For example, the Jobcentre Plus in Chelmsford has clients from across the Maldon district which means that it is difficult to engage them through the Jobcentre itself.

5.108   A more positive example of working with unemployed people was outlined by a provider in the Maldon area. This was a partnership project that engaged unemployed people through referrals from Jobcentre Plus that had proved successful. The Case Study below outlines the detail to the work of the project.

Case study: '50 not out' project, Maldon

I'm the project manager for a special project called '50 not out' and this is aimed at individuals who are 50+ or 45+ really who are either currently unemployed, in danger of becoming unemployed. With that project, we work in a three way partnership with Essex Library Service and JCP. Libraries are very useful as a way to promote the project and we use their premises to hold the interview and job search and CV writing and that and our own premises of course. The Jobcentre are more than happy to refer people through to us. Within the last year, we've engaged over 400 people in one small part of Essex in that project.

Provider, Maldon

5.109 Providers wanted to be more involved in the provision of training for unemployed people. They felt that funding was the main barrier as it would not be feasible for them to charge unemployed people for the provision so funding would be needed to bridge the gap:

> **'The government will fund learners in work but not unemployed people. We will train anybody in anything if people pay us. It's difficult for the unemployed to pay us. There are management skills and bespoke training that we could do if we got the money to do it, and we have the facilities here to do it'**

Provider, Breckland

5.110 Some public providers noted that there were training opportunities open to the unemployed but that the opportunities were conducted in isolation by a number of providers. This issue, though not necessarily rural, could indicate fundamental structural issues in the provision of training which would be affected by the dispersed nature of the three rural areas:

> **'I think there is loads available, but no sensible coherent structure for it to be delivered. There are too many organisations all trying not to step on each others toes, too many parallel agencies, you can't plan the provision. They need to find out what training is needed.'**

Provider, Maldon

6 Costs of provision in rural areas

6.1 **This chapter focuses upon the cost of providing training in rural areas across the East of England. The first section analyses responses from training providers to assess the true cost of provision in rural areas and explores the challenges faced by providers in operating across a rural area.**

6.2 **The following sections analyse the cost to employers and individuals (employed non-learners and unemployed non-learners) of accessing provision and the barriers they faced in accessing provision.**

Summary

Factors influencing the cost of provision in rural areas

n The rural nature of the areas we researched across the East of England heavily impacts on the cost of workforce skills provision.

n This rurality contributes to a series of hidden costs that providers have to absorb and employers and individuals have to take into account when accessing workforce skills provision.

n The key features of rural areas that have the greatest impact on the cost of provision are;

  (i) the dispersed populations of employers and individuals which mean that there are lower numbers of learners in any one area

  (ii) the cost of travelling is greatly increased, this includes the cost of taking the learning to the learners or bringing the learners to the learning.

n Other challenges that providers face that are intensified by the rurality of the East of England are the cost and effectiveness of providing IAG and the availability of experienced tutors.

n The inability to recruit sufficient numbers of experienced tutors with business knowledge is a major barrier to providing the specialist/technical training that employers demand.

Barriers to accessing training

n Employers and non-learners face a range of costs, and experience a number of barriers in accessing workforce skills provision. The actual cost of paying for a course is a significant barrier for small and micro employers, employed non-learners and unemployed non-learners.

n The issue of time lost to employers when employees are released for training is another significant cost. Again this is more pronounced for small/micro employers and in the rural areas of the East of England the make up of the business sector is characterised by a much larger number of such businesses than is the case elsewhere.

n The cost of and access to reliable transport due to the increased distances that learners have to travel in rural areas also contributes to the increased financial outlay and the higher time commitment that rural learners have to make. For unemployed people wishing to attend training this is a major barrier.

n It is important to recognise that the cost of accessing provision for both employers and non-learners includes the cost of the course plus the additional costs of travel and time. These are hidden costs which are

increased by the characteristics of the rural areas researched.

n Our analysis has shown that employers, employed non-learners and unemployed non-learners face a complex range of barriers to accessing provision in rural areas. Therefore any policy interventions will need to be aimed at tackling these multiple barriers.

n For the unemployed non-learners in particular tailored individual support is required to examine what barriers exist and to establish the most effective way of overcoming them.

n The large number of small employers dispersed over large rural areas also impacts on the level of help that employers can receive from business support organisations. Awareness of available training is often low and employers need more guidance in this respect.

Factors influencing the cost of provision in rural areas

6.3 The cost of providing training is influenced by a multitude of factors some of which providers operating in any area of the UK would face. Nevertheless the cost of provision in the areas researched was influenced heavily by the rurality of the East of England.

6.4 Providers in each of the three areas described their catchment areas as being characterised by populations being *'very wide-spread and isolated[96]'* and *'dispersed'[97]* this heavily influenced the number of students that providers could reach and the subsequent transport costs.

6.5 Providers felt that the biggest factors that influenced the cost of their provision were;

- **Numbers of students**

- **Travelling**

- **Staff costs**

- **Equipment/infrastructure needed**

- **Course Content**

Numbers of students

6.6 Providers felt that in rural areas the low numbers of students that they can attract at any one time in any one location impacted on the revenue they would receive, which often meant some provision might run at a loss to the provider. This had a larger impact when delivery took place in the workplace. The challenge was summed up by one provider;

> *'An hourly rate for an assessor say £20 an hour for an hour's assessing. If they come into the college to do that they might do it with a group of six. If we send them to a company they would only do one or two so we would only get the revenue from 1 or 2 and travel on top of that we could lose money rather than earn any.'*

> **Provider, Fenland**

6.7 Providers face the challenge of delivering provision in rural areas directly to communities that are dispersed and where getting viable numbers of learners can be difficult. Providers felt the cost of outreach provision within the community was significantly higher than offering training at a central site.

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[96] **Training provider, Maldon**

[97] **Training provider, Breckland**

> *'If you run provision in an outreach centre you might only get 6 or 7 where as if I ran it here I might get 20 – costs between those two are significantly different.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Breckland

</div>

Travelling

6.8 Travelling was another major factor that impacted on the cost of provision in rural areas. Providers felt that the cost of travel between dispersed populations was a major cost and in many cases the most significant factor.

> *'Main one is travelling – we cover a large geographic area, population is very spread, with pockets of high density population but they are 30/40 miles apart in between there is very little. Transport is a big issue and it is a shame we have had to diminish this outreach provision in the market towns because this was a way of people engaging with us without having to go to the college.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Fenland

</div>

6.9 In some cases providers felt that the additional cost of travelling in rural areas was not built into the current funding system. One provider commented;

> *'For NVQs there are 3 rates of funding and those that are delivered in the college get the greatest amount of funding which doesn't take into account the amount of travelling that assessors can do. They can spend as much time travelling as assessing. Costs of this aren't catered for.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Fenland

</div>

6.10 The cost of travelling was also significant for smaller training providers who liked to engage with employers by visiting them and offering a personal service to meet their demands. This impacted on costs of the final course. One provider commented;

> *'There is a lot of behind the scenes planning before it gets to that stage because there is 3 or 4 months of the year of going out to them and seeing them all of that time is charged per hour and all of that time needs to be recouped in the cost of the course. So you may of seen 12-15 members before you run that first aid course so that has a massive cost implication.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Fenland

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Staff Costs

6.11 Staffing costs incurred was also a major factor on the overall cost of provision. For some providers this was their major financial cost with 60 per cent of their costs being spent on staff.

6.12 The costs for staff differed by the subject of the course with certain more technical subjects such as construction, electrical, health and social care and agriculture being characterised by much higher wage rates. Rural areas have difficulty in attracting tutors who can earn more competitive salaries working elsewhere within their industries (the issue of attracting tutors is discussed in more detail in paragraph 6.30). In these specialist sectors providers have had to pay additional market allowances which added to their cost of provision.

