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ABSTRACT

A study evaluated the effectiveness of different styles of literacy provision in areas covered by eight British local education authorities representing 5,770 literacy students. A sample of tutors selected to represent the range of styles gave information on the provision they made for 1,730 students and more detailed information about 174 students. Little evidence indicated that style provided a clear differentiating factor in literacy provision. Styles of provision with specific target groups, written aims, specified time scales, homogeneous intake, and a matching commitment expected from students were best placed to help students to achieve their goals. Students chose to attend provision most convenient to them rather than choosing a particular style. Sufficient information about style was generally unavailable. Most styles seemed to work best where students attended regularly. Tutors advocated the style of provision in which they were engaged. Courses with written objectives and specific time-scales seemed to encourage students to attend more regularly. Students mentioned particularly the benefits of working in small groups and of having adequate individual support. Ninety-six percent of students who had completed a course were firmly convinced they had made progress; reports from tutors and independent assessors supported these claims. Assessment, review, and evaluation took place reliably where resources were specifically designated for these purposes. (An appendix describes methodology.) (YLB)

adult literacy

RESEARCH INTO EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT STYLES OF PROVISION IN ADULT LITERACY

ALBSU
The Basic Skills Unit

SUE ABELL

Effective Approaches in Adult Literacy

Sue Abell

An ALBSU research project in association with the Institute of Education

Effective Approaches In Adult Literacy

Evaluating The Effectiveness Of Different Styles Of Provision In Adult Literacy

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Contents

1 – Introduction

Between 1989 and 1991 ALBSU sponsored, through a specific grant from the Department of Education and Science (DES), a study into the effectiveness of different styles of adult literacy provision. This research study was led by an experienced practitioner, Sue Abell, supported by the University of London's Institute of Education which managed the project. Eight Local Education Authorities (LEAs), the (then) Training Agency, Workbase and two voluntary organisations agreed to participate in its operation.

This report gives a full account of the research and its findings. A summary leaflet, highlighting the key points, is also available from ALBSU.

2 – Summary

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of different styles of literacy provision with a view to identifying how practices might be improved.

Style was defined as a particular pattern of resources used for a given set of aims with specifically targeted students.

Providers defined different patterns, and descriptions were obtained from eight Local Education Authorities (LEAs), Workbase, provision funded by what was then the Training Agency and two voluntary organisations.

The main differentiating factor which emerged from publicity and claims made by providers was whether tuition was offered as part of a group, on an individual basis or through open learning. These variations were found within as well as between examples of provision.

It was felt that effectiveness would be demonstrated by the ways in which providers identified the different needs of literacy students and differentiated between them, responded to students' needs and monitored provision.

The framework which was used for exploring the effectiveness of different styles is shown in Figure 1.

Variables Examined		
Input	**Process**	**Outputs/Outcomes**
The Providers		
Styles of provision Aims Target students Staff/student ratio Materials Timing Staff development	Referral procedures Monitoring	Recruitment Retention of student numbers & target groups Attendance of students
Staff		
Tutors: age/ gender/ experience Volunteers Ratios Non-teaching support staff	Assessment procedures Classroom organisation Lesson Planning Methods Procedures for review Perceptions	Capacity to monitor Student progress
The Students		
Age Gender Occupation Purposes	Styles experienced Class organisation Factors affecting learning Perceptions	Changes in behaviour, attitude, aspirations, confidence Progress Satisfaction Progression

Figure 1

Methodology

Literacy provision was examined throughout the areas covered by eight LEAs, between them making provision for 5,770 literacy students. A survey method was adopted, augmented by an

analysis of published documents and information which emerged during structured interviews and visits to examples of provision.

A sample of tutors was selected to represent the range of styles of literacy provision encountered in participating areas.Tutors gave information on the provision they made for 1,730 students. They gave more detailed information about 174 students who had offered to form the main sample for in-depth investigation. Similar questions were asked of participants with differing perspectives over a period of one year.

Main findings/Conclusions

Little evidence emerged to indicate that style provided a clear differentiating factor in literacy provision as currently practised. But using the concept of style as an approach to analysing the effectiveness of literacy provision proved useful. It raised a number of issues concerning practice which must be taken into account in evaluating provision in order to improve that provision.

Aims and targets

Styles of provision with specific target groups, written aims, specified time scales, homogeneous intake and with a matching commitment expected from students were best placed to help students to achieve their goals. Such specificity appears to be related to the requirements of funders and seems to lead to provision which is better implemented.

Publicity and prior information

Students chose to attend provision which was most convenient to them rather than choosing a particular style. They could only make realistic choices about provision where clear information

was available to them about the respective merits of different provision, but generally they did not appear to receive sufficient information about choice of provision.

Except in open learning students did not appear to receive sufficient information about provision in which they had enrolled.

The contract between tutor and student

Most styles of provision seemed to work best where students attended regularly. However, it often appeared that insufficient demands were made upon them to do so, and to study independently between attendances.

In many class sessions more students were absent than present This posed problems of manageability for tutors/organisers.

Referral procedures

In order to advise students on styles of provision providers needed to ensure that thorough initial assessments took place.

Tutors advocated the style of provision in which they were engaged. (It is important therefore that they are enabled to see the benefits of other styles of provision.)

Style of provision

Courses with written objectives and specific time-scales seemed to encourage students to attend more regularly.

Each main style of provision incorporates a range of practices all of which were valued by at least some students: individual attention; opportunities to work with other students; opportunities to work alone; access to materials for independent

study. It appeared that all of these needed to be available to students, whatever the provision in which they participated.

Students mentioned particularly the benefits of working in small groups of four or less and of having adequate individual support.

Student progress

96% of students who had completed a course or who had remained in provision throughout the study were firmly convinced that they had made progress. Reports from tutors and independent assessors supported these claims. This progress did not appear to have been dependent on the style of provision in which they participated.

Support and monitoring

In order to monitor student learning effectively tutors needed to undertake structured assessments, make long term plans and keep regular written records. Although all tutors in the study said that they kept written records, less than 10% reported the use of structured assessment procedures.

It appeared that assessment, review and evaluation took place reliably where resources were specifically designated for these purposes. Such use of resources appeared to be largely limited to open learning centres.

3 – Background

In 1989 ALBSU set up this project in order to evaluate the effectiveness of different styles of literacy provision and to report on its findings.

Since the government's first injection of funds for Adult Literacy in 1975 there has been a huge increase in provision. 15,000 adult basic skills students were reported by LEAs to the Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA) at that time, compared with 109,869 basic skills students reported to the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) in 1988 when this report was first commissioned. All basic skills programmes aim to provide opportunities for adults to develop their literacy and basic skills successfully. Current adult basic skills provision usually includes literacy and numeracy and often includes English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). This study however focuses on literacy.

Literacy provision is made by LEAs, through further, adult and community education services, by voluntary organisations, by organisations funded by the Department of Employment and by some employers. Most literacy provision consists of small groups of adults meeting for approximately two hours per week. Within these groups the emphasis is often on individual tuition. However, some students are taught individually at home and some receive group tuition only. Increasingly open learning facilities are being made available. There are wide differences between the amount of tuition each student receives, from less than two hours per week to almost full time. The range of styles of provision available has developed partly in line with identified need and partly within the constraints of limited funding. ALBSU, in its good practice documents, has pressed for a greater diversity

of styles of provision so that opportunities for choice and progression are available.

Research in the early days of the national literacy campaign focused on the positive reaction of students to literacy provision. Recently attempts have been made to pinpoint more clearly successes and failures and the reasons for them. One of the most common variations in the experience of students in literacy provision is the way in which learning is organised. Little research has been available to demonstrate in what way a style of literacy provision might influence effectiveness.

In setting the context for the research it is also worth noting that a number of significant developments took place during the project. These include the widespread introduction of a framework of student accreditation (BSAI), the establishment of a coherent national system for staff training in adult basic education and the publication by ALBSU of guidance documents on the overall evaluation of effectiveness in adult basic education.

It will be seen from the findings of this research that each of these developments is likely to contribute to strengthening aspects of provision which emerge as significant in the analysis of effectiveness. The findings also highlighted a range of significant factors and variations which can enhance or detract from provision. These are summarised on pages five to seven. As in the recent Australian survey funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, *"The Learning Experience"*, it proved difficult to identify these factors tightly as style specific.

