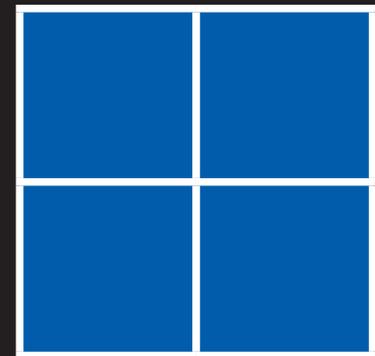# The Spatial Dimensions of Skills for Life Workplace Provision

Natasha Kersh, Edmund Waite and Karen Evans

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Abstract

This paper draws on the Adult Basic Skills and Workplace Learning project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as well as ongoing research carried out under the auspices of the ESRC Research Centre: Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES). The Centre's Strand 3 is concerned with the social, economic and cultural factors that influence and impede individuals' attempts to control their lives, and their ability to respond to and manage opportunities.

The strand's projects focus on degrees of 'riskiness' for individual life chances across the life course and the ways in which individuals react to these risks. The study discussed in this paper aims to assess the effects on individuals and on organisations of engagement in workplace literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programmes. Since the launch of the national Skills for Life strategy in 2001, the UK government has invested heavily in a drive to improve literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision, in particular, through a range of basic skills courses conducted within workplace premises.

This paper explores the semiotic significance of the spatial dimensions of workplace Skills for Life provision by (1) assessing employee motivations for learning as well as related outcomes, and (2) analysing the associations that are attached to different learning environments by employees. The research has indicated that learners' spatial associations with their workplaces are often perceived as positive, as they may contrast with their previous negative experiences associated with formal education and training (e.g. schools or colleges). This paper explores the extent to which work-based 'Skills for Life provision' facilitates employees' learning outcomes and achievements and enables them to use their newly acquired skills in other settings and life situations.

Introduction

This paper draws on the notion of space and the extent to which its different configurations affect individual employees' engagement in literacy and numeracy programmes delivered within their workplaces. The perception of the space in which education and training traditionally take place has been going through a process of change. The research focuses on literacy and numeracy programmes, which have previously been associated with formal provision in educational institution classrooms and more recently have moved into the workplace as a site for delivery. Different modes of learning such as experiential, community-based and work-based learning have become more prominent in recent years. The latest reforms as well as the demands of the market economy and the knowledge society have emphasised that learning may occur in settings other than the classroom, in a range of formal and informal environments, including workplace sites, virtual learning, home or leisure settings. Learning and acquiring skills through a range of experiences including learners' own life experiences facilitate links and mutual interaction between learning, work and leisure.

The target groups include individuals who have taken part in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision in the workplace. Since the launch of the national Skills for Life (SFL) strategy in 2001, the previous Labour government invested heavily in a drive to improve literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision, an important dimension of which has been the funding (largely through the Learning and Skills Councils[1]) of SFL workplace courses. Such provision includes literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses in the workplace, literacy embedded in IT courses, literacy embedded in vocational and job-specific training as well as LearnDirect[2] SFL courses undertaken in online learning centres in the workplace. The Leitch Review of Skills (H.M. Treasury, 2006) and the subsequent Train to Gain national initiative, which set challenging new targets for improving the attainment of literacy and numeracy skills by 2020, further developed UK policy emphasis on the

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[1] On 1 April 2010, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was replaced by two successor bodies – the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People's Learning Agency.

[2] LearnDirect is a government-funded initiative. It offers a range of courses that lead to nationally recognised qualifications – in maths, English, IT, and business and management. It is an online learning system that lets learners take things at their own pace. For further information, see http://www.learndirect.co.uk.

significance of SFL as a mechanism to support workplace learning. Some of the main targets identified by the Leitch Review included, as follows:

- Increase adult skills across all levels and aim to virtually eradicate low skills by ultimately getting to a position where 95 per cent of all adults achieve a Level 2 qualification
- Route all funding for adult vocational skills in England, apart from community learning, through Train to Gain and Learner Accounts by 2010
- Strengthen employer voice on skills and also rationalise existing skills bodies by establishing a new Commission for Employment and Skills
- Increase employer engagement and investment in skills by reforming, relicensing and empowering Sector Skills Councils
- Increase employer investment in intermediate and higher level skills and ensure that government provision (e.g. Train to Gain and Apprenticeships) is reformed to support this aim
- Increase people's aspirations and awareness of the value of skills and also develop a new universal adult careers service (ibid, 2006)

The change of government in 2010 has brought a number of changes to SFL strategies, funding and implementation at the workplace. The newly published Comprehensive Spending Review document has officially announced the abolition of the Train to Gain initiative, which will be replaced with training programmes focused on small and medium enterprises (SMEs). It is important to note that the funding system for SFL provision in the workplace is currently experiencing substantial changes; however, a more detailed consideration of the current changes in funding mechanisms is outside of the scope of this paper.

Our data is drawn from the Adult Basic Skills and Workplace Learning project, a five-year longitudinal study (2003–2008) and a follow-up Adult Basic Skills in the Workplace project (2009–2011), which aim to assess the effects on individuals and on organisations of engagement in workplace literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes.

Data collection has involved a variety of research methods, including interviews and questionnaires with learners, tutors and managers in organisations that offered SFL workplace training. Within the first study, the Adult Basic Skills and Workplace Learning Project, the data have been drawn from 564 structured interviews with learners in 55

organisations from a variety of sectors (including transport, local government, food manufacturing, engineering and health). Structured questionnaires with the relevant managers and tutors were undertaken at the selected sites, including 45 tutors' questionnaires and 46 managers' questionnaires (further referred to as Time 1 questionnaires). In addition, follow-up data-gathering included 30 questionnaires (further referred to as Time 2 questionnaires) that were completed by relevant managers at selected workplace sites one year after the SFL course has been launched at their organisations. The data analysis has involved both qualitative and quantitative methods, including use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

The follow-up project, the Adult Basic Skills in the Workplace Project, which is currently underway, is undertaking a longitudinal follow-up study of the organisations that were part of the previous research, aiming to consider the issues of sustainability and outcomes of the workplace SFL provision in those organisations. It also aims to examine the effects of participation in workplace literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes on individuals' life courses and educational trajectories.

A comprehensive understanding of the influence of spatial dimensions on learners' motivations and outcomes requires careful consideration of the concept of the 'learning space' and its role in the development and acquisition of work-based skills. Drawing on the interview and questionnaire data, in this paper we consider the importance of the learning space and discuss the implications for the learners of the spatial dimensions of SFL provision within a workplace context.

The paper includes seven Sections. The first Section introduces the essential literature review to inform the development of the theoretical framework employed in the paper. The next Section discusses the issue of motivating and engaging adult learners in the workplace. Section 3 considers some important aspects of employees' skills development in the workplace space, specifically focussing on personal skills and outcomes, such as confidence and positive attitudes to learning. The subsequent Section discusses the differences in associations that are attached to different types of learning environments by employees. Section 5 considers the new requirements of the contemporary workplace, discussing issues such as the use of the modern technologies in the workplace. Section 6 reflects on some

limitations and shortcomings of the SFL provision in the workplace and, finally, the concluding section discusses emerging findings and future developments.