> *'We have had to pay extra a market allowance in construction and more recently health and social care.'*

> <div align="right">Provider, Fenland</div>

Equipment/infrastructure needed

6.13 The equipment and infrastructure needed to operate provision for certain courses meant that costs were higher in these subject areas. Issues raised by providers ranged from the number of lap tops required to offer courses in outreach centres to the infrastructure needed to deliver agricultural provision where livestock is required. One provider who focussed on agricultural provision outlined the cost implications of this type of provision;

> *'The nature of being a specialist organisation is that we need specialist equipment, like agricultural equipment. In terms of science we have large animal collections. It's a very, very expensive course because we have to provide horses, for example.'*

> <div align="right">Provider, Maldon</div>

Course Content

6.14 As a result of the specialist skills of staff and the equipment required certain subjects were much more expensive overall for providers. The more expensive subjects mentioned were agriculture, technology and construction. Providers felt there was a clear impact on the cost of providing these subjects.

> *'Yes take agriculture; very expensive to deliver if you are going to do it properly, it is not a classroom subject. It is almost a factor of 2 between a classroom and outside learning.'*

> <div align="right">Provider, Breckland</div>

6.15 Agricultural provision is in greater demand in rural areas; therefore providers incurred higher costs in responding to this. Funding methodologies for provision to the agricultural sectors need to recognise and take this into account.

6.16 The infrastructure required to run a construction course meant that there were additional costs involved and the limit on numbers able to participate in any individual course also make them more expensive to the learner.

> *'There are some subjects where the resource is much more expensive –
> e.g. construction. Construction courses are limited by resources so
> can maybe only take 15 students whereas health and social care could
> take 30.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Fenland

</div>

6.17 From the analysis of providers' views on what impacts on the cost of provision
it can be seen that a wide range of factors influence this and the rural location
can exacerbate these factors. One provider summed up the complex situation
that providers faced;

> *'It's horses for courses. We do our costings based on premises, tutors,
> resources, materials required, accreditation costs, you name it.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Maldon

</div>

Cost as a barrier to provision

6.18 Providers were asked if they felt the cost of their provision acted as a barrier to
learners accessing training locally. The majority of providers did feel that
increasing costs were restricting the number of learners accessing training and
that funding was essential to subsidise training. One provider, commented;

> *'Yes, definitely, which is why we're always keen to access funding. If
> we said we weren't going to access funding, I don't know how long
> we'd survive. People can't afford that kind of money.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Breckland

</div>

6.19 There were also examples of specific subjects where it was more difficult to get
sufficient numbers of learners resulting in a higher cost per learner. Providers
felt that this acted as a barrier in their area to people signing up to the course

> *'The management courses that are very hard to fill. Something like a
> negotiating course where there are only ever going to be 6 people who
> want to come on that so you are looking at £90 a person to run it and
> the mentality round here is that that is too expensive so it does put
> people off.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Fenland

</div>

6.20 Providers felt that in some cases charging employers for training was a barrier
to delivery because they were competing with free training available through
schemes such as Train to Gain.

> *'For employers it is very difficult because Train to Gain is free for
> first level 2's so offering anything else is very difficult because they
> know there is all this free training around.'*

<div align="right">

Provider, Fenland

</div>

6.21 Providers felt that the cost that they had to pass on to learners had in some cases not significantly reduced the number of learners but it had impacted on the type of learner accessing training resulting in a reduction in people who are learning recreationally and an increase in those learning for a clear career focus.

> *'The leisure and pleasure market has declined because if you look at the fees we need to charge to cover our costs if somebody wants to learn French to go on holiday, they won't do it, but somebody who wants to learn French to get a job will pay that because they see a financial reward.'*

> Provider, Fenland

6.22 One provider gave an example of the increase in costs to adult learners from the previous level of 25 per cent of the full fee to 42.5 per cent this year and with a further increase to 50 per cent next year[98].

6.23 Although providers generally felt cost was a barrier one provider questioned whether this was more to do with the attitude or aspiration of learners than purely with the actual cost.

> *'For those who have to pay the fees have gone up steadily - this is more of a burden - but have to weigh up value of the training, "someone will happily spend £8 on a cinema ticket and then get some food before, and an evening course would take less time in their evening and probably cost about half as much.'*

> Provider, Maldon

Other key challenges providers face operating in a rural area

6.24 Providers were asked what key challenges they faced, other than the cost of provision, in providing training to rural areas across the East of England. The three main issues raised were;

n Marketing

n Availability of tutors

n The funding system

6.25 For all of these issues providers felt that they faced bigger challenges because of the fact that they operated within a rural area.

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[98] Provider, Fenland

Marketing

6.26 Providers felt that marketing was more of a challenge in a rural area because of the dispersed population. This added to the cost of marketing as it costed more to reach significant numbers of people effectively. Two examples of this were;

> *'Cost is significantly affected by rurality. I am dealing with 50 schools spread over 500 square miles and we go to every career convention the costs of this a very significant.'*

> Provider, Breckland

> *'To reach those people in rural areas advertising isn't always the way to go, you have to go and see community groups and work with them which is more expensive.'*

> Provider, Breckland

6.27 The difficulty in marketing effectively to employers is exacerbated by the make-up of the rural business population. As discussed in Chapter Five providers face difficulty in engaging with a large number of micro businesses that are dispersed across rural areas.

6.28 Providers used a wide range of methods to market their services. These included press releases, school visits, taster sessions, open days, brochures, advertising and use of websites. The marketing from providers was often linked to the range of rural support strategies (as discussed in chapter 5) that providers use to meet the challenges of dealing with dispersed rural communities.

6.29 One example of a method that a provider thought was successful, was the use of testimonials from employers.

> '[far better] *to do it with one employer, ensuring it's a success and then have a press release saying how successful it was and how they benefited and that tends to work better because you've suddenly got a proven track record rather than a glossy brochure saying what you're going to do.'*

> Provider, Breckland

Availability of tutors

6.30 Providers were asked if they had difficulty in getting sufficient numbers of qualified tutors into rural areas. This emerged as a major issue for a number of providers and a key barrier in the effective provision of certain types of training in rural areas. However, providers based in Maldon had less of a problem with the availability of tutors compared to Fenland and Breckland.

6.31 As mentioned in the discussion of staff costs, providers had considerable difficulty in recruiting tutors in agriculture, construction, technology, health and social care and health and safety.

6.32 The key reasons given for the difficulty in recruiting quality tutors were that in some areas such as agriculture and construction there were lower numbers of people with these skills and that individuals can earn significantly more working in the industry in question.

> *'In agriculture there aren't as many to start with and they can earn significantly more in industry than they can in teaching so therefore it is quite hard to recruit them at a reasonable price.'*

> Provider, Breckland

6.33 Providers commented that in those sectors where recruitment of tutors was difficult, they have had to increase pay in order to attract tutors:

> *'Particularly (difficult) in industry where they can command a higher wage, so in construction we have had horrendous problems. We have had to pay extra a market allowance in construction and more recently health and social care.'*

> Provider, Fenland

6.34 A provider in the Fenland area thought that the problem of attracting tutors was linked to the rural characteristics of the local area.

> *'Colleges in the same region 45 miles away in Cambridge it is a different dynamic a different base of people to draw upon. We have issues of being in a rural part of the region with poor infrastructure as far as travel in concerned.'*

> Provider, Fenland

6.35 In some case providers didn't want to settle for a tutor who they thought was of lower standard;

> *'There are definite shortages of good quality instructors. I have been trying since Christmas to run a health and safety update and a risk analysis course and I didn't want to compromise and go for an instructor that wasn't good.'*

> Provider, Fenland

6.36 To tackle the issue of attracting sufficient numbers of qualified tutors to rural areas providers felt that funding needed to reflect the additional challenges faced in rural areas and providers need to be able to fund higher salaries to compete more effectively in attracting tutors from within industry.