For the purposes of this research *style* was initially defined as *"a particular pattern of resources used for a given set of aims with specifically targeted students."* Aims, targets and patterns of organisation of resources were examined across the range of provision encountered. The concept of differences in style did not emerge as a clear distinguishing criterion in practice. There was

much overlap between aims, resource patterns and targets in the various forms of provision. However the definition provided a helpful framework for analysis. The styles as referred to by providers are used for description in the report rather than attempting any other classification.

The styles that were most commonly referred to in policy documents and publicity were: group tuition, individual tuition, open learning, flexible learning, drop-in, workshops, and distance learning.

Each of these styles was examined in relation to: recruitment, diagnosis of student needs, retention of students, student attendance, student progress, student satisfaction, student progression, monitoring of student progress, monitoring provision.

One critique of research on effectiveness of literacy provision in the USA identifies the fact that it has depended largely on *testimonials* of the success of individual students. It was thought important in this research to seek a more objective evaluation of the factors relating to style which influence effectiveness. It is noteworthy that the research did show a high degree of satisfaction at the progress made, 96% of responding students reporting gains, a view which was supported by tutors and independent assessors.

4 – Findings

A. Literacy Provision - Inputs

This section describes inputs into literacy provision. It looks at :

- The providers
- Styles of provision available
- Aims of providers
- Target students
- Students in the sample
- Staff: tutors, volunteers, support staff
- Other resources: timing, materials, staff development.

The providers

LEAs

LEAs provided the bulk of examples of provision in the sample. Their literacy provision was organised through adult education centres and further education colleges. Some of the examples were of Training Agency (as it was then) provision. Some were open learning centres which were mainly funded through educational support grants. Further education college open learning centres reported few literacy students participating.

Training agency

So that a full range of Training Agency provision would be examined additional non-LEA examples of provision were selected, one from the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO), the other a training company specifically set up to provide employment training. They were distinct from other examples in providing for unemployed people only, in having fixed time scales for tuition for basic skills training, in involving preliminary assessments undertaken by a separate agency, in embedding the learning within a work experience framework and in tailoring courses to match the needs of local employers.

Workbase

Workbase was included. It had two current projects within the geographical boundaries of the study during 1989/90. As a provider, Workbase was distinctive in providing for employed people only, in involving extensive preliminary investigations and marketing with employers, in providing literacy tuition in paid work time and in having tighter time scales for tuition than those found in other examples.

Voluntary organisations

Of the two voluntary organisations in the sample, one shared virtually all the distinguishing characteristics of the adult education examples. The other was part of the work of a registered charity aiming to help young people, not exclusively with education, so that literacy was only a small part of its brief.

Styles of provision available

The study derived its typology of styles from examples of publicity for literacy provision collected throughout the sample areas. Group tuition, individual tuition and open learning were the main distinguishing features of the provision advertised. Workshops, drop-in and flexible learning were also referred to.

Tutors in the sample were asked to describe whether the literacy provision they were involved in was individual tuition, group tuition, a mixture of group and individual tuition or open learning. Their descriptions differed slightly from those of providers who were much more likely to describe provision as a group, even when learning was organised on the basis of individual tuition. Tutor descriptions were used to categorise sample provision as they better reflected how learning was organised for students.

By far the most common provision in the sample consisted of classes offering a mixture of group and individual tuition which claimed to cater for all comers.

Group

Group was the most common description of provision in the documents provided by LEAs. The Workbase examples were of group tuition. The voluntary organisations offered group tuition. Individual tuition and open learning were often offered *within the group*. This was true of the Employment Training (ET) examples. *Group* was also seen by providers as a distinctive style. Often providers shared assumptions about the benefits of groups. In group tuition students were encouraged, expected and acknowledged to spend most of their time working with other students.

The features of group provision which were consistently stressed in publicity were *small, friendly, free, informal, working at your own pace.*

The range of activities found under the umbrella term *group* was wide. Some examples of group tuition in the sample may serve to illustrate this:

- Fourteen students were working together with common objectives for most of the class time.
- Eight students were working in ones and twos with the assistance of five volunteers and one paid tutor. Each student was working on an individual learning programme.
- There were seven students in one class. Three of them were working together on a common activity with the help of one volunteer. Four of them were following individual learning programmes supervised by the paid tutor.
- A group of six students spent half the class time, paired with volunteers, working on individual programmes. The second half of the class was spent working on a common activity.

Individual

Though not stated in the publicity, organisers reported that they saw individual tuition as a style for beginning readers and new students. In one authority, and in some centres in other authorities, new students were provided with individual tuition automatically and given encouragement to rely less on it in their second year of attendance at literacy classes.

In individual tuition students were encouraged, expected and acknowledged to spend most of their time working with a helper. In most cases this was a volunteer though there were many examples where it was a paid tutor who provided individual help.

Provision categorised as individual included:

- one student working with a volunteer, at home, in a private room in a centre or in a room with other pairs of students and volunteers;
- one, two, or three students with one volunteer;
- one student being taught individually for half of the session and in a group for the other half;
- one student being taught by a volunteer or a paid tutor on a drop-in or appointment basis;
- one student receiving individual tuition from a tutor who moved around the classroom during the session spending a few minutes with each student in turn.

Open learning

Open learning was a broad category, some organisers defining it in relation to the independence encouraged and expected from learners, others regarding flexibility as a synonym for open learning. Between these was a wide range of approaches:

- students using an open learning centre on a drop-in basis;
- students using an open learning centre on a regular basis;
- students being taught individually;
- students being taught as part of a group with specific time-scale and purposes, eg. Wordpower certificate courses;
- students using the centre as a source of learning packages for use at home.

Most open learning provision in the sample included the features listed below:

- newly adapted centre
- central location
- state of the art equipment
- wide variety of software available
- extensive opening hours
- receptionist normally on duty
- technical support regularly available
- large bank of self access materials
- full-time teaching and organising staff available
- pre-course interviews always undertaken
- negotiated programme and timing agreed
- regular review sessions.

Some of these features were also found in other styles of provision. The only totally distinctive feature of open learning centres was that students were encouraged, expected, and acknowledged to spend most of their studying time working alone.

Workshops

The examples of provision called *workshops* in the sample were mainly provided by further education (FE) colleges as support for students on other courses. On an operational level they were in no way distinguishable from provision called *individual*.

Drop-in

There were examples of provision called *drop-in* from the full range of providers. They shared many characteristics with provision called *individual*.

Aims of providers

Participating organisations were asked for copies of documents which described the aims of their literacy provision.

LEA aims

Though at the outset of the study literacy and basic skills were beginning to be incorporated into FE strategic plans, none of the participating LEAs had an agreed written policy statement for basic skills. In some cases this was because LEAs did not think it appropriate to differentiate basic skills from other forms of adult education. In some cases policies were in the process of being drafted. However each LEA provided documentation of some sort which yielded evidence of their aims for literacy provision.

It was clear from responses from tutors in LEA provision that in spite of the lack of published aims most tutors felt that they understood and shared the aims of providers. 62% of responding tutors reported that they had been given information about aims of provision. 30% reported receiving aims in writing.

The aims generally included raising awareness of basic skills opportunities, facilitating access to basic skills opportunities, offering appropriate guidance and support, providing basic skills tuition and offering progression opportunities.

Aims of other providers

Workbase aims, which had been agreed nationally, were common to its local provision. They included:

- advise employers on the appropriate strategies and methods for manual worker basic education on an advice consultancy or support basis;
- promote manual worker basic education so that it becomes a recognised and accepted form of employer based training;
- institutionalise manual worker basic education in the trades union and employer networks;
- liaise with and train local education authorities to provide basic education for local employees.

Staff employed in Workbase provision in the sample were all able to produce copies of these aims and reported induction and regular training and monitoring.

The voluntary organisation which catered specifically for young people aimed to provide opportunities in the fields of education, training and employment. Both voluntary organisations in the sample saw their role as offering provision for a particular locality or community.

ET provision in the sample was provided by adult education, further education and area consortia. The consortia sample had the aim of furthering education particularly through the provision of training and education to people who had difficulty or who were at a disadvantage in gaining employment.

The documents available from providers gave evidence of commonly shared assumptions about literacy provision:

- That students should have a choice of styles of learning available.
- That students should be able to enrol in provision at any time.
- That proficiency in reading and writing are only part of a basic skills curriculum which is also concerned with the development of confidence, self esteem, independence and self actualisation.
- That priority should be given to adults who previously have not benefited from education.
- That all students should participate in assessment. That careful monitoring should ensure high quality provision.
- That students should be encouraged to extend their goals and aspirations.
- That systematic guidance and counselling should be available to all potential and existing students. This should be both initial and on-going.