Section 1. Spatial Dimensions of Workplace Learning: Theoretical Perspectives

Factors related to adults' educational trajectories and the ways they interact with various social institutions (e.g. labour market, workplace, communities) signify the importance of the spatial dimension of workplace learning and its different configurations. The ways in which adults learn throughout their lives are strongly influenced by the social roles that they assume within a social environment or social structure at different stages of their occupational and learning careers. These complex interrelationships between adult learners and social structures call for a better understanding of these issues, and cultural and constructivist theories offer a useful basis for considering aspects of adults' learning in the workplace, as they underline the importance of contexts and environments and the ways people learn through social interaction within their immediate settings. Situated learning theory posits that learning is embedded within activity, context and culture (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This theory provides a useful framework for analysis of the social system factors that influence learners' experiences of their learning spaces. The learners' settings and environments, whether immediate or indirect, provide circumstances for learning that could be situated in three ways: in practical activity; in the culture and the context of the workplace/learning environments and in the sociobiographical features of the learners' life (Evans et al, 2006). Situated learning theory draws on the concept of social knowledge produced as a result of interactions between people and their social environments, (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in which the learning spaces and environments are not necessarily physical places but configurations of the person's biographies, experiences and life trajectories. In order to understand better learning in changing contexts and their influence on adults' individual learning the paper draws on the social ecology theories, which are concerned with the study of people in an environment and interrelations between them, (Evans et al, 2010). These theories underpin the importance of four categories that include actors, relationships, environments, and structures and processes (Weaver-Hightower, 2008), and the notion of a 'learning individual' as the unit of analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The work of Evans et al

(2006) and Hodkinson et al (2003) further developed understanding of individual agency emphasizing the importance of considering individual worker/learner perspectives in the context of the dominant social–organizational view of learning at work, which may relate either to macro, intermediate or individual levels.

At the macro level, social structures and institutions may play an important part in either facilitating or undermining workplace learning opportunities and benefits. An intermediate level has to do with the type of learning environments at work, which may be experienced either as restrictive or expansive (Fuller and Unwin, 2004). For individual workers, their past experiences and dispositions strongly contribute to their work and learning practices. The research by Evans et al (2006) suggests that workers are both a part of and separate from their workplace community. The ways in which learners work and learn are strongly influenced by their prior/parallel lives outside their workplaces. At the same time, their workplace environments may contribute to the development of their attitudes and dispositions. Through their participation in working practices, individual workers contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of those practices and also in the progressive development of their own sense of identity (Evans et al, 2006). Learning environments and contexts play an important part. The way employees perceive their learning is often associated with their perceptions of the space in which their learning is taking place. The notion of space is not necessarily understood as being a physical space (such as a classroom). The idea of the learning space at work is much broader. It is associated with social practices or social institutions, such as workplaces, which are perceived as different from those that are linked to a traditional school or college educational delivery.

The notion of the 'spatial dimension' and the 'learning space' has become an important issue in the area of lifelong learning. Drawing on the work of Bronfrenbrenner (1977, 1979), Kolb and Kolb (2005) refer to four types of learning space. The learner's immediate setting, such as a course or classroom, is defined as the *microsystem*. Other concurrent settings in the person's life such as other courses or family are called the *mesosystem*. The *exosystem* refers to the formal and informal social structures that influence the learner's immediate environment, for example, institutional policies and procedures and culture. Finally, the *macrosystem* relates to the overarching institutional patterns and values of the wider culture,

such as cultural values favouring abstract knowledge over practical knowledge, that influence actors in the person's immediate microsystem and mesosystem.

The significance of the learning that happens in settings other than classrooms has been emphasised by lifelong learning research (e.g. Keeling et al, 1998; Edwards et al, 2006; Boud et al, 2006). The new approaches to lifelong learning broaden traditional concepts of educational delivery (as used in conventional educational establishments) to include learning at home, at work, and in the community (Edwards et al, 2006). Recent trends in economic, political and educational developments have resulted in somewhat blurred boundaries between the spaces in which learning, work and leisure occur. Adult learning that takes place outside the classroom has been an important area of research in a number of countries in recent years. Issues such as informal learning, community-based learning and workplace learning have received recognition as important areas of research in many studies (as noted by Boud et al, 2006). Rapid changes in economic and social development and the impact of globalisation have contributed to the changes in perception of adult education and workplace learning.

Learning in settings other than the classroom is often associated with a more positive perception of education and training. Solomon et al (2006) highlight the significance of notion of 'space' in contemporary social and cultural theory as well as the increasing use of space metaphors in understanding the changing place of education, knowledge and learning in the contemporary period. Chisholm's (2008) research employs the concept of active learning as a set of differentiated practices pointing out their close associations with social locations and experiences. In this context, positive associations with a learning space (e.g. the workplace environment) facilitate individual learning attitudes and provide favourable circumstances for skills development. Solomon et al (2006) emphasised associations between space and learning and their importance for understanding social relations, specifically in the context of workplace learning. Thus, the workplace becomes an important arena for acquiring skills and culture, in addition to being a place providing regular employment and income for the workers (Rismark and Sitter, 2003). The workplace spaces are characterised by being both work and learning spaces where the boundary between the two is considerably blurred (Solomon et al, 2006: 6). Situated learning theory further enriches the concept of learning space by reminding us that learning spaces extend beyond the teacher and the classroom

(Kolb and Kolb, 2005). As problematised in Unwin and Fuller (2003) they also include socialisation into a wider community of practice that involves membership, identity formation, transitioning from novice to expert through mentorship, and experience in the activities of the practice.

Solomon et al (2006) further draw on the term 'workplace learning', arguing that this notion has particular kinds of meanings and practices because of its location and because that location is not an educational institution The idea of 'borderlessness' might help to re-focus and reposition the conceptual and practical connections between learning subjects (who), learning sites (where) and learning pathways (when and how). (Chisholm, 2008: 142).

In this paper we discuss the relationships between individual outcomes and motivations of adult employees in relation to workplace learning and the spatial dimensions afforded to them through their workplaces. Outcomes and motivations are considered as a manifestation of individual learning and career orientation that may also be constructed through social relationships and processes that go on outside of a particular community of practice.

Section 2. Motivating and Engaging Adult Learning Through and for Learning in the Workplace

The issue of increasing motivation within the workplace has become an important focus of work-related learning research. Much research has focused on finding ways to support and motivate learners/employees through the introduction of new approaches to tackle issues of skills and competence development in work-related contexts (Eraut, 1994; Fuller and Unwin, 2004). In the research literature, motivation theories draw on a set of assumptions about the nature of people and about the factors that give impetus for actions (Deci and Ryan, 1985). In both workplace and educational contexts, motivation is often referred to as being either intrinsic or extrinsic in nature (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Sansone and Harackiewicz, 2000). Intrinsic motivation derives from within the person or from the activity itself, when a person is motivated by internal factors, such a stimulating learning environment, tutors' support, teamwork, and when various learning activities and environments (such as, for example, learning contexts or learning spaces) facilitate motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985). It has been

drawn on in a number of studies that a stimulating 'learning environment' in a workplace may considerably facilitate learners' motivation and skills development (Evans et al, 2004). In this context the 'workplace is conceptualised as an environment in which people learn because it provides opportunities for them to (co)-participate in activities and practices' (Fuller et al, 2004, p.8).

Engagement of learners is another related notion in this context. Evans et al (2006) describe engagement as the biggest challenge for educators and trainers, as engagement facilitates motivation. Evans et al (2006) further note that in order for full engagement to occur, learning needs to be fully situated in three ways: in practical activity; in the culture and context of the workplace learning environment; and in the sociobiographical features of the learner's life. Learning that is situated practically involves participation in actual work practices and workgroups, access to programmes of activity, and the time and space provided for learning. Finally, to be situated socially and biographically involves shared responsibility among those involved (e.g. employees and employees; learners and tutors) for learning and personal development, the adjustment of learning contexts to learners' interests and experiences, links between activities and chains of support, and the acknowledgment of social and emotional dimensions of learning. Various configurations of learning that are well situated within workplace settings may considerably facilitate learners' engagement and motivation (Evans et al, 2006). Being situated in an expansive workplace learning environment (Fuller and Unwin, 2004) would further contribute to the development of favourable conditions for motivation and engagement in workplace learning. The expansive environments include features such as organisational recognition of and support for employees as learners; knowledge and skills of the whole workforce being developed and valued; managers becoming facilitators of workforce and individual development, etc. Participation in work processes and applying newly acquired skills in workplace activities potentially encourages staff to take on responsibility and develop commitment. As Evans et al (2006) further note, to have learning in an actual workplace context recognised can highlight the importance of the work being undertaken.