> *'How do we attract those people to pass on their knowledge and deliver the training if to do so they'd have to take a huge cut in their money and I think funding needs to reflect that. If we want skills to be developed and we want to increase the competitive edge of our national workforce, we've got to invest in the people passing on those skills.'*

Provider, Breckland

6.37 Providers also felt there was a need for the introduction of a 'rural weighting' to take into account the challenges that rural areas face, similar to the 'London weighting' applied to allow for the additional costs of living in the London area.

> *'Colleges are helped that are in the London weighting area; we probably need something similar for rural areas. Where there are significant costs in terms of travel and housing.'*

Provider, Fenland

The funding system

6.38 The public sector providers interviewed obtained around 80 per cent of their funding direct from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) but through a range of different funding streams. Public sector providers also received funding from Local Authorities, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and could apply for European Social Fund (ESF) and EEDA funding. In the main public sector providers indicated that only around 5-10 per cent of their funding came through full cost work.

6.39 Providers identified a range of difficulties in relation to the current funding system and suggested a number of changes that they would like to see implemented, these included:

More flexibility in the funding system

6.40 There were several comments around flexibility to enable the re-training or up-skilling of individuals. Providers commented on the restrictions of the funding related to Train to Gain and the need to offer funded places for employers looking to retrain staff who may have level 2 qualification from a previous industry. One provider summed up the situation:

> *'The new Train to Gain demand led funding routes for the industries I serve which are predominately employing less than 6, quite often they take staff from other industries who need re-training. They are very ill equipped to re-train them financially and in terms of resource and most of those workers fall outside the scope of Train to Gain. So what I have seen is a big reduction in the number of funded places that I have available to me to meet the needs of those industries (2,500 down to 700 this year). The cost of that work goes up dramatically because it is at full cost to employers what that is doing is exactly what we wouldn't want to achieve. In that it concentrates the training on very short light bits of training and it stops people doing longer course which would equip them more flexibly for the long term needs of the workplace.'*

Provider, Breckland

6.41 Providers would like the funding system to be changed so they could be more flexible in encouraging people to enter into training for qualifications.

> *'There is a big gap there we are only funded to provide full qualifications and encouraging people who have done nothing for 20 years is difficult. We need funding for stepping stones, unitised qualifications to build up to a full qualification.'*

> Provider, Fenland

Reduce Complexity

6.42 Providers also felt that the system in some cases was over complicated and could be made simpler in terms of the eligibility criteria.

> *'The FE funding system in the way it uses public funds and reflects costs is a very good system and what could be very simple to operate has been made very complicated for adults in the criteria which are being used to describe which programmes are eligible and which are not.'*

> Provider, Breckland

Reduce bureaucracy

6.43 Other providers felt that the paperwork for funding should be standardised across the region. A provider commented;

> *'Standardised across the regions we work across different areas and we have different paperwork for each of these areas. It is not even standardised across the institution.'*

> Provider, Fenland

The cost of and barriers to accessing training for local employers

Cost of accessing training

6.44 We spoke with a range of employers to ascertain their views on the cost of accessing training within rural areas and the barriers they faced. In the context of this report, the cost of training is related to finite resources (i.e. time and money), whilst barriers refers to anything outside this definition that makes training harder to access or acts as a disincentive to learning.

6.45 Employers outlined two main costs they faced in accessing training, these can be grouped as;

n Financial costs

n Time

6.46 A discussion of each of these follows below.

Financial costs

6.47 The financial cost of paying for training for their employees was a significant barrier for employers in undertaking external training; this was particularly the case for small employers.

> *'In a small business cost is the driver for most things.'*
>
> Employer, Marketing

6.48 Employers felt there was too much expectation on them to fund training when they are operating in a tight financial climate.

> *'I think that very often people expect employers to do something but as an employer, you're trying to earn a living for everybody and there's not lots of money sloshing around.'*
>
> Employer, Manufacturing

6.49 The main issue that smaller employers in particular had in relation to paying for training was that they could not justify additional spending when profits in their industries were low. This was summed up by one employer;

> *'We're in an industry which is being beaten out of the UK when you look at the number of companies going bust. So for us to provide a higher level of training for everybody and for us to have to fund it, if we have to do that then there simply won't be a company left for us to run because profits in our industry are exceeding low.'*
>
> Employer, Electronics manufacturer

6.50 Employers were also keen to point out that the cost of providing training was more than just the cost of the course. They had to take into account other financial costs, such as the cost of transport to and from any external training.

6.51 The cost of transport was a significant factor either for sending staff out to training or for paying for a provider to come into the workplace and train staff. Employers felt that this was a particular issue within their rural location.

> *'Rural location definitely impacts, we have to pay for people to come into to do the training and public transport is not good.'*

> Employer, Health and Social care

Time

6.52 The issue of losing production time within the company while a person is sent on training was the major barrier that employers identified. There were two facets to this in that there is a financial cost to the employer of paying for staff when they are away from their jobs and there is also the impact on the workforce of losing a member of staff for a period of time. Employers felt the time lost when undertaking staff training was a major barrier to their accessing training.

6.53 Smaller companies were much more likely to feel the impact of loss of staff time and/or production time when choosing to have employees trained. One employer highlighted the challenge they face;

> *'Just losing anybody for even a day is crippling. If we had to lose them for two weeks on top of their holidays and things it means somebody else has to work longer to cover for them. We once did some training, had an external person come in to deliver the training and we had to shut the factory for a whole day so that everybody could do that training.'*

> Employer, Electronics Manufacturer

6.54 Although for some employers internal training was preferable because it reduced any travel costs and enabled more staff to be trained at once, time was still a factor when employers were choosing to deliver internal training themselves. Employers felt that this still taking up valuable staff time of those delivering the training which put a strain on their business.

> *'Time we have to spend on doing internal training means we can't be doing other things - puts pressure onto the business.'*

> Employer, Marketing

Barriers to accessing training

6.55 Leading on from the issue of cost, employers identified a number of additional barriers that they face in accessing training. There were 3 main types of barrier identified;

n Information and awareness

n Lack of funding

n Risk of losing staff once they are trained

Information and awareness

6.56 A lack of awareness from employers as to what training was available in their local area was another main barrier. This was not the case with all employers but a number mentioned having little or no awareness of local provision.

> *'I'm not even sure how I would find out about something like that unless there was something very specific I needed to do and I stuck the title into Google, I don't know where we would look for training.'*

> **Employer, Electronics Manufacturer**

6.57 There was also an issue of some employers not being aware of what funding was available for them to access training. This acted as a barrier to their obtaining further training for their employees. Larger companies who had training budgets indicated that if they knew that funding was available they would undertake more training that was of a higher level.

> *'Funding isn't maybe such an issue as a larger employer than for a small employer but we might do more training more management type training or diverse training if I knew that funding was available.'*

> **Employer, Food Manufacturer**

6.58 Small employers in particular felt that they needed much more support in accessing information about training provision.

> *'We probably need somebody to come along and say this is what's available to you and this is how you make the most of it. Someone just to explain…the sort of companies you're talking about that I've never heard of…the trouble with Business Link is that we hear for them for a couple of months and then don't see them for years.'*

> **Employer, Electronics Manufacturer**

6.59 Business support agencies face a particular challenge of physically travelling around a large number of small employers who are dispersed over large rural areas. These rural characteristics impact on the level of support that employers can receive through traditional methods.

6.60 In terms of improving awareness employers felt it would be useful to have one central source of information that was interactive and where training needs could be identified. A number of employers mentioned this and one likened it to a training network;

'A training network on the web that was interactive. You could talk about needs for training and you may find that employers have similar need.'

Employer, Health

Lack of funding

6.61 It was the perception of at least one employer that there was no financial support available at all for employers.

'At the end of the day the problem we have here for a small employer is that there is very little local provision and there is *** all funding.'