The extent to which these assumptions made by providers were realistic and the extent to which students felt their aims were met is reported below in section 4c.

Target students

Where aims were clearly specified there was a matching clarity about target groups of students. Such clarity was mainly found where access to provision was limited. LEAs catered for wider populations and therefore generally had broader aims.

The publicity and information on basic skills available to the public was mostly of a very general nature. Providers did not appear to distinguish clearly between prospective students. Individual tuition was sometimes, but not always, available for beginning students. Certification was sometimes, but not always,

available for more advanced students. There was evidence of the establishment of accredited courses for students at different levels but these were generally too new to be evaluated by this study.

From the statements made by organisers, two groups of adults were mentioned as specific targets for LEA provision. They were women in general and adults, presumably of both sexes, who wanted to develop literacy skills for employment purposes.

Tutors in the sample were asked whether they, the institution or the LEA targeted specific students. Their responses showed that very few tutors were conscious of the targeting which LEAs claimed. Where organisers claimed to target, the evidence suggested that they did not always market provision effectively.

Whatever was said in the publicity about target students, it was a general view amongst staff in all forms of provision (including open learning) that open learning was least suited to students at a beginning level. Students with reading difficulties were often seen to need intensive individual attention which was not generally available in open learning centres. Many tutors of groups expressed the view that it was difficult to give such help in groups without volunteer help. This attitude accorded with the view providers had expressed.

Precise targeting, as with clarity of aims, was found where it was required by funding bodies. This sometimes led to provision which was more definable in terms of style and sometimes seemed to cater for students at higher levels of literacy. Inevitably some potential students were excluded from such provision. Where all-comers were welcomed to provision, aims were much less clear and styles of provision were less clearly definable.

Students in the sample

There were 174 students in the sample, 84 in adult education, 60 in FE, 30 in non-LEA provision. They participated in provision as follows:

Group	Group/Individual	Individual	Open Learning
47	65	52	10

Figure 2

Characteristics of students in provision are reported below.

Age

The following graph shows the distribution of ages of students in the sample.

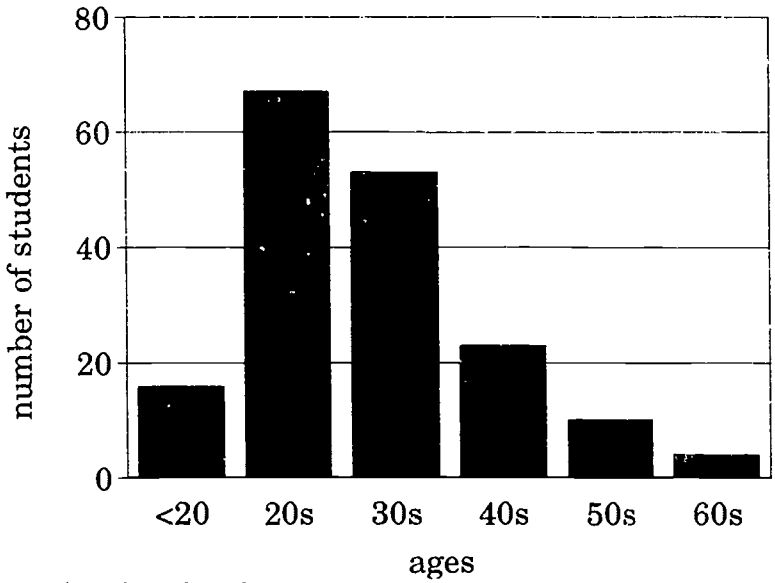

Figure 3: Ages of sample students

Gender

More males than females offered to participate in the project. However, there was a higher response rate from females resulting in a final sample of 86 males and 87 females. This accorded closely with the gender balance in literacy provision on an authority basis where data was available.

In group and group/individual provision the gender balance was even.

In the three largest open learning centres in the study, with a student body of 1426, females outnumbered males in the ratio 54:46.

In individual tuition males outnumbered females in the ratio 62:38.

It appeared that timing of provision may have contributed to the gender imbalances in open learning and in individual tuition.

61% of the individual tuition in the sample was available in the evening, however only 20% of the time available in open learning centres was in the evening.

Occupation

About half of the students in the sample described themselves as employed, though in fact this included 13% who were involved in Employment Training (ET).

The group with the lowest rate of employment was in open learning. As the open learning centres in the sample all offered literacy for employment purposes, sometimes in liaison with the Training Agency, it was not surprising that they attracted more unemployed students. Their opening hours in fact were less suitable for employed students.

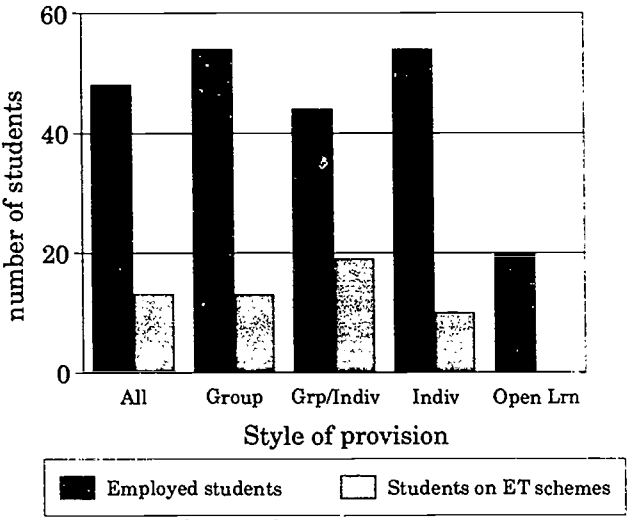

Figure 4: Student employment by style of provision

The jobs done by students in the study were generally of a type which made few literacy demands though change or improvement within the job sometimes required higher literacy skills.

Reasons for participation

Students answered a range of questions pinpointing the reasons why they were seeking help in developing their literacy skills and their purposes in participating in literacy provision. These questions were open-ended to ensure that students were not being directed to offer pre-selected views. The answers generally fitted into clearly defined categories. Some students gave several reasons for their participation.

- 39% of responding students said that they lacked confidence because of their literacy skills.
- 38% of responding students reported that they wanted to improve their employment situation or found their employment situation difficult because of lack of literacy skills.

- 35% of responding students reported that they felt a need to gain a qualification or to participate in further training.
- 34% of responding students reported that they needed to develop literacy skills in order to find employment.
- 9% of responding students reported a need to increase their independence.
- 7% of responding students said that they felt embarrassed or ashamed about their literacy.
- 6% of responding students said that they felt they hadn't achieved their full potential at school.

Motivation and purposes

When asked what made them decide to improve their reading or writing, students gave reasons which were very similar regardless of the style of provision in which they were participating. These can be summarised as related to wanting to write or spell better, desiring improvement in reading, wishing to improve prospects of employment and social and family experience. Most gave more than one reason.

The only reasons given which co-incided with styles were that students in open learning centres were more likely to mention job-related reasons for participation, and students in individual tuition were more likely than others to mention problems with their reading as reasons for participation.

When asked in a separate question what they hoped to gain from tuition,students responded in ways which confirmed the data reported under the reasons for participation and also responded that they hoped to gain in confidence and specifically to achieve objectives such as examination success.Those who mentioned increased confidence were mostly in group provision.These findings were strengthened by confirmation from students'

responses to an additional question asking what they thought improvement in literacy skills would add to their lives at home and work and in their leisure activities.

In spite of the possibility that a student's objectives might be best met within a particular style of provision, all the students giving evidence said that they attended for reasons of convenience rather than choice of style. Reported objectives therefore may well have been influenced by the style of provision experienced.

Tutors' reports on student motivation concerned a much larger group of students than those in the sample.It should not be expected, therefore, that tutors' perceptions of reasons for students attending literacy provision would match what was said by students. From their experience they reported the same range of reasons for attendance, but they thought each reason would apply to a higher proportion of students.

Spelling, writing and accreditation were each mentioned by about 30% of tutors from all styles.

Attendance in literacy provision

Hours of attendance per week

There were no appreciable differences between group, group/individual and individual styles of provision with respect to student hours per week in attendance: two thirds attended for two hours or less: a sixth for three or four hours: the remaining sixth for five hours or more.

Workbase provision examined in the study operated for three hours per week for a fixed course length of twenty weeks.

The voluntary organisations encouraged students to attend for more than one two hour session per week though the timing of classes made it difficult for students to do so.

