

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 391

Evaluation of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports

**A synthesis of qualitative and
quantitative evidence**

**Chris Hasluck, Jenny Bimrose, Sally-Anne Barnes, Jamie Brown,
Lucy Marris, Gerry McGivern, Michael Orton and Richard White**

A report of research carried out by the Institute for Employment Research on
behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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The Authors

The evaluation of Skills Coaching was undertaken by a research team from the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick. The research was led by Chris Hasluck and Jenny Bimrose with:

Sally-Anne Barnes

Jamie Brown

Lucy Marris

Gerry McGivern

Michael Orton

Richard White

Chris Hasluck is a Principal Research Fellow in the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick. A labour economist, Chris has particular expertise in labour market and skills issues, employment policy and programme evaluation. He has undertaken a wide range of evaluation studies and has contributed to the evaluation of most of the main New Deal programmes. He has recently been working with Jobcentre Plus to identify the most effective forms of provision for key customer groups. He has a particular interest in quantifying the wider economic and social effects of programme interventions. Since 2005 he has been a Governor of the BUPA Foundation (supporting medical and health research).

Jenny Bimrose is a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick. She has a wide range of research experience, much of it focused on practice-based research in the area of career counselling and guidance and on gender. She is a Fellow of the Institute of Career Guidance, Chair of its Ethics and Standards Committee and a member of its Research Committee. She is also Visiting Professor of Career Research and Practice at the Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby. Current research interests include supporting guidance practitioners in their use of labour market information in guidance; the theory and practice of careers guidance; and the implications for career guidance of women's career development.

Abbreviations and acronyms

BA	Benefits Agency
IAB	Inactive Benefits
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LMS	Labour Market System
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MI	Management Information
NDfS	New Deal for Skills
NINO	National Insurance Number
PA	Personal Adviser

Summary

The Skills Coaching trials

When the New Deal for Skills (NDfS) was announced in 2004, amongst the specific measures proposed were the development of a Skills Coaching service and the introduction of Skills Passports. The key objective of the proposed Skills Coaching service was to add value to existing Jobcentre Plus support for customers. It was to help individuals find the most effective route to improved employability. Trials of Skills Coaching and Skills Passports commenced in April 2005 in eight Jobcentre Plus districts.

Individuals eligible to participate in Skills Coaching are adults claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or inactive benefits (IAB) for whom a lack of skills is **the** barrier to sustained employment. Access to Skills Coaching is through Jobcentre Plus Advisers who refer eligible customers to the service. The Skills Coaching process consists of an initial Entry Review interview followed by a Skills Diagnostic assessment of the individual's employability leading to agreement of a Skills Development Plan setting out skill-related objectives for the customer. The Skills Coach then seeks to broker appropriate provision through local learning providers to enable the customer to meet their Skill Development Plan objectives. Skills Coaches also provide support to customers during, and after, their period of learning. Where customers remain on benefit, Skills Coaches will refer the customer back to their Jobcentre Plus Adviser.

The Skills Coaching trials also incorporated the trial development of Skills Passports. The Skills Passport was designed to provide a record of learning and achievement that meets the needs of both individuals and employers.

Evaluation of Skills Coaching

The Institute for Employment Research (IER), University of Warwick, was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), on behalf of its partners the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the national Learning and Skills Council (LSC), to undertake the evaluation of the Skills Coaching trials. The key aims

of the evaluation were to assess the costs and demand for Skills Coaching, to assess the effectiveness of Skills Coaching in raising individual levels of employability and to inform the design of any possible future national roll-out of the Skills Coaching service.

The evaluation consisted of two main elements: First, qualitative interviews were conducted with Skills Coaching customers, Jobcentre Plus Advisers, Skills Coaches, nextstep Advisers and training providers on two occasions (at the six month and ten month points of the trials). Second, quantitative analysis of the demand for Skills Coaching, the volume and characteristics of participants, the types of services received, and outcomes was conducted using data from the Jobcentre Plus Labour Market System (LMS) and the LSC Management Information (MI) system.

By June 2006, IER had produced three reports on Skills Coaching, consisting of two reports on the qualitative surveys and a third report providing quantitative analysis of MI. The present report provides a synthesis of the evidence presented in these earlier IER reports and draws together the qualitative and quantitative evidence. It seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of the implementation, delivery and impact of the Skills Coaching initiative. The evidence reported here relates to the first 12 months of operation of the Skills Coaching trials (April 2005 to March 2006).

Key findings

The key findings from the evaluation of the Skills Coaching trials were as follows:

- There were a number of serious problems relating to the recording of data on both LMS and LSC systems. In the former case, there was a serious under-recording of referrals by Advisers. The LSC MI, while containing comprehensive records regarding customers and services accessed, appears to under-record outcomes.
- Obtaining an accurate picture of the demand for Skills Coaching and the operation of the trials in the future will require steps to be taken to improve the accuracy of data on referrals and outcomes. Such steps include more training for those responsible for data collection at the local level, the creation and rigorous application of definitional rules (such as when a customer has left Skills Coaching) and better monitoring of the data collection process. Nonetheless, these measures need to be handled with tact since Skills Coaches already complain about the time-consuming nature of the Skills Coaching reporting process.
- The need for Skills Coaching can only be judged subjectively by Jobcentre Plus Advisers and their referrals provide a measure of such need amongst the benefit claimant population. Incomplete recording of referrals on LMS has meant that the only consistent measure of the need for Skills Coaching is the take-up of the service but this is likely to underestimate the true scale of need. There is evidence to suggest that around half of those referred (and thus in need) actually take up Skills Coaching.

- Participation in Skills Coaching has, in reality, diverged significantly from the original design of the programme. Over the period April 2005 to March 2006 around 4,580 people entered the programme and, while not an insignificant number, this was well short of the design target of 7,630. One consequence of under-recruitment was that few Skills Coaches reported high workloads or other capacity problems and some were concerned about the lack of referrals to the initiative.
- The intended balance of 75/25 per cent of inactive benefits (IAB)/Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers has never been achieved. Although the proportion of IAB entrants increased during the latter half of the period, the proportion of JSA customers was never less than 40 per cent. Moreover, many of these JSA customers were long-term claimants who were not originally intended to be a target for Skills Coaching. Rather than being people for whom skill was **the** barrier to employment, a large proportion of participants were people facing other or additional barriers. A quarter of JSA participants and half of all IAB customers on Skills Coaching had been claiming benefit for two years or longer. Around 40 per cent of IAB participants were lone parents, while the proportion of participants with a disability was significantly greater than that of the general claimant population in the trial areas. Evidence from qualitative interviews suggests that Jobcentre Plus Advisers have been referring 'hard to help' claimants to Skills Coaching because they had run out of other options for such customers.
- Qualitative interviews provided a substantial body of evidence to show that Skills Coaching was popular with customers, Advisers and Coaches and that this enthusiasm remained throughout the trial period. Jobcentre Plus Advisers saw Skills Coaching as offering them useful additional support to offer to customers while customers reported that Skills Coaching had been delivered in a professional manner that suited them in terms of the location and frequency of meetings. Where problems were encountered, these typically took the form of a failure of service provision, such as when their Skills Coach had left the service or a lack of suitable training provision. Customers with greater experience of Skills Coaching were more likely to be dissatisfied, although not with the Skills Coaching service itself but by the lack of suitable training provision, a long wait for provision, lack of funding for training and other support and, ultimately, where no job had followed participation in Skills Coaching.
- Most referrals were jointly agreed between the Adviser and customer and most customers who entered Skills Coaching appeared to do so willingly. Based on those whom they saw on entry, most Skills Coaches thought that referrals were appropriate.
- The proportion of participants who progressed from one Skills Coaching service to another declines rapidly. Only two-thirds of all entrants had undertaken a Skills Diagnostic despite this being a key element in the service. Less than half of all customers completed a Skills Development Plan, and only around a third completed a Skills Passport or received Learning Brokerage. This rapid 'drop out' from Skills Coaching was evident even when account was taken of date of entry.

JSA customers were less likely than IAB customers to progress to later stages of Skills Coaching as were people who were unqualified, older (50 plus customers) and, to a lesser extent, lone parents and disabled customers. These patterns reflect a filtering process in which those customers most able to leave Skills Coaching for employment, together with those facing significant additional barriers to employment, exit sooner than those who face skills-related and modest barriers to work.

- Opinions differed greatly concerning the Skills Diagnostic. Many customers found it useful and, by highlighting their strengths as well as their weaknesses, it had boosted their confidence. Others found it difficult to complete the Diagnostic (usually customers with low levels of educational attainment or poor IT skills) or too simplistic or inappropriate (usually customers with high educational attainment).
- Early exits from Skills Coaching averaged around five per cent over the whole trial period but dropped rapidly over the trial period. The most common reason was that the customer had entered some form of employment or voluntary work. The second most common reason was failure to attend an arranged interview.
- Around 600 Skills Coaching participants were reported to have had an 'outcome' during the first 12 months of the trials. This represented a rate of around 17 per cent (when Devon and Cornwall are excluded because they recorded no outcomes). Even amongst those who entered Skills Coaching within the first three months, barely a quarter of participants were recorded as having any form of outcome. Around a third of outcomes were work- or employment-related and one in five related to an education or learning outcome. A further quarter was classified as 'other', while the remainder returned to benefit.
- Positive outcomes were found to be associated with a number of personal characteristics, benefit type and history, use of Skills Coaching services and residence in particular trial areas. Three key findings emerged from multivariate analysis. These were:
 - the length of benefit claim was strongly related to outcomes with an exit to a job more likely for those with a short benefit claim and a return to benefit more likely for those with a long benefit claim;
 - customers who had completed a Skills Passport or accessed Learning Brokerage were more likely to leave for employment or an education outcome and less likely to return to benefit; and
 - even after standardising for other factors, individual trials areas were associated with differences in outcomes.
- Differences in outcomes across trial areas (after accounting for other factors) can be explained by differences in the way that outcomes are recorded, local labour market conditions and job and education opportunities and, finally, the delivery and effectiveness of the Skills Coaching programme. It was not possible to establish whether these area differences were related to the process of referral (directly to Skills Coaches or indirectly to **nextstep**).