One of the implications of the shifting of the learning space from the classroom to the workplace is associated with improved learning outcomes and motivations of individuals participating in Skills for Life provision within their working environments. The present

research has shown that, if embedded and contextualised in relevant work activities and tasks, workplace based basic skills provision could increase learners' engagement and motivation. Tutors have also stressed the importance of embedding skills:

> Yeah but I think because we've linked it into what you need every day as an adult, you need to have these functional skills. [...] If you don't have those key skills there how are you going to be able to deal with that? [...] Yes, and the tutors work with us around using materials, like customer bills, customer letters, so it's real and you can see where it will make the relevance to. And that's important to our business, that they [the learners] see the relevance for the programme too [Extract from tutors' interviews].

The issue of the motivations and attitudes of employees towards the acquisition and improvement of their basic skills, delivered in the workplace context, has been an important aspect of this project. The research has indicated that learners' spatial associations with their workplaces are often perceived as positive, specifically in relation to the following:

- Basic skills provision in workplace locations is considered to be relevant to work-related activities;
- Basic skills provision in the workplace is often associated with a number of learning outcomes such as improved confidence within the workplace;
- It may contrast with learners' previous negative experiences associated with formal education and training (e.g. schools or colleges);
- Such 'outside of classroom SFL provision' facilitates the employees' learning outcomes and achievements and enables them to use their newly acquired skills in other settings and life situations;
- Another motivational factor is associated with a real benefit to learning being delivered in the workplace and at times, which suit the learners (e.g. during employees' working hours, see also Chart 5).

The semiotic significance of the spatial dimensions of workplace SFL provision derives from the contextually specific settings in which social actors (e.g. learners/employees) undertake their everyday work-related activities, duties and responsibilities. Embedding SFL provision in the workplace context fosters positive connections and associations between literacy and numeracy acquisition and workplace activities, thus emphasising the notion of relevance of the SFL training. In contrast to acquiring skills for life in a school-based context, work-based

skills provision is perceived as relevant to a range of work-related activities, which provides an additional incentive and motivation for learners.

Section 3. The Spatial Dimensions of Workplace Learning: Acquiring Literacy and Numeracy Skills within the Workplace

All the factors mentioned above contribute to the potential for workplace courses to respond to shifting attitudes to learning. Both structured and in-depth interviews as well as questionnaires with managers, tutors and learners have indicated a wide range of factors behind learners' engagement in workplace courses (such as Literacy, Numeracy, and ESOL), beyond merely the wish to develop job-specific skills.

Within their workplaces, employees need to cope with a number of new workplace requirements and demands. The questionnaires and interviews with managers have shown that less-skilled workers are now expected to have good literacy and numeracy skills as they are required to be able to write more than they were in the past. 'Less-skilled workers', sometimes referred to as 'low paid' or 'low-skilled' workers, is a term that is open to interpretation (O'Grady and Atkin, 2006; Finlay at et al, 2007). In this paper we draw on the Institute for Employment Studies' research project's definition that describes less-skilled workers as those with qualifications below Level 3 or those in jobs assessed as needing skill levels less than or equivalent to Level 3 (Newton et al, 2006).

As Chart 1 below indicates, over 60 percent of the sample indicated that within their workplaces less-skilled workers have to write more than they had to in previous years, and this situation may prove to be a problem for both the organisation and the employees themselves. As observed by a learner, who works as a care assistant in a nursing home:

> Yeah, and it changes rapidly how things have to be reported. And it will be changing again very soon, so it does change quite quickly. And there's lot of things like that could happen during the day. If somebody's had some type of illness, like a fit, or they've been diagnosed some new medication or something like that and it isn't something that is care out of the standard, what we would do normally, all of that has to be documented. Documents, the medication documents, everything's got to be [recorded]. So there's loads of other things in the paperwork like that that you have to do [Extract from learner's interview].

Another care worker made similar observations:

Yes, handwriting [is important], because [...] you write how that person is that morning, the medication you give them, personal care: all goes down, so that they [supervisors] have that information. It just means that the supervisor can go in and check everything [...] at any time and look through [the file] on the date that that person was looked after. And like say if they've had a fall then they look and say "oh such and such had a fall, we're waiting for a doctor coming out", it's all written down in there in their little file [Extract from learner's interview].

Not being able to deploy good literacy skills in order to handle work tasks that involve writing (such as, for example, filling in a form or issuing an invoice) has a very negative effect on employees' confidence and self-assurance within their workplaces. Employees' motivation is also affected by their deficiency in basic skills, thus affecting negatively their confidence and general learning attitudes at work. As noted by one of the interviewees who works as a general assistant in a hospital:

I was not confident because I could not write properly [...] English is not my mother tongue. One day I had to write a note for my manager and it took me a while because I was not sure about spelling of some words. And it was embarrassing; I did not want my manager to read my note with a lot of mistakes. I had to ask my colleague to read it and correct my mistakes. It was embarrassing too. But now my English is much better. I would be able to write the same note without any problems. [Extract from learner's interview]
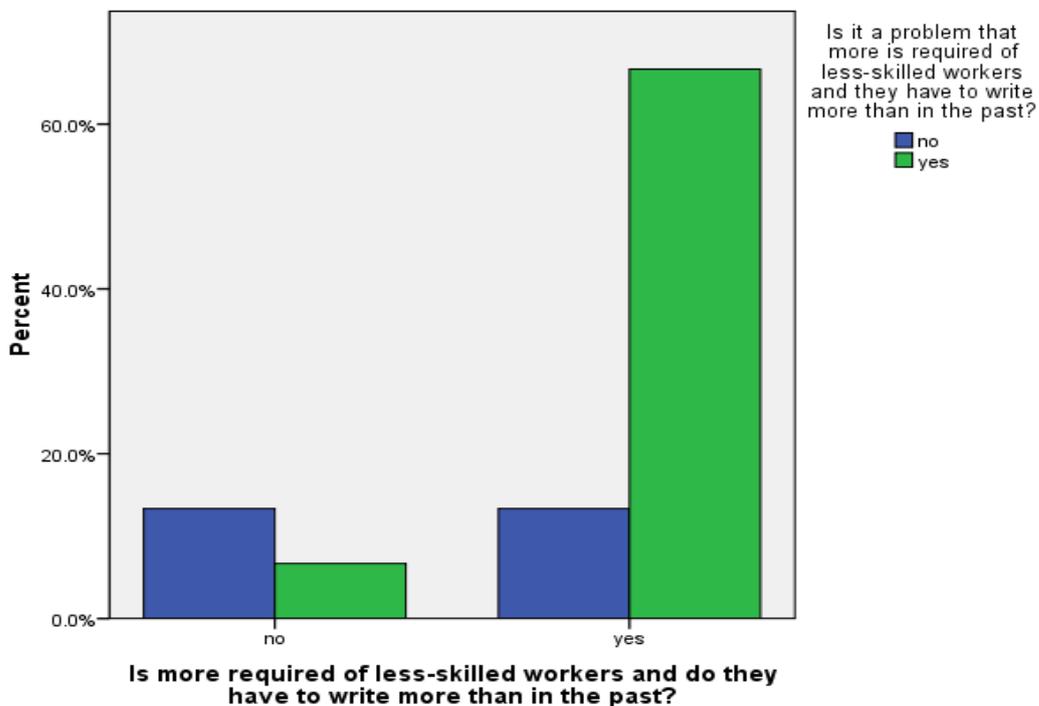

Chart 1: New requirements for less-skilled workers

The majority (over 70 percent) of managers participating in our survey have reported they felt that within their organizations less skilled workers really benefited from the course, and, as a result, the course has helped the managers to deal with the problem of the new requirements for less-skilled (or low skilled) workers in their workplaces. On the other hand, only 22 percent of the sample reported that they did not consider it to be a problem for their workplaces that less-skilled workers now had to engage in more writing tasks and assignments as part of their duties and responsibilities.