Employer, High Tech Manufacturer

6.62 Employers also referred to the need for funding at higher levels than was available through the Train to Gain funding stream. There was a lack of awareness that any of this funding for higher level qualifications was available:

'We need information above the Train to Gain level that is where we want to be. The Train to Gain information is for that person who has poor literacy, basic skills - but what is available for improving your in-house staff the people you have got so you can bring them further on?'

Employer, High Tech Manufacturer

Risk of losing staff once they are trained

6.63 The other major barrier that employers identified was the risk of investing heavily in training for an employee then losing that investment if that employee moves on to another job. A number of employers mentioned this as a consideration when making decisions regarding investment in training.

'We are really committed to training our own where we have skill shortages but that takes time and there is a risk factor for an employer in doing large amounts of in-house training because they can leave – just like that and they often do'

Employer, Public Sector

The cost of and barriers to accessing training for employed non-learners

Cost of accessing training

6.64 Employed non-learners identified a significant number of costs associated with accessing workforce skills provision. They also identified a number of other barriers. In the context of this report, the cost of learning is related to those finite resources (i.e. time and money). Other barriers are anything outside this definition that makes training harder to access or acts as a disincentive to learning.

6.65 Again as with employers, employed non learners outlined two main costs they face in accessing training, which can be grouped as;

n Financial costs

n Time

6.66 A discussion of each of these costs follows below.

Financial costs

6.67 The financial burden of accessing workforce skills provision was also a big factor in engaging employed non-learners in training.

6.68 The financial cost of the courses was an important cost to bear for non-learners. The financial cost took three broad themes:

n the rising costs of workforce skills provision in general;

n the financial cost in terms of lost income from not working;

n transport costs.

6.69 There was a consensus among non-learners that the financial cost of accessing workforce skills provision was rising. Many non-learners believed that historically courses were funded by central government but as the funding had diminished, the cost of the courses to learners had increased. As one of them said:

> *'A lot of these courses were funded by the government historically. That's all stopped now…maybe that's why they're so expensive, because the funding's stopped.'*

> **Employed non-learner, Maldon**

6.70 The financial cost in terms of accessing workforce skills provision as an alternative to working was a particular issue for migrant workers, especially those who are in the UK for a short time to earn as much money as they can before returning. As one non-learner said:

[If you want to train] *'you have to find a part-time job and manage that with your course and work. It's not so easy because…you won't earn enough money.'*

Migrant Worker, Breckland

6.71 Some migrant workers were able to access heavily subsidised workforce skills provision through migrant worker organisations that had funding streams available to support this work. For many, this was the only way they were able to access workforce skills provision financially.

"For forklift, one person is £180. When it comes to the courses that have been organised by Keystone, they pay £5 plus lunch so they didn't pay a lot of money."

Migrant Worker, Breckland

6.72 The lack of local workforce skills provision has led to a reliance on provision outside the respective districts. This has dramatically increased the financial costs for learners.

"We have to …[go to London]. *The level of training at the local level is extremely poor. For us to reap any benefit we have to travel to Castleford or Nuneaton. For the specialist training, obviously it's focused at what we do and we can't do it locally."*

Employed non-learner, Fenland

Time

6.73 Time was a major cost in accessing workforce skills provision for employed non-learners. It accounted for many employed non-learners' unwillingness to engage in workforce skills provision. For employed non-learners, time covered three distinct aspects; travelling to, attending and completing coursework. As one non-learner said:

"Time. Not necessarily the day release but the assignments that go with it…Simply the time. So many 1000 word assignments every two weeks. At the end of each unit. I think its 10 units long…"

Employed non-learner, Fenland

6.74 For migrant workers, the issue was even more pronounced because of the long hours that many of them work. As one migrant worker said:

"If you work for an employment agency, you start at 5am and you work until 12 midnight and you get home at 3am. You can't embark on training. This is the problem."

Migrant Worker, Breckland

6.75 For employed non-learners, the best way for them to access workforce skills provision was in the workplace during normal working hours. This would

ensure that learners are present during the training and do not incur any financial costs. As one migrant non-learner said:

> *"The best way to teach the migrant workers is in their workplace. They are paid so they will come to the training...because they are not out of work. Out of normal working hours, they have to travel, they have to spend time...which makes it a little bit complicated."*

> **Employed non-learner, Breckland**

6.76 The issue was similar for UK employed non-learners:

> *"One of the things I would say about training, is…if it couldn't be combined with my employer saying 'yes you can go' then I would struggle because when you work full-time and you've got a family you like to see them and I think that's a big issue to get home, cook the tea, feed the kids, then go out."*

> **Employed non-learner, Fenland**

Barriers to accessing learning

6.77 Employed non-learners in the three areas identified a significant number of barriers to their accessing workforce skills provision. Whilst these factors were not specifically related to costs, they did act as disincentives for individuals to access workforce skills provision in their respective areas.

6.78 The barriers mentioned by employed non-learners can be categorised into four main areas;

- A previous negative experience

- Transport

- Information advice and guidance (IAG)

- The provision on offer

6.79 There follows a more detailed discussion of each of these barriers.

A previous negative experience

6.80 Bad experiences of workforce skills provision was a major issue for non-learners in terms of firstly not benefiting from the training but also in terms of being unwilling to engage with subsequent learning as a result. As one non-learner said:

> *'I think the big thing for me is attending training and it actually meeting my expectation. There is nothing worse than giving up your time and paying for training which doesn't meet your expectation.'*

> **Employed non-learner, Fenland**

6.81 Similarly, an experience with a sub-standard tutor or the perception that local tutors are not highly qualified is a barrier to learning for non-learners. There were two main issues in this respect, tutors not recognising the difference between teaching 16-18 year olds and adults, and the subject specific expertise and experience of those tutors.

6.82 In terms of the difference between teaching 16-18 year olds and adults, some non-learners had experienced being treated 'like children rather than adults.' As one of them said:

> *'I think tutors need to not treat learners like 16 year olds sat in the class room. These people have paid because they want to learn and the standard of the teaching needs to reflect that'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

6.83 In terms of the expertise and experience of tutors, non-learners believed there was often an issue that tutors were not well qualified and there was a gap in their level of knowledge.

6.84 As one non-learner bluntly stated:

> *'What [I] want is someone who's sh*t-hot. Someone best practice who's gonna come in and say 'this is what you do to wipe the floor with everyone'. [I] can read the manual and achieve that [the basic stuff]. That's where you come to expectation and actually getting a trainer in or getting a trainer in and thinking, well, they don't know much more than we do.'*

> Employed non-learner, Fenland

6.85 Other non-learners were more philosophical:

> *'If it's a technical course, you tend to get tutors who technically know what they're talking about, but aren't necessarily all that good at putting it across. They're not good tutors, they're good at their subject. For general education it's probably the other way, they're much better at putting it across than the actual subject.'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

6.86 There was also previous experience of courses not running every week which led to a lack of confidence in future training. As one non-learner said:

> *'I did an IT one last year 6 weeks short course but for two weeks the tutor didn't even turn up. They hadn't booked the tutors.'*

> Employed non-learner, Maldon

Transport

6.87 Perhaps not surprisingly, transport was seen as a barrier to workforce skills provision in rural areas.

6.88 As a rule, the nearer the learning opportunity, the more likely individuals were to want to access it. As one non-learner said:

> *'…There are courses in London that I would prefer to do in Maldon (basic accountancy). It's a nuisance having to travel all that way for a course.'*
>
> Employed non-learner, Maldon

> *'It depends on how far you have to go to do it. If it's a 5, 10 minute drive then it's not too much of a problem.'*
>
> Employed non-learner, Maldon

6.89 There were considerable difficulties with the availability of transport and many non-learners highlighted that public transport in the rural parts of the East of England was very limited and mainly available only during the daytime:

> *'Round here it's really relying on your own transport because we don't have a great infrastructure of public transport round here. I think the buses finish at 6 o clock.'*
>
> Employed non-learner, Maldon

