The Challenge Project Evaluation

Final Report

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1.0 Introduction

Tyne and Wear Learning Partnership (TWLP) Skills for Life sub group was commissioned by TyneWear Partnership (TWP) Employment and Skills panel to develop a proposal in relation to the Skills for Life (Eliminate the Basic Skills Deficiency) Priority Theme. The project aimed to use Single Programme Revenue funding to address the significant gap in relation to funding for capacity building and tutor training.

The Challenge Project ran for just over two and a half years, from July 2005 to March 2008, across Tyne and Wear. A Skills for Life Advisory Group consulted with a broad range of Skills for Life providers and other partners in Tyne and Wear in planning the Project. This extensive consultation ensured that project activity brought added value by filling gaps in existing provision but not duplicating it. Staff took up positions from September 2005 and an active recruitment strategy began in January 2006. The Project received Single Programme funding from the Regional Development Agency - One NE, via the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and TWP[1] and was administered by Tyne Metropolitan College.

1.1 The Evaluation

The evaluation of the Challenge Project was carried out between January and March 2008 by an independent research and evaluation agency[2]. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed. Qualitative data was gathered through interviews with Project staff, learning providers, learners, Steering Group members, participants on long and short Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses and representatives from the LSC and sub-regional Learning Partnerships (numbers are presented in table 1.1). The quantitative data was provided from the comprehensive Project data collection systems.

Table 1.1 Agencies and Numbers Interviewed for the Evaluation

Agency or Group Interviewed	Numbers
Challenge Project staff (present and past)	12
Learners	25
Learning providers	18
Long CPD course providers	3
LSC	2
Participants on CPD courses	16
Short CPD providers	3
Steering Group	6
Tyne and Wear Learning Partnerships	5

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[1] For more information on these agencies, see: http://www.onenortheast.co.uk/; http://www.lsc.gov.uk/; http://www.tynewearpartnership.org.uk.
[2] See www.barefootresearch.org.uk

The evaluation found a project which had many successes, including engaging with learners who would not otherwise have taken part in Skills for Life provision, professionalising the Skills for Life workforce, developing new methods and approaches within this sector and moving the Skills for Life agenda forward.

2.0 The Project

For the majority of the Project (September 2005 to September 2007), the staff team was consistent. There were 11 employees and the structure was as shown below:

- Project Manager
  - Project Administrator x 2
  - o Recruitment Manager (Mass Market)
    - Recruitment Advisor x 5
  - o Recruitment Manager (Employed People)
  - o PLUS Strategy Coordinator

Towards the final six months of the project the structure changed significantly as a result of staff leaving for other roles and was made up of:

- Project Manager
  - o Senior Administrator x 2
    - Administrative Assistant
  - o Senior Recruitment Advisor
    - Recruitment Advisor x 5

A Project Steering Group was established and composed of individuals representing a range of stakeholders. The role of this group was to provide advice to the Project management team regarding the direction of the project, partnership working and assisting with management decisions. Over the duration of the Project the membership of this group changed slightly, but it has included representatives of the further education sector, local authority adult education, providers of training for Skills for Life, professionals and union representatives. Members of the Steering Group also held positions on other key groups such as the Tyne and Wear Basic Skills Advisory Group.

In addition to the strategic steer provided by the Steering Group, the Project Manager has attended all of the individual Tyne and Wear Learning Partnerships and supplied them with information and updates of the Project as well as receiving advice, guidance and suggestions from them, in a two way relationship.

The following section outlines the three elements of the Challenge Project.

2.1 Strand 1: Professional Development for New and Existing Skills for Life Teachers

Single Programme Revenue funding was used to address the significant shortage of suitably trained Skills for Life tutors by not only raising awareness of the opportunities for training and Continuing Professional Development but by organising access to the training. Single Programme funding helped to ensure that Tyne and Wear had sufficient highly motivated, highly qualified, expert Skills for Life teachers to cope with the increased numbers of Skills for Life learners generated by activities included within Strand 2 of the Project. This activity included events (e.g. themed days such as creative learning), short courses (e.g. day long dyslexia awareness) and long courses (e.g. funding for the 12 month level 3, 4 and 5 literacy and numeracy qualifications).

All CPD was developed to meet recognised sector-led needs and continued to be informed by the Skills for Life agenda.

The short courses were developed, often from scratch, in response to the needs of the sector. For example, an ADHD awareness day was developed in close partnership with a local charity, Gateshead ADHD Support. The Project Manager worked with the charity to develop a customised course for teachers working with many learners with ADHD. This included input from a psychologist working in the field.

The subjects of the CPD short courses were developed through a working group (made up of the Challenge Project, providers and other key Skills for Life professionals from across Tyne and Wear) that met regularly for the first 18 months and also through the Skills for Life expertise of the Project Manager. A list of the courses is presented in the appendix.

Strand 1 and Strand 2 of the Project received approximately equal funding.

2.2 Strand 2: Stimulating Demand for Skills for Life Learning

The Project employed a team of engagement staff to interact with potential project beneficiaries/clients to increase the numbers of individuals entering basic skills training; it was anticipated that individuals having acquired these skills would then be better equipped to progress into further training and/or employment. Strand 2 created three posts, two engagement managers and a PLUS Coordinator, each having individual responsibility for particular sectors:

- Mass Marketing including, on the street/high street canvassing, publicity in public buildings, targeted activity, informal networking, telemarketing campaigns and door-to-door canvassing.

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- Employed People – a direct approach to employed people - those that were reluctant to admit to employers that they had basic skills needs were encouraged to become engaged.

The targets associated with this Strand were 18000 contacts made with potential learners and 6000 people on learning programmes.

The name, brand (including logo) and the promotional strategy for the Challenge Project were created and developed by the Project team. The name, brand and logo were developed with a specific intention to reflect a positive image about Skills for Life, not to portray a deficit approach and not to include the word 'test'. The Project team developed the designs and gained approval from the Steering Group.

The Project essentially had three parts to its promotional strategy: marketing; incentives; and rewards. Marketing consisted of: stands used at events and for the mass market recruitment; posters; leaflets for learners and employers; promotional giveaways such as trolley key rings, water bottles, tea towels, lollipops, cups, pens and bottle openers; and an advertisement covering a Metro train for 18 months. These marketing items were largely distributed by the recruitment team and at events and it should be noted that the most effective (i.e. most welcomed and most easily transported) giveaways were the smaller items. The incentives included mini radios, mini fans and tape measures. These were given to learners at the point they signed up to take an initial assessment. The rewards were for learners who had passed a test and were intended as a learning-related gift which had the objective of spreading the Skills for Life message amongst the learners' friends and family. The Project also developed a comprehensive website which was used as a source of information and direction for learners, professionals and those interested in the PLUS Strategy.