- The number of outcomes associated with any gain in qualifications was comparatively small. Only 40 per cent of outcomes (accounting for less than seven per cent of all participants) were associated with a new qualification and many outcomes were classified as achieving no qualification (although a large proportion was recorded as 'not known'). Moreover, the majority of qualifications obtained were at a very low level (almost 60 per cent at level 0).
- Estimates of the direct cost of Skills Coaching indicate that the cost of the programme were modest. By March 2006, the cost of providing the service to 4,657 participants averaged around £200. This figure was so low because so few customers accessed multiple services. Looking at the costs of achieving a positive outcome (including 'other' as a positive outcome), the following were estimated:

– average cost of achieving a positive outcome	£1,898
– marginal cost of achieving a positive outcome	£319
– the unit cost of achieving a positive outcome	£268

Key messages

The first key message from the evaluation of Skills Coaching is that the initiative has provided a service that has been enthusiastically received by all involved, be they Jobcentre Plus Advisers, **nextstep** Advisers, Skills Coaches or customers. Enthusiasm for the initiative remained strong throughout the 12 month trial period. Importantly, Skills Coaching appears to have offered something in addition to existing support arrangements for benefit claimants. This was the case in both qualitative terms – Skills Coaching appeared to fit customer need and Coaches appeared genuinely interested in supporting their customers and helping them achieve something positive (both of which contrasted with customers' experiences when visiting a Jobcentre) – and quantitative terms in the sense of more regular, and in-depth, contact with someone who was a professional adviser and counsellor together with access to a greater number of learning opportunities.

Second, Skills Coaching is a complex process necessitating effective engagement between Jobcentre Plus Advisers, **nextstep** advisers, Skills Coaches and training providers. In some trial areas the process has been simplified by cutting out the referral stage between Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep**. This risks losing expertise that resides in **nextstep**, but the evidence suggests that, in practice, this has not been the case because of the good working relations and links that exist between Jobcentre Plus, **nextstep** and Skills Coaching.

The effectiveness of delivery was also enhanced where Skills Coaches were located in a jobcentre or visited regularly. This facilitated co-operation between Advisers and Coaches. In contrast, engagement between training providers and Skills Coaching appears more problematic. Coaches and customers frequently complain of a lack of suitable local training provision or that provision was not available at times and in a

manner that suited Skills Coaching customers. From their perspective, training providers reported insufficient referrals from Skills Coaching and that customers sometimes wanted skills and training for which there was little demand in the local job market. There would appear to be an element of dissonance here that needs to be addressed.

It is clear that, in a number of respects, Skills Coaching has evolved at the individual trial area level into something rather different from the programme initially designed and is serving a rather different client group from that originally envisaged. This is not necessarily a bad thing and the relatively high participation of long-term JSA claimants, lone parents and people with disabilities suggests that the programme may be offering support to key Jobcentre Plus customer groups. There is evidence from the qualitative interviews that Jobcentre Plus Advisers often see Skills Coaching as something they can offer to customers when nothing else is available and customers often commented that Skills Coaching had offered support they had otherwise felt lacking from Jobcentre Plus mainstream services.

The implications of this change in Skills Coaching need to be acknowledged. Many participants are likely to be entering Skills Coaching facing more than just skills barriers to employment. They will require a much greater level of support, probably much greater levels of support than originally envisaged and, crucially, more than was budgeted for. The presence of a large proportion of generally disadvantaged customers also means that it will be likely that progress through the programme is slower, more customers will fall by the wayside and fewer will achieve positive outcomes. At present, the low level of work- or education-related outcomes, the even lower rate of gaining qualifications and the very low level of qualifications gained is notable. If these outcomes seem disappointing, it should be recognised that for many customers on Skills Coaching these will be considered major achievements. For others who have yet to achieve an outcome, it is the impact of Skills Coaching on their journey towards being fully employable that is important. While the administrative data is incapable of saying anything about that, there is strong evidence from Skills Coaches and customers that the programme has, in most cases, boosted confidence and motivation and raised aspirations. For many customers the experience of Skills Coaching has been of a liberating and highly supportive nature. This is a view that is backed up by the opinions of Skills Coaches, Advisers and others involved in the programme.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the report

In March 2004, The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the New Deal for Skills (NDfS), an initiative offering a package of measures designed to provide workless people, with no skills or low skills, with an opportunity to improve their skills and to move from welfare into sustainable employment. Amongst the specific measures in NDfS were:

- the development of a Skills Coaching service to ensure adults with low skills can access skills advice and support for learning;
- introduction of Skills Passports' to build a record of skills and competencies gained and to help transfer skills between jobs.

The 2004 Pre-Budget Report, *Opportunity for all: The Strength to Take the Long-Term Decisions for Britain* (published on 2 December 2004) and an associated document *Skills in the Global Economy* announced that Skills Coaching trials would commence in April 2005 in eight trial districts (later reduced to seven when the Manchester West and Manchester East Jobcentre Plus districts were merged). In these eight districts the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) was to work in partnership with Jobcentre Plus to trial the Skills Coaching service.

The Institute for Employment Research (IER), University of Warwick, was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), on behalf of its partners the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the national LSC, to undertake the evaluation of the Skills Coaching trials. By June 2006, IER had produced three reports on Skills Coaching. These consisted of two reports on qualitative surveys of key Skills Coaching stakeholders (see Hasluck, Bimrose, Barnes, McGivern, White and Orton, *Evaluation of Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports: Stage 1 Report. Early Lessons from Implementation and Delivery*, October 2005 and Hasluck, Bimrose, Barnes, Marris and White, *Evaluation of Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports: Stage 2 Qualitative Report*, May 2006) and a third report providing an analysis of Skills Coaching management information (see Hasluck, *Evaluation of Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports: Quantitative Analysis*, June 2006).

This report provides a synthesis of the evidence presented in the three earlier IER reports on Skills Coaching. It draws together the qualitative and quantitative evidence and seeks to provide a comprehensive assessment of the implementation, delivery and impact of the Skills Coaching initiative. The evidence discussed relates to the initial 12 month trial of Skills Coaching. The Budget 2006 announced that the Skills Coaching trials were to be extended for a further 12 months with four additional Skills Coaching trial areas from July 2006 and further trial areas to start delivery from 1 September 2006 (giving a total of 19 overall). The evidence considered in this report relates only to the experience of the original seven trial areas but the findings have implications for new trial areas, both in terms of how Skills Coaching is delivered and how it is evaluated.

1.2 Aim of the evaluation

The key aims of the evaluation of Skills Coaching were to:

- assess the costs and demand for Skills Coaching;
- assess the effectiveness of Skills Coaching in raising individual levels of employability;
- inform the design of a possible future national roll-out of Skills Coaching service.

To meet these aims, the evaluation pursued a number of objectives. These were to:

- assess the extent of the value added through the introduction of Skills Coaching to Jobcentre Plus support for individuals who were looking to improve their skills and their opportunities in terms of sustainable employment;
- identify examples of good practice and the lessons to be learnt from Skills Coaching to inform the National roll-out;
- examine how Skills Coaching has been managed, how Skills Coaches have performed, and what they have achieved;
- look at the level of demand for Skills Coaching.

1.3 Evaluation method

The evaluation consists of two main elements. These are:

- qualitative interviews with a variety of Skills Coaching stakeholders; and
- quantitative analysis of management information (MI).

1.3.1 Qualitative interviews with key Skills Coaching stakeholders

Qualitative interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in all seven trial areas on two occasions. Stakeholders include Skills Coaching customers, Jobcentre Plus Advisers, Skills Coaches, nextstep Advisers and training providers. The first stage of interviewing was carried out during the first six months of the trials and focused on

implementation and early lessons from the delivery of Skills Coaching, considering such issues as the preparedness of Advisers and Coaches, the adequacy of resources and training and the effectiveness of referral and other working arrangements and procedures. In total, 138 interviews were completed. These mainly took the form of face-to-face interviews conducted in the trial districts, but where this was not possible, interviews were conducted by telephone. Interviews were as follows:

- seven telephone interviews with Jobcentre Plus district contacts (one from each trial district);
- 56 Jobcentre Plus customers referred to Skills Coaches (six in one district, seven in six districts and eight in one district);
- 24 Skills Coaches (three in each trial district);
- 24 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers (three in each trial district);
- 21 **nextstep** Advisers (one in one district, two in one districts and three in six districts);
- three training providers (from two trial districts).

The findings of this qualitative survey, together with some early analysis of Skills Coaching MI, were reported to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in October 2005¹.

The second wave of qualitative interviews was conducted during the first quarter of 2006. This second survey was able to build on the preceding one and interviews were conducted with many of the same respondents as on the first occasion, as well as some who were interviewed for the first time. This design was intended to establish both how customers had progressed since starting Skills Coaching and to see if the delivery of Skills Coaching had changed since it was launched. In some instances (especially in the case of Skills Coaches), staff turnover and changes in responsibilities meant that the original respondents could not be interviewed. While all 56 customers interviewed in Stage 1 had agreed to be interviewed on a second occasion, a number withdrew their consent and some could not be contacted. Stage 2 qualitative interviews were conducted with:

- 36 customers interviewed in Stage 1;
- 33 customers referred to Skills Coaches (and not previously interviewed);
- 15 Skills Coaches;
- 17 Jobcentre Plus Advisers;

¹ Hasluck, C., Bimrose, J., Barnes, S-A., McGivern, G., White, R. and Orton, M. *Evaluation of Skills Coaching Trails and Skills Passports: Stage 1 Report. Early Lessons from Implementation and Delivery*, October 2005.

- four next**step** Advisers in two areas where initial referrals are to next**step**;
- 16 Training Providers

The findings from the Stage 2 qualitative interviews were reported to DWP in May 2006².

1.3.2 Quantitative analysis of management information

The quantitative analysis was designed to provide evidence relating to the demand for Skills Coaching, the volume and characteristics of those participating, the type of service received, and immediate outcomes from Skills Coaching using MI. The MI was derived from two separate sources: First, data was available from the Jobcentre Plus Labour Market System (LMS). In terms of Skills Coaching, this data was limited to records of referrals by Jobcentre Plus Advisers but also provided information on the wider population of benefit claimants from which Skills Coaching customers were drawn. Second, data was available from the LSC MI system. This MI related specifically to Skills Coaching and provided a range of data covering customer characteristics, progress through Skills Coaching and, to a limited extent, outcomes and costs.

A number of issues relating to the quality of MI emerged during the course of the evaluation: First, there was a significant concern about the accuracy of the reporting of referrals to Skills Coaching by Jobcentre Plus Advisers with the number of recorded referrals being significantly less than the number of Skills Coaching participants recorded in the LSC MI. There was also a poor match between the records from the two sources with some LMS referrals not appearing on the LSC MI (possibly 'no shows') and some participants recorded in LSC MI not recorded as having been referred. The LSC MI data on individual Skills Coaching customers was also the subject of some concerns, including duplicate LSC reference numbers and National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) and, more significantly, missing data for some records in some trial areas. In particular, outcomes appeared particularly poorly recorded and in one trial area no outcomes were recorded, while in two trial areas there were no records of any qualifications associated with outcomes.