> *'We're in a desert away from any train station. Obviously* [it's] *seen to be… designed around the day for people without their own transport.'*
>
> Employed non-learner, Maldon

6.90 Furthermore, a number of employed non-learners said that without access to private transport, many people would be unable to access workforce skills provision at all. As one said:

> *'If you haven't got your own transport you won't be able to do it.'*
>
> Employed non-learner, Maldon

Information and Guidance

6.91 A lack of information about the courses on offer was seen as a barrier to engaging in workforce skills provision both in terms of a general awareness of the range of courses on offer but also the specific content of those courses. As one non-learner commented:

> *'Sometimes you hear about courses too late.'*
>
> Employed non-learner, Maldon

6.92 In terms of more detailed information about those courses, one non-learner commented:

> *'It's a bit like picking my daughters' options for school. What are the differences between them? You don't quite know what the content of the course is unless you go and speak to people.'*

<div align="right">Employed non-learner, Maldon</div>

6.93 Employed non-learners felt that if they were more aware of the workforce skills provision available to them, they would be more likely to engage with those opportunities. As one non-learner said:

> *'I was thinking that if there was an awareness that those courses were there, you would get more people actually taking them up. If they were aware of it, they might think, yeah, I might do that.'*

<div align="right">Non-learner, Maldon</div>

The provision on offer

6.94 The lack of relevant workforce skills provision is a barrier to non-learners engaging in learning. These shortcomings relate to the type, volume and the timing of courses on offer.

Type of courses on offer

6.95 Amongst non-learners, there was a feeling that the workforce skills provision on offer did not meet their learning needs. For most, there was a need for such provision to be tailored to the individual needs of the non-learner. The gap seemed to be very much related to work-related skills provision. As one non-learner said:

> *'With a lot of our packages linked together and it's actually being able to analyse the information which is the next step up.'*

<div align="right">Employed non-learner, Fenland</div>

6.96 Another non-learner commented that courses should be more job-specific:

> *'I tend to switch off when I see another batch of IT courses because everyone seems to be providing them. It's the whole thing and I think now just general IT courses could well be replaced with IT specific to a subject, How do you use IT to help you do this and how do you use IT to help you do that. A move away from general IT.'*

<div align="right">Employed non-learner, Maldon</div>

6.97 Non-learners felt that they were less likely to access workforce skills provision if they were unsure as to whether it would meet their individual needs as learners. As one non-learner said:

'I think the only time I would turn down training is if I felt I'd already done it or if I didn't think it was going to cover something new and it wasn't going to broaden my capabilities.'

Employed non-learner, Fenland

6.98 Some non-learners were not incentivised to engage in workforce skills provision because the provider offer was not, to them, especially appealing. As they said:

'[I'm] looking to be impressed and inspired. So if [the course prospectus] isn't particularly aspirational or inspiring, that doesn't draw me in.'

Employed non-learner, Fenland

Volume of courses

6.99 The volume of courses on offer was also an issue in some areas. There were examples of non-learners missing out on taking up a learning opportunity and unable to find a similar one at a future date. As one non-learner said:

'Back to the music course that I was going to do, that was a bit of an experiment on offer at one time. Now I've missed it, I don't think there will be another opportunity which is a bit of a shame really because it's something I really wanted to do.'

Employed non-learner, Maldon

Timing of courses

6.100 There was a slight issue where courses had been specifically designed to target particular groups that excluded other groups as a result. As one non-learner said:

'[some courses are]…more for retired people and for the unemployed. If you wanted to do it in the evening it was booked up until April of next year. And if you have to wait till April, it's a bit pointless.'

Employed non-learner, Maldon

The cost of and barriers to accessing training for unemployed non-learners

Cost of accessing training

6.101 Unemployed people faced a range of barriers to participating in training with no-one mentioning just one barrier. The majority of people interviewed identified between two and five barriers with some mentioning even higher numbers of interrelated and unconnected difficulties that prevented them taking part in training.

6.102 Unemployed non-learners outlined two main costs they face in accessing training, which can be grouped as;

n Financial costs

n Transport

6.103 A discussion of each of these costs follows below.

Financial costs

6.104 A high number of unemployed people cited the cost of the course as being a barrier to their taking part in training. They said this was a problem due to the low income they received under Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and the problems with receiving additional financial support:

> *'I suppose when you are working you know it's a cost but next month you can budget you've got money coming in, but when you've not got a great deal of money coming in because you're not working, you would possibly put that (training) on a shelf because your bills and that take priority'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

> *'Yes that is a big thing (the cost), you can't really get any funding to help you because, being on benefits they would take that into consideration and cut your money down'*

> **Unemployed, Maldon**

6.105 Some of the unemployed group said if that if they could receive a grant, or subsidised training this would enable them to take up training.

> *'Do them for free. Get the government to get all these taxes we keep paying to pay for training a bit more and offering training that's more specific to what people need…I've spent the last 10 years paying my taxes in full and don't feel that I get an awful lot back out of it'*

> **Unemployed, Fenland**

6.106 Some unemployed people argued that cost was a partial barrier but that if the course was something they wanted to do they would try to find a way round it, or that it would be beneficial to be able to pay for it over a period of time to spread the cost:

> *'I'm not to sure about the cost, because I don't mind paying out as long as I know I'm going to be paying out to get something at the end'*

> Unemployed, Breckland

> *'You do need to have some form of system so you can pay it back over a long period of time so that you're not then losing out too much in one go'*

> Unemployed, Fenland

Transport

6.107 The cost of transport was seen to be a common barrier for a number of people. A number of people noted the high cost of public transport (buses, trains and taxis) or the cost of petrol for those who had private transport:

> *'Because I don't drive everything has got to be near, if I travel to Norwich and I'm out of work I have got to pay for the rail fare, it's a tenner there and a tenner back that's 20 quid, that's a 100 quid in a week, I get £118 a fortnight, so if say I done it for a month that's over 500 quid coz you've got to eat as well'*

> Unemployed, Breckland

> *'Maldon to Chelmsford is 45 mins on the bus, it's not bad, but it's £5.30 which is a lot of money really'*

> Unemployed, Maldon

6.108 The rural location clearly leads to unmanageable travel costs for some unemployed people.

Barriers to accessing learning

6.109 A number of further barriers were often cited by unemployed non-learners such as:

n Lack of transport

n Lack of IAG

n Availability of courses in the area

n Flexibility in the benefits system

Lack of transport

6.110 Not only was the cost of transport an issue, the availability and reliability of transport in rural areas was also noted to be a problem for a number of individuals. The general lack of transport, lack of transport available early in a morning or in the evening, or the unreliability of public transport, were all cited as examples of the difficulties faced:

> *'Say you wanted to get to Bury St Edmunds or something like that…you could get it to Bury but you couldn't get it back, so you'd be left on a limb sort of there, because the last bus back is 6 o'clock or before 6 really'*

> Unemployed, Breckland

> *'in the day they are either half an hour late or they just don't turn up'*

> Unemployed, Maldon

6.111 Other respondents felt that provision had to be local or within walking distance otherwise they would not be able to travel long distances to undertake training:

> *'In Maldon if it can… I can get to Maldon and get back from Maldon I'm not that bothered about walking there and back, but I can't go all the way to Chelmsford and back'*

> Unemployed, Maldon

Lack of IAG

6.112 There were a number of unemployed non-learners who felt that the lack of Information and Guidance (IAG) was a barrier to learning.