For the recruitment in public venues and in terms of process, the recruiters would record someone's details and make an immediate appointment for them as soon as possible, either on the street or by telephone later (providers arranged one or more slots when they would accept project referrals). The Project would then let the provider know how many appointments had been made.

The learners who attended were assessed by the provider who would then progress their programme. Providers informed the Challenge Project of learner progression. If the learner had failed to attend then the Administration Team followed this up; if the learner had achieved a test pass they were sent a gift. Contact time between learner and provider was from nine hours upwards. Most learners however took part in programmes between nine and 30 hours. Often the learner, once engaged would continue to take further learning or different tests (this can be evidenced in graph 3.2 which shows there are more test passes than people who have passed tests).

A variety of recruitment approaches were used and as the team became more experienced, the recruitment became more sophisticated. The team were able to take more individual responsibility, whereas previous to this they were directed where to recruit by the Mass Marketing Manager in consultation with Local Learning Partnerships. From January 2007, the recruitment team could choose with input from the Mass Marketing Manager where in each area they recruited.

The majority of providers were engaged with the project from the outset and were contacted and met with regularly. The Challenge Project developed comprehensive systems for the providers to record the outputs of those referred to them. The Project referred recruits to a total of 24 providers across the region, which were:

- Bridge Sunderland
- CCP South Shields
- ETEC
- Exchange Group
- Gateshead College
- Gateshead Council
- Learning Concepts
- Learning Links
- Newcastle ABE
- Newcastle College
- Newcastle Family Learn
- Nissan

- North Tyneside ABE
- Pallion Action Group
- Pennywell Youth Project
- Pyramid Project
- S4L 4 VCS
- South Tyneside College
- South Tyneside Council
- Sunderland College
- Sunderland Council
- Tyne Metropolitan College
- Wearmouth CD Trust
- Zodiac Training

In terms of process for Employed People recruitment, the Project built a comprehensive database of employers, identified and contacted the main gatekeeper (e.g. human resource or business managers), sold the Project and idea and then negotiated an opportunity for the employees to learn and then pass a test[3]. This could be in work time (but was most commonly outside of work time, e.g. at the end of a shift) and was commonly in the workplace (although occasionally the employees visited a local provider). The recruitment manager would then arrange for learning to be delivered in the workplace by a local provider.

2.3 The PLUS Strategy

The PLUS Strategy is the Youth Justice Board's (YJB) literacy and numeracy strategy for young people at risk of re-offending. It started in 2003 in England and Wales and, although it was initially a four year strategy, it has been extended nationally until March 2008.

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[3] This is a simplistic explanation of the process and does not reflect the significant work that went into identifying, contacting, tracking, re-contacting and meeting employers.

Box 2.1 The PLUS Strategy

The PLUS Strategy aims to raise significantly the literacy and numeracy levels of children and young people in order to prevent crime through:

- attracting young people aged 14 to 19, specifically those with poor basic skills, back into learning programmes that will help them improve those skills;
- encouraging flexible, tailored approaches that motivate and engage young people and help raise their attainment; and
- finding additional, innovative ways of engaging with these young people.

PLUS is an integral part of the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) Skills for Life Strategy and is a partnership between the YJB, DfES and Arts Council England.

In order to motivate young people into becoming more involved and engaged in learning, and to raise their attainment levels, PLUS:

- provides high-quality, accessible and relevant printed and ICT-based materials;
- trains and supports those who plan and deliver PLUS;
- evaluates the effectiveness of PLUS; and
- promotes an understanding of the links between literacy and numeracy, participation and progression.

From the original pilot in 2001, working within 10 custodial institutions (Young Offender Institutions and Secure Training Centres) only, PLUS has grown and moved out into the community. PLUS is currently working with over 400 organisations around the country, including Schools, Further Education Colleges, Pupil Referral Units, Learning Support Units, Youth Offending Teams, Intensive Surveillance and Supervision Programmes, Training Providers, Preventative Schemes and Custodial settings.

Source: http://www.challengeproject.org.uk and http://www.tyneandwear.org.uk

The Strategy did not have a consistent presence across the regions of England and Wales and the Coordinator's post was often connected to a Youth Offending Team or a Connexions' office. In the North East, the PLUS Strategy Coordinator was a dedicated post and formed part of the Challenge Project. ECOTEC had the contract to manage the national PLUS Strategy (including monitoring its outcomes). The PLUS Strategy Coordinator in the North East was line managed by both ECOTEC and the Challenge Project Manager.

The PLUS Strategy worked with pre-designed literacy and numeracy resources (both a tutor's pack and a learner's pack) which were aimed at young offenders or those at-risk in community settings. For example, young people connected to a Youth Offending Team, local community projects or in schools. Teachers, trainers or project staff associated with such agencies or projects would be

trained in the use of the resources and packs would be given out. The resources were designed to be delivered by non-teaching staff, although evidence from the Project does suggest that the resources are used most effectively by qualified teachers or tutors.

3.0 Key Findings

3.1 Strand 1: Professional Development for New and Existing Skills for Life Teachers

The Project funded a total of 440 people on subject specialist courses. These courses were delivered by a range of colleges and universities. Graph 3.1 displays the numbers of people funded and the type of course. Approximately 30% of the total number came from colleges across the region, 30% were from local authorities and 12% came from training providers. The remainder came from a range of organisations such as Sure Start, trade unions and the voluntary and community sector. Although there continues to be an unmet demand for numeracy specialists, the Project reflected the national picture of more literacy qualifications being delivered.

Significant energy had been put into preparing a workforce to meet the needs of potential learners - in Tyne and Wear specifically via an ESF/LSC co-financed project in capacity building. Nevertheless, providers reported continuing shortages of suitably trained staff to meet need let alone to meet the needs of the 6,000 new learners envisaged in this Project. It would have been negligent to set out to recruit large numbers of new learners without ensuring that suitable, high quality staff were available to support them once recruited.

The CPD long courses also developed the skills base of new professionals via (a total of 33) students undertaking post 16 PGCE courses, adding an element of 'new blood' to the Skills for Life staff base in the region. These students would have been unlikely to fund themselves to undertake their level 4 in literacy and numeracy and therefore without the Project it is unlikely that they would have gained the specialist Skills for Life qualifications.