The results of the quantitative analysis examining referral to Skills Coaching, patterns of participation, progression, outcomes and cost (together with details of how data problems were dealt with) was reported to DWP in June 2006³.

² Hasluck, C., Bimrose, J., Barnes, S-A., Marris, L and White, R., *Evaluation of Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports: Stage 2 Qualitative Report*, May 2006.

³ Hasluck, C., *Evaluation of Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports: Quantitative Analysis*, June 2006.

1.4 Outline of the report

This report draws together the evidence from the qualitative surveys and the quantitative analysis of MI. It seeks to integrate the evidence and to draw from it some of the broad messages from the evaluation of Skills Coaching. The report is organised in the following way: Chapter 2 considers the Skills Coaching programme design and the way in which the service was implemented. Chapter 3 examines the evidence on referral and participation in Skills Coaching. Chapter 4 looks at the evidence relating to activities that formed part of the Skills Coaching service while Chapter 5 examines the evidence relating to outcomes and impacts (including issues of cost effectiveness). Finally, Chapter 6 highlights the key findings and key messages to have emerged from the evaluation of Skills Coaching. This includes the identification of some key issues for the remainder of the Skills Coaching trials and for any national 'roll out' of the programme.

2 Programme design and implementation

2.1 The aim of Skills Coaching

The key objectives of the Skills Coaching service are to:

- add value to existing Jobcentre Plus support for customers;
- review and sub-contract within each district's local provider network a wider range of specialist providers;
- provide a greater range of services to customers reflecting the needs of the local labour market.

Skills Coaching aims to help individuals find the most effective and efficient route to improved employability. Individuals eligible to participate are adults (aged 20 and over) claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or inactive benefits (IAB), principally Income Support (IS) or Incapacity Benefit (IB). The target group is Jobcentre Plus customers for whom lack of skills (or inability to apply their skills successfully in the labour market) is the barrier to sustained employment. Specifically, Skills Coaching is aimed at:

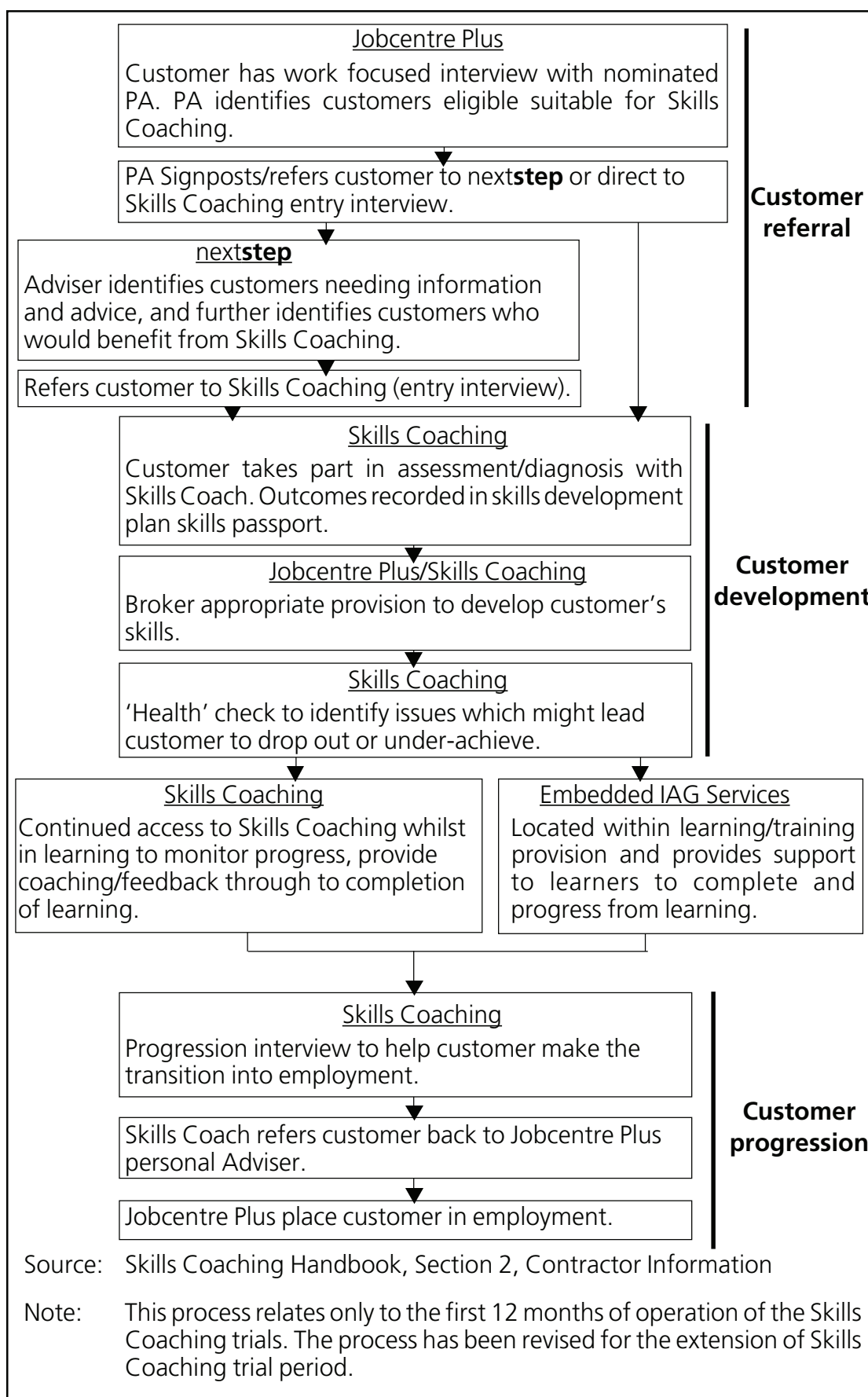
- inactive benefit claimants who intend to return to the labour market in the mid to longer term, but want to do something in the short term to improve their job prospects;
- jobseekers for whom lack of skills is the barrier to employment, including those moving into employment with a company or organisation participating in an Employer Training Trial.

2.2 The Skills Coaching programme design

The original design of Skills Coaching was as set out in Figure 2.1. Access to Skills Coaching was through Jobcentre Plus Advisers who were to refer eligible customers to, initially, **nextstep**. **nextstep** would then identify those customers who could benefit from Skills Coaching and, in turn, refer them to a Skills Coach who would conduct an Entry Review interview. Direct referral from Jobcentre Plus to the Skills Coaching service was thus intended to be the exception rather than the rule.

After the Entry Review interview, Skills Coaching takes the form of a Skills Diagnostic assessment taking an holistic view of the individual's employability, with a strong emphasis on skills. Account is taken of individual characteristics and household circumstances, key skills, vocational skills relevant to the particular sector or occupation within which the customer wishes to work and personal attitudes and motivation. Account is also to be taken of local labour market conditions and whether the individual's skills, qualifications, remuneration requirements are consistent with the types of employment available in the local district. The skills assessment leads to an agreement of a Skills Development, or Action Plan that sets out skill-related objectives for the customer. The Skills Coach then seeks to secure, or broker, appropriate provision through local learning providers to enable the customer to meet their Skills Development Plan objectives.

Figure 2.1 The stages of the Skills Coaching process



Where a customer enters some form of learning, the Skills Coach can offer support in the form of an 'In-learning health check' or work with the customer at the end of their period of learning. Where customers remain on benefit, Skills Coaches will refer the customer back to their Jobcentre Plus Adviser.

The Skills Coaching programme also incorporates the trial development of Skills Passports. The Skills Passport is designed to provide a record of learning and achievement that meets the needs of both individuals and employers. Skills Passports consist of two elements:

- information for prospective employers, including a Curriculum Vitae, an assessment of skills achieved, a skills action plan, as well as a summary of validated evidence which is clearly referenced to support the skills assessment;
- supplementary guidance for the passport holder, including information on job search techniques and relevant local contacts.

It is the responsibility of the individual to complete their Skills Passport, supported by the Skills Coach. The Skills Passport should follow, and take account of, the Skills Diagnostic and Skills Development Planning activities between the individual and the Skills Coach.

2.3 Implementation in practice

In fact, when Skills Coaching was implemented, a variety of procedures were adopted for referrals. In the Derbyshire trial area the original Skills Coaching design was followed, with customers being referred by Jobcentre Plus only to **nextstep** which then identified customers who could benefit from Skills Coaching and, in turn, referred them to a Skills Coach. Methods of referral varied greatly across the other trial areas. In some, Jobcentre Plus Advisers only referred customers directly to the Skills Coaching service (without the intermediate step of referral to **nextstep**) while in others, both types of referrals were made.

The deviation from the original design in six of the trial areas has a number of potential consequences: First, the original two-stage referral process was intended to provide a screening process that would ensure that customers receiving Skills Coaching services were those who really needed and would benefit from such a service (rather than those who simply needed some careers guidance). In the trial areas where customers are referred directly to Skills Coaching, this intermediate screening process is removed (in many, if not all, cases). This may have the advantage of simplifying and/or speeding up the process of entry to Skills Coaching but it relies on the Jobcentre Plus Advisers having the ability to adequately assess the suitability of customers and runs the risk that unsuitable customers may enter the Skills Coaching programme.

Direct referral to Skills Coaching by a Jobcentre Plus Adviser also means that the expertise that resides in **nextstep** was, in some instances, cut out of the Skills Coaching process. In practice this was not the problem it might have been for two

reasons: First, in some (but not all) trial areas the working relationship between Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep** was a good one and **nextstep** Advisers were aware of Skills Coaching and, as a result, referred any of their customers who might benefit to a Jobcentre Plus Adviser for them to refer the customer to Skills Coaching. Second, many of the Skills Coaches had links with **nextstep**, either having worked for that organisation or having a dual role as Skills Coach and **nextstep** Adviser. Where this was the case, the modification to the referral process probably made no significant difference to the operation of the initiative. There were, however, instances where **nextstep** Advisers appeared to know little of Skills Coaching or, if aware, had little to do with it. This can only have been to the detriment of the Skills Coaching service.

