

Skilled to go evaluation

Researching the effectiveness of the Skilled to go further education toolkit

Prepared for the Office of Fair Trading by LLU + ,
London South Bank University

Annexes A - G

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The executive summary below includes a brief overview of the research project report and a sample of findings and recommendations. This work was undertaken by LLU+, London South Bank University for the Office of Fair Trading (OFT). The views expressed in the publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the OFT.

Introduction

1.2 This report outlines the results of a research project which LLU+, London South Bank University undertook on behalf of the OFT from August 2007 to April 2008. Its main aims were firstly, to test the appropriacy and effectiveness of two modules of the OFT 'Skilled to go' toolkit - a free, online consumer education learning resource with embedded literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy (LLN) – and secondly, to suggest adaptations to the toolkit before it went live.

1.3 The aim of 'Skilled to go' is to develop consumer skills, confidence and knowledge alongside literacy and numeracy skills. Developing the toolkit supports the OFT's consumer education strategic aim to 'give consumers the skills and knowledge to function confidently, effectively and responsibly when buying goods and services'.

Research

1.4 The research consisted of:

- The pilot programme which involved trialling two modules of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit in a range of contexts and settings with 16-18 year old and adult learners.
- Data collection which was undertaken at the beginning and end of the pilot programme to evaluate the effectiveness of the toolkit by benchmarking learners' consumer confidence and knowledge, their perception of their consumer, LLN and IT skills and their ability to

handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills. Data to suggest adaptations was collected through learners' and teachers' feedback on the modules throughout the pilot programme.

- 1.5 The pilot programme took place with learners and teachers in two large further education institutions: City and Islington College, London, England, and Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, Glasgow, Scotland.
- 1.6 Over a six week period, a total of 135 learners in 11 different learning contexts spent over 500 hours trialling materials from the 'Buying and selling' and 'Technology' modules of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit. Of these, 78 learners participated in the profiling and benchmarking data gathering activities. A total of 95 learners and 10 teachers took part in the feedback on the resources and the results were outstanding.

Research findings

- 1.7 The research showed that **the 'Skilled to go' toolkit is an excellent vehicle for raising consumer skills, knowledge and confidence as well as learners' ability to handle consumer scenarios with related LLN skills.**
- 1.8 On average, over the six week pilot period **learners' consumer knowledge improved by 13 per cent, with increases of 14 per cent in their ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy skills and eight per cent for handling consumer scenarios with related numeracy skills.** The consumer scenarios included identifying questions to ask before buying a mobile phone, writing a letter of complaint, estimating the cost of items and calculating a discount.
- 1.9 Learners' perceptions of their consumer skills also showed considerable gains. For example:
 - by the end of the pilot programme 24 per cent more learners said that in future they would always or usually think about what features

of a product or service are important to them before buying, compared to at the start

- the proportion of learners who said they would always compare the advantages and disadvantages of goods and services before buying, rose by around 20 per cent during the pilot programme.

1.10 Learners' confidence also developed. Examples include:

- Confidence to research products and services using methods such as newspapers, the telephone or internet grew: over 50 per cent of learners said that they felt very or quite confident doing this by the end of the pilot programme compared to around 30 per cent of learners at the start.
- Learners' confidence in knowing their rights as a consumer also increased. At the beginning, just over 20 per cent said they were very or quite confident in this and around 30 per cent said they were not confident or unsure. After the pilot programme, 64 per cent said they now felt very or quite confident with only four per cent saying that they were not confident.
- The proportion of learners who felt very or quite confident in being able to find out about their rights regarding consumer issues doubled over the course of the pilot programme.

1.11 The 'Skilled to go' toolkit proved to be very effective with learners at Level 1/Intermediate 1 who were the target group. It was also successful above Level 1/Intermediate 1 and at Entry level 3/Access 3 and below, when used with appropriate support. The toolkit was therefore, adaptable and flexible enough to use with learners outside the target group.

1.12 'Skilled to go' was found to have particular appeal to:

- groups of learners who are traditionally harder to reach in an educational setting, such as young males
- learners in a range of learning contexts including discrete literacy and numeracy courses and vocational courses, and
- learners who generally require longer periods to demonstrate progress in their skills such as language (ESOL) learners and learners with learning difficulties such as Asperger's syndrome. There was evidence that these learners were motivated by the link with citizenship skills and by an enhanced feeling of inclusion in society.

Teachers' views

1.13 Teachers rated the toolkit highly both as an authorable resource and for addressing the needs of their learners, as the quotes below demonstrate:

'There's a definite need for these materials.'

'I think they're fantastic, personally.'

'The less confident have become more confident.'

'This is not just for learners, I've learned a lot too.'

1.14 One teacher managed to get a £100 refund during the pilot programme due to her improved consumer knowledge and confidence.

1.15 All but one teacher said they would be likely to use the 'Skilled to go' toolkit in their future teaching.

1.16 Most of the teachers reported that they found it very easy to find what they needed on the OFT website.

1.17 All teachers said their learners enjoyed using the materials from the toolkit. They highlighted how much their learners really enjoyed the group work and interactive activities: one said,

'my learners absolutely loved them.'

Behaviour change

1.18 Interviews with learners during and after the trialling of the modules revealed changes in behaviour relating to application of consumer skills, knowledge and confidence.

- One learner said in the final learner interviews that he 'checked price comparison sites and saved £125 on a laptop'.
- One learner had recently travelled abroad and when she told the group the cost of her air fare, they told her it was too expensive. Another learner from the class then showed her how to compare prices and get a cheaper ticket on the internet.

1.19 Learners on ESOL courses were consistently highly positive about their increased skills and confidence:

- They also provided numerous examples of successful application of what they learnt for themselves, their friends and family. This clearly indicates how much they had benefited from even a brief exposure to the modules.
- One learner said they managed to replace a coat.
- Another commented, 'Now I know how important receipts are.'
- Another said they told a friend what they had learned about consumer issues and the friend then took back a faulty heater and got it replaced.
- The class teacher said, 'That's what's nice about it – learners are going home and telling people about it.'

Recommendations

1.20 The recommendations include suggestions for:

- rolling out and extending the 'Skilled to go' toolkit
- developing an online teacher training module on contextualised LLN for teachers
- a section on the website to collect feedback from teachers on learners' application of consumer skills in their daily lives, and
- using the methodology developed in this research project if further modules are to be evaluated.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

2.1 This report outlines the results of the research project which was undertaken to test the appropriacy and effectiveness of two modules of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit - a free, online consumer education learning resource with embedded literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy (LLN).