Graph 3.1 Numbers of People and Type of Long CPD Course
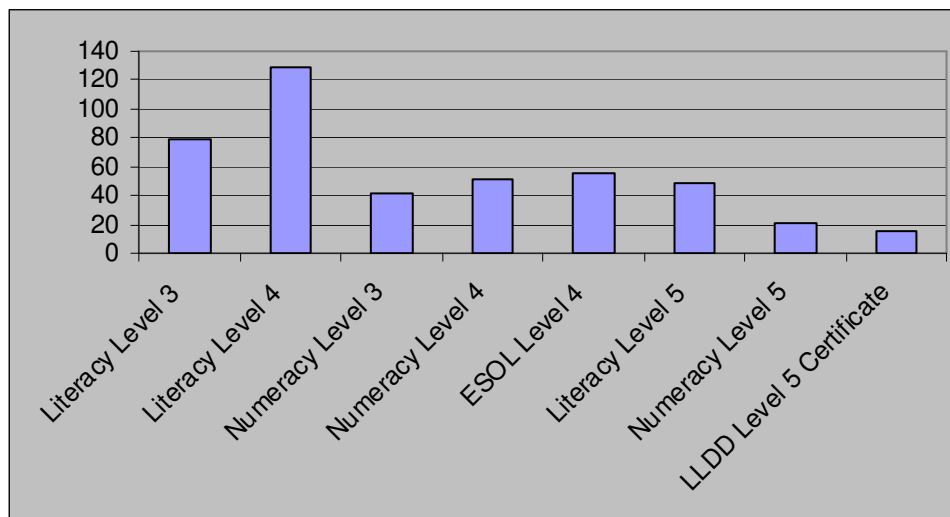
Note: ESOL is English for Speakers of Other Languages and LLDD is Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities.

The Project delivered a total of 888 training opportunities over six hours since 2005. This equated to 624 different individuals, as sometimes one person did more than one course (e.g. completed a level 4 literacy, a level 4 numeracy and several short CPD courses.

The short courses were highly valued by participants and regarded as being interesting, well delivered and extremely beneficial. Reactions from those professionals attending the courses were overwhelmingly positive and the impacts of the courses included:

- Developing the skills of participants which allowed them to more effectively do their job, including teaching or supporting learners;
- Improving the service received by learners through developing the understanding of participants on the courses and improving their technical expertise to deliver learning;
- Increasing the awareness of both Skills for Life and specific specialisms (e.g. ADHA and impacts of torture);
- Improving the local availability of courses and therefore increasing the participation of professionals. Other opportunities for short CPD courses are few and far between and people often have to travel as far as York and Leeds to access specific courses they need.

The Challenge Project's short CPD courses were not only local but flexible, creative and often tailor made. One provider stated "*if you had 10 people who wanted a course on say dyslexia,* [the Project] *would come to your workplace and deliver it … it was free and on demand*". Another example of the flexibility and inventiveness was a tailor-made course delivered to teachers of 16 to 18 year olds who were in transition from teaching key skills to Skills for Life. Another

participant said "*They were doing things that no-one else was doing … like the victims of torture course*".

All of those providers interviewed were extremely concerned about the end of the Project and what this would mean for both the short and long CPD courses.

3.2 Strand 2: Stimulating Demand for Skills for Life Learning

As of early February 2008, the Project had made contacts with over 30,000 people[4] and enrolled a total of 4246 people who had undertaken an initial assessment[5] (IA) with a learning provider. However, given the changes to funding over the past two years, this would no longer be used as a measure should the project be starting now. The Project was therefore in excess of its contact target but had not met its learning target.

The percentage of all engagements who attended an initial assessment was 39% (n=4246) and the pass rate of those people who attended an initial assessment was 33% (n=1420). The number of test passes was higher at 2145, as individuals may have taken more than one test.

Graph 3.2 shows the distribution of these figures across Tyne and Wear, as well as the number of people who had passed tests and the number of test passes.

Graph 3.2 Total Engaged, Number Attended Initial Assessment (IA), Number of People Passed Tests and Number of Test Passes


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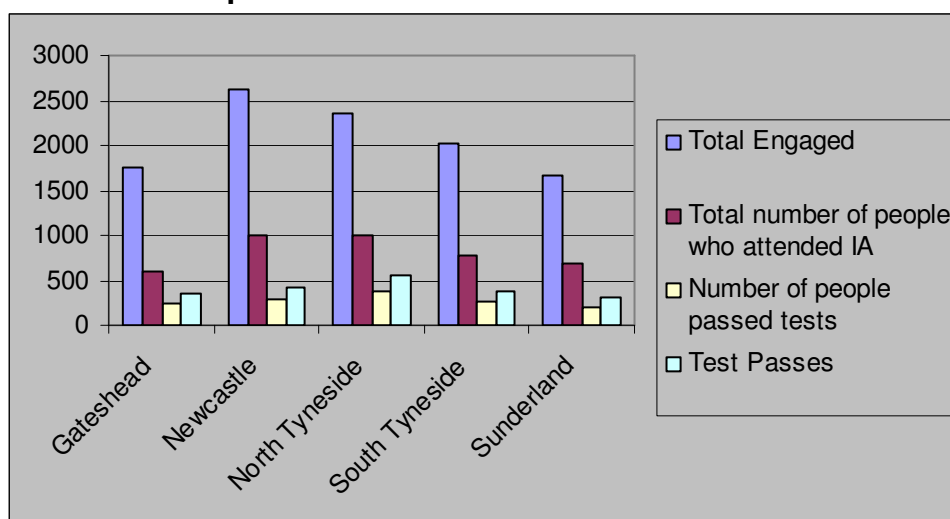
[4] For every person that the recruitment team succeeded in recruiting (i.e. recording their details and making an appointment for them with a provider), they talked to another two people. The figure for this engagement is 10,851 and the figure for contacts is three time this figure.
[5] This is essentially an assessment to determine their literacy and/or numeracy level which then informs further learning.

Graph 3.3 shows where learners were recruited from. The largest single recruitment area was the Job Centres across the region followed by recruitment from town centres. This is noteworthy as it demonstrates the willingness of people actively seeking employment to engage in further learning and pursue qualifications. There is therefore an argument here to permanently locate recruiters within Job Centres to direct potential learners to providers. The graph also demonstrates the effectiveness of the mass market recruitment in town centres. The third highest source of referrals is the recruitment from employers, which also demonstrates the success of this method.