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The issue of staff being able to handle multiple tasks at work, which is also associated with increased literacy skills requirements, has been underlined as critical in managers' and learners' interviews and questionnaires. In fact, the increased ability of managers to deal with the issue of more diverse requirements of less-skilled workers has been linked to managers' positive perceptions and evaluations of the SLF course offered one year ago (within Time 2 questionnaires). Chart 2 below indicates that over 60 percent of the managers who evaluated the course as very successful also reported that the course had an impact on their ability to deal with the issues of increased workplace requirements of less-skilled workers.
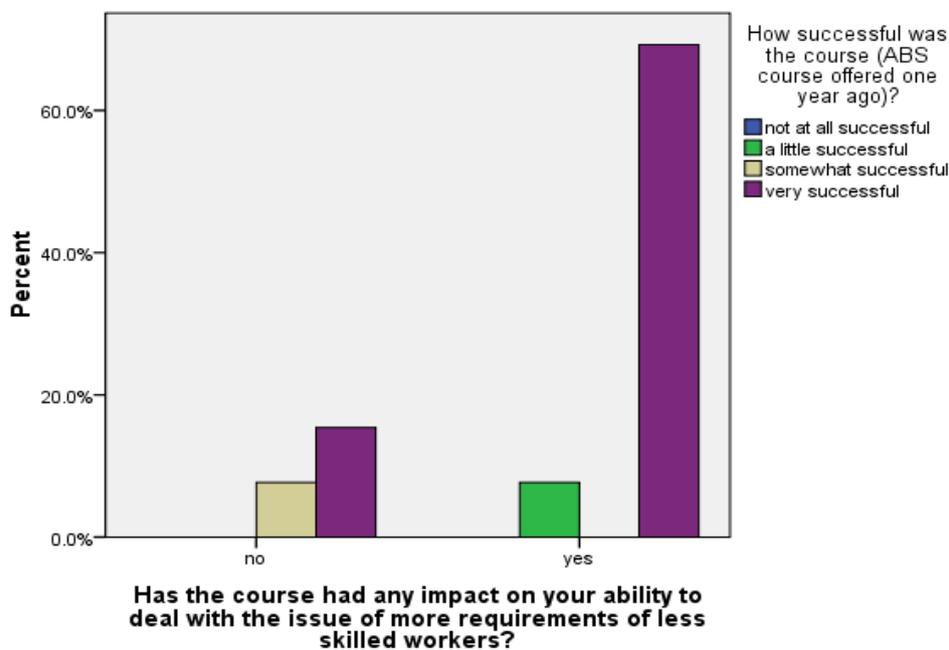
Chart 2: Managers' evaluation of the course

Our empirical data have further suggested that as a result of improving and being able to employ their basic skills within their workplaces, learners may further develop their personal skills and attitudes, including their confidence and motivation. Managers' questionnaire data (Time 2 questionnaires) have indicated that developing learners' confidence was an important aim and outcome of the SFL course at the workplace. Chart 3 indicates that the majority of the managers at participating sites considered learners' confidence to be a very significant learning outcome of the course. As noted by a manager,

> I think [the aim of the course is] to empower them, I know it's a bit of cliché, but I suppose to give them more self-confidence [because] I think I've lost track of the number of people that come in to that course and they'll pull you to one side and they'll say look I was never very good at spelling, [...] I wasn't very good at school, and you have to say to them: look that's not what it's about, it's about […] whatever you want to do in this classroom, whatever you feel your needs are; we can address them here [...] , it's not a case of testing you you've got this 3 hours for the next 10 weeks to develop those, improve them. [Extract from manager's interview].

Tutors have also emphasised the important role of confidence in particular in the context of the skills development and deployment in the workplace:

> […] you've got to put something in about confidence as well because to a certain degree you can have the best skills in the world, but if you've not got that self belief to use them […] I think we all know people who have got more confidence than ability but equally so there's more people with ability than confidence to use that full potential […]. [Extract from tutor's interview]

Another tutor has stressed the significance of confidence as the major factor that facilitates the general success of the course

> And I think overall over all the courses if I could put the success down to one word, it is confidence. A learner has come up to me and said to me, this hasn't made me as good as I want to be in the skills but what it has done to me [...] it's the level of confidence really, so it's a more of a can do attitude at work. [Extract from Tutor's interviews]

Other outcomes, such as improving job-specific skills, helping staff to perceive change and offering general development to staff have also been cited. Our interviews with learners have indicated that improving their job-specific skills has resulted in boosting their confidence. One learner who works a call centre noted that attending a numeracy course helped her to both improve job-specific skills and to develop her confidence in the workplace:

[...] you're more confident. Like when you're taking the call and you know that you've got to work out...say for me it's like 70% of things, it's a lot easier and you know you're confident in what you're saying is true...like because I'm always dealing with billing [...] we've got to work out billing or work out for manual accounts and things, so it is easier because it's like I'm able to take away and add up quicker because like you're doing it more. It's like different methods and things, so I do find it a lot easier to do my job, at this [Extract from learner's interview]

What was the most important outcome of the training course (ABS course offered one year ago)?
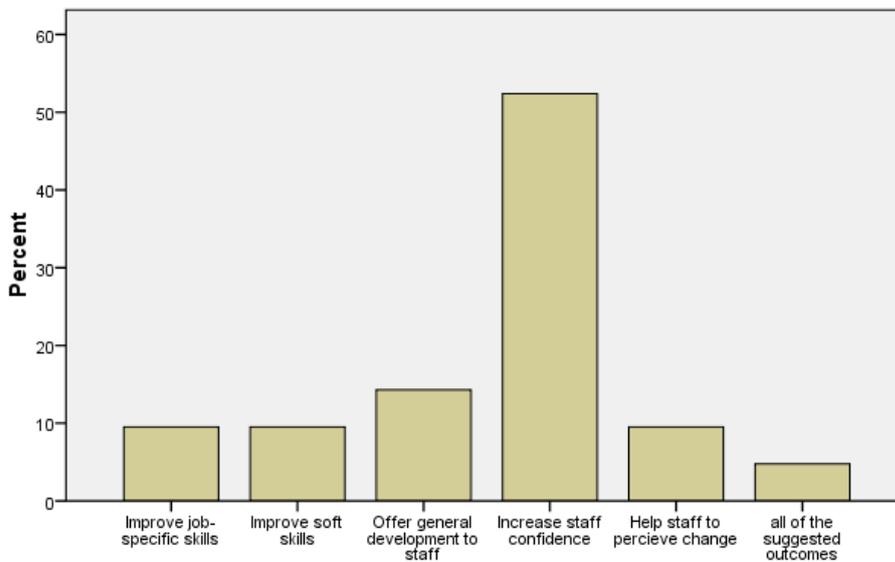
Chart 3: Outcomes of the course: managers' views

Learners' responses have also emphasised the importance of acquiring personal skills and confidence from the course they engaged in at the workplace. Our empirical data indicate that of the 564 learners interviewed within Phase 1, almost two-thirds were male with an average age of just over 40 years. Almost all of these individuals were in permanent full-time employment at the time of the interview. The average length of employment with the current employer was almost eight years. ESOL learners represented a sizeable 35% of the full sample, whereas the current UK workforce is made up of only 3% of employees who do not speak English as their first language (Waite et al, 2010). Of particular significance for the topic of this paper is that 54% of the learners had left full-time education with no

qualifications; 14% were qualified to level 3[3] or above when they left full-time education; 23% acquired further qualifications after leaving formal education; and 3% acquired further qualifications at level 3 or above after leaving full-time education (Evans and Waite, 2009)

Nearly all participation was on a voluntary basis. Chart 4 (Evans and Waite, 2009) provides data on the two most important outcomes that learners wanted or expected from their course. This is then compared with the two most important outcomes that learners actually felt they achieved from the course. It is noticeable that the generic motivation of 'learning new skills' was most commonly cited (by 51% learners), and the outcome of the course surpassed such expectations. 35% of learners cited the improvement of work performance as a factor and rather fewer listed this as an actual outcome. This is consistent with findings from in-depth studies, which have highlighted a whole range of reasons for engaging in such courses: from 'curiosity' to wanting to make up for missed earlier educational opportunities; from wanting specific help with job-relevant skills to wider career aims; from a desire to help children with school work to wanting self-improvement and personal development (Evans and Waite, 2009).