2.2 LLU+, London South Bank University developed the 'Skilled to go' toolkit for the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to support the OFT's consumer education strategy, which aims to,
'Give consumers the skills and knowledge to function confidently, effectively and responsibly when buying goods and services'.

2.3 The OFT's consumer education work supports people to become more confident, assertive consumers who can help to promote competitive markets by demanding high standards from business.

2.4 The 'Skilled to go' toolkit was launched in June 2008 on the OFT website¹. It currently comprises three modules. It aims to develop consumer skills, knowledge and confidence, together with related literacy, language and numeracy skills. Examples of the type of consumer skills the toolkit aims to develop include the ability to:

- research relevant information to help make consumer choices
- consider personal needs and preferences before making a consumer decision
- analyse the features of consumer goods and services to identify their pros and cons
- compare consumer goods or services to make the best choice for individual circumstances

¹ See www.offt.gov.uk/skilledtogo.

- communicate effectively in a wide range of consumer situations
- identify sources of help to deal with consumer problems, and
- handle consumer problems effectively.

2.5 The importance of the relationship between consumer education and literacy and numeracy skills is recognised by the OFT in its consumer education strategy², which explains that 'the confidence and skills that consumer education aims to develop depend on sound levels of literacy and numeracy'. The OFT also states that its 'strategy for consumer education will benefit from, and complement' the Government's Skills for Life strategy which aims in the long term to eliminate poor literacy and numeracy'.

2.6 The serious consequences of low levels of literacy and numeracy were described by the then DfES in their 2003 'Skills for Life' impact survey³ as leading 'to social exclusion, denying people the opportunity to get the most out of what is available to the rest of society'. This is certainly true in relation to people's opportunities as consumers. The OFT's consumer education strategy outlines that improved basic skills would allow consumers 'to make better choices'. Underpinning the ability to make better consumer choices are a range of consumer skills which people with improved basic skills would also be able to access. Low levels of literacy and numeracy can make it difficult for people to, for example, get the best deals, avoid being pressurised into making buying decisions, lower the risk of making unsuitable purchases by being able to ask the right questions or read a contract before buying, make product or service comparisons, complain effectively or know where to get help if things go wrong.

² OFT/753 *Consumer education: a strategy and framework, November 2004*
www.oft.gov.uk/shared_oft/consumer_education/oft753.pdf.

³ *The Skills for Life Survey: A national needs and impact survey of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, DFES Research Report 490, 2003*
www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR490.pdf.

- 2.7 The 'Skilled to go' toolkit aims to develop learners' consumer skills and knowledge and their confidence in consumer situations, alongside developing their LLN skills. By strengthening learners' skills in these complementary areas, the OFT aims to support people to become more effective consumers who can transfer their learning between different consumer situations and thereby gain access to a wider range of consumer opportunities. Armed with skills, knowledge and confidence, people can make the most appropriate consumer choices for their circumstances and in some instances the most appropriate choice may be not to make a purchase at all.
- 2.8 The 'Skilled to go' toolkit has significant potential for further development. Further modules will be added and there are plans to repackage the existing content for different audiences or different course offerings. There is an ongoing programme to review and update the modules to keep the content current.
- 2.9 The OFT commissioned LLU+, London South Bank University, not only to develop the first three modules of the toolkit, but also to undertake research into the effectiveness of two of the modules with learners and teachers in two large further education institutions in the United Kingdom.
- 2.10 LLU+ is a teacher training and consultancy centre based at London South Bank University. Its aim is 'to help organisations improve the quality of education and training so that individuals with a wide range of language and learning needs can achieve success'. It does this through pioneering and disseminating innovative approaches and good practice in teaching and learning. These approaches informed not only the development of the toolkit but also the research methodology.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 The overall aims of the research were to:

- measure the effectiveness of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit in developing consumer skills, knowledge and confidence and related LLN skills, and
- evaluate how suitable the 'Buying and selling' and 'Technology' modules of the toolkit were for use in a teaching and learning setting.

3.2 The main objectives were to:

- produce and administer high quality benchmarking and evaluation tools
- administer and quality assure a pilot programme to trial two modules of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit with learners in a range of learning contexts
- measure the effectiveness of these modules in developing consumer skills, confidence, knowledge and ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills, and
- make recommendations for adaptations to the modules based on analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data.

3.3 The five key research questions were:

- What level of consumer confidence, knowledge, skills, and ability to apply these do learners have at the start and end of the pilot programme?
- What are the LLN skills of learners at a range of levels and ages at the start and end of the pilot programme?

- What progress have learners made in consumer skills, confidence, knowledge and in ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills through engaging with the modules?
- To what extent do the trialled modules of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit appropriately address all target groups, contexts and settings?
- To what extent are the trialled modules of the toolkit accessible to teachers and learners in different contexts and settings?

4 METHODOLOGY

The research

4.1 The research consisted of:

- The pilot programme which involved trialling two modules of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit in a range of contexts and settings over a six week period to evaluate the effectiveness of the resources and document suggested adaptations to the toolkit before it went live.
- The data collection which was undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of the toolkit by benchmarking learners' consumer confidence and knowledge, their perception of their consumer, IT and LLN skills and their ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills at the beginning and end of the pilot programme. Data to suggest adaptations was collected through learners' and teachers' feedback on the modules throughout the pilot programme.

The pilot programme

4.2 The pilot programme took place with learners and teachers in two large further education institutions, City and Islington College, London, England, and Glasgow College of Nautical Studies, Glasgow, Scotland.

4.3 A total of 135 learners in 11 different learning contexts spent over 500 hours trialling materials from the 'Buying and selling' and 'Technology' modules. Of these, 78 learners participated in the profiling and benchmarking. A total of 95 learners and 10 teachers took part in the feedback on the resources themselves.

4.4 For details of the selection criteria for the pilot programme sites and a breakdown of participation see Annexe A.

4.5 For background information on how the pilot programme operated in practice see Annexe B. This includes:

- the range of materials teachers had access to during the pilot programme
- how the teachers used the 'Skilled to go' toolkit
- the support offered to teachers by LLU + project team, and
- the process for collecting learner and teacher feedback on the materials and activities.