Graph 3.3 Where Learners Were Recruited
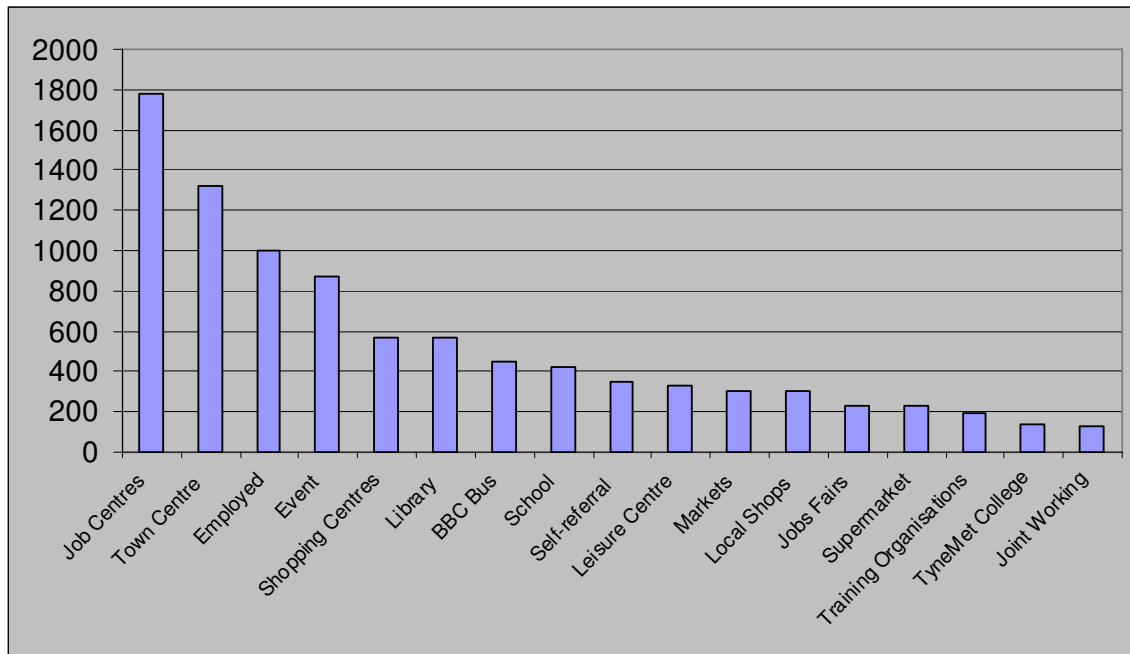
Note: the sources of recruitment above contain those with the higher numbers and is not an exhaustive list.

Graph 3.4 shows that there were a number of peaks and troughs in the numbers of people recruited. There are obvious troughs that coincide with Christmas and others which may be attributed to holidays (around Easter) and a return to school (September). The other noteworthy dip is in September 2007 which coincided with staff changes. In the two full years of the Project (2006 and 2007), there were approximately 5000 learners recruited each year.

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Graph 3.4 Number of People Recruited by Month August 2005 to March 2008
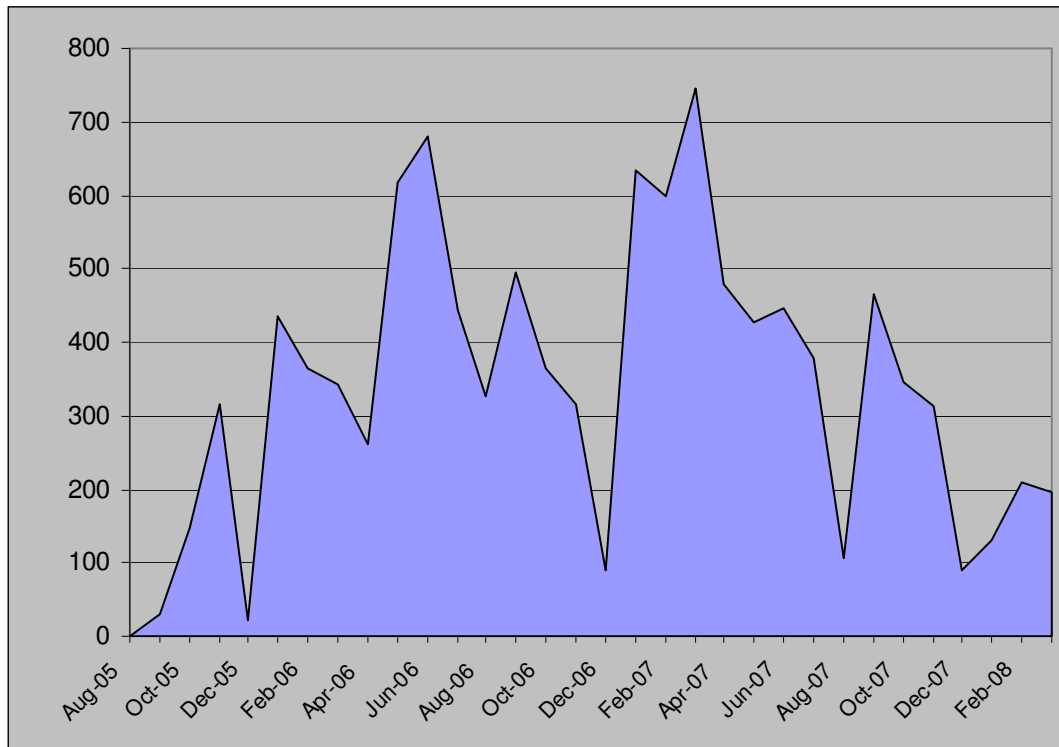
Graph 3.5 shows the numbers of learners that came from employers across the region. There are notable differences: Newcastle has the highest number of engaged employee learners because of the concentration of employers in the city; Sunderland has the least due to the presence of Test the City who already worked with local employers; and South Tyneside has the best conversion rate (i.e. from those engaged to those who passed tests).

In the early stages of this Strand it was anticipated that there would be a close working relationship with the Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) located within employers. However, it soon became clear that there were issues of double funding (both the ULRs and the Project were One NE/TWP/LSC funded) and it was eventually mutually and amicably agreed that the Project would target employers where there was no danger of double funding.

Graph 3.5 Employer Engagement Across Tyne and Wear: Number of Employees Engaged and Number of Test Passes
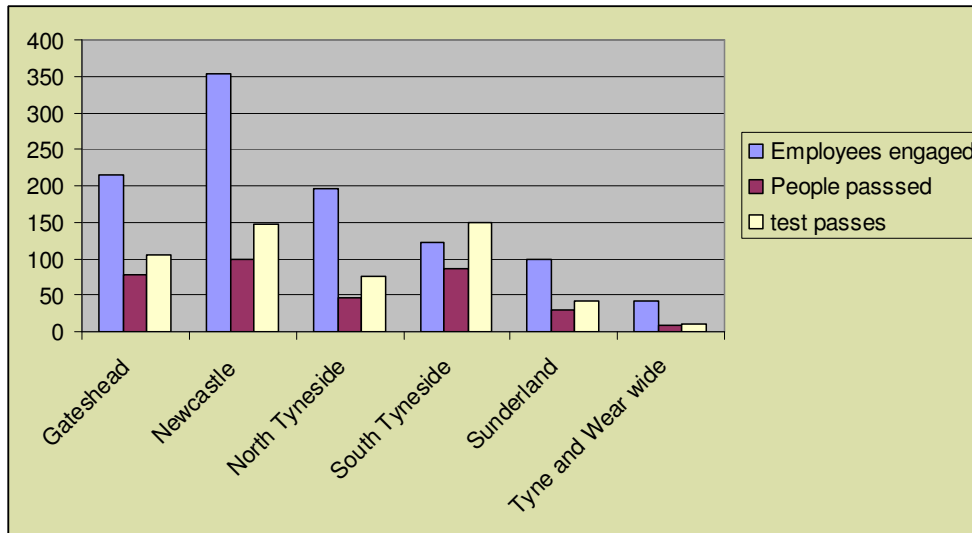

The Project had different impacts on each learning provider as the number of referrals to them varied. However, for one provider it increased learner numbers by 35%. Graph 3.6 shows the number of learners received by learning providers since October 2005.