Drop-in and open learning provision was available for much longer periods each week but centres reported that most students attended the centre once a week for approximately two hours.

Length of time in provision

The following graph indicates the length of time students in the sample had spent in provision.

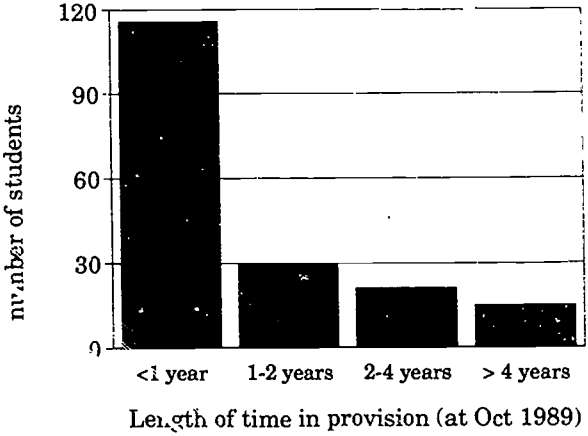

Figure 5: Length of time in tuition

The tutors

There were 127 tutors in the main sample, 65 in adult education, 49 in further education and thirteen in non-LEA provision. They participated in provision as follows:

	All	Group	Group/ Individual	Individual	Open Learning
Tutors	127	36	39	39	13

Figure 6

Tutor characteristics are reported below.

Gender

Only seven of the 127 tutors in the study were male. There was no suggestion that this balance was in any way atypical.

Age

Tutors teaching groups were on average slightly younger than the others being in their thirties as opposed to in their forties for all other forms of provision.

Basic skills teaching experience

Tutors in the sample had on average six to seven years experience of teaching in basic skills. This was the same regardless of the style in which they participated.

Basic skills hours taught per week

Individual tuition had the highest rate of tutors teaching fewer than four hours per week.

Open learning centres were mainly staffed with full time tutors.

Staff in ET, Workbase, voluntary organisations and FE colleges showed the same employment pattern as those in open learning centres, that is, preponderantly full time.

The volunteers

Volunteers were used in all participating LEAs and also in the voluntary organisations. In 60% of sample classes volunteers were used to provide individual tuition.

They were not used in Workbase, and only rarely in ET, or open learning centre examples. This may be worthy of note since access to individual tuition was rated by participants as the factor most likely to promote success for students.

An examination of the data shows a connection between class size and the number of volunteers being used. Authorities consistently claimed that using volunteers was not a substitute for professional support. The data suggests that sometimes it may be (see Figure 7).

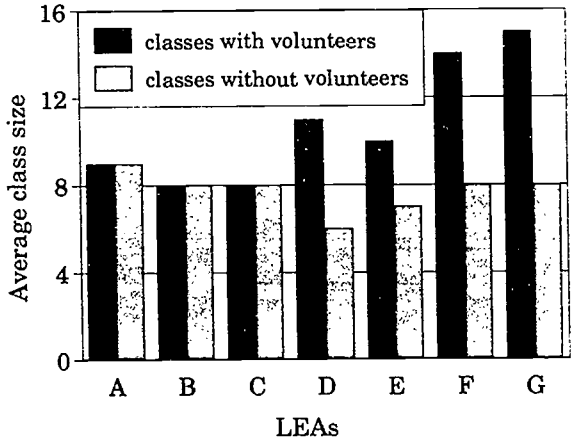

Figure 7: Class size by volunteers

Non-teaching support staff

Alongside literacy teaching a range of ancillary activities took place. Those most commonly reported were clerical, technical, reception, assessment of students, organisation and monitoring of provision. However, the provision of staff for these functions varied widely particularly between styles and providers:

In open learning centres, Workbase and ET these functions were regularly undertaken by full time staff separately from teaching time or by staff specifically employed for the purpose.

In much of the adult education provision the functions were undertaken more usually by teaching staff, often in time designated for teaching.

Other resources

Academic year length

Most of the open learning provision was available for more than 37 weeks per year.

Timing of provision

The sample consisted of equal numbers of examples of daytime and evening provision. However there were differences between styles: 80% of open learning provision was available in the daytime: 61% of individual provision was available in the evening. It was noted that average class size varied according to timing: eight in daytime provision, ten in evening provision.

Materials and resources

Tutors in open learning all considered that their materials and resources were good or excellent. Tutors in individual tuition were less satisfied with materials and resources than others, 50% rating resources as poor.

In terms of educational hardware individual tuition appeared to be much less well resourced and open learning much better than other styles of provision.

Class size

The average number of students enrolled at the beginning of September 1989 according to registers was:

- six in classes where students were mainly taught as a group;
- seven where a mixture of group and individual tuition was reported;
- nine in classes where students received mainly individual tuition.

The roll-on roll-off nature of basic skills, a declared aim of providers and tutors, means that new students can and do enrol in provision at any time during the year. But registers revealed that most students leave gradually, not announcing their departure but attending less and less regularly as the year progresses. New students are enrolled and therefore average attendances may remain the same but the student population is much wider than appears from a scrutiny of attendances only.

Staff development

The most comprehensive staff development available was in open learning centres where the definition of staff development was a wide one. In open learning centres in addition to planned programmes of staff development there were opportunities for informal staff development which partly depended upon a number of full time staff working in the same location.

Open learning tutors all rated the staff development available as very good or excellent.

Tutors involved in individual tuition did not rate highly either the staff development available or that which they had experienced. The main criticism of staff development was its lack

of specificity. This was mentioned particularly often in reference to literacy groups where students had different purposes and were at different levels. Many tutors expressed the view that staff development was best as an introduction for new tutors but less effective for more experienced tutors and those catering for a wide range of needs.

The main distinction which emerged from a study of the variables examined was between provision which was specifically targeted and that which was open to all-comers. Most LEA and voluntary organisation provision fell into the latter category. The specifically targeted provision was mainly employment related and funded externally.

There were differences in the styles used in these two distinct groups of provision. Open learning centres and Workbase provision did not offer regular individual tuition and therefore made very little use of voluntary help but did make extensive use of state of the art technology and self access materials. The students most likely to benefit from such resources were those at higher levels of literacy.

LEA and voluntary organisation provision used volunteers regularly and offered individual tuition. State of the art equipment was much less in evidence. The students using the provision included a higher proportion at lower literacy levels and with special educational needs particularly severe learning difficulties.

B. Procedures and processes

This section of the report describes:

- Procedures used by providers/organisers of literacy provision

- Tutors' reports on tuition
- Tutors' reports on effectiveness
- Students' reports on experience in tuition.

Procedures used by providers/ organisers

The aspects of most concern for evaluating effectiveness were considered to be procedures relating to student entry and to the monitoring of tuition.

Referral/entry procedures

Non-LEA provision

Where provision was not available to the general public as in ET and Workbase, referral was by recommendation and entry procedures clearly laid down.

LEA provision

Potential students in the sample areas were generally offered one of two options. *Come along to a class* or *contact your local organiser*. Resources were not always used to enable tutors to provide an adequate response to the *come along* invitation. In particular tutors reported that no time was designated to deal with new students beyond regular teaching hours.

The tutors who expressed the most difficulty with their task were those who had least involvement in decisions about which students would be in their classes, particularly those who reported students *just turning up*. In such situations tutors with mixed-ability classes and integrated groups had the least chance

to assess new students thoroughly even where this was one of their responsibilities.

It was clear that either by choice or direction many basic skills students were likely to adopt a *drop-in* mode of attendance. Open learning centres and designated drop-in provision were equipped to deal with this. But for other styles it was only large centres with specialist non-technical staff that appeared to deal effectively with drop-in and spasmodic attendance.

Monitoring procedures

Workbase, ET and the voluntary organisations in the sample each reported that feedback was required by funding bodies; regular reports were produced and staff time was allocated for the purpose. Each of them employed full time staff who were involved in the monitoring of provision.

All LEAs employed full time staff with responsibility for monitoring basic skills provision over a geographical area. Responsibility for delivery of provision however was usually on an institutional basis. Some of the larger institutions reported having monitoring systems in place. These included all the open learning centres. Other large institutions with their own monitoring systems included FE colleges and some of the larger adult education institutions which offered a range of styles of literacy provision.

Those with responsibility for monitoring on an LEA basis reported some barriers to effective monitoring of provision. These were mainly concerned with heavy workloads, wide geographical areas to cover, the part time nature of staff delivering literacy provision and the fact that responsibility for delivery and monitoring were often separate.