Data collection

4.6 Data was gathered through:

- Profiling learners at the start of the pilot programme. Questionnaires were designed to gather personal information including socio-economic background, information about education and experience of learning.
- For the content of the profiling questionnaire see Annexe C.
- Benchmarking. This involved establishing learners' consumer skills, knowledge, confidence and ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills at the start and end of the pilot programme.
- Criteria for the benchmarking tools included:
 - content and context to be based on the content and context of the modules to be trialled
 - appropriacy for use in FE colleges, community and voluntary provision, prisons, etc

- relevancy to learners from different age groups and learning contexts
- provision of interesting and real-life, authentic activities
- learner-centred activities
- the need to ensure the tools developed provided robust evidence and were also usable within the limited time teachers and learners could give to the pilot programme - which was additional to their allotted timetables and syllabi
- accommodating national variations in England and Scotland.

For more details of the benchmarking tools see Annexe D.

- **Evaluating** the effectiveness of the materials. The evaluation tools were designed to measure learners' and teachers' reactions to the trialled modules:
 - immediately after completion of an activity
 - at the mid point of the pilot programme
 - at the end point of the pilot programme.

The evaluation tools included activity tasks, paper-based questionnaires, and face-to-face group interviews with both learners and teachers.

For more details of the evaluation tools see Annexe E.

Factors affecting the research

The research brief

4.7 Factors from the brief which influenced the design of the tools and process were the need:

- for the benchmarking and evaluation tools to be used with learners in their usual learning environment without requiring any specialist equipment or technology
- to ensure standardisation of the process
- for straightforward systems and procedures for data collection
- for a robust measure of how effective the 'Skilled to go' toolkit is in developing learners' consumer skills, knowledge and confidence and related LLN
- to complete the pilot programmes over a six week period, and
- to measure learners' ability to handle simulated consumer scenarios, as it was not possible to measure consumer skills in real life situations.

LLU + philosophy

4.8 The development of the benchmarking, evaluation tools and the pilot programme was underpinned by the LLU + philosophy of learner-empowerment.

4.9 Therefore, the methodology needed to be learner-centred. To fulfil this aim, the benchmarking and evaluation tools were designed to:

- accommodate different learners' learning styles and preferences

- provide meaningful and relevant contexts in which learners' skills, interests, enthusiasm and confidence could be benchmarked and measured in a non-threatening and learner-friendly environment
- enable learners to recognise their own consumer knowledge, skills and confidence and their LLN skills, and
- encourage candid feedback from learners and teachers about the trialled modules and their experience of taking part in the pilot programme.

The Kirkpatrick model of evaluation

4.10 The Kirkpatrick model of evaluation was followed because it is recognised as an effective method to ensure a full and significant evaluation of learning. It has four stages: reaction, learning, behaviour and results. The approaches and principles of this model were adopted as far as was possible within the parameters of the project. For example, measurement of behaviour change according to the Kirkpatrick model is best conducted three to six months after learning as this allows time for individuals to implement new learning and for retention of new knowledge and skills to be checked. However, this timescale was obviously not possible within the six week period of the pilot programme therefore, it was immediate impact that was measured.

4.11 For more information on the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation and how it was used see Annexe F.

Equality and diversity

4.12 Equality and diversity were addressed:

- in the format, lay-out, content and methodology of the benchmarking and evaluation tools
- in ensuring the tools were free of bias and presented positive role models rather than stereotypes

- through including differentiation to identify the varying skills, strengths and distance travelled of participating learners
- by ensuring the tools, the process of using them and guidance were user-friendly, accessible and clear to give a positive experience for the learner, and
- by ensuring standardisation of measurement.

Sustainability

4.13 The benchmarking and evaluation tools were designed as prototypes and so can be adapted for future consumer education projects. This brings time, cost and environmental savings.

Application of the benchmarking and evaluation tools

4.14 The benchmarking tools were quality assured prior to their use in the pilot programme and amended in the light of this process.

4.15 LLU+ project team briefed the teachers and managers from the participating colleges on the project prior to the pilot programme and trained the teachers on administering the tools and using the modules.

4.16 Good practice principles and procedures guided the delivery of the pre and post benchmarking and a mark scheme was drawn up and administered by LLU+ project team.

4.17 For further details see Annexe G.

4.18 A series of paper-based consumer scenario tasks were designed to measure the distance travelled by learners during the pilot programme. Completion of these tasks required a combination of consumer skills and knowledge and related LLN skills. The scenarios included:

- identifying questions to ask before buying a mobile phone

- writing a dialogue to negotiate a refund on a consumer item
- writing a letter of complaint
- estimating the cost of a range of items and calculating a discount and the VAT on these.

4.19 These tools were designed to simulate authentic situations as it was not possible to measure changes in consumer skills in situ. Measuring consumer skills changes in situ would have necessitated making a video or audio recording of learners, for example, carrying out consumer-related tasks in everyday life or engaged in classroom-based research and analysis activities, in order to ensure standardised marking. The scenarios chosen reflect the fact that in real life people's ability to read, write, speak, listen and manage numbers effectively can impact on their ability to handle consumer situations effectively. The tools used provided a robust method of measuring whether learners' ability to deal effectively with consumer situations had changed after participating in the pilot programme.

4.20 These scenarios are referred to in the research findings as 'ability to handle consumer scenarios' with either 'related literacy skills' or 'related numeracy skills' depending on the requirements of the scenario. When findings are presented in the form of a chart, the name of the data is shortened, in order to save space, to 'handling consumer scenarios with related literacy skills' or 'handling consumer scenarios with related numeracy skills'.

4.21 Data was gathered at each stage of the evaluation.

- The first stage (reaction)
 - captured teachers' and the learners' immediate responses to the materials (also referred to by Kirkpatrick as the 'happiness rating') using activity feedback sheets for teachers and learners

- responses from specialist focus groups, networks and representative sample groups of learners were also recorded.
- The second stage (learning)
 - captured any change in learners' consumer skills, knowledge and confidence and in their ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills.
- The third stage (behaviour)
 - measured behaviour change, that is, as a result of taking part in the pilot programme, what, if any, learning had been retained and used outside of the classroom. This was measured using observation as well as semi-structured interviews half-way through and at the end of the pilot programme.
- The fourth stage (results)
 - measured the overall impact of the pilot programme on teachers and learners through group discussions and a final evaluation questionnaire.