One feature of Skills Coaching in practice is that many customers referred to the service fall outside the original target customer group. In particular, there is a large minority of customers who have long JSA claims and who would have been eligible for, and participated in, mainstream provision such as New Deal. There are probably several reasons for the presence of this large sub-group of customers but in part it is likely to be attributable to the dominant role given to Jobcentre Plus Advisers in the referral process many of whom said, when interviewed, that Skills Coaching offered them an additional service to offer to long-term JSA customers when all else had failed. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.4 The delivery processes

The Skills Coaching process, although officially comprising seven steps, takes anything between two and eight (sometimes more for 'hard to help customers') appointments and was very dependent upon customer need. All of the Skills Coaches interviewed reported that the number of sessions was not restricted. Sessions varied in length from 20 minutes to two hours with one hour generally thought to be the norm. Time was not an issue for the majority of Skills Coaches who emphasised that flexibility was needed to meet the needs of customers. All of the Skills Coaches stated that the number and frequency of appointments was negotiated and agreed with their customers.

Skills Coaching has been delivered in a number of different types of location. Most Skills Coaches saw their customers initially at a Jobcentre Plus office with further sessions held at various locations, such as the customer's home, local Connexions offices, college premises and **nextstep** offices. Some saw customers only at a Jobcentre Plus office while others met customers at **nextstep** offices, training centres or Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) network offices. In most instances, Skills Coaches thought these venues were suitable all or most of the time. Where Skills Coaches did not find facilities suitable, their main complaint was the lack of privacy (where they interview in open plan offices) or lack of access to IT equipment. In most cases, Skills Coaching interviews and other activities were held in premises belonging to other organisations. This could be a source of difficulties and some Skills Coaches who were interviewed in the second half of the trial period, reported difficulties in retaining good locations or in having to share such locations with other activities. These difficulties appear to have stemmed from uncertainty

about the future of Skills Coaching which made the host organisations a little reluctant to allow Skills Coaching to use their premises if they had a pressing need of their own.

The caseloads of Skills Coaches varied between individuals and trial areas. In part, this arose because some Skills Coaches worked both as a coach and as an IAG practitioner. Caseloads ranged from four to 32 active customers. High caseloads were attributed to the limited IAG funding available for customers above Level 2. Accurate reporting of caseloads was difficult in some areas because of 'no shows'. Most Skills Coach thought of their caseload in terms of active participants and did not really take into consideration customers who were referred but did not actively participate in Skills Coaching. If account of such customers was taken, actual caseloads were probably higher than Skills Coaches acknowledged. In some areas a low rate of referrals from Jobcentre Plus meant that the caseloads of Skills Coaches were lower than they had expected. Many expressed the view that if the referral targets had been met they would be stretched but was not the case given the actual number of participants.

Skills Coaches often took referrals from two or three jobcentres within their trial area. Those working in rural locations tended to work on their own, which was both problematic when they wish to take time off or when the number of referrals increased. Teams of around five Skills Coaches were working in urban districts. While at the time of the interviews a majority of Skills Coaches felt that there are enough Coaches working in their district, a number stated that if for demand for Skills Coaching increased significantly then more Skills Coaches would be required and some felt this situation had already been reached.

The delivery of the Skills Coaching service appears quite demanding of Coaches. One stated that three was an ideal number of customers to see in one day, as time was required to undertake necessary paperwork and research. Another said he needed as much time away from the customer as with the customer in order to complete the associated paper-work. Several Skills Coaches felt that time was increasingly becoming an issue as caseloads increased. One reported that, as her caseload increased, she had been forced to reduce her contact time with customers to once a fortnight as opposed to the original once a week. Although the Skills Coach was not happy with this arrangement, customers had not complained. She felt that it was important to see customers regularly to motivate them as *'two weeks is a long time for someone not in work'*.

It became evident when seeking to arrange qualitative interviews with Skills Coaches as part of the evaluation, that there was a high turnover amongst such staff. Customers too reported that staff turnover had caused them problems. These problems including broken appointments (because the Skills Coach had left and no one informed the customer) and long waits between appointments while a new Skills Coach was appointed. Such turnover also raises issues about the continuity of support and the consistency of advice. It is difficult to say what lay behind this turnover amongst Skills Coaches, whether it was inherent in the nature of IAG type jobs or whether it was something specific to Skills Coaching. Either way, it would be desirable to reduce, if not eliminate, such turnover in the future.

While the majority of Skills Coaches interviewed believed that customers had received high quality, informed advice that had opened up their employment options, several thought that some customers had encountered significant problems in accessing the skill coaching process. These problems included arranging and funding childcare (particularly for lone parents), lack of funding for training, inadequate language skills (where English was the second language) and a lack of transport in rural areas. These views were often echoed by customers, most of whom felt that Skills Coaching provided the kinds of support they needed but often indicated a need for additional forms of support. In most cases this meant financial support or support for customers with special needs or a disability.

Although a majority of Skills Coaches felt that the Skills Coaching process was diverse enough to meet individual customer needs, there was a view amongst some that Skills Coaching was too rigid and many were providing extra support for customers outside of the Skills Coaching process. This additional support, while not funded by the Skills Coaching process, was considered vital for customer progress. For instance, Skills Coaches help with the completion of application forms, writing Curriculum Vitae and letters to potential employers, preparing customers for interviews and general 'hand holding' (such as taking customers to college and adult education centres). Some Skills Coaches also offered on-going support to customers once they had completed the Skills Coaching process.

2.5 The 2006 extension of the Skills Coaching trials

The original Skills Coaching trials were intended to operate for 12 months from April 2005 and terminate in March 2006. The Budget 2006 announced that the Skills Coaching trials would be extended for a further 12 months. The seven existing trials of Greater Manchester (combining Manchester East and West), North Yorkshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Devon and Cornwall and Birmingham and Solihull) would continue to operate under existing arrangements until 30 June 2006. From 1 July 2006, four new trials would commence (Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon, Central London and West Yorkshire), giving a total of 12 trial areas. From September 2006 further trial areas will operate. These are Manchester Central, Tees Valley, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, Surrey and Sussex, North and North East London, South London, City and East London and West London.

The Budget 2006 also signalled an additional priority for Skills Coaching. While the programme will continue to provide intensive guidance and support for adults of working age (20 and over) for whom lack of skills (or inability to apply their skills) is **the** barrier to sustained employment, the Budget 2006 announced £10 million over two years to double the number of Skills Coaches in order to focus on helping low skilled women return to work. This was in response to the Women and Work Commission's Report '*Shaping a Fairer Future*' which highlighted that women returning to work after time out of the labour market find their skills out of date or no longer in demand.

The evaluation of Skills Coaching covered by this report relates to the original seven trial areas and the first 12 months of delivery of the programme. Where information is available, however, the opportunity has been taken to report evidence from the first 12 months of Skills Coaching trials that relates to the new priority group – low skilled women – with a view to informing the future delivery of the programme.

2.6 Changes and improvements to Skills Coaching practice

There was little evidence during the trial period of any significant or fundamental change in practice beyond the fundamental changes introduced at the start of the trials when some areas decided to refer directly to Skills Coaching and not do so via **nextstep**. There were probably several reasons for this: First, the trial period covered only a 12 month period during which all stakeholders were mostly concerned with getting the Skills Coaching service up and running. The extension of Skills Coaching announced in the Budget 2006 signals the first significant reorientation of the programme. While low skilled women have represented a significant proportion of current Skills Coaching participants, the programme extension announced in Budget 2006 gave Skills Coaching a more explicit focus on low qualified women benefit claimants than was the case previously. It is too early to know what the impact of that change will be. The second reason for the lack of fundamental change is that early evaluation and monitoring provided very positive messages about the implementation and delivery of the new programme. One issue that was identified fairly early on was the disproportionate number of referrals of JSA customers as opposed to customers on an inactive benefit. The changing pattern of entry to Skills Coaching from around September 2005 onwards provides an indication that referral practices on the ground had probably changed to take account of this. In other instances, the solution to problems identified lay outside the ability of Advisers and Coaches to solve at the local level. The lack of financial support might be something that a resourceful Coach could work around to find funding but in the main that is a much bigger issue of policy. Similarly, almost all Skills Coaches reported a lack of adequate training provision in their local area. Again, the best Coaches may be able to find the training need in some instances but the adequacy or otherwise of training provision is something largely outside the scope of the Skills Coach.

All of the above is not to deny that many small improvements have been made to the way that Skills Coaching has been delivered, whether through improvements in the working relationships between organisations at the local level or through the application of lessons learnt from delivering components of the Skills Coaching service, such as the Skills Diagnostic. A regular Skills Coaching Newsletter, circulated by e-mail, has helped spread good practice amongst the teams delivering Skills Coaching in the different trial areas.

There were comparatively few concrete suggestions for improving the Skills Coaching service. Most Jobcentre Plus Advisers and **nextstep** Advisers felt that the programme had worked quite effectively as it was currently delivered. Skills Coaches

did, however, identify a number of improvements they would like to see implemented in the future. This is not surprising since they are centrally involved in the delivery of Skills Coaching. The improvements suggested by the Skills Coaches interviewed included:

- improving the training infrastructure;
- having access to funds to support training;
- increased flexibility in the delivery of the Skills Coaching service;
- a rationalisation of the paperwork required; and
- improved diagnostic tools.

3 Referral and participation

3.1 The Skills Coaching target group

Skills Coaching aims to help individuals find the most effective and efficient route to improved employability. Individuals eligible to participate were adults (aged 20 and over) claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or inactive benefits (IAB) (principally Income Support (IS) or Incapacity Benefit (IB)). The target group is Jobcentre Plus customers for whom lack of skills (or inability to apply their skills successfully in the labour market) is the barrier to sustained employment. Specifically, Skills Coaching is aimed at:

- inactive benefit claimants who intend to return to the labour market in the mid to longer term, but want to do something in the short term to improve their job prospects;
- jobseekers for whom a lack of skills is **the** barrier to employment.

In either case, Skills Coaching was intended for customers who had been claiming benefit for a comparatively short time and, thus, were not yet eligible for their respective New Deal programmes.

3.1.1 Who needs Skills Coaching?

Despite the clear definition of an eligible customer, it is not possible to measure, a priori, the number of customers in the target population. The target group for Skills Coaching is adults, claiming a non-working benefit (JSA, IB or IS) and who face some form of skill-related barrier to entering employment. Only the age and benefit status elements of the eligibility criterion are matters of objective record. Skill-related barriers to employment, on the other hand, are not directly observable but are a matter of subjective assessment by a Jobcentre Plus Adviser. There are few, if any, objective measures currently in use by Advisers to help them make this judgement. Although qualifications and final level of schooling can and probably are used by Advisers, this information is not recorded on the Labour Market System (LMS). It is, thus, extremely difficult to estimate whether a customer is eligible for Skills Coaching prior to a Jobcentre Plus Adviser actually conducting an interview and making a referral to the programme.