6.113 There were unemployed non-learners who did not know where to find information on courses or noted that sometimes information was not well explained, or readily available. They also wanted to know where to find out about any funding to which they might be entitled. The following case study highlights the barriers that some individuals face:

Case Study: IAG

One individual wanted to get information on courses she had seen advertised but commented that the providers were sometimes unhelpful when she contacted them or that the information was out of date which she had received:

> *'but some of the courses started in January so you have to wait till September, so the information I was given was basically out of date, so it gets a bit frustrating, as information isn't readily available I find'*

She also commented that:

> *'trying to find out [about information] is just not readily available, you sort of make one phone call, and no it's not here, which if they could try and put an information number that you could go through, so you could find out, but it's sort of you phone here and no we don't do that and phone here, it's a bit like telephone tennis really'*

Alongside trying to find out information they felt that it would be beneficial to sit down with someone to talk over what kind of courses would be suitable for them to undertake to support them in moving into work:

> *'I really don't know, it would be really nice to just sit down with somebody and just say 'right this is what I've been doing and this is what I can do' and sort of like maybe speaking to somebody [and them saying] this is what's available'*

> *Unemployed, Breckland*

6.114 **Some people commented that little information and advice on training was provided through the Jobcentre regarding what training was available and advice on what training to do:**

> **'they're [Jobcentre]** *not geared towards training as such, they prefer that they just want you to get a job, when your on jobseekers they don't have a hell of a lot of information on courses and them kind of things'*

> **Unemployed, Breckland**

6.115 **A number of respondents felt that it would be useful to be able to get this information from the Jobcentre:**

> *'the information I find here is not readily available and neither is it given, you know it's not so on here, it would just be nice, I'm not*

asking them to pay for the course I'm happy to do it myself but its just trying to find the information'

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

6.116 A minority of respondents were of the view that the information was out there if you wanted it, although they mostly referred to the internet which was not accessible by all respondents.

6.117 Respondents felt that training providers needed to advertise their courses more or better so that the information was readily available. They suggested mechanisms for this, such as advertising in the Jobcentre, leaflets and advertisements in the local newspapers.

6.118 It was recommended that there should be a central place where they could go to get information and advice on training, where you would be able to talk to someone about what you had done, what you would like to do and how you could get there:

'to just sit down and see what's available with somebody and say I have got this, and what do you feel with the courses that are available you feel I might benefit from, that's what would be nice'

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

Availability of courses in the area

6.119 The availability of certain courses which matched learners requirements was cited as being a barrier to taking part in training. Some individuals noted that there were some training courses available in the area such as computer courses, basic skills via learn direct, hobby style courses or administration, but not those that they wanted to study

'there is nothing around here for the sort of thing I would like to do, there's plenty if you want to work on a computer or in an office or something like that but there's not much choice in Thetford really, you've got to be a secretary or some sort of store manager…the rigidness of what's available around here is very one way if you know what I mean, you've gotta do this or your not gonna do nothing …it's a small little area but there are a lot of people, there are a lot of job opportunities that they need to acquire skills, but there's no way of learning them skills'

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

Flexibility in the benefit system

6.120 Some individuals felt that the 16 hour rule for training was a barrier for them. They felt that they were restricted in the number of hours they could commit to a course;

> *'I feel like I'm desperately held back because I'm fed up of being at home but I can't do the courses because if it's a day course it will exceed the hours…because I'm currently looking for work, if I take a course that could be from 9-5 in the day, that could affect my benefits, it's a certain number of hours that you're restricted too'*

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

6.121 There were also difficulties in relation to how often they could volunteer because of this affecting their benefits;

> *'If you go full time into voluntary work your jobseekers gets stopped, it has to be under a certain amount of hours'*

<div align="right">Unemployed, Maldon</div>

6.122 One participant outlined the difficulty some unemployed people face in accessing training when switching from Incapacity Benefit to JSA. The individual explained how he had been forced to come off Incapacity Benefit to go onto JSA and look for a job. He felt that it was unfair that he could not then access training through the Jobcentre because he had not been unemployed for long enough even though he wanted to train:

> *'There's just no help, I have suffered from clinical depression, there has been no help for me in that, and now I'm actually being penalised for having that, because I've had that, the tiny little help that I may have got is void, they have voided it for a reason that makes absolutely no sense whatsoever…because you've been, sick, what a load of rubbish, perhaps I need training to help me get over, I mean I'm bipolar and that is a clinical, manic depression, that is clinical and there is nothing I can do about it, it's been going on since I was 5, training and support is exactly what I need, exactly, and it's not on offer for me'*

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

Specific individual barriers

6.123 There were a number of people who had a variety of individual barriers. It is important to recognise this as it shows the diversity and complexity of the barriers which would need to be overcome when helping individuals, particularly the unemployed, to get into training.

6.124 Confidence and mental illness problems were mentioned by a number of respondents as being barriers to their taking part in training. Confidence related in some instances to individuals not wanting to be in a room with strangers and in others to the experience they had with certain skills and not having the confidence to use those:

> *'The confidence to drive in a* [fork lift] *truck…driving is very very nerve racking…you're driving a truck that weighs like 3 tonne, you*

hit someone with that they ain't gonna get up... I haven't got the confidence and that's all I need'

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

6.125 Mental health issues also prevented some unemployed people from taking part in training. They felt that such problems were not dealt with by the Jobcentre:

> *'I've done it before and because I didn't know anyone I went all shy, I have a habit that if I get too shy I just start crying and I can't breathe and I just have to go out of the room and calm myself down, and they just say* [the Jobcentre] *well you've got to get over it, and it's not that easy to do ...I can't help it'*

<div align="right">Unemployed, Maldon</div>

6.126 There were some participants who noted that they had difficulties in doing specific training courses because of their lack of basic skills (in reading and writing) or learning difficulties:

> *'The only thing that holds me back is my reading and writing that's it'*

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

6.127 They had been refused access to training courses because of this, with concerns being raised that they would be too slow to keep up with the pace of the course:

> *I've tried applying a couple of times more and they still stick to their grounds and said that I would be too slow'*

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

6.128 However these individuals would appreciate help with these difficulties and would consider training focussing on reading and writing:

> *'yes, yes I'd be willing to learn, I enjoy learning, I have come a long way from what I was like when I was at school'*

<div align="right">Unemployed, Breckland</div>

6.129 Further barriers to training included a lack of childcare, family problems and a criminal record.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

7.1 Our research suggests that any interventions at the levels of both policy and practice that seek to raise the levels of skills and qualifications among the workforce in the rural East of England will need to take into account issues of rurality. Findings from across the three study areas have reflected to a large degree the issues identified in the national research that is explored in the literature review on the distinctive challenges attendant upon both the provision and accessing of opportunities for adult learning and skills development in rural areas.

7.2 Individuals and employers within the study areas face a complex range of barriers to accessing learning and skills provision. Therefore any interventions aimed at increasing participation will need to tackle these multiple barriers. For unemployed adults in particular, tailored individual support is required to examine what barriers exist and to establish the most effective way of overcoming them.

7.3 Evidence clearly suggests that within the study areas there are greater costs to providers of delivering, and to individuals and employers of accessing, provision, and that these additional costs can be attributed to the rural nature of the districts. For example: travel costs for learners attending and for providers delivering training are greater; the smaller numbers of potential learners within a geographical area mean that providers cannot benefit from economies of scale in relation to class size; and the costs of staff training are disproportionately higher for small and micro-businesses, which make up the majority of employers in the districts. These higher costs appear to act as disincentives for providers, employers and individuals. Providers are reluctant to take on the additional costs, and are not confident that these can be passed on to employers and individuals, so the development of provision is inhibited; individuals are discouraged from participating in learning and skills development; and employers are unwilling to build the levels of skills within the region's rural workforce.

7.4 There appears to be a substantial mismatch within the study areas between what employers and individuals say they want in terms of workforce training provision, and what learning providers are currently delivering. However, the research findings must be approached with caution against a straightforward acceptance of this notion, which needs further unpicking. Providers assert that they base the development of their provision on an informed understanding of local need, while both employers and individuals acknowledge that their awareness of current provision is low.