Monitoring when it was in place often concentrated on statistical information. Mechanisms for monitoring quality of provision were rarely in place.

Tutors' reports on tuition

Assessment in the identification of objectives

Tutors were asked about the processes that had led to the identification of objectives for students in the sample.

One third of the tutors cited a combination of discussion, negotiation and more formal assessment procedures. Another third cited discussion and negotiation only. One quarter of the tutors said that thematic influences, immediate concerns, or work done previously were the greatest influences in shaping the educational objectives of their students.

The responses were similar and similarly distributed across styles of provision except in open learning where all tutors reported using formal assessment procedures.

Classroom organisation

Tutors in individual tuition where there were large numbers of volunteers described their main role as supporting and organising those volunteers. Frequently students were taught only by volunteers. Tutors in such classes reported that they taught students when volunteers were absent.

Tutors in individual tuition in classes without much volunteer help reported that they tried to spend time with each student in turn, maintaining individual relationships. Some students in such classes reported that they felt they did not receive sufficient attention.

Tutors in group/individual tuition reported organising class time to include some group work as well as opportunities for students to have individual help. They generally had fewer volunteers for this purpose but also smaller classes than tutors in individual tuition.

Tutors in group and group/individual provision were strong advocates of students working together. 69% of them cited using group activities such as games, role play and video. This contrasted with data from tutors in other styles 41% of whom gave similar reports.

Tutors in open learning described the organisation of resources and the training which learners undertook to enable them to work independently. They described learning activities rather than teaching practices.

There were marked differences in responses of tutors. Those in open learning centres described their main responsibility as helping students to learn independently. Those in other styles described their role as organising people (students, volunteers or both).

The role of volunteers

The majority of tutors reported that they used volunteers mainly to provide individual tuition, though a minority were reported as being involved in assessment, planning and group work.

The sample volunteers, who were mainly involved in individual provision, reported on the processes that shaped their teaching: about half of them reported that the class tutor gave them directions; a similar proportion reported that they based their lessons on previous work; less than 10% reported the use of long term plans.

The volunteers reported that they felt their contribution was mainly in terms of boosting the confidence and self esteem of students. When asked how they could most help students, encouragement was cited by volunteers more than any other factor.

Lesson planning

Quite separately from the question on identification of objectives, with questionnaires four months apart, tutors were asked how they decided what to teach in any session. Their responses portrayed a very similar picture for the two occasions.

Student choice was overwhelmingly cited as the determining factor in shaping a lesson. This was fairly evenly distributed across styles.

Discussion and negotiation were mentioned next most frequently with previous work a close third.

Very few tutors referred to assessments or long term plans. Some categorically stated that they didn't decide what to teach, rather it was the students who did so.

The answers revealed much ad hoc decision making and gave the impression of inadequate long and short term planning and insufficiently rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

Methods of teaching

Because methods of teaching were part of the process of delivery of styles of provision, literacy tutors were asked what methods of teaching they found appropriate.

Their descriptions tended to reflect the terminology of provision (ie. group, individual, etc.) rather than specific teaching methods.

Another aspect of description was reference to resources rather than methods. This lack of specific description may be understood in the light of their responses to the question about lesson planning.

The methods they reported were very similar across styles and confirmed that whatever the style was called tutors were likely to use a combination of individual tuition, group interaction and independent study. Tutors in open learning reported more use of technology, 67% of them, for example, citing the use of computers as opposed to 11% of tutors in other styles. But this relates closely to comments on resources which indicated the far greater availability of technological equipment in open learning centres.

Record keeping for teaching and monitoring

Tutors were asked about the routine paperwork they did. Almost all said that they kept written records. Just over a third said they produced written lesson plans. Less than a quarter said that they did written evaluations. Less than 10% mentioned assessments but amongst these were all the open learning tutors.

These findings confirmed others which suggested that in some literacy groups there was inadequate long term planning and monitoring. They reinforced the distinction about organisation made above.

Procedures for review

In open learning centres paid staff time was allocated to review the progress of each student enrolled. The organisation of provision was predicated on this process rather than on teaching.

In provision which they funded Workbase insisted on a similar allocation of staff time for review.

In ET provision full-time staff were allocated time for review but it was more common for part-time tutors to undertake review as part of their regular teaching. This was also true of other forms of provision. Review procedures were in place where full time staff were involved in teaching. In other forms of provision they were less reliable.

Tutors' reports on effectiveness

Tutors from the main sample were asked what most helped students achieve their objectives. They generally responded by identifying factors which were within their control.

A supportive group and individual tuition were each cited by 50% of sample tutors . But there were differences which related to the style of provision in which the tutors were engaged. Individual tuition was identified by most tutors involved in individual tuition though many of them also thought resources an important factor.

A supportive group atmosphere was cited by most group and group/individual tutors.

The findings confirmed others in the study which showed that tutors advocated the style of provision in which they were involved.

Tutors from the main sample were also asked what they felt had made it difficult for students to learn. Tutors seemed to feel that difficulties in achieving objectives were due to factors outside their control. Lack of time was the factor most cited by 28% of tutors. Students' personal problems were the third major factor cited.

With specific reference to students in the sample 30% of tutors said that being part of a supportive group had most helped sample students to learn.

Tutors from the sub-sample described the problems that had made learning difficult for students. The main ones cited were:

- physical and learning disabilities;
- problems with eyesight, hearing, memory and concentration;
- home circumstances.

All tutors were asked what changes they would recommend to improve the effectiveness of literacy provision. The main ones they suggested were more time for students in provision and better resources. 30% of tutors responded thus in each case.

Students' reports on experience in provision

Styles of provision

Students were asked which of the following styles of provision they had experienced:

- individual tuition at home;
- individual tuition in a centre;
- a small group of four or less students a group of five or more students working alone at home;
- working alone in a centre;
- any other style.

Most had experienced three of the styles of provision listed. When they were asked which of the styles they felt worked best for them, the styles cited, in order of preference, were:

- 50% of students said that they preferred individual tuition in a centre.
- 25% of students said that they preferred to work in a small group of four or fewer students.
- 25% of students said that they preferred to work in a group of five or more students.

In view of the ratios recommended and operating in literacy provision and the eagerness with which group tuition is promoted it is important to note that only 25% of students in the sample felt that a group of five or more students was effective for them.

This confirmed other findings from the study which suggested that students preferred a style which offered individual tuition and/or a small group setting rather than being part of a larger group.

Organisation

It was interesting to find that when asked about factors which facilitated learning, students referred to practices rather than methods or organisational features referred to by tutors. The following are illustrative of their comments on organisation:

From a student in group tuition:

"I am with a group of women on Wordpower. We are all ages. Most have children. They are trying to come up to a higher standard of education in hope of getting employment in the career they would like to follow. We have two tutors and one helper. We meet on Mondays. We go up in to the study area where there is more room. We help one another."

From a student in individual tuition:

"I go to class on Wednesday evening. We have a helper. Sometimes we work as a group. This depends on each individual at the time. We're not pushed. If we find something too difficult we will ask each other for help. PS, I hope you don't mind I used a dictionary."

From a student in an open learning centre:

"Also the files containing worksheets, kept at the centre. They range from very simple tasks to more difficult ones. The tutor suggests which ones may be suitable at first but after a while you can select your own. Even if you select something you're not sure about, the tutor is at hand to guide you through."

Factors reported by students as affecting their learning

In an open-ended question students were asked about what had made learning difficult.

Lack of time was the factor mentioned by most students. Students were asked to comment on what had most helped them to learn successfully.

Over a third said they felt that the tutor was the crucial factor in their success. This was true regardless of the style of tuition they experienced.

Another third said that they thought the class activities most promoted their learning.

The activities they cited reflected the style of provision in which they were engaged. They described worksheets,dictations and cloze exercises as particularly useful.

Reports from students and tutors showed that two major difficulties which emerge in less targeted provision are initial assessment and placement, and the variability of student attendance. These prove to be considerable handicaps for tutors in their planning and monitoring.

It is also clear that students and tutors in less targeted provision feel that more time in tuition would promote better learning and that students particularly value individual attention and very small groups.

Where provision was designed and resourced to meet more specific aims with particular kinds of students these difficulties and preferences were not reported.

C. Outputs/outcomes

This section reports on the effectiveness of the provision described in the previous two sections. It is important in examining outcomes to be aware that aims, target students and resources varied greatly between provision.