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

5.1 The findings relate to the two main strands of research conducted in the pilot programme. These were to:

- measure the effectiveness of the modules in developing learners' consumer skills, knowledge, confidence and ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills
- gather responses and recommendations from teachers and learners in order to adapt the 'Skilled to go' toolkit prior to its launch in June 2008.

5.2 This chapter focuses firstly on the effectiveness of the toolkit, before outlining the feedback from teachers and learners about 'Skilled to go' and finally presents examples of adaptations that were made prior to launch as a result of the feedback.

Effectiveness of the 'Skilled to go' toolkit

5.3 The findings about the effectiveness of the toolkit are organised into two parts. The overall findings are outlined from **5.4** to **5.31**. While the findings are broken down into various factors which may have an effect on learning from **5.32** to **5.53**.

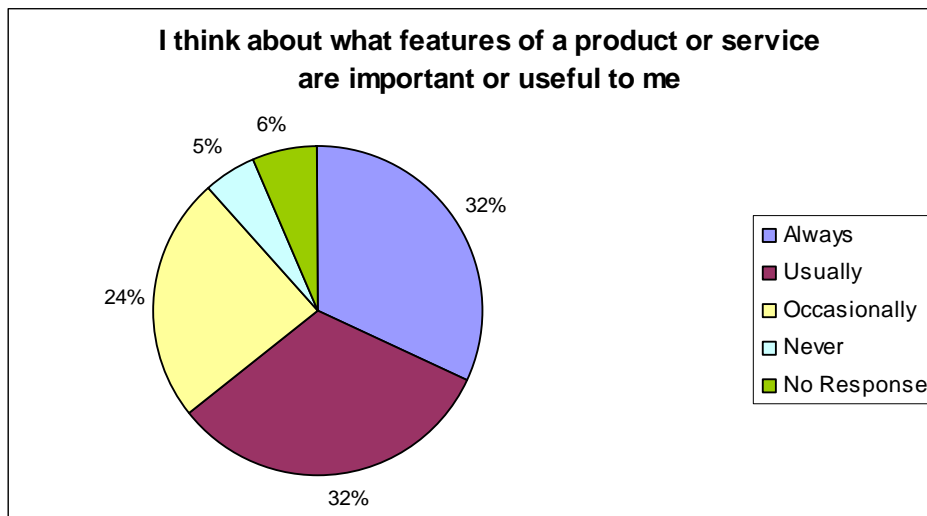
Overall findings

5.4 The summary of findings is based on an analysis of data which has been gathered from teachers and learners in the pilot programme sites. These findings focus on the key aspects of the OFT aims and objectives for this research project as outlined in Chapter three of this report.

Learners' perceptions of their consumer skills

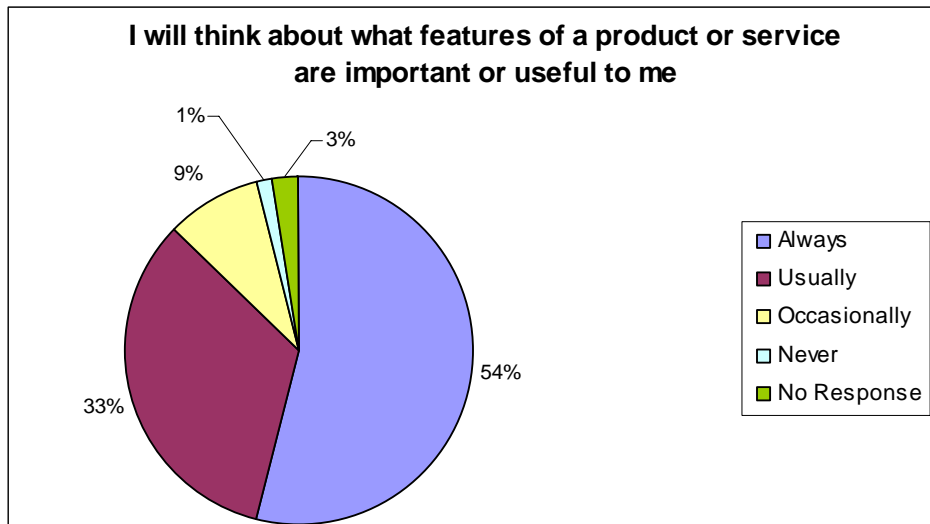
- 5.5 At the start of the pilot programme, learners were asked what their current practices were regarding buying products and services. At the end, they were asked about their intentions regarding those same practices.
- 5.6 An example of responses from the cohort of learners is shown below. For more charts showing responses to a selection of questions see Annexe I.

Chart 1 Pre pilot programme



Total number of learners: 78

Chart 2 Post pilot programme



Total number of learners: 78

- 5.7 The pie charts above show a substantial increase in the percentage of learners who intend to consider the important features of products or services before buying them. After the pilot programme only 1.3 per cent, which represents one person, said they would still not consider these features before buying.
- 5.8 Learners were also asked at the start and end of the pilot programme about whether they compared the advantages and disadvantages of different goods and services before making a choice. At the end of the pilot programme, almost 50 per cent of the respondents to this question said that they would always do this in future compared with less than 30 per cent who did this at the start of the pilot programme. Similarly, at the end of the pilot programme, over 33 per cent of respondents said that from now on they would always check for terms and conditions, small print and so on compared with 20 per cent who said they always did this before.
- 5.9 At the end of the pilot programme, data was gathered from learners about the ways in which they find the best product for their needs. In every case, there was an increase in the percentage of learners who

would always or usually do research first to help them with their decision compared to responses at the start. Responses to some questions showed a particularly large improvement, such as the questions about going to several shops or different companies and doing research on the internet to find the best product. At the start of the pilot programme, only just over 30 per cent of the learners said that they always or usually researched the best product for their needs on the internet. At the end, almost 70 per cent of learners said that in future they would always or usually do this.

- 5.10 It is therefore clear that sizeable proportions of learners intended to change their behaviour as a result of taking part in the pilot programme.