Most important expected and actual benefits from the course
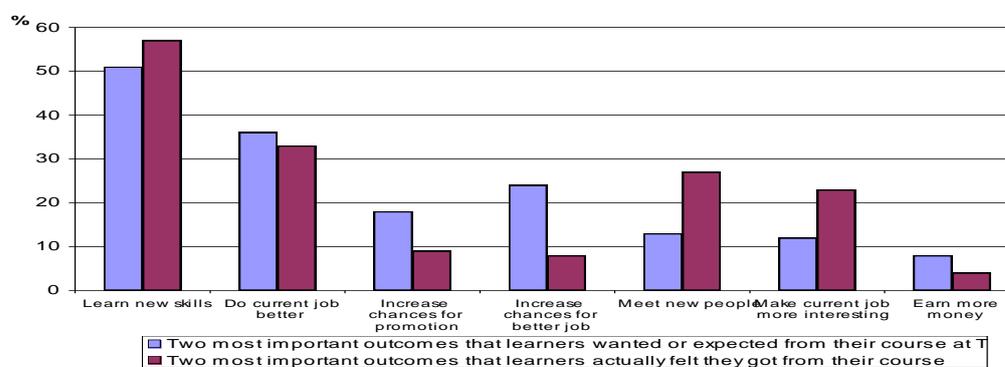
Chart 4: Outcomes of the course: learners' views

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[3] All qualifications fit into a national framework. It has nine levels. Entry level is at the bottom and level 8 is at the top. The higher the level, the harder the qualification. Every level has different types of qualifications - subject based, work-related and job-related. For more information see http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualification-and-assessment-framework/89-articles/250-explaining-the-national-qualifications-framework

The in depth interviews have allowed us to explore these 'softer' outcomes in more detail, including the various ways in which courses have succeeded in increasing the confidence of learners. Of those learners who elaborated in detail about the issue of confidence during the course of the first phase of in depth interviews, around 50% of the learners linked their growing sense of confidence specifically to the acquisition of literacy skills. For example, one employee had experienced a surge in confidence as a result of being able to fill in reports at work without resorting to the support of colleagues: "It makes me feel really good, cos now I can fill in forms and write down what problems are going on in the flats. Now I don't have to keep sneaking around to find someone else to keep spelling it for me. I can try and have a go at it myself." Several of these learners were also boosted by the knowledge that their skills were not as poor as they thought and that others were in the "same boat". Another employee of a transport company who suffers from dyslexia told us: "I mean, really do have a problem, and not wanting to sound nasty but actually makes you feel much better because yours isn't as bad as perhaps some other people's might be… well I've learnt to have more confidence in myself, I suppose, and realise that it's not such a big issue and not to beat myself up about it." Seven learners remarked that their growing sense of confidence was accompanied by a broadening of horizons and a willingness to take on more challenges. One of the interviewees, a CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television) support assistant, who has taken the SFL course stated that participating in this course and acquiring a range of math skills enabled him to engage in Do It Yourself (DIY) activities, which he was not able to do before due to lack of numeracy and literacy skills. He reported that being able to follow the complex DIY instructions to assemble pieces of furniture made him feel really good and also boosted his confidence. Another adult learner, who works as a cleaner in a college of further education, remarked that taking the literacy and numeracy course had given him the confidence to start taking driving lessons. He passed his driving test, which generated a sense of confidence and self-assurance and motivated him towards engaging in a range of new activities and hobbies.

Developing social skills was another important outcome that has been referred to by the respondents. Social skills include a range of skills related to interaction, communication and mutual understanding within a group of people. The majority of our respondents reported that the course enabled them to meet people who shared similar experiences. In addition, the course work provided plenty of opportunities for socialising within a group. One of the

respondents noted that taking part in the course "was a good way of getting to know other colleagues and learning things about each and just seeing each other as people rather than fellow employees which was an excellent side of the course". Our interviews have indicated that the tutors often use teamwork as a teaching method, which helps to develop the learners' interpersonal and communication skills.

Some employees reported that their participation in a general literacy course had given them more incentive to try further courses. This was typical of many learners who saw the literacy course as a first step towards engaging in further learning that did not relate specifically to the workplace. (Evans and Waite, 2009). Some other specific examples of the learners' personal skills and confidence development include the following:

- In one of the participating organisations (hospital) the course enabled care assistants to write down information about patients given to them at the ward 'handover' and gave them the skills and confidence to complete incident forms, sickness notifications, etc;
- In another organisation a member of staff reported that participating in the course enabled him to read a bedtime story to his small child for the first time in his life; as a result his personal confidence has been dramatically enhanced;
- One manager stressed that the course improved the employees' confidence as it made them realise that the company (food company) cared for their staff.

Success story 1 (hospital)

A porter who was very introverted and would not readily speak to others has changed dramatically following his involvement in this training. He now chatters consistently and readily makes conversation. His whole demeanour has changed and he strides about [the hospital] with an air of confidence (extract from managers' questionnaires).

Success story 2 (building company)

One person, who was very unsure and lacking in confidence, was pushed towards the course and persuaded not to drop out. The course developed his confidence and, eventually, enabled him to achieve NVQ Level 2 (extract from managers' questionnaires).

Our evidence suggests that the benefits of acquisitions basic skills within the workplace are not restricted to the development of skills to be employed at work only. The research has indicated that participation in the SFL training has enabled the employees to develop their confidence and self-assurance in general. There are, for example, positive effects on the learners' family lives and leisure activities that have been associated with their SFL training as they are able to recontexualise their acquired basic skills in environments other than their workplaces.

However, managers have identified various factors that may, potentially, decrease learners' motivation:

- The problems of tutor turnover have been highlighted; learners would have benefited from a more continuous teaching process;
- Poor feedback from training providers/tutors; learners would have been motivated by more constructive feedback;
- Tutors did not take into account learners' specific needs and abilities; as a result, some learners felt that the course content was not relevant to them (they felt bored).

Section 4. The Spatial Dimensions of Workplace Learning: Differences in Associations that are Attached to Different Learning Environments by Employees

The difference in associations that are attached to different learning environments draws on the data that indicate that some of the respondents had previous experiences, perceived as negative, within formal education structures (e.g. schools and colleges). The relatively large number of learners in our sample with few or no qualifications is indicative of the potential of SFL workplace courses to engage learners who have not benefited from other forms of educational provision. Through the employment of in-depth interviews, we have explored in detail individual attitudes to learning.

The benefit of learning with colleagues in a familiar setting was frequently cited as an advantage of workplace learning during the course of in-depth interviews. A bus driver mentioned that he preferred undertaking a course in the workplace "because at least it's in

familiar settings as opposed to I've got to find a room, J49 and Fred Bloggs will be in there waiting for you". Similarly, an employee of an engineering company told us that he preferred "learning at work because you're working with the people you're learning with… they can have the chats, and… conversations and… discuss it amongst yourselves if they're struggling with anything". In relation to this issue, three learners mentioned explicitly that learning with people of the same age was an advantage of workplace provision. Several employees told us they thought that learning in the workplace was more 'relaxed' and less intimidating than learning in a college. For example, a care worker for a local authority told us "you're more relaxed but I think if you're going to college, it's like back to school again". A bus driver told us "I think you're a lot more relaxed in your workplace… it's not all taken as serious as it would be in college". (Evans and Waite, 2009). Another SFL course' learner, working in a call centre, also stressed the benefits of her current learning in the workplace:

> I just think....I don't know why, because it's like we want to be here so it's better for us to learn because we actually want to be here to learn, whereas as school, you know, you're a bit of a child and you're just there to mess about like - you're not of course but that's like what a lot of people did. Because you realise you really should have stuck in. [...] I was saying to her [the Numeracy tutor] the other day like, her method of teaching is better than my old maths teacher. I had my old maths teacher for 3 years like at the other school, so I found that I learned not as much as what I've learnt with Heather [the tutor]. Because the way she explains things is better [Extract from learner's interview].