- Recruitment of students
- Assessment
- Retention
- Attendance
- Student progress
- Student satisfaction
- Student progression
- Monitoring systems.

Recruitment of students according to need

As might be predicted from the previous sections, organisers of provision in Workbase, Training Agency and voluntary organisations reported success in their more specific targeting.

One example in the study was a voluntary organisation that targeted young people. The students showed an enthusiastic response and reported positive gain from participation. The apparent success of this specific provision contrasted sharply with other forms of provision where the ratio of young people was usually very low.

It was geared to its target group in every variable examined: location, premises, staffing, materials. But its success may have been attributable as much to the commitment of staff as to any other variable. It offered group and individual tuition at separate times with students encouraged to participate in both.

Equally predictable is the finding that most provision was broadly targeted and this diminished its capacity to respond effectively to specific needs. Tutors reported difficulties in coping where the range of student needs was very wide if matching resources were not in place. For example, tutors reported difficulties in organising group activities where they had few volunteers but several students requiring individual attention. They also reported inadequate staff development for the range of special educational needs encountered.

Apart from open learning centres none of the LEA providers had specified the number of students they intended to attract. It was not therefore possible to tell in what way student numbers were related to the aims and objectives of providers.

The evidence suggested that numbers of males and females in literacy provision are broadly similar. This might be considered surprising in view of the wealth of evidence which suggests that males have greater need of help with literacy skills.

Diagnostic assessment

All providers declared that it was important that students should define learning objectives and negotiate programmes of work with their tutors. However, sufficiently differentiated publicity about literacy provision was not generally available to enable students to make informed choices. Neither was assessment offered as a preliminary to all provision. Often initial assessment was undertaken after enrolment as part of a class session.

Where preliminary assessment was undertaken by local organisers new students were most likely to be directed to individual tuition if it was available. There was little evidence that once assessed by tutors students would be directed to any other style of tuition.

In Workbase provision some assessments were undertaken prior to recruitment and the aims of courses were disseminated amongst the target groups which usually included people at the same level of the same occupation.

In ET provision students had theoretically been assessed prior to placement but tutors reported that the assessments available rarely guided them to the immediate identification of learning objectives. The range of assessment procedures available in ET provision varied as much as in other provision and showed the same range of options.

In FE literacy support provision, students were often encouraged to attend because specific literacy problems had been identified in other courses. Where FE offered drop-in support it shared

many characteristics with open learning, students being taught on an individual basis and/or through independent study. In all such cases encountered in the sample students were assessed before a programme was negotiated. As with open learning centres these assessments were usually undertaken by full time staff. It appeared that assessment was undertaken in all styles of provision. Its formality ranged from:

Least	A wide range	Most
In provision where students were directed into classes	In FE, ET and most LEA provision	In Workbase and open learning centres

What was missing was evidence that assessment in one style of provision could facilitate entry or movement into another.

Where assessment was undertaken as part of the teaching role (as it was in about half the sample provision) the only realistic opportunity for choice and guidance was within the group. There are clear implications for the development of systems and staff expertise to improve the practice and use of diagnostic assessment.

Retention and attendance

The roll-on roll-off nature of basic skills has made providers wary of using *drop-out* as a measure of ineffectiveness. Yet it is clear that most literacy students need and feel they need a considerable amount of tuition if they are to make any real progress. It is not possible to put a figure on the actual hours of attendance required but this study expected that the number of students dropping out of classes at an early stage in literacy learning would provide a very useful indicator of the effectiveness of provision.

It was further assumed that students who are involved in regular learning activities are more likely to make progress and that a style of tuition which can sustain learning is more likely to be effective. In most cases this sustained learning will be related to attendance patterns.

For open learning centres different indicators might apply but the open learning centres in the sample were too newly established to provide comprehensive data on attendance patterns of students. The registers used in the study therefore were group, individual, group/individual and drop-in.

Attendance

The average attendance across all styles of provision was 64% of potential attendance (omitting students who had not attended for a minimum of three consecutive sessions). The average attendance was higher for students who completed a year's study – about 80%.

In Workbase provision it was common to find virtually 100% attendance. The fact that provision was in paid time clearly affected this.

In ET provision attendances appeared from the registers to be lower than average.

In FE provision where literacy support was available on a drop in basis, it was reported that few students used the service but those who did often attended for several hours per week.

In LEA adult education provision there were few examples of provision which imposed any attendance requirements on students. Yet tutors and students identified regular attendance as a major factor influencing success. Some providers encouraged students to *come when you like*. But the registers showed

patterns of attendance which would make regular lesson planning very difficult to sustain.

In the 63 classes whose registers were used for this study, on average sixteen students enrolled during the year. The average attendance of students at any session was six. Absent students and newly enrolled students thus often outnumbered the established attenders.

Some classes clearly commanded more regular attendance than others. The classes most likely to command regular attendance appeared to be those which were the smallest. These were also often those with specific time scales, common objectives and a homogeneous intake. But it was impossible to determine from the data the relative weighting of these factors.

Students leaving provision

37% of the 739 students on the registers left literacy provision between October 1989 and May 1990.

28% of the 174 students from the sample were reported as having left literacy provision between October 1989 and May 1990. The actual number of students leaving is likely to have been higher as tutors were not always able to provide accurate information.

In ET, Workbase and FE literacy support, students were usually in provision for a fixed time. Tutors knew in advance when they would leave and final reports were demanded.

In LEA provision it was common for tutors not to know when or why students had left provision. This varied with the attitudes of providers. At one end of the scale organisers and tutors said that on principle they would not follow up students who did not attend. They felt that students would regard this as an intrusion. Other tutors and organisers had systems for speedy follow up if a regular student failed to attend on even one occasion. What

appeared to be missing was evidence of any firm guidelines being given to students about the need for regular participation if they were to make progress.

Student progress

In June 1990 the students in the sample were asked questions about what they had achieved from participation in literacy provision.

The tutors in the sample were asked what their students had gained from participation in literacy provision and more specifically what gains they could identify for students in the sample.

Finally independent assessors were asked to report on progress identified in the writing of 50% of the students in the sample. The estimates of gain from these three assessments were then compared. Students, tutors and independent assessors were in close agreement about gains made.

The reports from tutors and students were very positive about gains made and very convincing. However it needs to be borne in mind that such gains were reported for only 60% of the sample. For 11% of the sample no information was available to the researcher beyond that provided in the first questionnaire. Of the remainder of the sample, 28% were reported as having left. Of those who left half returned questionnaires which gave their reasons for leaving.

The reasons given confirm the views expressed by tutors that students usually leave for personal reasons rather than through dissatisfaction with provision.

It appeared that in many examples tutors had even less information about the reasons for students leaving. There are

therefore worrying gaps in the data which indicate the need for more thorough investigation of the reasons why students leave or why they choose not to enrol after one or two visits to provision.

However, convincing reports of gains were available for 96% of responding students. Only 4% of students appear to have made no gains. Those who were identified by independent assessors as having made no gains were also reported by tutors as having not gained from participation in literacy provision. Each of the students in question reported no improvement in literacy skills.

The overwhelming impression gained from the data is of the high value placed on their experience in literacy provision by students.

Progress was identified by asking distinct questions about:

- reading
- writing
- confidence
- achievement of previously identified objectives
- additional gains
- positive differences made by the development of literacy skills.

As students were invited to make their own assessment of progress it was not possible to make direct comparisons between styles. However it emerged strongly from the study that students felt very positively that they had made progress. Specific gains which appear to be at least partly due to participation in literacy provision were identified for 96% of respondents.

The type of gain reported by students, tutors and independent assessors was the same across the styles. However students who

spent longer in tuition each week reported a wider range of gains as did students who had identified accreditation as one of their objectives.

It is felt that some reliance can be placed on these estimates as the range of gains reported by students, tutors and independent assessors matched closely and as there was agreement amongst them about which students had made no progress. The gains which students reported were expressed in similar terms across the range of styles.

87% of responding students claimed that their reading had improved since they started having help with literacy. Their tutors confirmed this view as did the examples of improvement which they reported. These involved more independent use of reading skills, and increased speed and confidence in reading.

96% of responding students claimed that their writing had improved. Their views of progress were confirmed by their tutors and also by independent assessors. The examples of progress given again emphasised the independence which students had acquired in being able to undertake their own writing tasks without any longer needing the help of partners or colleagues.