Behaviour change

- 5.11 Interviews with learners during and after the trialling of the modules revealed some changes in behaviour relating to application of consumer skills, knowledge and confidence. **One learner said in the final learner interviews that during the pilot programme he 'checked price comparison sites and saved £125 on a laptop'.**
- 5.12 Yet another learner recently travelled abroad and when she told the group the cost of her air fare, they told her it was too expensive. One learner from the class then showed her how to compare prices and get a cheaper ticket on the internet.
- 5.13 One learner working at about Entry 2/Access 2 said that it was very challenging but he felt he had learnt something from it. He said, 'I am a lot calmer now when it comes to dealing with people selling.' **Another learner from this group said that they returned a faulty item to their local pound shop because they had the confidence to do this now.** The class teacher agreed, saying 'confidence has improved on the consumer education side – they feel more included in society.'

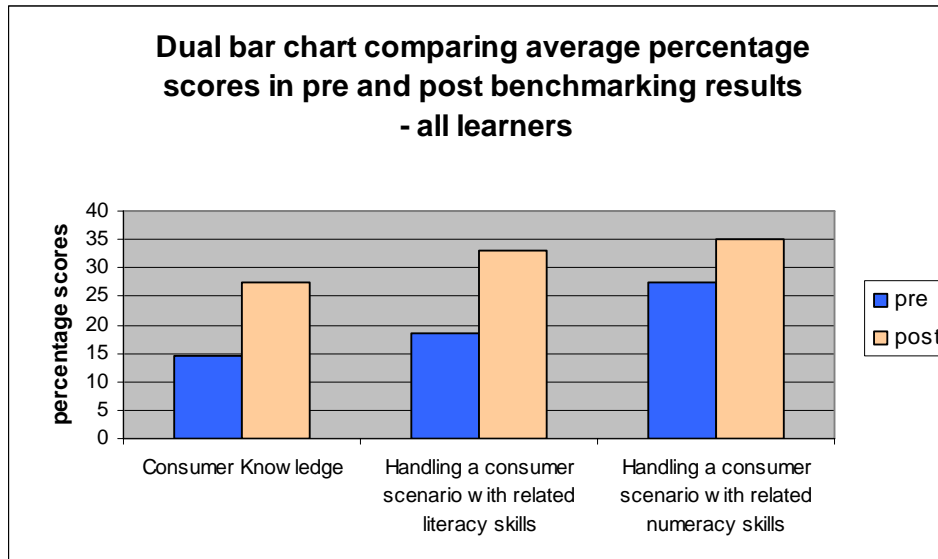
- 5.14 One group of 16-18 year old learners said 'now we know more words about technology we can explain problems.' Another learner said, 'If they say no in a shop I can talk to the CAB.'
- 5.15 Several learners from one of the literacy with numeracy groups appeared to be very enthusiastic about what they had learned. One learner from this group said that she now 'checks receipts for correct prices,' whereas 'before I didn't care.' Another learner said that they 'check prices at different supermarkets to get the best value'.
- 5.16 In whole class interviews ESOL learners were consistently highly positive about their participation in the pilot programme and their increased skills and confidence. For example, one learner said that the toolkit was 'very useful for ESOL learners' and 'very helpful for English'. **They also provided numerous examples of real life application of this for themselves, their friends and family and so clearly benefited significantly from even a fairly brief exposure to the materials.** For example, one learner said they managed to replace a coat. Another learner commented, 'Now I know how important receipts are.' One more said they told a friend what they had learned about consumer issues and the friend then took back a faulty heater and got it replaced. The class teacher said, '**That's what's nice about it – learners are going home and telling people about it.**'
- 5.17 One Entry 3/Access 3 learner studying in a numeracy class found learning about consumer issues really helpful as she was able to 'phone BT about a very high bill which BT agreed to check'. She also found out about some free calls that she could have after 6pm. Another Entry 3/Access 3 numeracy learner said he has 'found cheaper prices' since being involved with the pilot programme. The group generally said that being involved 'gave confidence' and they unanimously agreed that it was relevant to them.
- 5.18 Behaviour change wasn't restricted to learners. Teachers also reported improvements. For example, one teacher managed to get a £100 refund due to her improved consumer knowledge and confidence.

Benchmarking results

Consumer knowledge and the ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills

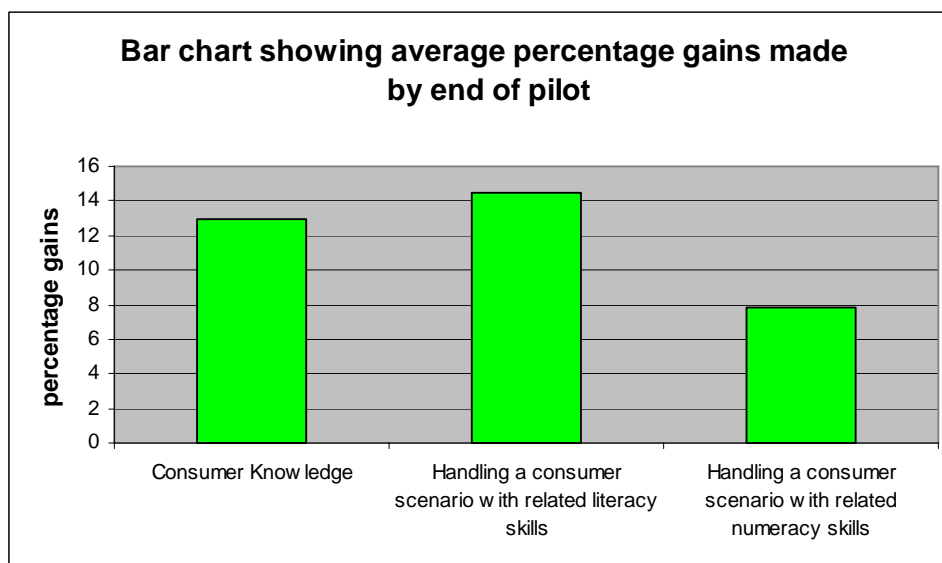
5.19 Taking learners who completed both the pre and post benchmarking as a whole, it can be seen that there was an improvement in the average percentage scores in consumer knowledge, and in learners' ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy and numeracy skills. **The greatest gains were made in learners' ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy skills: just over a 14 per cent improvement** in the average scores from the pre and post assessments. **There was an improvement of 13 per cent in learners' scores for consumer knowledge** and **around an eight per cent improvement for their ability to handle consumer scenarios with related numeracy skills.**

Chart 3



Total number of learners: 68

Chart 4



Total number of learners: 68

Confidence in consumer skills and knowledge

5.20 Learners were asked questions before and after the pilot programme about their confidence in their knowledge of consumer rights and their consumer skills. Below are learners' responses to some of the questions that were asked.