The employees' previous negative experiences in schools or colleges have often been contrasted with the current SFL provision. Basic skills provision at work has been perceived as more positive and motivating in contrast to their past learning experiences. However, it is important to bear in mind that different associations attached to different learning environments may be related to the individual's personal growth and development, including changes in disposition and attitudes that people undergo during the years of their occupational and/or learning careers. Most of our respondents have been mature adults (average age 40) with a range of previous life experiences. Therefore, their attitudes and dispositions may have changed as they assumed a variety of different responsibilities throughout their lives (e.g. family and work) compared with their previous situations during their earlier learning experiences in schools or colleges at a much younger age. As noted by Evans et al (2006):

> [...] the way the learners perceive and respond to the learning opportunities within their workplaces is strongly influenced by their individual attitudes and dispositions. Learners bring to their workplaces not only their prior skills and competences but also their individual dispositions and attitudes towards learning. Learners' previous and parallel life experiences such as social and education backgrounds, financial situation,, family life or prior workplace practices influence and shape their outlooks and dispositions which their bring into their new workplace environments (Evans et al, 2006: 82).

The following two cases demonstrate the way the learners' previous and parallel life experiences may influence their attitudes towards learning in the workplace also drawing on the role played by the differences in associations that are attached to different learning environments by employees.

<u>Kate's experiences</u>

Kate is a teaching assistant in a college of further education. Her duties involve various responsibilities including helping the tutors with preparing lesson materials, exhibits, equipment and demonstrations, supervising students in classrooms and halls, as well as distributing teaching materials such as textbooks, workbooks and papers to students and providing any other support required to the teaching staff.

She joined an SFL course because she wanted to improve her numeracy skills. Reflecting on her past experiences in secondary school, she noted that she was never able to succeed in maths because she was "labelled" as an underachieving pupil. She said that her level of confidence was so low that she was not able to give a correct answer in maths, even when she knew it. Kate perceived the school setting as an environment where she was not able to achieve, and this affected her motivation at school. She said that her teachers did not really try to support her to boost her confidence. Maths as a school subject never interested her as it seemed very abstract and detached from real life. Kate was quite sure that maths would never be "a useful thing" for her, and the only reason she was doing it was because she was forced to by the school.

Her present position as a teaching assistant in a college of further education has enabled her to develop a number of personal skills, which have helped to boost her confidence and self-assurance. Attending the SFL numeracy course was on her own initiative, because the requirements of her workplace environment increased her motivation towards learning.

Although her current responsibilities do not require a high level of numeracy skills, she feels that developing her maths skills could be useful within her workplace. She noted that from time to time she encountered a situation when a range of numeracy skills, such as multiplication and percentages, could be used and applied. Acquiring and developing maths skills in a work-related setting and applying them in her workplace make her perceive her learning as being directly relevant and useful for her working and personal life.

She noted that the SFL classroom was very different from the setting of her secondary school. When Kate started her SFL course she was really impressed by the modern equipment of the classroom including the whiteboard and PCs as well as comfortable chairs and desks. She said that learning in such an environment made the whole process very stimulating and inspiring. As she described it, the classroom layout was very relaxing. All students were seated in a way that made them feel part of a team.

Kate's case demonstrates that contrasting her past school experiences with those of her current SFL training motivates her towards participating in further learning and skills development. The physical, or spatial, dimension of the acquisition of skills becomes important in this context. The physical surroundings of the classroom, such as the modern equipment and technology, are perceived as part of the stimulating learning environment. In addition, an encouraging and friendly atmosphere in the class and the relevance of SFL learning to the workplace and personal development contribute to the whole concept of a positive learning space.

Maria's experiences

Maria is a mature adult, who works as part of the cleaning team in a primary school. As a school cleaner she had to engage in a range of tasks including being responsible for cleaning certain parts of the school site, using cleaning materials as instructed by the supervisors and operating cleaning machinery in cleaning soft and hard surfaces, e.g. vacuum cleaners and polishers. Her job required a number of personal and social skills including the ability to communicate and follow instructions, the ability to prioritise work and manage time effectively and the ability to communicate with a wide range of people and work as part of a team as well as to be responsive to the changing demands of the post. She has recently been promoted to the position of a supervisor within her cleaning team. As a result she has assumed more diverse and complex responsibilities, and her duties now include tasks such as

monitoring standards of cleaning in line with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations; supervising a cleaning team including assisting with training, recruitment and selection, maximising attendance, team briefing etc.

Maria said that her new position's responsibilities required her to develop basic skills including both numeracy and literacy skills. She admitted that taking classes in literacy and numeracy was for her "a bit like going back to school". However, she perceived her workplace learning environment in a different way, not so much because the environment was different but because there was a considerable change in her own disposition and motivation. Her past school experiences did not facilitate her learning success, because she was not mature enough and not fully motivated. She maintained that her life experiences have brought her a range of responsibilities and commitments that have helped her to grow and mature. The way she experiences her learning space now is associated her perception that the learning environment can enable her to develop her skills in order to succeed in life and further her career. She said that the course helps to boost her confidence not only in professional but also in family settings, as she is now able to help her children with their homework. In addition, the course is useful in terms of helping her to manage her household budget.

Another important aspect is that Maria was undertaking her basic skills training with a group of fellow-learners, some of whom had had similar previous experiences. She felt that she was not alone, and that there was nothing "embarrassing" about learning at a mature age. Maria said that there was a really healthy environment within the classroom, where the learners supported and encouraged each other. This kind of stimulating learning environment was facilitated by the tutor. Maria noted that in addition to acquiring basic skills and competences she also developed her communication skills, which enabled her to make new friends. For Maria the differences in associations that are attached to different learning environments have been related to her growing maturity and shifts in disposition.

These two cases have demonstrated the ways adult learners contrast their past mainstream school experiences with those of their current basic skills courses. The cases and interviews have supported the view that these learners experienced the two types of learning in different

ways; however, the grounds for the differences in their perceptions vary depended on their personal circumstances, life experiences and dispositions. The interviews have indicated that participating in SFL provision has often been associated with a positive perception of the course's relevance to the workplace. The growing maturity and changes in dispositions and motivations of adult learners have also contributed to their positive responses.

The tutors' role and support are other significant aspects that have been mentioned by a majority of our respondents. They noted that at school they had seen a teacher as a very detached figure. As described by one of our interviewees, "the teacher was like a person from another planet". The teaching methods were rather formal, and it was difficult, especially for underachieving pupils, to ask questions and give their answers, when asked by the teacher. The environment at the workplace training course is very different. The learners describe it as informal and relaxed, also emphasising that their tutors are very approachable, friendly and easy to talk to. The vocabulary that they use throughout their teaching is meant to create a friendly and stress-free atmosphere in the lessons.

The in-depth interviews have allowed us to explore other potential advantages and disadvantages of learning in the workplace rather than at a college. This important aspect, which is associated with the physical space at work and the provision of the SFL course in the workplace setting, although away from the employees' immediate 'work stations' locations, is that of convenience and accessibility for the employees. Just under half the learners referred to the relative convenience and accessibility of workplace learning in so far as it fitted in more smoothly with their lives at work and at home. For example, one ESOL learner at a bakery told us: "workplace is better for us because we are here… Because when you go home you've got to see children and you've got to cook and that… and then people don't bother." (Evans and Waite, 2009). For some employees, because of a number of other commitments (such as family and work), participating in the workplace SFL course is the only feasible opportunity to participate in the basic skills provision. The employees reported that time pressures would not have allowed them to travel to remote premises (for example, to colleges of further education) in order to attend a similar course. Being able to undertake a basic skills course at their work and during their working hours makes the courses more accessible, and this considerably motivates the employees to participate in workplace-based SFL. The issue of the course being offered during the employees' working hours seems to be of crucial importance and it has been emphasised by the learners, the tutors and the managers.

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Chart 5 below indicates that in the majority of sites the SFL course has been taking place during the employees' working hours. Over 50% of the managers (Time 2 questionnaires) reported that at their sites (over 50% of the sites sampled) employees have been released from their normal working duties in order to give them an opportunity to attend the SFL course offered at the workplace premises.