The number of people referred to Skills Coaching could provide a measure of the size of the target population and 'need' for such provision. Unfortunately, actual referrals can provide only an imperfect measure of the target population because the behaviour of Jobcentre Plus Advisers will affect who is referred. Where an Adviser sticks rigidly to the Skills Coaching design, the number referred will reflect their ability to correctly identify customers for whom skill is **the** barrier to employment. If an Adviser is unaware of Skills Coaching, lacks commitment to it, or fails to identify customers with skills-related barriers, referrals will underestimate the true target population. Conversely, if an Adviser refers inappropriate customers (perhaps to be seen to be offering something to their customers regardless of their skill needs) then referrals will overstate the true need for Skills Coaching.

Whatever the merits or otherwise of using referrals as a measure of demand for Skills Coaching, the recording of referrals to Skills Coaching on LMS is not accurate enough to provide more than a rough indication of demand. In fact in the early months of the trials there were few recorded referrals to Skills Coaching (and none at all in some Jobcentre Plus Districts). Table 3.1 provides a comparison of the number of referrals (LMS) and Skills Coaching starts (Learning and Skills Council management information (LSC MI)). There is a major discrepancy between the two sets of records, with the LSC record consistently exceeding that of the Jobcentre Plus LMS data. The discrepancy will be even larger than indicated here because referrals would be expected to exceed Skills Coaching starts because of 'no shows' where customers are referred but drop out before having an Entry Review interview.

Table 3.1 Comparison of LMS and LSC MI records of referrals and Skills Coaching starts

	LSC MI record	LMS record	% difference
April 2005	27	19	29.6
May 2005	82	38	53.7
June 2005	250	76	69.6
July 2005	491	328	33.2
August 2005	341	184	46.0
September 2005	411	510	-24.1
October 2005	467	236	49.5
November 2005	597	502	15.9
December 2005	326	177	45.7
January 2006	523	186	64.4
February 2006	501	228	54.5
Total	4,016	2,484	38.2

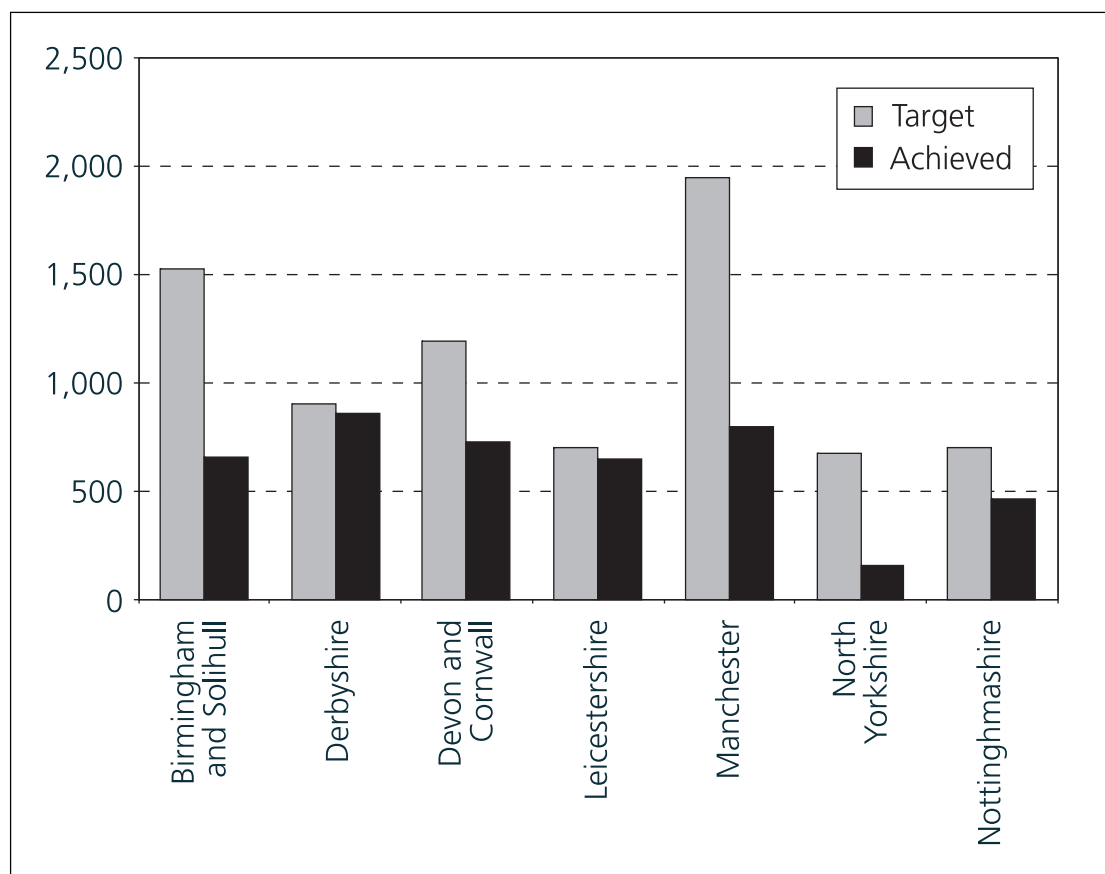
3.1.2 Programme targets and achieved entry

At the outset, Skills Coaching was set targets for participation. These targets represent a priori estimates of the demand or need for Skills Coaching services. Over

the 12 month trial period the entry target across all trial areas was 7,630 but the number of achieved entries was only 4,582, or just over 60 per cent of the target total. Does this mean that there is less need for Skills Coaching than originally thought? As indicated earlier, the numbers being referred to Skills Coaching will reflect Adviser behaviour as much as underlying need. Detailed examination of entry to Skills Coaching across time and by trial area does suggest that a slower than planned implementation of Skills Coaching was a key factor contributing to the underachievement of targets.

Some trial areas were slower to implement Skills Coaching than others. Sometimes this was for exceptional reasons (such as the collapse of MG Rover in April 2005 which affected Birmingham and Solihull). More generally, implementation appeared slower in non-integrated Jobcentre Plus districts than in those that were integrated. While no trial area exceeded their entry target, Derbyshire and Leicestershire came very close (see Figure 3.1). The largest divergences between target and achieved entry were in Birmingham and Solihull and Greater Manchester. It should be noted that both these trial areas had very high targets for entry and even though achieved entry fell far short of target in each area, the actual number of customers entering Skills Coaching were amongst the highest of the Skills Coaching trial areas.

Figure 3.1 Entry to Skills Coaching by trial area: target versus achieved



3.2 Eligibility and participation

Skills Coaching was intended for adults of working age (20 years and over with no upper age limit) for whom lack of skills (or inability to apply their skills successfully in the labour market) is the barrier to sustained employment. A lack of skills is considered to be where a claimant is without a first full Level 2 qualification or equivalent. Specifically, those eligible are:

- JSA recipients: anyone prior to the mandatory New Deals for whom lack of skills (or lack of skills relevant to the current labour market) is the barrier to employment.
- IS or IB recipients who have had a Work Focused Interview (rolled out offices) or an interview or discussion about work or training (non-rolled out offices) and who intend to return to the labour market in the mid to longer term but want to do something in the short term to improve their job prospects.

(Section 3 'Jobcentre Plus Information', *Skills Coaching Handbook*, 2005).

Jobcentre Plus Advisers determine whether a customer is eligible for Skills Coaching (using the above criteria). If Skills Coaching is an appropriate way forward the Advisers refer the customer to a next**step** Adviser or directly to a Skills Coach (with the latter route being more common). It was expected at the outset that 75 per cent of referrals would be people on an inactive benefit and 25 per cent on JSA.

In the light of the above, a typical entrant to Skills Coaching could be expected to be 20 years old or above, hold qualifications at or below Level 2 (or no qualifications) and, most probably, they would be claiming an IAB. Where claiming JSA, they could be expected to have been unemployed for up to six months in the case of young people and up to 18 months for those aged 25 or above (these being the eligibility thresholds for mandatory entry to New Deal). The likely length of benefit claim of those on IS or IB is less clear. Those with short claims might be those most close to job ready and facing limited skills-related barriers to employment. On the other hand, some inactive benefit claimants will not be in a position to contemplate employment until a period of time allows other barriers (such as a need to care for young children) to be reduced.

This sub-section examines the characteristics of entrants to Skills Coaching in terms of the eligibility criteria. Insofar as Jobcentre Plus Advisers are complying with the eligibility criteria, those referred will look like the typical Skills Coaching participant described above. Insofar as Advisers are not following the eligibility criteria, participants will look somewhat different. This is not to say that any deviation from the eligibility criteria is necessarily a bad thing. Skills Coaching may well be meeting customer need, it is just that the need is not that which underlay the original design and intention of the programme.

3.2.1 Age and participation

The majority of participants in Skills Coaching were aged between 25 and 44 years of age with 27 per cent aged 25-34 and 29 per cent aged 35 to 44 (see Table 3.2). A

further 15 per cent were aged 18-24 and 20 per cent were aged 45-55. While there is no upper age limit to referral to Skills Coaching, less than seven per cent of all participants were aged 55 or over. Surprisingly, around two per cent (or 52 participants) were recorded as being aged 18-19 on entry to the programme, despite the minimum age for eligibility being 20. A further 34 participants had no age recorded.

While the general pattern of participation by age was similar across the trial areas, there were some differences. The proportion of young participants (18-24 year olds) was relatively high in Derbyshire, North Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire while the proportion of older participants was relatively high in Leicestershire and North Yorkshire.