The graph shows the difference in the conversion rate of the Employed People work. This element was more successful in getting those who first engaged to take an IA. It was also more successful in achieving higher numbers of both people passing tests and the number of test passes. There are several reasons for this, including: learners were all from one venue; learning was mostly arranged at the place of work, either in work time or at the end of a shift; and a higher proportion of learners were more likely to be almost test ready than members of the public. The Employed People work was significantly more efficient in engaging high numbers (see graph 3.6) bearing in mind the staff ratio (one compared to six).

Employees were much more likely to engage in learning if their employer gave them paid time in which to do it. This is demonstrated by the fact that whilst only a handful of employers said that learning could be done in work time, almost 50% of the Challenge Project's employee recruits undertook the learning in paid time.

Graph 3.6 Learning Providers, Learners Engaged, Number Attending Initial Assessment, Number of People Passed Test and Number of Test Passes
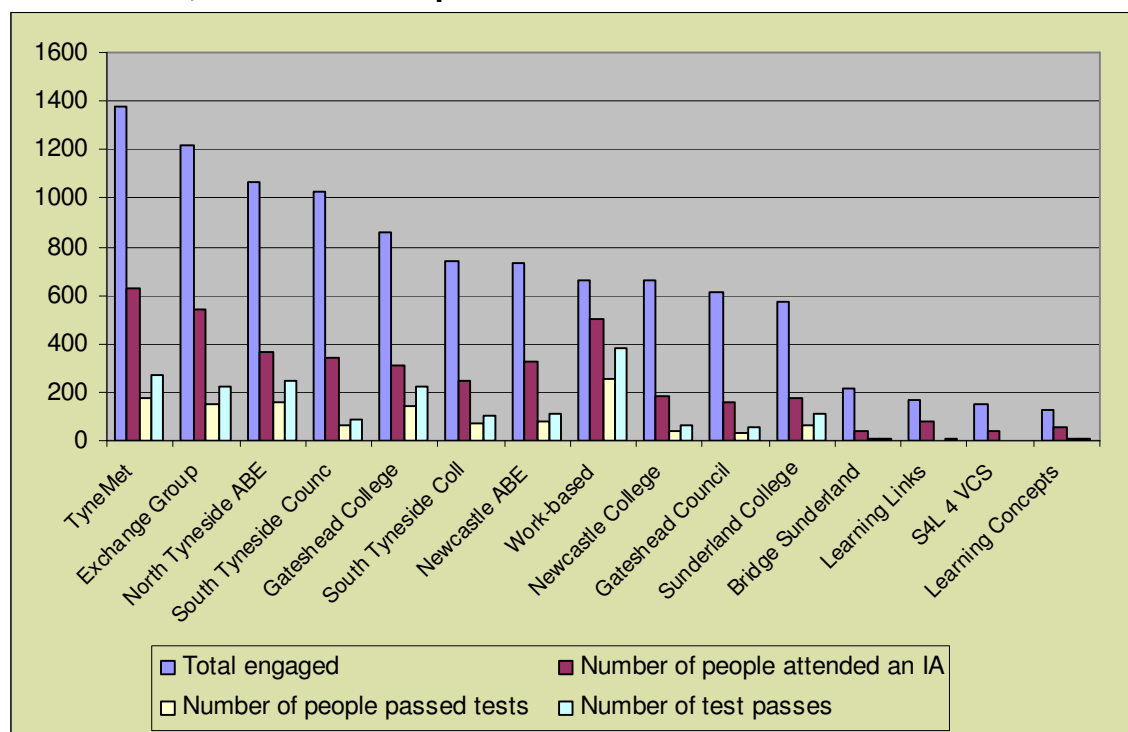
Note: The figures in the graph cannot be used as a comparison between providers and a defacto league table. This is because it is unknown at what level those learners entered/enrolled with each provider. This will have an effect/impact upon each provider's results.

There was a good and strong relationship with the providers and all welcomed the Project and its approach. There were some initial issues with data recording (filling in the monitoring returns) and referrals not turning up (many referrers arranged additional resources for referrals, e.g. booking rooms, computers or child care for learners who did not turn up).

In the first six months of the Project, there were two main problems experienced by providers: the first was referrals not turning up to the first appointment; and the second was the drop out rate of those turning up for the first appointment and not turning up to their next appointment. These problems of non attendance improved as the recruitment team developed their sales message and refined their recruitment approach. Providers reported that they valued the relationship that developed between the recruitment team and themselves and stated that this had helped their success rate in learner retention.

All providers stated that the Project brought them learners who they otherwise would not have been able to access. For example, one provider said "*we had people coming in who said they wouldn't have done it* [come to the centre if it were not for being 'recruited']". One of the big differences between Challenge Project referrals and other referrals is that the former would spend less time with

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a learning provider than other referrals, as the focus was to recruit almost test ready.

All providers were also convinced that the recruitment approach was effective. One provider said "*the concept works, that you can get people in who are almost test ready … it's proven* [by the Challenge Project]". One provider stated "*I've been round every GP, library and community venue in a five mile radius around here and put up posters and left leaflets and I haven't had one referral … but the Challenge Project brought loads in … you need that recruitment … if it wasn't for the Challenge Project we'd be pretty thin*".

Several providers are now trying this direct recruitment approach or are planning to do so. This includes: one college who deployed one staff member to shadow the recruitment team; two local authorities who have adopted the employer engagement approach to recruit learners; and a private sector provider who is piloting a Challenge-style approach. It has therefore been recognised that recruitment, either in the employed sector or by mass market is an effective and proven method of engaging with learners who would otherwise not engage, which fulfils Skills for Life objectives of achievement, attainment and employability.

Providers from across the region also reported that the Project has raised the profile of Skills for Life. One provider said "*it's keeping up the profile of the national test on the streets and in the workplace … it's good*".

There were many positive reports about the Project's branding. For example, several of the providers reported that the brand was popular and did much to improve the profile of Skills for Life. One provider stated "*breaking into business was easier because they liked the image and brand … that was very good because the image of Skills for Life was very poor*". Another provider said "*the brand was great … it was slick and definitely helped attract people*". One provider said of the learning-related rewards "*they gave out* [gifts] *… the calculators were good … the pen set that was sent to them* [learners] *when they passed their test … learners brought them in to show me … it gave people a sense of sense worth, it was really nice*". There were also comments about the usefulness of the Project's website for directing professionals to CPD opportunities and keeping the Skills for Life community up-to-date with Project developments.

As of March 2008, the Project had distributed approximately 95% of its promotional materials.