New course: is the course taking place during employees' working hours?
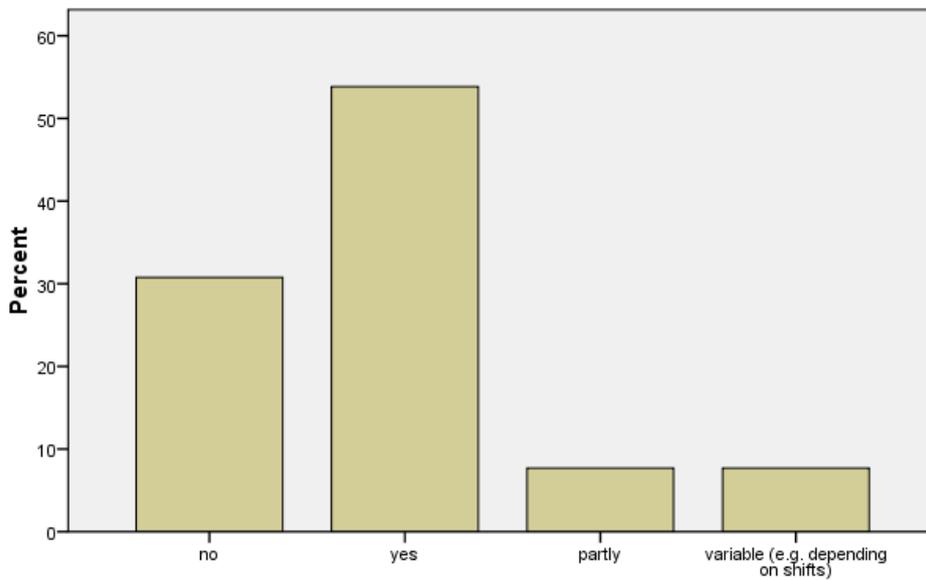
Chart 5: New course: is the course taking place during employees working hours?

Our empirical data further suggest that the majority of managers (over 50 percent) perceived that courses that were offered during the employees' working hours were the most successful (see Chart 6 below).
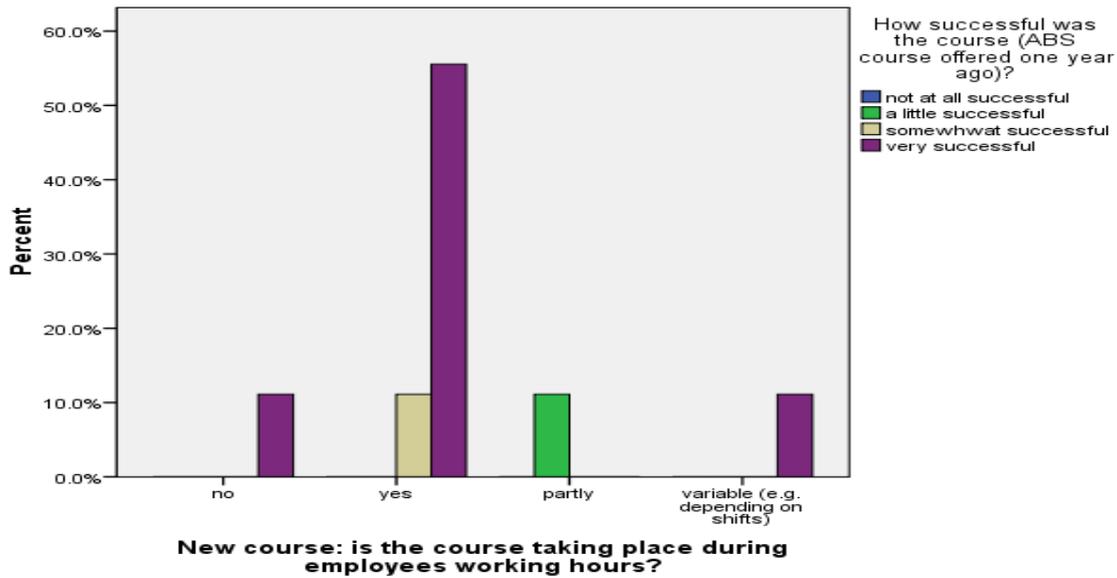
Chart 6: Success of the course offered one year ago

The qualitative data have further indicated that offering the course during employees'
working hours may significantly improve learners' attitudes towards basic skills acquisition
in the workplace. It makes the employees feel that acquiring skills for life is a process that is
considered to be mutually beneficial for both the employees and their employers. Therefore,
employees feel more motivated not only to learn and improve such skills but also to use them
within their workplace environments.

Section 5. Spatial dimensions: requirements of the contemporary workplace

The acquisition of skills for life in the workplace is associated with another important spatial
dimension, which relates to the development of modern technologies. It has been observed
that factors such as rapid technological development and job mobility as well as
unemployment have had a profound impact on competence development in the workplace
(Mulholland et al, 2005). Computer literacy and skills related to the use of technologies are
becoming of utmost importance in the context of workplace and college learning settings.
The use of technologies has been gradually changing approaches to and ways of teaching and
learning in work-related environments. In this context the concept of mobile learning has
been emphasized. As Pachler (2010) stresses, mobile learning is not simply about delivering

content to mobile devices but, instead, about the processes of coming to know and being able to operate successfully in and across new and ever changing contexts and learning spaces.

The expansion of new technologies, such as the internet, email, mobile phones, etc, makes an impact on the concept of the learning space. Certain skills and knowledge can be acquired in so-called virtual settings (e.g. via electronic resources). However, in order to engage in various types of virtual learning, employees need IT skills. The notion of the virtual learning space further loosens the boundaries between different types of environments. Employees are increasingly expected to have good IT skills. There is a growing tendency for 'online paperwork'. In many organisations it is expected that employees are able to complete or work with various forms (e.g. reports, orders, invoices, etc) online. The need to undertake such tasks may create some stress and pressure for some staff in a range of workplaces. The data have indicated that employees who have no or limited IT skills may feel threatened and de-motivated if they are 'forced into' doing or engaging in IT-based activities without prior training. The majority of our respondents, however, reported that the Basic Skills course offered to them has assisted in dealing with such issues.

What motivated the employees was the fact that their newly acquired IT skills could be applied immediately within their workplace settings. In some cases the learners felt that their IT skills really 'make a difference' – in other words they enabled them to perform their jobs better. In addition, being computer-literate enabled them to expand their learning environments by engaging in many types of 'virtual learning' (e.g. through the internet), either tacitly or explicitly. However, it is important to bear in mind that modern (digital) technologies alone do not facilitate learning in the workplace. To be meaningful, e-learning processes need to be grounded in various workplace activities. As e-learning becomes embedded in adult learning in the workplace settings, it may further contribute to facilitating the development of expansive learning environments for adult learners in both workplace and college contexts. Technologies have the potential to enable learners to shape and personalise their learning environments in order to respond to their individual requirements and provide meaningful learning. In addition, these factors may increase both learners' motivation to acquire knowledge and their motivation to use technologies within their learning spaces. E-learning or modern technologies provide opportunities to facilitate and support teaching practices in the workplace context, in particular, by providing flexibility of time and place of

delivery; allowing the sharing and re-use of resources; enabling collaborative working and fostering learning. While both the learners and the tutors may recognize the potential benefits of the technologies, they noticed that all types of technologies need to be implemented carefully taking into account learners' individual needs and backgrounds. Some students may need more training and support before they can feel confident to use technologies. One of the learners, employed in the care sector, experienced the following problems while undertaking her mock computer-based assessment:

> I don't use computers at all so I found that very difficult. It wasn't intimidating or anything but I just don't know computers at all. Because it was the very beginning I didn't really know and what I did wrong, I did the questions and then didn't realise that I could go back and change them. I was just stuck and I couldn't look them up. I just thought you just answered the question and went the next time, I didn't realise you could go back and answer them. But I know now. [Extract from learner's interview]

Our data have shown that if learners' individual needs and requirements are not taken into account, technologies may provide barriers to learning and, as a result, undermine motivation of the learners. Our research suggests that tutors' support may play an important role in the process of supporting the learners in using the modern technologies for the benefit of their learning.