5.21 For more charts showing responses to the questions see Annexe I.

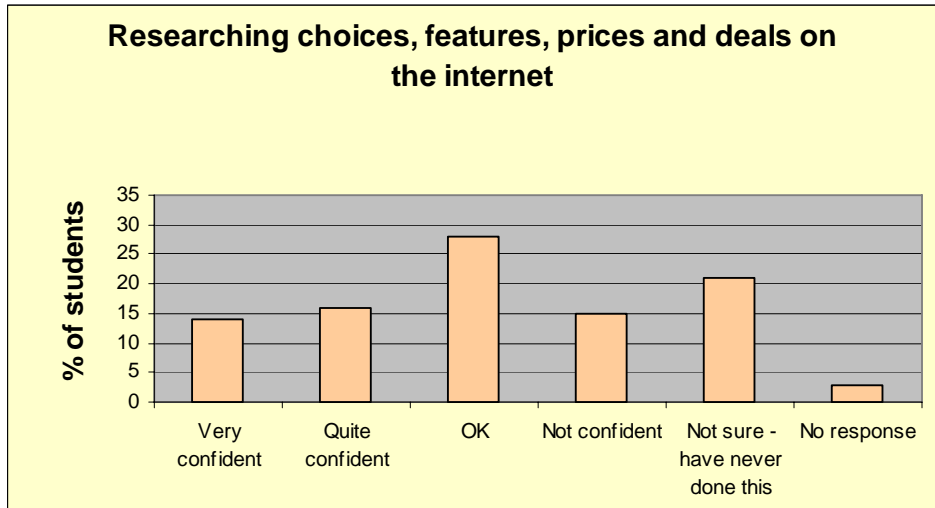
Researching choices, features, prices and deals/buying something on the internet and getting a good deal

5.22 There were also significant improvements in confidence relating to researching choices and prices through different types of media such as newspapers, telephone and the internet. Before the pilot programme around 30 per cent of learners said that they already felt confident in doing this. This had improved by the end of the pilot programme, with over 50 per cent of learners saying they now felt very or quite confident in doing this. Only just over five per cent of learners said that they were

not confident in researching choices and prices through paper-based media and on the telephone. The figure was slightly higher for the internet - this may be because some classes did not have internet access.

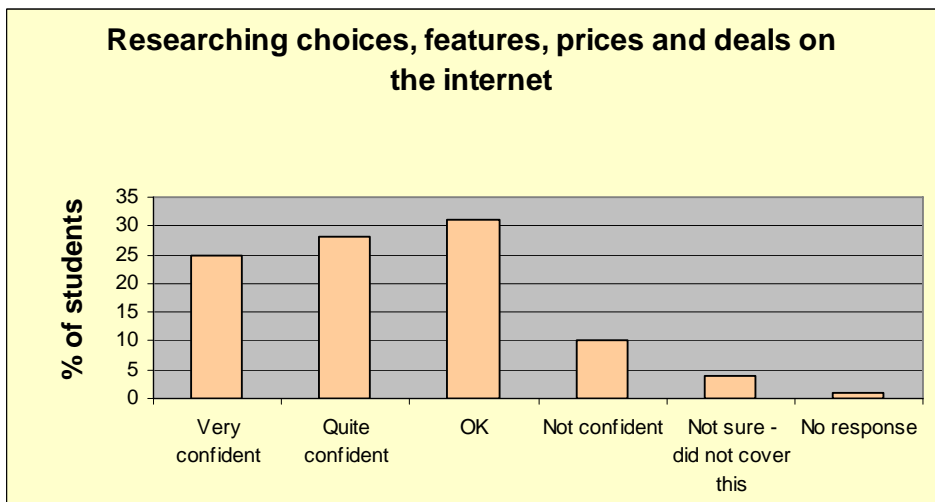
- 5.23 This may also help to explain why around 35 per cent of learners were still not confident in making purchases on the internet by the end of the pilot programme. However, there had been improvements here also as at the beginning around half of the learners were not confident about this activity. Additionally, approximately 40 per cent of learners felt very or quite confident in this skill as opposed to only 25 per cent who felt this way at the start of the pilot programme.
- 5.24 With regard to getting a good deal, almost a quarter of the learners already felt very confident about this at the start, and this proportion remained the same at the end of the pilot programme. However, there was a big improvement in the proportion of learners feeling quite confident by the end – just over 30 per cent felt quite confident about getting a good deal by the end, compared with 18 per cent of learners who felt this way before. Also, about 20 per cent of learners were not confident, or unsure, about getting a good deal before taking part in the pilot programme. This percentage had dropped to around seven per cent by the end.