7.5 This apparent lack of a common understanding of local workforce skills needs and provision between providers on the one hand and employers and individuals on the other, strongly suggests that current information advice and guidance (IAG) and skills brokerage services available in the three study areas are not performing adequately.

7.6 Individuals seem to be making little use of impartial IAG services that could help them to make and act upon decisions about learning and work. Such services also act as an important conduit for informing local providers about learner demand, and so can help with matching demand and provision. Inadequate access to appropriate IAG provision has been identified as a particular issue for learners in rural areas. An important step towards addressing non-participation in learning in the study areas would be to increase the availability and accessibility of IAG for individuals.

7.7 Similarly, employers appear to be making little use of skills brokerage services that could help to identify their workforce training needs and to work with providers to secure appropriate opportunities for skills development. The use of skills brokerage services by employers, including those running small and micro-businesses, needs to be encouraged as part of wider support for business development.

7.8 Notwithstanding their general low level of awareness about current provision, employers and individuals can identify three specific gaps. These are:

n A shortage of job-related technical and specialist provision linked to local labour market needs, including short courses in technical and vocational subjects;

n The need for better access to training in leadership and management;

n A demand for more ESOL provision for migrant workers.

7.9 The research also suggests that the standard of much teaching and training in technical and specialist subjects, where such provision is available, falls below the standard required by both employers and individuals. In particular, difficulties appear to arise because teaching staff do not have the relevant technical and business background that would enable them to understand and address the specific, practical and business needs of the workforce. For employers and individuals in rural areas, the difficulties in finding suitable training are likely to be greater than in urban areas due to more limited choice of providers.

7.10 Our evidence indicates that providers are aware of these gaps and shortcomings in their provision, but are currently hampered in their ability to address them by a number of factors. They have faced difficulties in attracting tutors with the appropriate specialist and technical skills and experience to work in rural areas. A key reason given for this is that in some areas such as agriculture and construction there is a limited pool of individuals with such expertise and, where they do exist, they can earn significantly more working in the industry in question than by undertaking a tutoring role. It was also

suggested that even when those with technical and specialist expertise were prepared to act as tutors they preferred to work in a town or city environment rather than in a rural area suffering from poor travel infrastructure. However, funding presents the major obstacle to addressing the gaps in provision. Providers reason that provision which does not attract public funding, such as short courses and leadership and management training, is too costly to deliver.

7.11   This last point on the relationship between provision and public funding raises an important conundrum that will need to be addressed in seeking to raise opportunities for rural workforce learning and skills development in the East of England. Employers and individuals – both employed and unemployed – state that they recognise in principle the value and importance of learning and skills development. However, employers have also told us that they wish to secure training at little or no cost to themselves. Providers, constrained by government priorities in terms of the subsidised training which they can offer, are therefore unable to plan and develop provision in the expectation that employers will pay for it.

7.12   There is a clear challenge here in the need to effect a fundamental cultural and practical shift in the willingness of employers, particularly from small and micro-businesses, to pay for training, and so liberate providers to deliver what they demand. Policy and practice interventions are needed which will encourage employers to invest in the training of their workforce.

Recommendations

7.13 Drawing on the findings and conclusions from our research, we have developed a number of recommendations for consideration based around four key areas:

n Skills information and advice services for individuals and employers;

n Access;

n Specialist tutors;

n The system.

These recommendations should be of interest to all partners involved in the East of England Skills and Competitiveness Partnership as well as to future members of the regional Employment and Skills Board. However, they will be of importance to others at a more local level including local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships. Care has been taken to ensure that the recommendations are, where appropriate, capable of alignment with existing and proposed delivery mechanisms. They are also framed so as to be realistic, achievable and to build on examples of existing good practice.

Skills information and advice services

7.14 There are a number of agencies involved in providing information and advice on learning and skills development to individuals and employers. The following recommendations could enhance the capacity of these agencies to meet the needs of individuals and employers in rural areas of the East of England.

Support for individuals

7.15 A targeted publicity campaign could usefully be undertaken to increase awareness in rural communities of the national on-line and telephone IAG services provided through Learndirect and of the regional Nextstep website and telephone access point launched on August 1. Evaluation of these services suggests that they are effective, and the media through which they are delivered could overcome some of the barriers associated with accessing face-to-face provision in rural communities.

7.16 It is recommended that the local library services have stronger links with Jobcentre Plus and Nextstep to provide a visible and local presence to support the IAG needs of local individuals and employers. This is particularly important in areas such as Maldon where there is no Jobcentre Plus presence.

7.17 In order to inform the establishment of the Adult Advancement and Careers Service and in line with the national policy direction of integrating employment and skills, consideration should be given as to how IAG agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and Nextstep can work together to best support the

training needs of individuals living in rural areas. Particular consideration should be given to:

> n **How best to provide 'skills health checks/screening' within a rural location;**

> n **Increased signposting to local providers;**

> n **Management of a central hub/portal of training related information relevant to those living in specific rural areas.**

7.18 **There appears to be a need for an enhancement of the provision of workforce skills training available to those living in rural areas. This should include a broadening of provision to include:**

> n **A better fit with the needs of the increasingly diverse rural economy;**

> n **Increased relevance of provision to local employment opportunities;**

> n **A greater practical element;**

> n **Mechanisms to ensure that the level of the course is best suited to individual need;**

> n **More accredited training where required.**

7.19 **IAG provision within the community would be improved by the introduction of 'learning champions'. These learning champions would act as a link between individuals and providers, delivering initial IAG and supporting people into learning, as well as working with providers to supply them with information about local learning needs. Successful learning champion schemes have already been established in ten locations across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with the support of *Investing in Communities* funding.**

7.20 **Recruitment agencies provide a direct link to many migrant workers and strategies should be developed to encourage them to play an increased role in signposting training provision for migrant workers, through enhanced liaison with Jobcentre Plus, Nextstep and the Adult Advancement and Careers Service (when this is established).**

7.21 **Consideration should be given to the introduction of peripatetic 'learning ambassadors' who would provide IAG to migrant workers and play a role similar to that of 'learning champions' within local communities.**

Support for employers

7.22 **Local Employment Partnerships already provide an effective vehicle in relation to larger employers. Consideration should be given to adapting this model to work effectively with small employers in rural areas through developing partnerships that build on existing business engagement activity and will provide a more formal link to employers in rural areas.**

7.23 A more visible and direct service to employers in relation to skills brokerage could usefully be offered. Exploration of initiatives which could reach employers in rural areas such as the use of a mobile bus with mobile internet access would be helpful in this respect.

7.24 The establishment of a website portal which would act as a 'right move' for training or a 'learning shop' could considerably enhance the support available to employers. A sector focus to any information is recommended with the Sectors Skills Councils (SSCs) playing a lead role in providing information for inclusion in the portal.

7.25 SSCs already play a key role in mapping the level of training/workforce skills provision available for each business sector. However, there is a need for initiatives at local level to bring together providers and employers in specific sectors in order to effectively meet the skills demands of each sector. The work of LANTRA offers a model of how this can work in practice.

7.26 The greater flexibility in the services that skills brokers can now offer to employers through Train to Gain needs to be more widely promoted. Additionally, brokers should also be encouraged to support employers to address all their workforce skills needs, including demand for short, very short and non-accredited training which may fall outside the scope of Train to Gain.

Access

7.27 To inform future investment decisions it is recommend that a minimum travel to learn distance and/or time for all adults accessing lower levels of workforce skills provision should be established in each local authority area.

7.28 It is recommended that extra support is made available to enable individuals in designated rural areas to travel to training. However, travelling difficulties are not the only barriers to participation. It is important that any such support is introduced as part of a wider package designed to encourage and enable people with low levels of skills and qualifications to participate in learning and skills development.

7.29 It is recommended that providers review their approaches to distance learning in order to increase its use in rural areas. However, an approach based solely on distance learning would not be welcomed by learners who already suffer from isolation. There is a need for the development of tailored distance learning packages which offer a blended approach, where one-to-one tutor support and peer support are available throughout the course and with practical elements embedded into the learning.