3.3 The PLUS Strategy

On a national level, there was enough evidence to suggest that the resources were effective at delivering literacy and numeracy to young people, but there was little evidence to suggest that they reduced the likelihood of re-offending by the

young people. A focus of the Challenge Project was therefore to look at such outcomes through the creation of examples (or case studies) of where the PLUS materials had been effectively delivered across Tyne and Wear. A common approach of the Project would be to deliver training and then revisit the agencies three or four months later to see the progress and impact of the courses on young people. The impact varied with some agencies structuring entire programmes or curriculums around the PLUS materials and others where the materials were not used to full advantage.

The PLUS Strategy trained a total of 142 professionals to deliver the PLUS courses from 48 different organisations. These organisations included; Connexions, Tyne Metropolitan College, schools, Pennywell Youth Project, YMCA, Millennium Trust, local authorities, CSV and Rathbone. They also created a number of cases studies where PLUS materials were used including at Norham Community Technical College, South Tyneside College, Thornhill School and Gateshead Youth Offending Team. As stated, these case studies were sent back to the ECOTEC management team in order to measure the outcomes of the national PLUS Strategy.

The PLUS Coordinator was able to support and be supported by the Project, thus providing some element of added value. Indeed, when the PLUS Coordinator left post in September 2007, the Challenge Project continued the work programme that had been arranged. The PLUS Strategy also benefited from the Skills for Life advice and knowledge of the Challenge Project's Manager and this helped the delivery of the PLUS Strategy.
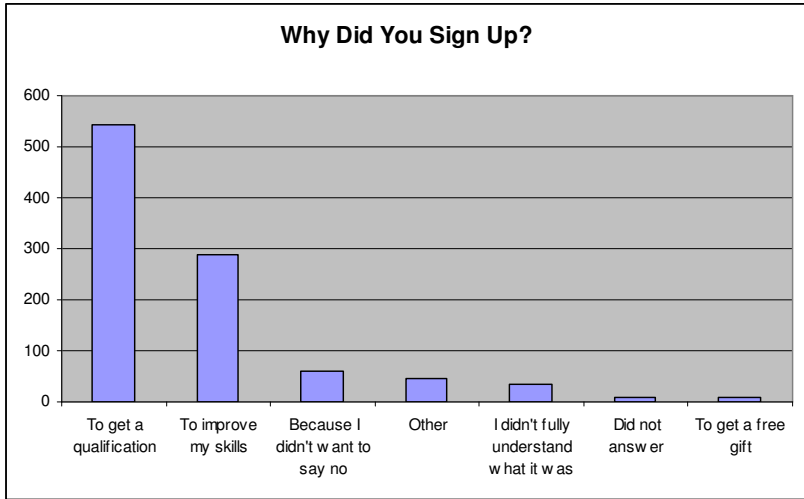
However, opportunities were missed to build on relationships forged by PLUS. For example, although participants who attended the PLUS training (on how to use the packs) were informally informed of the availability of CPD courses, there was no formal link between the PLUS and CPD Strands, to build capacity amongst the agencies with whom PLUS worked.

The research for this evaluation suggests that the PLUS element of the Challenge Project was not sufficiently capitalised upon and there was a feeling that it was apart from the general Challenge Project. However, the PLUS objectives would also appear to be very different to the other Project Strands and thus it naturally sat apart from the other Project activities.

3.4 The Impact on Learners

The Project carried out significant learner monitoring throughout its lifetime and as of August 2007, a total of 7457 learner surveys were sent out with 991 returned.

As can be seen from the following graph, most learners who returned surveys signed up to either get a qualification or to improve their skills.

Why Did You Sign Up?

Category	Value
To get a qualification	~540
To improve my skills	~290
Because I didn't want to say no	~60
Other	~45
I didn't fully understand what it was	~35
Did not answer	~10
To get a free gift	~10

The majority of learners found the initial assessment either very good or good.

How Was the Initial Assessment

Category	Value
Very Good	~248
Good	~187
OK	~60
Poor	~7
Very Poor	~2
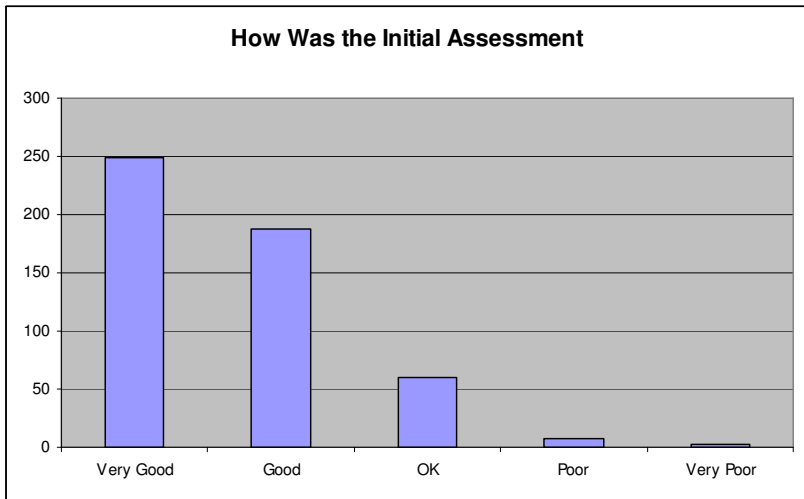
Of those who sat the test, almost all learners stated that they felt test ready.

Did You Feel Ready for the Test

	Yes	No
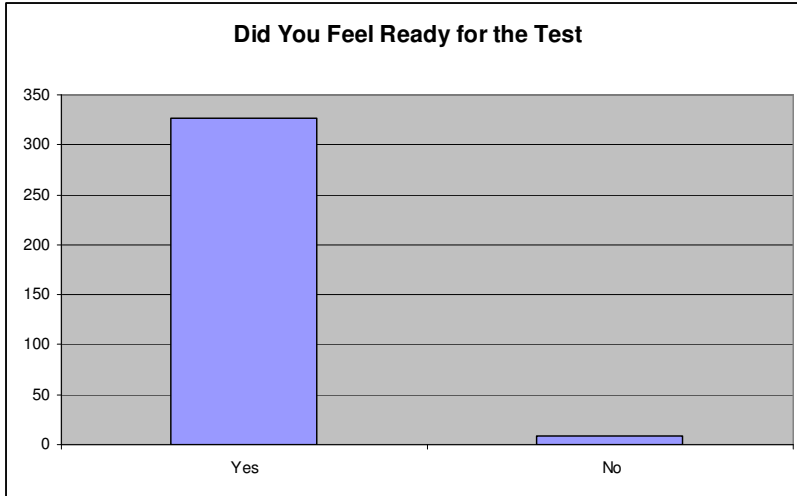
More than 80% of learners who sat the test stated that they had benefited from passing the test.