Students were asked to describe changes that had resulted from help with literacy skills. The changes they described were fairly evenly distributed between the spheres of home, leisure and work. A common pattern emerged with the emphasis on independent letter writing and form filling; increased reading of notes, letters, instructions, magazines and books; increased use of reference materials, typewriters and computers.

85% of responding students claimed that their confidence had increased. The examples they cited referred mainly to independent use of reading and writing though 18% of them cited improved social interaction as evidence of their increased confidence.

91% of responding students claimed to have made progress towards their original aims. As these aims had usually been expressed in very general terms it was not possible to confirm from the data whether this was so. Students in individual tuition were even surer, 100% of them claiming to have made such progress.

68% of students claimed to have made additional progress which pointed to outcomes. They cited improvements in job practices and prospects, more independent attitudes and exam successes.

Tutor reports of student gains co-incided very closely with claims made by students except for outcomes where additional progress was identified for 91% of responding students, which contrasts with the student figure of 68%. The additional gains identified by tutors were largely in the affective domain. 25% of them referred to the increased confidence and self esteem which they observed in sample students, 25% referred to improved communication and social skills. They also used terms like *determination*, *staying power*, *perseverance*, *responsibility* and *involvement* which were not used by students.

Student satisfaction/dissatisfaction

Overall, students were clearly convinced that they were gaining from their participation in literacy provision. They were clear about the gains they felt they had made. They were equally clear in indicating where they felt provision was not meeting their needs effectively.

They were asked questions about:

- length of classes
- length of terms
- the amount of individual tuition received

- the amount of time spent working with other students
- the amount of time spent working alone.

The level of satisfaction expressed was high. 66% overall said that they found these factors about right.

However, of those in individual tuition about 40% felt that the amount of individual tuition they received was insufficient. Nearly 60% reported that they felt they did not spend enough time working with other students.

Students in group tuition were more satisfied but over 60% of them felt that they did not get sufficient opportunity to work alone.

Students in group/individual tuition were most satisfied with the aspects of tuition explored; the length of classes being their only major criticism.

No style of provision met the needs of all its students. This may have been due to other factors within the styles. For example, the average class size of students who felt they didn't get enough individual help was twelve. This compares with an average class size of nine.

Student progression

The study looked for evidence of progression which was interpreted as:

- undertaking additional classes concurrently with participation in literacy provision;
- moving on to literacy provision at a higher level;
- moving on to other courses;

- participating in accredited provision;
- undertaking new training;
- changing job prospects or aspirations;
- the development of a more positive approach to education and training.

Using this interpretation, 73 students gave evidence of progression though the criterion mainly identified was further improving their English.

12% of students expressed a desire to gain qualifications or accreditation or to participate in more formal courses.

The Wordpower certificate has proved a popular mechanism for beginning this process but at the time of the study it was too early to judge its effectiveness in encouraging and facilitating student progression.

In Workbase provision students were generally only offered one opportunity to attend literacy provision in paid work time. However they were strongly encouraged to move on to other things both during and after a course. Sessions on progression were regularly included for students and information was given about opportunities available. The Workbase students in the sample reported a strong determination to go on with their studies and training. The evidence suggested that this determination was not matched by the students on ET courses.

Some LEAs build a degree of progression into provision by having all new students participate in individual tuition and move on to group tuition in year two. Home tuition students are often encouraged to attend a centre after a period of tuition at home. Tutors generally said that they encouraged progression onwards from literacy classes and also encouraged students to broaden their horizons by participating in other courses concurrently with

their literacy studies. There was clear evidence of encouragement to participate in accredited courses.

Monitoring systems

It is not possible to evaluate adequately unless good monitoring systems are in place.

Monitoring of provision

Although providers had identified the monitoring of provision as one of their aims there were few examples of comprehensive monitoring systems being in place on an LEA basis. Many barriers to effective monitoring of provision were reported.

There was evidence that monitoring systems were in place where monitoring was the responsibility of the institution making provision. This was particularly noticeable in open learning centres where responsibility for assessment, monitoring and review were clearly defined and resources allocated for the purpose.

Where local organisers had a responsibility for monitoring it was common for this to be delegated within institutions and not always reliably undertaken.

The monitoring of provision was built into the new externally funded open learning centres but there was little evidence of how effective these procedures were. The statistics made available by open learning centres were not sufficiently detailed to allow comparisons to be made.

Workbase used monitoring systems which were agreed nationally. The evidence suggested they were functioning effectively. ET used monitoring systems which were agreed

nationally. There was insufficient evidence from the study to indicate how effective these might be.

Monitoring of student learning

All tutors in the sample indicated that they shared the belief that literacy provision should be designed to enable students to identify and record what and how they should learn, and to monitor that learning.

In open learning centres provision seemed to be designed for these purposes but in other styles there were many factors which seemed to militate against them. For example, the workload of tutors was erratic, systems were not generally in place to deal with the erratic attendance of students and tutors were expected to undertake monitoring at the same time as teaching students.

Also, the effectiveness of tutors in helping students achieve their objectives appeared to be insufficiently monitored and support for those with the greatest need of support ie. those working the fewest hours, appeared to be the least.

The criteria of effectiveness examined were recruitment, assessment, retention, attendance, progress, satisfaction, progression and monitoring. They yielded little evidence of differences related to styles of provision except insofar as classes which were: smaller, had fixed time scales, and where students shared motivation and aims, seemed to produce more positive outcomes. Such classes were often those which were specifically targeted because of the requirements of funding bodies. According to the criteria selected, specifically targeted provision seemed more effective than that which was open to all comers. However, its effectiveness was related to the use made of resources, particularly staffing.

Appendix – Methodology

The method of research chosen

In order to achieve the aims of the study one research worker was employed for a two year period.

Each main style as defined by providers was examined in terms of its aims, resourcing and outcomes.

A sub-group of the sample was used to provide deeper insights into goals, motivation and progress of students and the organisational patterns which were regarded by participants as most likely to lead to effective provision.

Safeguards were taken to avoid bias though it is acknowledged that those tutors and students willing to participate in this study may have been in some ways atypical.

The framework in Figure 8 was used for assessing the effectiveness of different styles of literacy provision.

In order to maximise the validity of descriptions and findings and partly to check reliability and partly to monitor change over time, data was collected from participants with differing perspectives and at different times (see Figure 9).

This meant that within the resources and timescale, data had to be collected by post. The study therefore adopted a survey method.

Variables Examined		
Input	**Process**	**Outputs/Outcomes**
The Providers		
Styles of provision Aims Target students Staff/student ratio Materials Timing Staff development	Referral procedures Monitoring	Recruitment Retention of student numbers & target groups Attendance of students
Staff		
Tutors: age/ gender/ experience Volunteers Ratios Non-teaching support staff	Assessment procedures Classroom organisation Lesson Planning Methods Procedures for review Perceptions	Capacity to monitor Student progress
The Students		
Age Gender Occupation Purposes	Styles experienced Class organisation Factors affecting learning Perceptions	Changes in behaviour, attitude, aspirations, confidence Progress Satisfaction Progression

Figure 8

The questionnaires yielded the perceptions of providers, students, tutors and organisers about style as it related to their experience of practice. Some of the outcomes of literacy provision were examined by independent assessors to cross check tutors' and students' reports with an objective perspective.

In addition to the data derived from questionnaires, selected interviews were undertaken, visits were made and published documents were collected. These supported and enhanced the interpretation of the survey data.

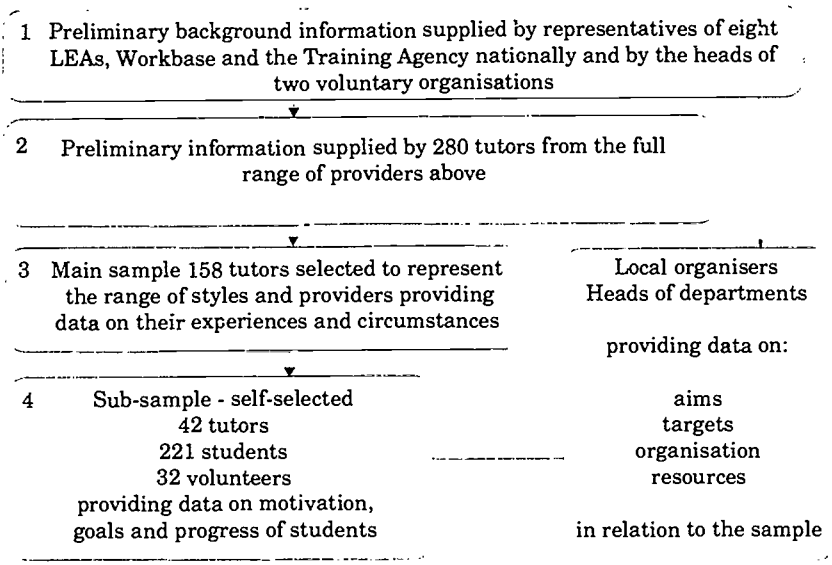

Figure 9

Sampling decisions and procedures

The study limited itself to literacy provision and used a mix of rural and urban areas with a wide geographical spread. The in-depth nature of the intended study determined the sample size.