Section 6. Skills for Life at Work: Limitations and Shortcomings

While there are a number of benefits to learning associated with SFL being delivered in the workplace, there are potential shortcoming and limitations associated with basic skills delivery at various workplace sites. As Finlay's research has indicated, there are specific concerns related to a limit to the range and level of courses that can be delivered in the workplace settings. (Finlay, et al, 2007: 23). In terms of other disadvantages of the workplace as a learning space, three employees (two from a bakery and one from a transport company) made a point of mentioning that the pressure of complying with shift work had interfered with their participation in the course. Only four employees (one employee of a bakery and three care workers) stated that they preferred the idea of learning in a college rather than the workplace. Two of them (one employee of a bakery and a care worker) mentioned that they preferred to separate studying from the workplace while another wished

to undertake a longer course and felt this was only possible in a college. The fourth individual, who undertook a management role in a residential care home, was concerned about incurring negative perceptions from her fellow employees, which was possibly related to her relatively low literacy skills (Evans and Waite, 2009).

Another important factor to be considered in this context is that for most workplaces, learning (basic skills training provision, in particular) is not a primary concern. So in most cases learning would take a second place to other priorities (such as the goods or services provision that the relevant companies are associated with).

A related problem in this respect, which is a major concern for the delivery of workplace-based basic skills, is continuity and sustainability of SFL funding (for an update on SFL sustainability and funding, please refer to Waite et al, 2010). The issue of sustainable development of basic skills training in the workplace is of crucial importance. Data from our follow-up questionnaires have indicated that of the 30 organisations that were included, only 13 were still involved in programmes that offered workplace-based basic skills provision to employees. Of the 13 new courses, the majority (31%) were Literacy and Numeracy courses, as shown in Chart 7.

New course: type of basic skills
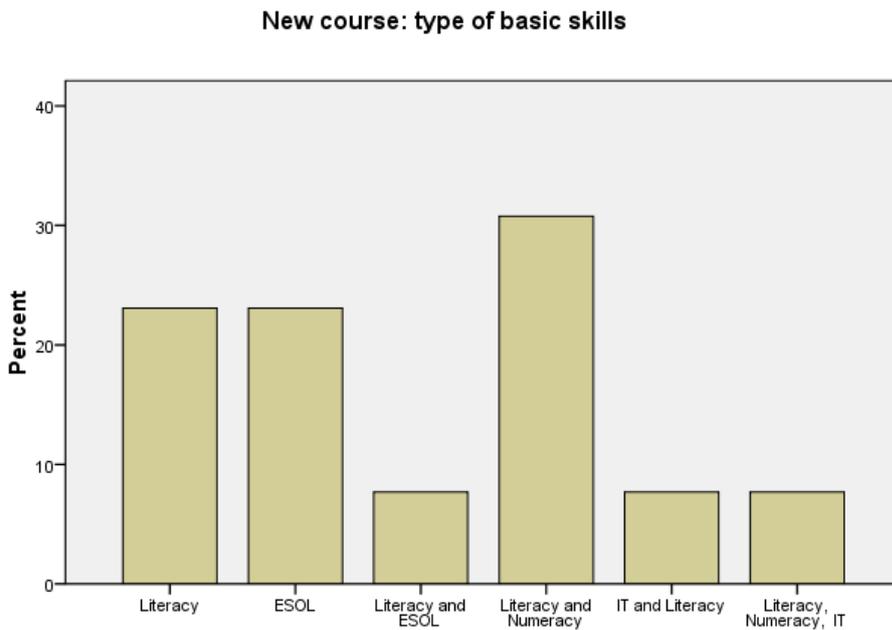
Chart 7 Type of Basic skills

At the time of the follow-up questionnaires, 17 of the companies did not offer any new basic skills courses; in only three cases the managers reported that they would consider offering another basic skills course. In this respect the following factors may have affected the issue of sustainability:

- Difficulties in communicating with training providers (and, also, miscommunication). It has been noted that in some cases providers have been approached but did not respond;
- Company managers' lack of time and/or initiative;
- Learners' lack of motivation (e.g. problems of drop-outs);
- Internal problems/changes within the company (e.g. reorganisation). This could result in some administrative delays. The research has indicated that the companies that have experienced significant changes were less able or willing to consider offering a new basic skills course for their staff.

These data indicate the extent of risk that may affect the sustainability and continuity of learning taking place in workplace settings. The spatial dimensions of workplace-based skills for life provision needs to be considered carefully, taking into account the advantages and shortcomings of this concept.

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Section 7. Conclusions

Learning that takes place outside the classroom is as significant as learning that occurs in formal educational settings (Edwards et al, 2006). The significance of learning that takes place in settings other than the classroom is emphasised by our research findings, which indicate that learning in the workplace setting provides learners with opportunities to acquire a number of significant skills, for example literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, learning in the workplace may facilitate the development of a range of personal skills, including skills such as communication or time-management and enhance learners' confidence and self-assurance. This paper argues that the spatial dimensions of workplace learning facilitate learners' motivations and outcomes towards the acquisition of basic skills. The research findings indicate that the workplace as a type of learning space is associated with positive attitudes and outcomes for our respondents. The research has indicated that spatial associations may play a significant part in enhancing the learning processes and aspirations of adult learners. Developing confidence in the workplace is another significant outcome. Although workplace SFL provision aims to boost skills relating to economic productivity and is focused quite narrowly on one spatial environment – the workplace – learners' motivations are much broader. Our theoretical and empirical research has helped us to underpin and relate learners' skills and motivations to a wider range of differing environments. Apart from using their newly acquired skills in the workplace, learners can also recontextualise their skills to other contexts, for example to their family environments.

Drawing on both theoretical (e.g. Solomon et al, 2006; Unwin and Fuller, 2003) and empirical research we argue that the semiotic significance of the spatial dimension of workplace SFL provision proves to be extremely important in this context. For a better understanding of the issues and problems that could be associated with SFL delivery in the workplace we employed theories that explore the notion of the workplace as a site of learning (Unwin and Fuller, 2003; Evans et al, 2006). Solomon et al's (2006) concept of the workplace space, which could be recognised as being both a work and learning space where the boundary between the two is considerably blurred, enabled us to understand better the way the employees perceive their workplace-based SFL courses. Furthermore, the framework of four types of learning space (Kolb and Kolb, 2005) enabled us to frame and relate the data to the relevant type of learning space and to explore the relationships between them.

The scope of our project allowed the researchers to gain an insight into the *microsystem* and *mesosystem* types of learning space. As our data indicate that the learner's immediate setting, such as a course or classroom located in the workplace space (the *microsystem*), symbolises an environment that is perceived as different from a classroom-like setting where the learner might have had negative prior experiences. Our research has shown that such a *microsystem* is associated with a number of positive developments for the learners, such as increased motivation and positive attitudes towards learning. Literacy and numeracy courses delivered in the workplace setting provide learners with skills that they can embed and contextualise in the same settings (in some cases on the same day) within their workplace tasks and responsibilities, for example using newly acquired literacy skills for filling in relevant forms or writing reports. Our research has further indicated that other concurrent settings in a person's life, such as other courses or home, referred to as the *mesosystem* (Kolb and Kolb, 2005), also play an important role in creating a learning space, where learners acquire, develop and deploy their skills. Our interviews have demonstrated that the employees who participated in the SFL workplace course have often used their literacy and numeracy skills in their family life (e.g. reading a bedtime story to their children or better managing their household budgets). The data suggest that *mesosystem* and *microsystem* are interrelated, and this interrelation may facilitate or undermine learning processes and outcomes. Family settings provide opportunities for employing and developing a range of skills acquired in the course of workplace literacy and numeracy programmes, thus extending the learning space from the workplace to the home environment. The data have also shown the relevance of the *exosystem*, which refers to the formal and informal social structures that influence the learner's immediate environment, workplace policies, procedures and culture. Certain workplace policies (for example, opportunities to attend a SFL course during the employees' working hours) may increase the learners' motivation and learning success. The workspace, as opposed to a college, may offer rewards such as improved career prospects (for example promotion), which provide an additional incentive for taking a SFL course. The exploration of the *macrosystem* that relates to the overarching institutional patterns and values of the wider culture, such as cultural values favouring abstract knowledge over practical knowledge, and their impact on the other types of learning spaces, was outside of the scope of this paper; this issue could be addressed by further research.

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