Have You Benefited from Passing Your Test

	Yes	No
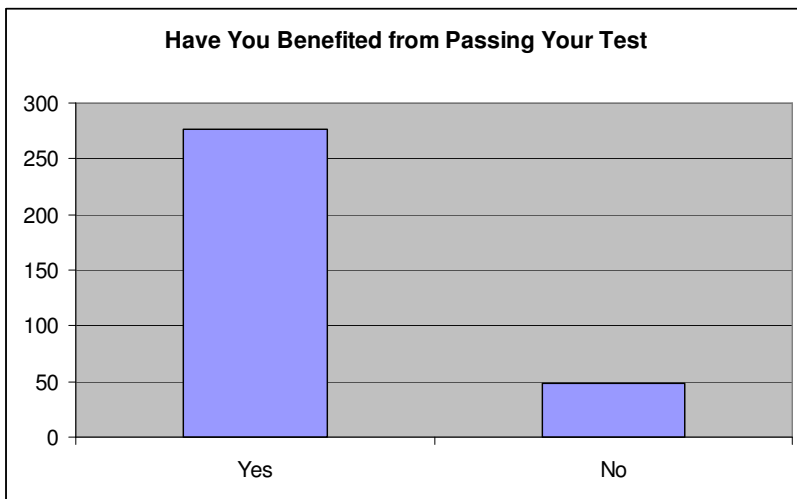
In addition to an examination of the Project's learner surveys, this evaluation interviewed a total of 18 learners on the telephone and seven were interviewed face to face (at the learning provider venues). All of the learners interviewed had completed the initial assessment and gone on to do further learning and most had passed tests[6].

Learners interviewed were recruited from a range of places including shopping centres, customer service centres, libraries, the BBC bus and job centres. All learners expressed their surprise at being stopped and asked whether they would like to undertake an assessment in order to gain a qualification. Almost

[6] Many telephone calls were made with a selection of people who had not turned up or not turned up after their initial assessment but these refused to be interviewed.

three quarters of learners stated that they were initially sceptical and reluctant to commit to taking a test and a similar number stated that it is not something they would have thought about doing.

Some comments from the telephone interviews include:

"*If I hadn't been stopped I would never have done something like that* [taken a test]".

"*I took my granddaughter on the BBC bus and I met a recruiter … she was very polite and explained things to me, so I came here* [to a provider]".

"*There's no way I'd have done anything like that … but I'm really pleased I did and they stopped me … it was great … got my whole family talking about college and qualifications*".

Several learners said they were very apprehensive about taking the assessment and 'going over the threshold' of a learning provider. One learner said "*I was very apprehensive … it took a lot for me to come … but it's great now*". However, many of these stated that once they had visited the establishment and talked to the tutors, it became easy to continue. Indeed, the Project ensured that support mechanisms were in place to help learners over this initial step.

When asked why they were doing the learning, the responses varied from "*I'm doing it to get a better job*" to "*I'm doing it for myself*". One learner, who was in her sixties said "*I've been a housewife, a babysitter … never thought I was clever … I'm doing it to prove that I can do something*". Other comments included "*just for a laugh … to see if I could*", "*I wanted to get on*", "*I'm a cleaner and wanted to prove that I could do stuff … I'm going to get a better job or go to college*" and "*'cos they* [the providers] *said I could, so I did*".

There was evidence from interviews with the learners that there were wider impacts of being stopped by the recruiters and the 'Skills for Life message' being spread. One learner said "*I was stopped in the street … I agreed and that but I didn't think I was going to go … then I was talking to my family at tea time and we got talking and I went, they thought it was a good idea … they ended up talking to the neighbours and they said 'I wouldn't mind doing that*". Another said "*it got us* [her family] *talking … improved us … passing tests and that, getting qualifications … we all hated school*". Thus the research showed that because of the learners' participation in the learning, it spread the Skills for Life message amongst their families and friends, where it became a discussion point.

It is clear that the Project has had significant positive impacts on people's lives, including increasing self esteem, self worth and building confidence; and improving their job prospects. Indeed all learners interviewed stated that they

would not have otherwise enrolled to take a test or undertake learning had they not been recruited by the Challenge Project.

3.5 Project Management

The Project was approved by LSC/TWP/One NE in June 2005 - posts were advertised and the first staff began in September and were appointed in quick succession thereafter. By October 2005, the Project had its full quotient of staff.

The Project developed comprehensive data recording systems for Strand 2 of the Project and these proved effective at gathering rich and detailed information. There were some problems experienced by the providers at the beginning of the Project with completing the monitoring forms. These included: that the form was too big to fit onto a computer screen so had to be printed and manually filled in; and that due to the way certain providers deliver their learning, it makes following Challenge Project learners difficult. However, most providers became used to the systems as the Project matured.

The LSC stated that from their perspective (specifically around monitoring, and reporting of Single Programme Funding) the Project had been well managed. Although there had been some lack of budget control resulting in a slight under-spend of funding. In particular the Project's administrators who were said to have understood the processes and were a great asset to the Project. Indeed, the administrators for the Project were reported to be the key to the success of the Project and were highly valued by both those within and without of the Project.

There were two management issues which affected the Project. These were a conflict of management styles within the management team and a recruitment team who were not effectively managed.

As a consequence of the latter, the recruitment team felt unsupported, undervalued and excluded from the Project's core and purpose from the start and this was never effectively resolved, although attempts were made by both Project management and Steering Group. The poor management also negatively impacted on relations with certain providers and ultimately had an impact on this part of the Project's targets.

As a result of the conflict of management styles and the problems that this caused within the management team, the Steering Group were required to attempt to both manage and steer the Project. This caused delays in the Project's decision making process and further created tensions within the management team. However, it must be noted that the Project has been supported throughout the project period through a high level of commitment from Steering Group members, which have been informed by the systematic production of reports and statistics to inform the monthly meetings.

Despite the Project's management issues, many of the staff reported that they had enjoyed the Project. Comments included "*it was a fantastic experience … I learned a lot*". Many people associated with the Project commented about the significant personal and professional development in many of the staff, which will ultimately be transferred to their future employment areas in Skills for Life.

4.0 Conclusions

The Project was responsible for a series of big wins in relation to Skills for Life in Tyne and Wear, including:

- Talking to over 30,000 people about Skills for Life, thus carrying out significant awareness raising;
- Enabling more than 4000 people to take an initial assessment;
- Achieving over 2000 test passes;
- Developing the recruitment method to include innovative employer engagement;
- Developing the professional capacity of Skills for Life professionals and supporting new entrants to the profession;
- Supporting the work of the PLUS Strategy; and
- Engaging with learning providers who are not traditionally part of the Skills for Life community or the sub regional Learning Partnerships. Benefits to these organisations include the provision of referrals, CPD opportunities and access to the expertise of the Project team and Steering Group.

In addition to these, this evaluation has shown that the Project also had positive impacts on learners' lives, including increasing self esteem, self worth and building confidence.

There was much discussion amongst senior staff[7] who were involved with the Challenge Project about the role of the initiative in bringing about a change of culture in the delivery of Skills for Life. One interviewee stated "*Skills for Life has a very nurturing background … the Challenge Project was very driven and focussed*". They continued "*we have encouraged people* [to see] *that there are different ways of doing it* [Skills for Life delivery]".