Chart 5 Pre pilot programme



Total number of learners: 117

Chart 6 Post pilot programme

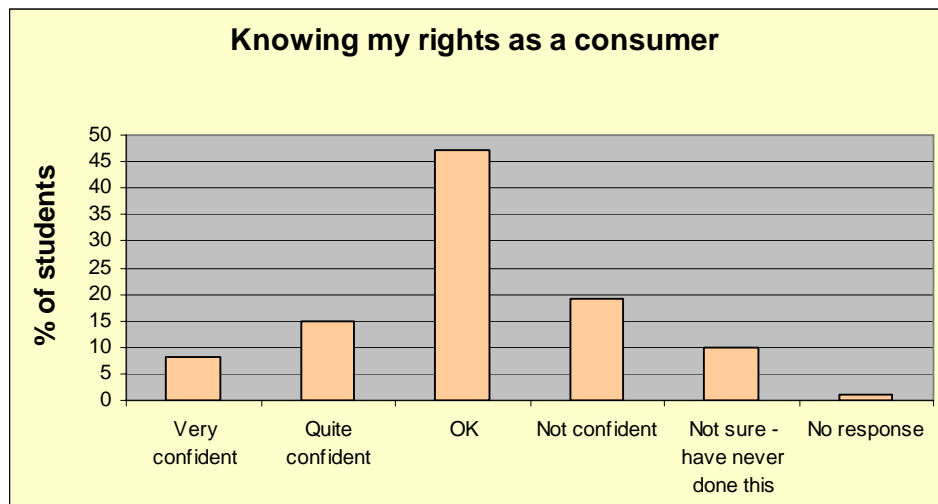


Total number of learners: 92

Knowing/finding out rights as a consumer

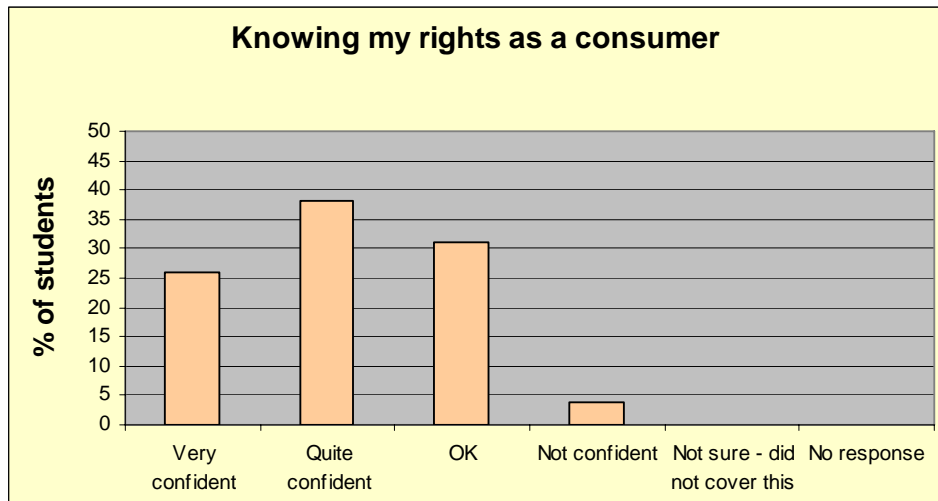
- 5.25 When the learners were asked how confident they felt about knowing their rights as a consumer at the beginning of the pilot programme, only just over 20 per cent said they were very or quite confident with around 30 per cent saying that they were not confident or not sure. After the pilot programme, 64 per cent of the learners said that they now felt very or quite confident, with only four per cent saying they were not confident.
- 5.26 A significant improvement in confidence could also be seen regarding learners' ability to find out their rights regarding particular consumer issues. The percentage who felt very or quite confident with this more than doubled, going from 23 per cent to 52 per cent. At the start of the pilot programme, around 40 per cent of the learners were not confident or not sure as they had never looked into their consumer rights. This improved to approximately only 12 per cent of the learners saying that they were not confident or not sure by the end.

Chart 7 Pre pilot programme



Total number of learner: 117

Chart 8 Post pilot programme



Total number of learners: 92

Returning items to shops/making complaints

- 5.27 There was around a 10 per cent rise in the percentage of learners who felt very confident about returning faulty goods. The proportion of people who did not feel confident or were unsure about this had also halved by the end of the pilot programme. In addition, females were already confident in this aspect, but males reported a significant improvement in their confidence by the end of the pilot programme.
- 5.28 Improvements in confidence were made regarding making complaints such as by letter and on the phone or directly to sales assistants or managers. The biggest improvement was made with writing a letter of complaint where originally only about 17 per cent of learners had felt very or quite confident. **This had risen to approximately 40 per cent by the end, and the percentage who felt unsure or not confident had dropped from over 50 per cent to just over 20 per cent.**

Checking bills and invoices and following up errors

- 5.29 Extremely good improvements were made relating to confidence in checking bills and invoices. Before the pilot programme approximately 30 per cent of learners were not confident about doing this or had never tried to check bills or invoices. This figure fell to just under eight per cent by the end of the pilot programme. In addition, by the end, over 60 per cent of learners felt very or quite confident that they could check their bills or invoices. Similar, but slightly smaller improvements were made with regard to having the confidence to follow up errors on bills. This is as expected because confidence in this element of consumer competence usually takes longer to develop.

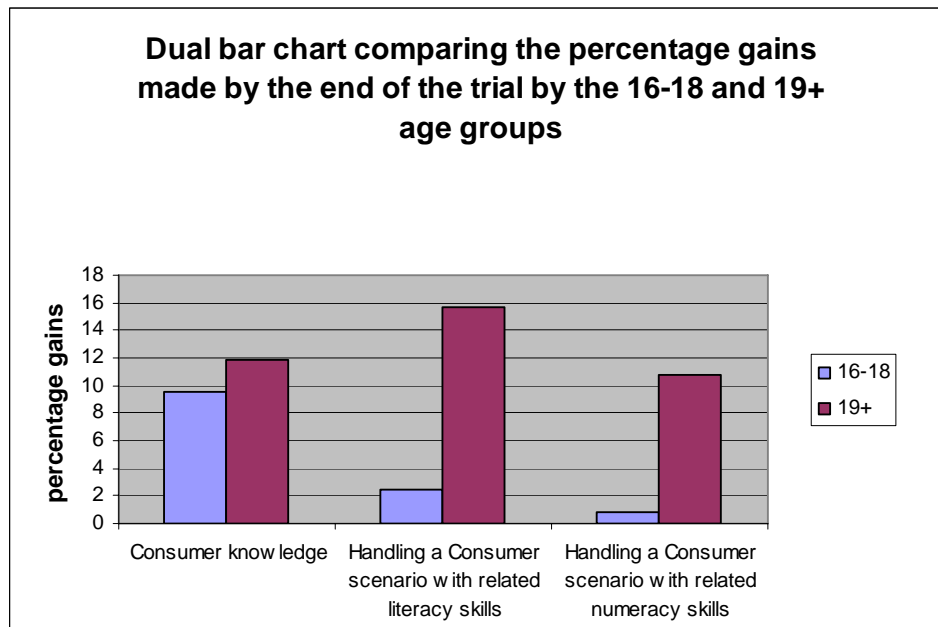
Learners' perceptions of their LLN and IT skills

- 5.30 Evidence from the learners' self assessments indicates an improvement in their speaking, listening, reading, writing, maths and IT skills. There were higher percentages of learners saying that they felt very strong or good for all of these skills and lower percentages saying that they did not feel good about them at the end of the pilot programme than at the start.
- 5.31 As learners often underestimate their abilities and skills in assessments it is very positive to note that over 80 per cent of learners felt that they had made at least a little progress in their literacy and language skills. Learners working below Entry 3/Access 3 and those working at Level1/Intermediate 1 and above assessed themselves as making most progress in their speaking and listening skills, with around 80 per cent reporting that they had made a lot or quite a lot of progress in these skills. Learners working at Entry 3/Access 3 reacted differently. The best results were seen in their reading skills, with 80 per cent of learners saying that they had improved a lot or quite a lot in these skills.