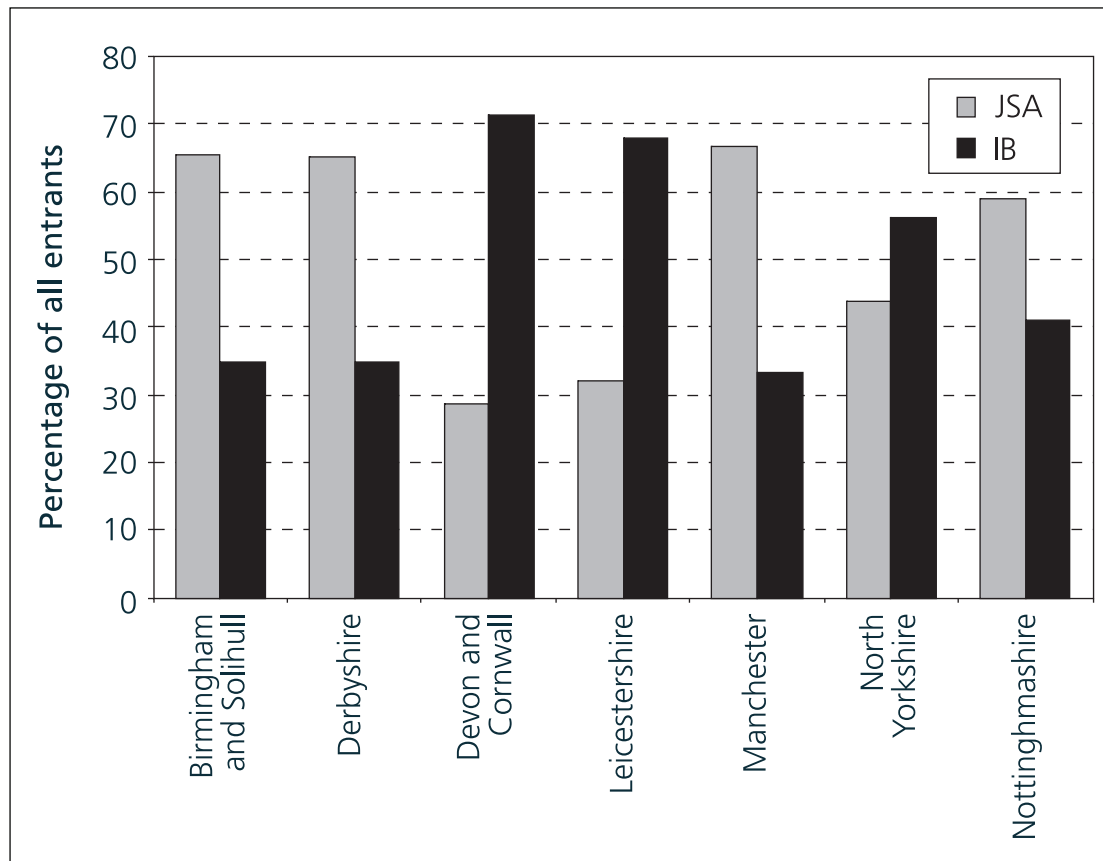
Table 3.2 Age on entry to Skills Coaching, by trial area

	<i>Percentage within area</i>				
	18-24 years	25-34 years	Total 35-49 years	50 plus	All
Birmingham and Solihull	13	30	41	17	100
Derbyshire	22	24	40	14	100
Devon and Cornwall	12	30	41	17	100
Leicestershire	11	24	45	20	100
Manchester	14	30	38	18	100
North Yorkshire	19	27	34	20	100
Nottinghamshire	16	26	43	16	100
Total	15	27	41	17	100

3.2.2 Benefit type

The target proportion of participants entering Skills Coaching who were inactive benefit claimants was not achieved at any time during the 12 month trial period. The proportion of inactive benefit claimants was just over 65 per cent at the commencement of the trial but this quickly declined, reaching a low of just under 40 per cent in September 2005. Between September 2005 and February 2006, the proportion increased and peaked at 58 per cent in January but dropped sharply again in the following month. Over the period as a whole, the proportion of inactive benefit claimants entering Skills Coaching was just 47 per cent. None of the trial areas achieved the 75 per cent target for inactive benefit entrants to Skills Coaching. Devon and Cornwall and Leicestershire came close to achieving 70 per cent of entrants from inactive benefits but the proportions were reversed in Birmingham and Solihull, Derbyshire and Manchester (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Proportion of entrants to Skills Coaching, by benefit type and area



To some extent this variation reflected the fact that some offices in trial areas were not integrated Jobcentre Plus offices and this restricted the number of customers on inactive benefits that Advisers could access to refer to Skills Coaching. This was compounded by different time pattern of entry across trial areas with the most rapid progress in implementing the Skills Coaching tending to be in areas such as Leicestershire where the proportion of IAB claimants was relatively high. Later, entry was increasingly dominated by areas such as Birmingham and Solihull and Manchester, where the proportion of IAB entrants was relatively low. These were, however, unlikely to be the only factors and it is likely that early monitoring of Skills Coaching resulted in changes in practice such that Jobcentre Plus Advisers actively sought to refer more IAB customers to Skills Coaching.

3.2.3 Length of benefit claim

Just under two-thirds (63 per cent) of all Skills Coaching entrants had been out of work for less than two years (Table 3.3). Of these, the largest group was those claiming a benefit for less than six months (who accounted for almost 32 per cent of all Skills Coaching entrants). While this is broadly consistent with the aim of Skills Coaching (namely to make provision for customers before they become eligible for New Deal), it follows that more than a third of entrants had been out of work for two years or more and well over a quarter (29 per cent) had been out of a job for three years or more.

Table 3.3 Length of benefit claim by area

<i>Percentages within area</i>						
Length of benefit claim	Less than 6 months	6-11 months	12-23 months	24-35 months	36 months or more	Total
Birmingham and Solihull	29.2	17.8	17.4	8.0	27.5	100.0
Derbyshire	25.8	18.1	14.0	10.7	31.4	100.0
Devon and Cornwall	28.1	14.8	16.8	9.5	30.8	100.0
Leicestershire	30.5	13.8	14.9	6.8	34.0	100.0
Manchester	32.4	20.8	14.4	7.1	25.4	100.0
N Yorkshire	70.7	10.2	6.5	3.3	9.3	100.0
Nottinghamshire	32.6	19.9	12.5	8.2	26.8	100.0
Total	31.5	17.1	14.7	8.2	28.5	100.0

There was substantial variation across the trial areas, with the proportion of very short term claimants (less than six months) being particularly high in North Yorkshire (71 per cent). In contrast, in Derbyshire, Devon and Cornwall and Leicestershire the proportions of claimants out of work for three years or more exceeded 30 per cent. These area variations are likely to reflect the different age and benefit composition of the benefit populations of each area. For instance, the latter two districts had large proportion of Skills Coaching entrants who were on IAB and, as Table 3.4 indicates, those on IAB were likely to have been those out of work for a longer time than customers on JSA. Overall, around 40 per cent of customers on IAB had been claiming for three years or more compared with 18 per cent of those on JSA. Correspondingly, around 60 per cent of JSA customers had been out of work for less than 12 months compared with 38 per cent of those on an inactive benefit.

Table 3.4 Benefit duration by benefit type, Skills Coaching entrants

<i>Percentage within benefit type</i>			
Claim duration	Benefit type		Total
	Inactive benefit	JSA	
Less than 6 months	24.7	37.7	31.5
6-11 months	12.8	21.0	17.1
12-23 months	13.5	15.7	14.7
24-35 months	9.3	7.2	8.2
36 months or more	39.8	18.3	28.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Age interacts with benefit type to affect referral to Skills Coaching. Young people (18-24 years of age) on JSA are required to enter New Deal after just six months and may be less likely to be referred to Skills Coaching as a consequence. JSA claimants aged 25 or above must wait until they have a claim of at least 18 months before

being required to enter New Deal. This might suggest that older JSA claimants entering Skills Coaching will have longer benefit claims. Table 3.5 indicates that this was the case to some extent, with 45 per cent of young entrants from JSA having been on benefit for less than six months whereas only 25 per cent of young entrants from IAB had been claiming for six months or less. Correspondingly, 42 per cent of young entrants to Skills Coaching from IAB had been claiming benefit for two years or longer. Amongst older entrants to Skills Coaching (those 25 years or above), a similar pattern is evident, albeit to a lesser extent. Amongst adult JSA claimants, over a quarter (27 per cent) had been unemployed for two years or more. Amongst adults on an inactive benefit the proportion was even greater, at 50 per cent.

Table 3.5 Benefit duration by benefit type and broad age group, Skills Coaching entrants

Claim duration	Benefit type		
	Inactive benefit	JSA	Total
<i>Percentage within benefit type</i>			
18-24 year olds			
Less than 6 months	25.0	44.8	36.8
6-11 months	17.2	22.7	20.5
12-23 months	15.7	14.9	15.2
24-35 months	10.4	6.5	8.1
36 months or more	31.7	11.1	19.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
25 year olds and above			
Less than 6 months	24.5	36.3	30.6
6-11 months	12.1	20.6	16.4
12-23 months	13.2	15.9	14.6
24-35 months	9.1	7.3	8.2
36 months or more	41.1	19.9	30.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

While the expected age-benefit relationship is evident amongst entrants to Skills Coaching, it remains the case that a not insignificant proportion of young entrants from JSA were longer term claimants at the time of entry to Skills Coaching and 18 per cent had been out of work for two years or more. The data does not record whether young entrants from JSA were on a New Deal programme at the time of being referred to Skills Coaching but it might be surmised that many of those with long benefit claims would have been through New Deal for Young People (perhaps even on more than one occasion). Skills Coaching might be seen by Advisers and customers alike as offering something new by way of provision. This may also be the case for adults on JSA. The 20 per cent who entered Skills Coaching after three years or more on benefit would certainly have participated in New Deal 25 Plus on at least one occasion and, again, it may be inferred that Skills Coaching offered something additional for this group of customers.

3.2.4 Skill as a barrier to employment

The key eligibility criterion for Skills Coaching is that a lack of skills is the barrier to employment. MI does not record whether customers had a skills-related barrier, although the LSC MI records the level of qualifications held by Skills Coaching entrants. These records indicate that almost two-thirds of Skills Coaching customers had no or only low (NVQ Level 1 or equivalent) qualifications on entry to the programme. There was little difference in this proportion between customers on JSA and those on inactive benefits. This strongly suggests that a majority of Skills Coaching customers probably had been referred because of a lack of skills or a skills-related barrier to employment (although it should be noted that skills-related barriers are not congruent with a lack of qualifications).

Two further features of skill, as measured by qualifications should be noted: First, there is an association between the possession of no, or low level, qualifications and other barriers to employment. The qualitative interviews noted that although 'skill' was the main barrier for most of those interviewed, many also cited health and disability and caring responsibilities as barriers alongside skill. Moreover, almost 16 per cent of Skills Coaching customers recorded in the LSC MI had qualifications, on entry, of at least NVQ Level 3 or above. At first sight such customers seem unlikely to lack the skills necessary for employment and may well face barriers to employment other than a lack of skill. Some of these better qualified participants may require training because their skills are out of date, they have been out of the job market for a long time and lack confidence or they wish to re-train for a different occupation.