The LSC had a slightly different opinion and stated that one element of the Project was about professionalising Skills for Life rather than changing a culture. They stated "*to be a good Skills for Life teacher you need to care for people … the teaching resource* [i.e. teacher] *must be sympathetic … that remains the same … so it's not about changing the culture, it's about professionalising delivery, which ultimately improves the learner's experience*".

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[7] e.g. Members of the Steering Group, members of the Tyne and Wear Basic Skills Advisory Group, staff at the LSC.

It would seem that both opinions are equally valid in relation to the Project's Strands: the Project has developed[8] a new way of engaging learners (thereby changing culture) via the recruitment Strand; and it has professionalised the workforce through its CPD Strand.

In addition to both changing a culture and in professionalising a workforce, it has also developed a new model that challenges the deficit model, i.e. using Skills for Life to address an absence of skills in people (popularised by the government's advertising campaign that used images of gremlins). The Challenge Project developed almost a skill recognition model of Skills for Life delivery. One interviewee reflected this by saying "*it's about, 'you have the skills now we just want you to get a qualification to reflect that' … it's not about selling it like you're embarrassed because you can't read or write*'".

It should be noted that there was a national decision which coincided with the start of the Project to only fund learners[9] who completed a minimum of nine hours learning instead of the previous three hours. As the rationale of the Project was a fast track approach aimed at almost test ready learners, this caused significant concern. However, as the LSC noted, "*it shifted the project from a test-ready project to a learner recruitment project*". Indeed, it is the finding of this evaluation that the decision had limited impact and, although Challenge Project learners were found to take a shorter time to complete their learning than other referrals, they still tended to complete in excess of nine hours learning.

4.1 Lessons Learned

Based on the research that was carried out for this evaluation, there are a series of learning points and lessons for future projects of similar nature. These are:

- The professional branding of the Project facilitated both the engagement of learners (via the Mass Marketing and the Employer Engagement elements) and attracting professionals to the CPD courses (particularly the short courses). It also helped improve the image of Skills for Life.
- Using a recruitment approach using existing sub-regional learning providers has been shown to be efficient and effective.
- Adopting a recruitment method attracts and engages with learners who would not normally access learning and this achieves many Skills for Life objectives, including the many positive impacts on people's lives and increasing the profile of Skills for Life.
- The added value to the recruitment approach through learner retention, i.e. learners often staying on to complete additional learning and qualifications

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[8] Based on the approach introduced by Test the City.
[9] i.e. The learning provider receives funding from the government for each learner who completes a certain amount of 'learning hours'.

after their first test. One provider stated "*you get someone doing a level one* [literacy] *who stays on to do a level two*".

- Employee recruitment has been shown to be extremely effective and efficient at converting learners engaged to those completing initial assessments to those both sitting and passing tests.

- There needs to be a close relationship between the recruitment team and the provider. This results in the learner being given accurate information and realistic expectations and consequently lowers the likelihood of attrition.

- The staff team needs to be appointed in order of seniority, so managers can choose their own staff.

- The need for a mid term review (often called a backstopping exercise) in a project of this size carried out by an independent organisation. This would allow project management issues to be identified and resolved quickly.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: The Experience of a Work Place Provider

"We had an introductory session booked for 12 people at the Greggs Balliol bakery and eight turned up. [The Recruitment Manager (Employed People) from the Challenge Project] *had done the initial assessments and arranged everything with the training manager. They were baker trainers on the production line. It was on an afternoon at the end of a shift at about one o'clock. We used one of their rooms and did group sessions over between 10 and 12 weeks.*

All eight people did their level one and two test in literacy and passed and six people did their level one numeracy and passed that too. It was really worthwhile. There was a feeling at the beginning [amongst the workers] *that you didn't need tests, it was more important what you could do with your hands. We had one lad who said to me "I left school at 16 … I'll never be on the dole 'cos I can make pasties". One lad told me he'd taken his test paper back home and done it with his 14 year old son. He would never had got a GCSE paper and done that. It* [the Challenge Project] *has introduced it* [learning] *into people's lives where it wouldn't have normally been".*

Case Study 2: The Experience of Learners

These are a selection of comments which represent commonly reported themes by learners.

- *Just to say thank you - if it wasn't for courses like this one I would not have bettered myself and I enjoyed it as well.*
- *After gaining the qualifications my self-esteem has risen. Thanks to the helpful and skilled tutors, I could not have done it without you!*
- *It was easy to take the test and there was no time for pre-exam nerves. It was 'in, bang, bang, out'. Remarkable.*
- *I had no qualifications but now so proud I have.*
- *Very friendly staff. Relaxed atmosphere, enjoyable! Now going to do numeracy. Recommend it!*
- *When I was looking for a new job I was so pleased I had taken the Challenge for literacy and numeracy as it showed employers I was able to work at that standard*
- *Having been suffering from depression this test helped me increase my confidence greatly.*
- *I feel more confident. I have not worked for 10 years, and having a recent qualification would help with a job*

Case Study 3: The Experience of Professionals on the Short CPD Courses

The following quotes are from a series of professionals who attended the short CPD courses and reflect the comments of others.

- "*It equips us better to do our jobs … gives us empathy*".
- "*It's opened more doors so we can better help people*".
- "*A lot of people could do with doing it … from the council to every walk of life*".
- "*I work with people with autism and this has really improved my skills … it's been invaluable*".
- "*I've waited ages for a course like this … if this wasn't run? I'd be doing loads of reading but you can't beat the group, sharing experiences, you learn a lot*".
- "*They've been excellent … very useful*".
- "*CPD is normally curriculum training or updates … generic teaching stuff … but the Challenge Project's been different things … new things and different approaches … it's been really fresh and really useful*".
- "*The profile, marketing, branding and communication of the short CPD courses attracted people who wouldn't normally have gone … it's raised the profile of CPD in Tyne and Wear … it'll be a miss*".

Case studies from the PLUS Strategy can be read on
http://www.challengeproject.org.uk/?tok=5&atk=205

Appendix: List of Short CPD Courses

- 9297 learner support unit 1
- ADHD awareness
- Adult learner support
- Autism spectrum disorders: awareness and strategies
- Core curriculum and embedding day 1
- Core curriculum and embedding day 2
- Core curriculum numeracy
- Core curriculum: introduction
- Core curriculum: literacy
- Core curriculum: pre-entry
- Creativity in the Skills for Life curriculum
- Delivering numeracy in family learning settings
- Dyslexia awareness
- Embedded training
- Feeling good, learning well
- ICT, the new skill for life
- Impact of torture
- Introduction to adult pre-entry curriculum framework
- Neuro linguistic programming
- Recruiting in the voluntary and community sector
- Skills for Life awareness training