Breakdown of findings by category

5.32 This section includes a discussion about how effective the two trialled modules of the toolkit were in relation to the following key factors that may have an effect on learning. These were age, gender, context, levels of LLN.

Chart 9 Age



Total number of learners: 78

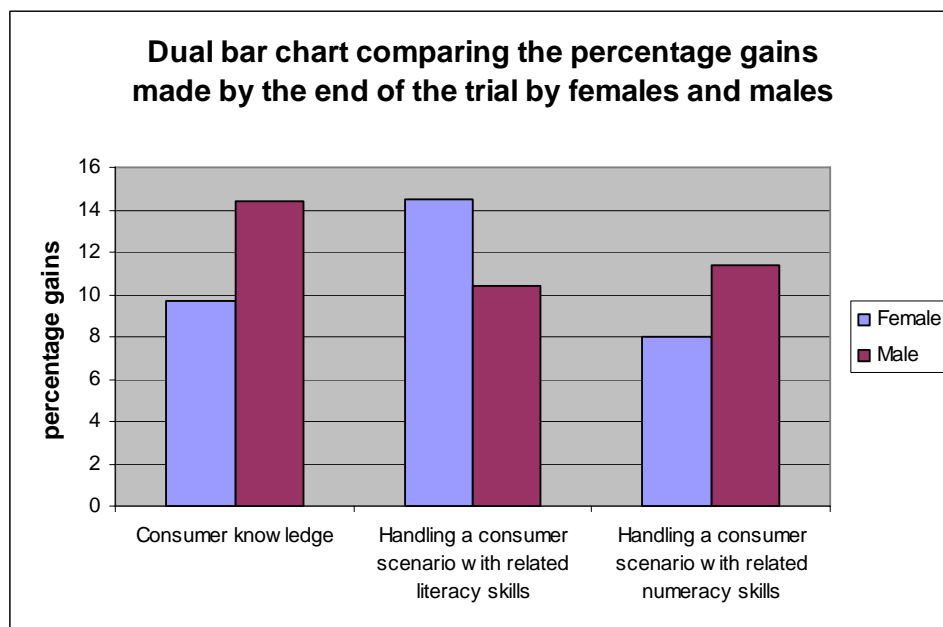
5.33 Learners aged 19+ (19+) started off with higher average scores in consumer knowledge, as might be expected from people who have more life experience, but both age groups made similar levels of progress in this area. Learners aged 16-18 (16-18) gained on average nearly 10 per cent in the consumer knowledge part of the assessment by the end of the pilot programme, and 19+ learners gained approximately 12 per cent.

5.34 While 16-18 learners made greatest progress in their consumer knowledge, 19+ learners made greatest progress in their ability to

handle consumer scenarios with related literacy skills, on average a 16 per cent gain. This is particularly noteworthy in such a brief period of learning. **They also made good progress in handling consumer scenarios with related numeracy skills - nearly 11 per cent was gained on average by the 19+ group.**

5.35 This may be partly due to greater exposure to the toolkit. Teachers reported better attendance and lower dropout rates among older learners. Seventy five per cent of these completed the whole pilot programme compared with only 46 per cent of 16-18 learners. It could also be due to a greater intrinsic motivation within the 19+ age group to improve their literacy and numeracy skills as generally these learners have chosen to join such classes.

Chart 10 Gender



Total number of learners: 76

5.36 Overall, males made the greatest improvement in consumer knowledge, with 19+ males making the greatest gains of all. However, when the gender groups are split into learners aged 16-18 and 19+, there are some interesting differences in improvement in consumer knowledge.

The 16-18 females made greater average gains in consumer knowledge than all males and 19+ females. If the inclusion of 'Technology' has made a difference it may be connected with a change in the way that the different genders engage with technology, with younger females being much more interested and actively engaged compared with some older females.

- 5.37 Females made their greatest progress in their ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy skills, with an average percentage gain approaching 15 per cent, compared with almost 11 per cent for males. It may be that females were more interested in the communication aspect of the modules and also more motivated by being able to communicate effectively on consumer issues. Males on the other hand, could be more interested in gaining knowledge and skills relating to consumer issues. A recent YouGov⁴ survey of over 800 employers found that female bosses value communication skills (73 per cent) more than male bosses (58 per cent).
- 5.38 When overall progress across the whole benchmarking exercise is compared, there is no significant difference in the progress demonstrated by males and females. Both groups made average gains of between 11 per cent and 12 per cent with males demonstrating marginally higher gains on average. This fact in itself is significant however, as males are currently faring less well than females in educational settings. Boys fall behind after just two years of compulsory schooling and girls stretch their lead at the age of 11, 14, 16 and even degree level⁵. With the results of this pilot programme showing a similar outcome for males and females, **it could indicate that the 'Skilled to go' toolkit has effectively engaged males in learning where other resources have failed.**
- 5.39 It can be seen that the gains made by males are due to progress made by 19+ males, as progress made by younger males in their consumer

⁴ YouGov 30.05.2006 www.trainingreference.co.uk/news/td060530.htm.

⁵ 'Boys: A School Report', Skidmore, C and the Bow Group, August 2007
[www.bowgroup.org/harriercollectionitems/BoysASchoolReport\[1\].doc](http://www.bowgroup.org/harriercollectionitems/BoysASchoolReport[1].doc).

knowledge is not matched by a measurable development in their ability to handle consumer scenarios with related literacy or numeracy skills. However, most of them reported that they felt they had improved their LLN at least a little, with over half of them saying that their writing, speaking and language skills had improved a lot. Furthermore, over half of them said that they felt a lot more confident in their reading, writing, speaking, listening and language skills, and a little more confident in their numeracy skills.

Context

- 5.40 A range of different part time and full time main site FE courses were fully involved in all stages of the pilot programme in London and Glasgow. Additionally, some materials were trialled on a range of LLN courses at Holloway women's prison in London, although these learners did not participate in the benchmarking.