Organisers provided information on the literacy provision made for 5,570 students. A sample of tutors gave information on the provision which they made for 1,730 students. More detailed information was provided by tutors of the 174 students who formed the main focus for in-depth investigation.

Care was taken to ensure that the sample covered a range of providers and styles. Participating bodies included LEAs, FE colleges, Workbase, the Training Agency, voluntary organisations and open learning centres.

The information sought

The reports of participants were used as a major source of evidence for this research.It was not possible to measure changes in literacy skills of students accurately over the time-scale of the project. Indeed, no acceptable measures of such changes were available to the researcher. But the usefulness of reports was increased by asking similar questions of different participants.

Published documents were also collected to provide an up to date picture of the intentions of providers and the attendance patterns of students.

Questionnaires

The use of questionnaires for literacy students may be considered surprising, particularly since the student questionnaires involved a total of 25 complex questions and often relied upon freely expressed answers.

However the researcher was experienced in using questionnaires successfully with literacy students and found the majority well able to deal with them. Students were invited to seek help in completing questionnaires if they felt they needed it. Fifty of the 174 responding students indicated that they had had help in completing questionnaires. Some students with severe reading difficulties used tutors, friends, or family to help with the reading and writing.

The potential literacy difficulties of students were taken into account by phrasing and laying out questionnaires in as accessible a manner as possible, and writing to students to assure them that spelling and handwriting didn't matter for the purposes of completing the questionnaires.

Open-ended questions based on concerns expressed in piloting exercises were included in the first round of questionnaires. The analysis of responses led to more closed and multiple choice questions in subsequent questionnaires.

Response rates

The initial response rates from tutors and students were very good. Inevitably response rates decreased over the year, for students from 79% on the first questionnaire to 45% at the end, and for tutors from 81% on the second questionnaire to 64% at the end. Information was available to indicate that 65 students and eighteen tutors of the initial sample left provision during the period of the study. It is likely that the actual numbers leaving were higher since tutors and organisers were unable to provide fully accurate information (see Figure 10).

Procedures used to maximise response rate

In order to maximise response to the questionnaires preliminary letters were sent out explaining the importance of the research and its potential usefulness to the field. A brief description of the project was enclosed.

Participants not completing the questionnaires by the date specified were sent a reminder after three weeks. Students who did not return questionnaires after the reminder were sent a simplified form of multiple choice questions with a view to discovering whether they were still participating in literacy provision or why they had left.

Questionnaires - Response Rates

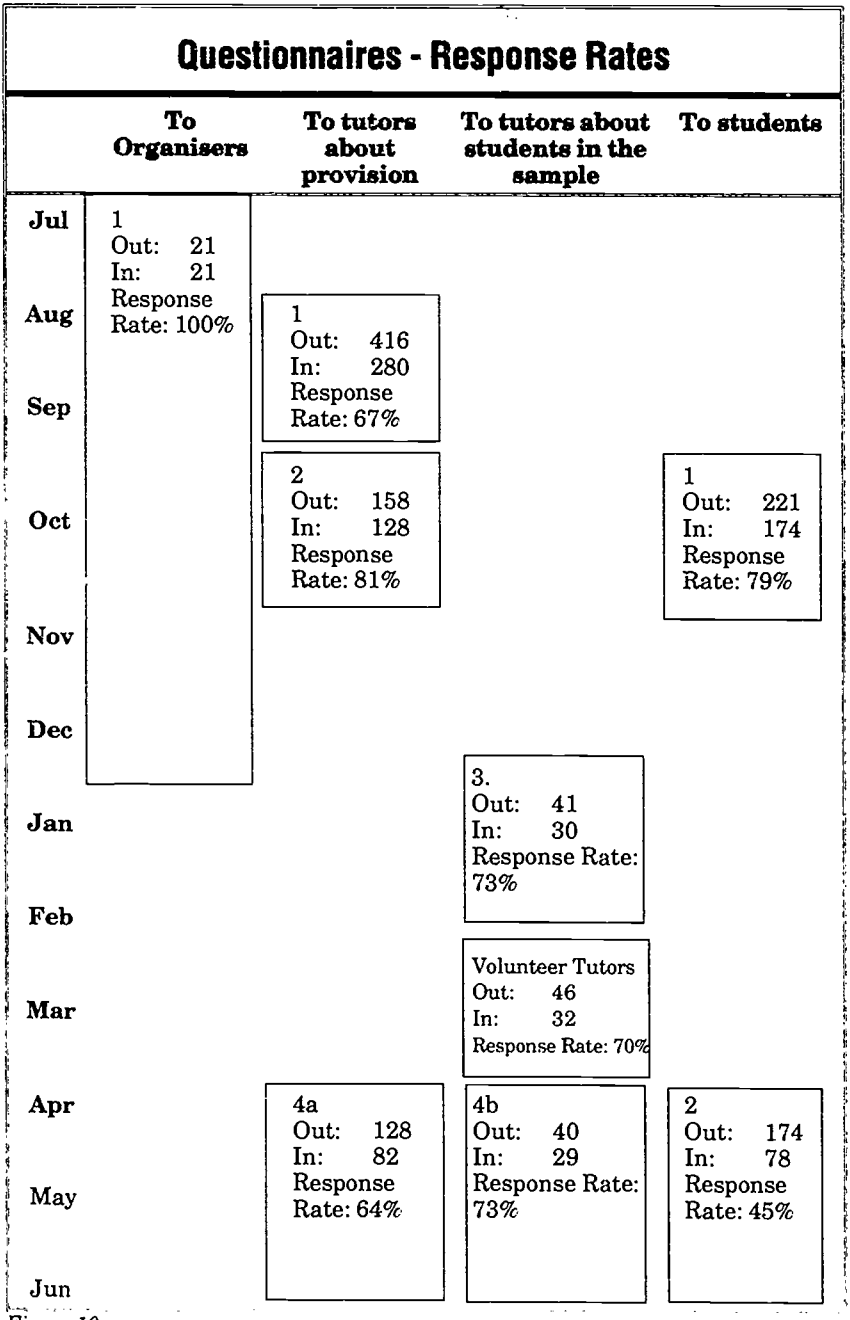

Figure 10

Interviews and visits

Structured interviews were used in the early stages of the research to enable those with local knowledge of basic skills to raise issues which might be important for the study. It was felt that this would be more likely to happen in face to face contact where participants could speak freely.

Visits were made to sites because it was felt that this would help to maximise the response rate to questionnaires, interpret the data and provide further necessary examples where gaps had been identified in the initial response.

Documents

Policy documents

Policy documents were requested from the person identified by participating bodies as having responsibility for organising literacy provision. The policy documents available were sometimes basic skills specific, sometimes of a more general nature.

Publicity

Publicity was gathered directly from literacy organisers during visits. This was to avoid too much selectivity. The examples of publicity which organisers supplied were generally the ones which were readily to hand and therefore the ones they'd be likely to give to members of the public who enquired about literacy provision.

Additional examples were collected on visits to designated sites thus augmenting locally co-ordinated publicity with some for specific centres or classes. This yielded 55 examples.

Registers

Since the attendance patterns of students were regarded as a likely indicator of effectiveness, registers were collected from as many of the main sample tutors as possible.

Ways of maximising validity and reliability of data and inferences from it

Piloting was undertaken with open-ended questions to ensure adequate coverage of the concerns of participants in the main questionnaires. Questionnaires and interviews were designed and timed to facilitate cross validation of reports from different participants. Several items were used to obtain information on each issue thought to be important, increasing the reliability of the data. Non respondents were followed up. A sample of evidence of student performance was subjected to independent assessment by a group of six City & Guilds Wordpower assessors.

Analysis of data

The data was analysed in terms of styles as defined by LEA providers, namely, group tuition, individual tuition, and open learning. Within each style, aims, resourcing, student experience and outcomes were examined.

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