7.30 The use of specialist equipment purchased for the new diplomas for young people should be broadened to include adult learners with more use being made of equipment in local schools. Arrangements proposed at Fakenham High School in relation to their lead role in specialist diplomas in construction may provide a useful model to build upon.

Specialist Tutors

7.31 LLUK and sector skills councils could usefully work together to make it easier for individuals with industrial experience (either still in employment or recently retired) to obtain relevant teaching qualifications and thereby to increase the supply of part-time tutors. Although this is not a specifically rural issue its impact would be greater in rural areas where the shortage of such tutors is particularly acute.

7.32 There is a need for a campaign to attract qualified tutors to rural parts of the region. At the same time there should be wide promotion to employers and to highly skilled current and recent employees of the social and economic benefits that they can offer to local communities by devising ways of injecting current industrial expertise into local training. The work of employers such as Perkins Engines (in opening their learning centre to the wider employer community) and bodies such as the Engineering Employers Federation (in training peripatetic NVQ assessors) are worthy of widespread dissemination as examples of good practice. Business in the Community already undertakes valuable advocacy work in this respect but a more rural focus to their activity could be of benefit to rural communities.

7.33 To overcome the difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of qualified tutors it is recommended that providers cluster together to share tutors. These clusters should build upon other successful examples in the land-based sectors currently in operation in the East of England.

7.34 Groups of local businesses could usefully work together to form employer clusters to address their shared training needs. Clusters could commission bespoke training and could be supported to develop qualified tutors and assessors from within the cluster. The work of 'Shaping Norfolk's Future' where clusters of employers have been established in targeted sectors provides a successful model that could be built upon as do the well established Rural Training Groups.

7.35 Sector skills councils could play a strong role in supporting the development of both provider and employer clusters. They could help to shape the provision of training across clusters of employers and to identify ways in which industrial expertise could be more widely shared within a training context.

The System

7.36 More flexibility in the benefit system to support the needs of unemployed groups would particularly help individuals in rural areas. Regional lobbying would be of value in ensuring that the principles enshrined in the recent welfare reform white paper are taken forward into legislation in the next parliamentary session. In particular a relaxation of benefit rules such as the '18 month rule' on entitlement to training and the '16 hour rule' that limits time available to attend training would enable more unemployed people to access the high quality training they need to enter the workforce.

7.37 Funding available to support provision in rural areas needs to be at a level adequate to allow providers to deliver outreach provision in a flexible manner matched to local needs. It will be important in this respect to continue to argue for a rural 'uplift' factor to be included in any funding methodologies associated with learning and skills development for adults.

7.38 There are considerable demands for greater flexibility within the funding system to allow employers to retrain individuals who have an existing Level 2 qualification. This is particularly an issue in rural areas where the economy is experiencing major structural change, with the on-going shift of employment to new sectors and a decline in traditional sectors. Some such flexibility has recently been introduced into Train to Gain on a negotiated sector by sector basis. There is an urgent need to encourage sector skills councils to include those qualifications most relevant to rural areas in the priority qualifications lists which are currently under development.

7.39 There may be opportunities to make more use of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) in order to direct funding towards more effectively meeting demand in rural areas. In addition increased links with sub-regional strategies that cut across local authority boundaries such as the 'Regional Cities East' model should be explored as vehicles for delivering change to provision in rural areas.

7.40 The East of England Skills and Competitiveness Partnership may wish to consider developing a regional action plan to take forward the recommendations contained in this report.

Potential pilot projects

A small number of projects have been identified as suitable for piloting some of the recommendations in this report.   In some cases these involve simply a new way of working or a new focus to existing activity.   In others there will be a requirement for a modest amount of funding to pump prime the activity.   There may be some merit in trialling several of these pilots in the same rural area, along the lines of the recent Fens Rural Pathfinder, in order to establish whether a measurable change over time becomes apparent but also to exploit the synergies between the various proposals.

Pilot projects to improve skills information and advice services

Pilot project 1: IAG provision through libraries

To establish a task force including:

- Jobcentre Plus

- Nextstep

- Connexions

- Library services

- Business Support Collaboration Group

- Local Authorities

to explore ways in which IAG services could have a more visible and effective local presence in rural areas to support the needs of local individuals and employers.   Lessons could usefully be learned from the Adult Advancement and Careers Service prototypes being piloted elsewhere in the country.

Pilot project 2: Small rural employer partnerships

To develop a model, based on Local Employment Partnerships, to establish formal partnerships with small rural employers based on a tightly defined travel to work area.   This would allow a key link to be made between local Jobcentres and employers in tackling the particular recruitment and skills challenges faced by small rural employers.

Interested agencies are likely to include:

- Jobcentre Plus

- Business Link

- Train to Gain

n ACAS

n Nextstep

n Connexions

n Business Support Collaboration Group.

Pilot project 3: Learning Champions

To build upon the successes of IiC-funded schemes already operating in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by establishing teams of 'learning champions' in rural communities. Learning champions, often trained volunteers, work within local communities to advocate the power of learning, to establish information for providers on local learning needs and to broker provision suited to individual requirements. They have been particularly successful both in the region and elsewhere in reaching those who have not engaged in any form of learning since leaving school, as is the case of the many low-skilled individuals living in rural areas.

To specifically meet the needs of migrant workers and their particular difficulties in relation to accessing mainstream IAG support, by establishing and training teams of peripatetic learning champions who would have a good understanding of the issues faced by new arrivals and new communities and how their learning needs might be met. They would travel around sites employing migrant workers and provide IAG support in the workplace.

Pilot projects to improve access to provision

Pilot project 4: Supported travel

To establish task forces at Local Strategic Partnership level in rural areas to develop and implement support strategies to better enable low-skilled unemployed individuals to overcome the barriers they face in accessing training, particularly in relation to travel. Successful strategies implemented elsewhere have included: making school bus services available to adult learners; Community Transport schemes; and 'Wheels to Work' initiatives. Other approaches transferable from different contexts might include: Jobcentre Plus travel support for incapacity benefit claimants entering employment; centrally organised transport-sharing schemes; and the provision of travel vouchers.

Pilot project 5: Distance learning

To select one sector of particular relevance to the rural economy in which to develop a pilot module to be delivered in the workplace by a blended approach incorporating a distance learning element complemented by regular on-site tutor support, structured peer support and with embedded practical experience where appropriate.

Such a project would require a substantial contribution from the appropriate sector skills council but would also benefit from the involvement of agencies such as Foundation Degree Forward and MOVE which have considerable experience of innovative materials development in vocational areas.

Pilot projects to address the problem of recruitment of specialist tutors

Pilot project 6: Requirements to teach

To undertake a scoping exercise in collaboration with LLUK and selected sector skills councils to identify the most effective and attractive ways to enable those with current industrial experience (either in employment or recently retired) to undertake a teaching role.   The exercise would involve the establishment of any necessary training and on-going support required as well as the identification of incentives required to encourage both employers and skilled employees and ex-employees to engage in such an initiative.   It would be useful to learn from the successes of similar ventures elsewhere including at Thurrock and Basildon College.

Pilot project 7: Provider Clusters

To establish a cluster of providers operating in a defined rural area.   The cluster would work together to:

n Identify skills gaps and training needs;

n Identify areas of tutor shortage;

n Employ peripatetic tutors in appropriate sectors to act as a shared resource.

Pilot project 8: Employer Clusters

To establish sector-specific clusters of employers operating in a defined rural area. These clusters would be an expansion to other sectors of the Rural Training Group model operating within the land-based sector. The cluster would work together, with the support of the appropriate sector skills council to:

n Identify shared skills gaps and training needs;

n Commission external cross-cluster training as required;

n Identify and train potential tutors and assessors from within the employment base;

n Deliver internal cross-cluster training as required.