In 2006, Skills Coaching was given a new priority, namely to provide support for women with low skills who wished to return to employment. Using 'no qualifications' or 'only Level 1 qualifications' as a measure of 'low skill', it is estimated that just over a quarter (27 per cent) of all Skills Coaching customers were low skilled women. This amounted to almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of all women participating in the Skills Coaching programme. It should be noted that there is, as yet, no agreed operational definition of 'low skill' and a lack of qualifications is not necessarily the same as a lack of skills.

3.3 The referral process

Reference has already been made to the importance of the referral process, both in determining the number of customers to enter Skills Coaching as well as who is referred to Skills Coaching (and how appropriate they might be for the service). MI data cannot reveal much about this process but the qualitative interviews have provided evidence that sheds light on the process and illuminates some of the issues raised earlier in this chapter.

Interviews with Jobcentre Plus Advisers, nextstep Advisers and Skills Coaches found a general impression that the referral process was, overall, working reasonably well. Most regarded the referral process as simple and flexible (although some felt there were too many forms to be filled in). The referral process seemed to work particularly

well where Skills Coaches worked in Jobcentre Plus offices or spent time there, enabling Jobcentre Plus Advisers to ask Skills Coaches any questions they had. Other practices that helped establish good working relationships included informal, regular meetings between Advisers and Coaches, presentations by Coaches and being able to contact a Skills Coach easily for a discussion where doubt about referral exists.

Stage 1 interviews with Jobcentre Plus Advisers picked up some evidence of 'teething problems' (such as lack of information about Skills Coaching and a need for clarification of how it differed from similar schemes) and there was some confusion about whether customers should be referred directly to Skills Coaches or through **nextstep** Advisers. There was also a lack of clarity in some trial areas about which customers should be referred; whether Skills Coaching should be targeting customers on specific benefits or any customer with skills gaps and development needs. Many Jobcentre Plus Advisers considered Skills Coaching to be 'another option' for their customers. Most of these problems were no longer evident at the second round of interviews but the issue of Advisers regarding Skills Coaching as an option for all customers appeared to have persisted.

The majority of Jobcentre Plus Advisers referred customers directly to Skills Coaches, often seeing this as being more direct and easier than referring to **nextstep** Advisers. This was particularly the case where the Skills Coach was located in the Jobcentre rather than elsewhere. Some Jobcentre Plus Advisers appeared to have a choice about whether to refer via **nextstep** or directly to Skills Coaches. In these cases, referral to **nextstep** was often made when the Jobcentre Plus Adviser was unsure about the suitability of the customer for the Skills Coaching service.

In some trial areas **nextstep** Advisers were not involved in the referral process. Where they were involved, opinion was divided, with some having generally positive experiences of the referral process but others reported negative experiences because the referral process was too lengthy and customers were fearful of losing their benefits through non-compliance. Most **nextstep** Advisers felt unable to comment on which referral process was of most benefit to customers. However, most felt that a key factor in effective referrals was when customers were given a thorough and detailed explanation of Skills Coaching.

Where Skills Coaches had experience of both direct referral and referral via **nextstep** (and were thus able to make comparisons), they too could not, or were unable to, specify which worked better for customers. They did state, however, that the Skills Coaching experience of the customers was the same, regardless of the referral process.

Most Jobcentre Plus Advisers said that they made an informal judgement about whether customers should be referred to Skills Coaching and relied on their professional expertise and experience. **nextstep** Advisers said much the same, although a wider range of approaches to referral was evident. Both Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep** Advisers said it was easy to identify customers who would benefit

from Skills Coaching but this view was not universal and some said they found it hard or a matter of 'trial and error'. Despite the apparent informality of the process, an identified skills issue was often a prompt to refer a particular customer: Referral judgements were also facilitated by personal contact between the Jobcentre Plus Adviser and Skills Coaches. Given that their professional judgement was on the line, it was unsurprising to find that most Jobcentre Plus Advisers said that the right kinds of customers were being referred to Skills Coaching. Some, however, recognised that too many people on JSA were being referred.

In the main, Skills Coaches felt that the majority of customer referrals were appropriate. Examples of appropriate referrals to Skills Coaches included customers who:

- have a basic skill need or want to update their skills;
- need further training to progress;
- do not understand or lack confidence in their skills and capabilities;
- need a change of direction;
- need signposting, clarification or ideas; and particularly
- have multiple barriers to finding employment and need support in addressing them.

In a few cases, ineligible customers had been referred, such as some no longer on benefit, partners of customers and those whose application for benefits had been refused. Even if eligible, some other referrals were thought inappropriate, for instance, customers who:

- needed direction but not basic skills (such as a graduate or post-graduate);
- did not want to use the Skills Coaching process, questioned the value of the process and those who thought Skills Coaching was compulsory;
- knew what they wanted to do;
- needed only brief support (such as help with job searching or writing a CV or simply further information);
- required funding to participate in the training and learning activities identified;
- were unable to complete the paperwork as they had a very low level of basic skills or did not speak English.

The extent of inappropriate referrals appears to have decreased as the Skills Coaching process developed and Advisers developed a better understanding of the process and its aims.

Both Jobcentre Plus Advisers and Skills Coaches said that most customers were happy to be referred to Skills Coaching once the programme had been explained to them. These views were broadly confirmed by customers, most of whom had agreed

to be referred after discussion with their Adviser (but few said they had asked to be referred). Only a small minority of those interviewed said they had not really wanted to be referred to Skills Coaching. Some caution needs to be exercised here as the interviews were conducted only with customers who had started on Skills Coaching. Unwilling customers are likely to 'drop out' between referral and their appointment with the Skills Coach (since the programme is voluntary and there is no sanction for non-participation).

A common view of Skills Coaches was that customers who were not happy to be referred, had unrealistic or false expectations about the process, did not understand the aims and benefits or wanted to find work and not training. One Skills Coach commented that the success of the referral process was dependent on the attitude and expectations of the customer. Some Skills Coaches were of the view that customers referred via **nextstep** were less likely to attend appointments. This could be because the **nextstep** referral route involved two appointments rather than one as in the direct referral or, as many Skills Coaches believed, customers referred from **nextstep** made their own decisions about entering Skills Coaching, whereas JSA customers were 'sold the idea' by their Jobcentre Plus Advisers.

Some Skills Coaches suggested improvements for the referral process. These included:

- improving the referral paperwork and its transfer to Skills Coaches;
- creating better communication between Skills Coaches and Jobcentre Plus Advisers;
- giving Advisers the opportunity to explain why a customer is being referred;
- ensuring customers' first appointment with a Skills Coach is made whilst they are attending the jobcentre.

One Skills Coach, who is not satisfied with the referrals from his local Jobcentre Plus Advisers, indicated that the referral process could be improved just by letting **nextstep** Advisers make referrals. **nextstep** Advisers also suggested improvements including feedback from Skills Coaches on the outcomes of a referral; more flexibility in the process of referral; and a publicity leaflet to give to customers.

Amongst Skills Coaches who were interviewed, most believed that referrals were more effective if customers were given an appointment to see the Skills Coach within a few days of being referred and if the appointment was somewhere convenient or known to the customer (such as within the local jobcentre offices, or in offices close to the jobcentre). Evidence from customers suggests most were seen by their Skills Coach within two weeks of being referred and many within days (although one or two customers reported much longer waits to see their Skills Coach).

3.4 Patterns of participation

Earlier in the Chapter some of the characteristics of participants were examined insofar as they related to eligibility for the programme (age, benefit type and claim length). This section takes the discussion of participation a little further by examining the extent of participation in Skills Coaching of a number of key customer groups. Table 3.6 contains summary statistics on the pattern of participation amongst the key customer groups. When considering Table 3.6 it should be borne in mind that because Skills Coaching is a voluntary programme, customers enter largely through choice or because they are persuaded to do so by their Jobcentre Plus Adviser. The characteristics of those entering Skills Coaching will, thus, be a reflection of the demand for such support amongst the eligible population as identified by the Adviser.

Although the majority of Skills Coaching participants were men, this is only true of JSA customers (where more than two-thirds were men), while women were in the majority (57 per cent) amongst IAB customers. A large proportion of IAB customers were lone parents (over 40 per cent) compared with only ten per cent of JSA customers. The age structure of IAB and JSA customers is also somewhat different, with IAB customers tending to have been rather more concentrated in the 35-49 years age group compared with the JSA customer group which tended to be slightly younger. This difference is almost certainly associated with the large proportion of female lone parents claiming IB. This group is more likely to volunteer for Skills Coaching when they feel ready to return to work and this, in turn, is more likely to be when they and their children are older.

Just over a quarter (28 per cent) of customers were recorded as having some form of disability but the proportion differed considerably between JSA and IAB customers (19 per cent and 39 per cent respectively). The proportion of Skills Coaching customers with a disability was significantly above that of the population of claimants in the trial areas, where around 13 per cent of JSA claimants, and 25 per cent of IAB claimants, were recorded as having a disability. The comparatively large proportion of disabled customers on Skills Coaching can, as with lone parents, be seen as an indication of a demand for such a programme from individuals who have chosen to enter Skills Coaching because they perceive potential benefits from it.

Direct comparison of ethnicity between the Skills Coaching and LMS is difficult because a large proportion of cases in LMS are 'unclassified' (16 per cent) whereas only one per cent of Skills Coaching records were unclassified. Excluding the unclassified cases from LMS suggests that the proportion of ethnic minority customers on Skills Coaching (16 per cent) was similar to the general population of claimants in the trial areas (15 per cent). While the differences between ethnic minority groups were small, the comparison indicates that the proportion of South Asian customers on Skills Coaching was somewhat below the population average for the trial areas (7.3 per cent compared with 8.7 per cent) while the proportion of other ethnic minority groups was slightly above the claimant population average.

Table 3.6 Key customer groups and Skills Coaching (percentage of total participants)

	IAB	JSA	All
Gender			
Male	43.2	68.8	56.7
Female	56.8	31.2	43.3
Lone parent status			
Not lone parent	59.7	89.9	74.9
Lone parent	40.3	10.1	25.1
Age			
18-24 years	12.7	17.1	15.1
25-34 years	26.9	27.5	27.2
35-49 years	44.2	37.7	40.8
50 plus	16.2	17.7	17.0
Disability			
Non-disabled	61.5	81.0	71.7
Disabled	38.5	19.0	28.3
Ethnic origin			
White	85.5	81.9	83.6
Black	3.2	5.5	4.4
South Asian	6.8	7.6	7.3
Chinese and Other	1.7	2.4	2.1
Mixed	1.8	1.6	1.7
Unclassified	1.0	.9	1.0
Qualification level on entry			
No qualifications	41.8	38.9	40.3
Level 1	23.5	25.0	24.3
Level 2	18.0	16.0	17.0
Level 3 or above	14.1	17.0	15.6
Other qualifications	2.6	3.1	2.9
Low skilled women			
(Men – all)	(43.2)	(68.8)	(56.7)
Women with no qualifications	22.8	11.3	16.8
Women with NVQ Level 1	13.8	7.6	10.6
Women with NVQ Level 2 or above	20.2	12.2	16.0

Note: Column percentages for each customer group sum to 100.

Comparison of the qualifications of Skills Coaching participants with those of the claimant population of the trial areas is not possible because qualifications are not recorded in LMS. The Skills Coaching records indicate that almost two-thirds of Skills Coaching customers had no or only low (NVQ Level 1 or equivalent) qualifications. There was little difference in this proportion between customers on JSA and those

on IB. However, almost 16 per cent of Skills Coaching customers had qualifications on entry of at least NVQ Level 3 or above. It is difficult to reconcile this with the aim of Skills Coaching to support people for whom a lack of skills is the barrier to employment, although the currency and relevance of these higher level qualifications cannot be gauged from the data.

In 2006 Skills Coaching was given an additional priority, namely to provide support for women with low skills who wished to return to employment. Using 'no qualifications' or 'only Level 1 qualifications' as a measure of 'low skill', it is estimated that just over a quarter (27 per cent) of all Skills Coaching customers fall into this category. This amounted to almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of all women participating in the Skills Coaching programme. It should be noted that there is no agreed operational definition of 'low skill' and a lack of qualifications is not necessarily the same as a lack of skills.

3.5 Exits from Skills Coaching

Customers can be thought of as 'exiting' from Skills Coaching at a number of different points in the process. Some individuals who are referred to Skills Coaching may not even get as far as an Entry Review interview, perhaps because they change their mind about participation or leave benefit in the interval between referral and interview. Little can be said about this group because of the lack of any reliable way of identifying Jobcentre Plus customers who are referred. A second group of leavers are those who leave part way through the Skills Coaching process. They may give up on Skills Coaching or leave for some other reason (such as moving out of the area or leaving benefit). Thirdly, customers leave Skills Coaching after 'completing' the programme. This is signalled on the customer records as an 'outcome' and is discussed in the next chapter.

There is a degree of ambiguity about the notions of early exits and outcomes. Some early exits may be outcomes in another guise. For instance, failure to attend an arranged interview could indicate withdrawal from Skills Coaching but might equally indicate that the customer has obtained a job. Even the notion of participation itself is not entirely clear cut. There is some evidence from the qualitative interviews with Skills Coaches that each had a number of customers whom they rarely saw. Interviews with customers also found some who had ceased to meet their Skills Coach but kept in contact occasionally by telephone. In such cases it is difficult to say if or when the customer ceased participation in the programme. Consequently, the recording of MI relating to exits will be sensitive to the practices of Skills Coaching teams in trial areas and these appear to differ to a considerable degree.

3.5.1 Early exits

The overall rate of early exits across all cohorts and areas was around five per cent but this figure varied across trial areas and time. Figure 3.3 shows the percentage of recorded early exits for each trial area. Examination of the reasons recorded for early exits suggests that a large part of this difference arises from differences in recording practice. Figure 3.4 shows the rate of early exits from Skills Coaching by date of entry to the programme. Exit rates from entry cohorts are less likely to be affected by differences in recording practices between trial areas. The chart indicates that the recorded rate of early exits has fallen sharply during the life of the Skills Coaching trial. This partly reflects the changing composition of customers. During the early months of the trials it was predominantly JSA customers (who were more likely to leave benefit) who were referred to the programme. Later IAB customers were less likely to leave Skills Coaching. In addition, the reduced rates of early exits may reflect a more effective operation of the Skills Coaching programme, with more appropriate referrals and a greater capability of matching customers' needs.

Figure 3.3 Proportion of early exits, by Skills Coaching trial area

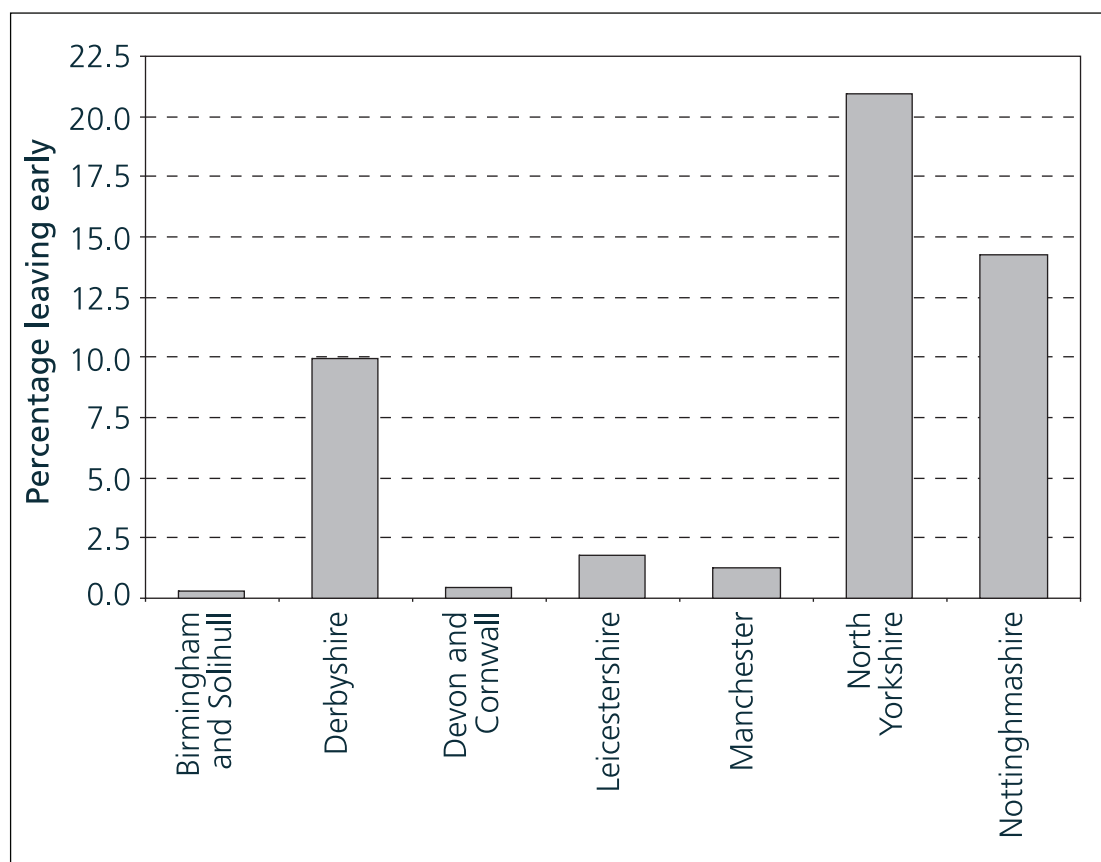
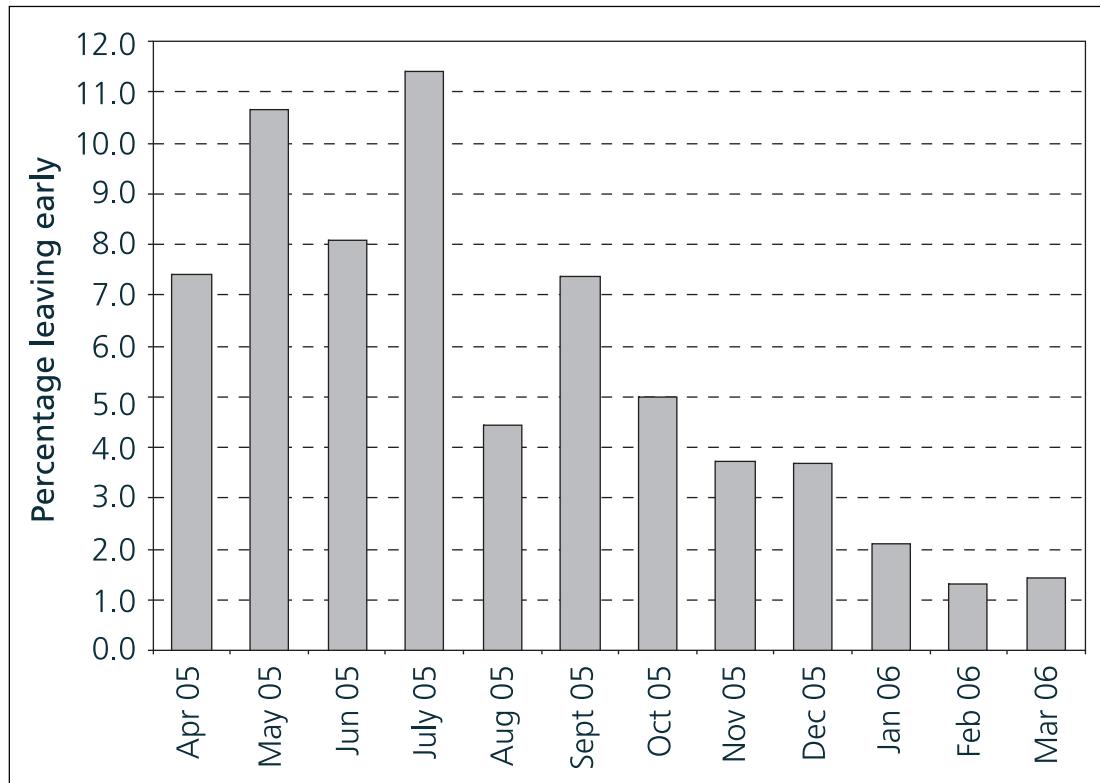


Figure 3.4 Proportion of early exits, by date of entry to Skills Coaching



Some differences were apparent in the rate of early exit across Skills Coaching customer groups. As already noted above, customers claiming JSA were twice as likely as those on IAB to be recorded as leaving early (6.5 per cent compared with three per cent). Customers with long durations of benefit claim were less likely than those with short benefit claims to leave early. Only 2.7 per cent of customers who had been claiming a benefit for 36 months or more left early, compared with more than six per cent of those claiming benefit or less than 12 months. Both of these differences may reflect the different job prospects of individual customers, with IAB claimants and those with long-duration benefit claims having least likelihood of leaving early.

Some differences in exit rates were related to personal characteristics. Men were slightly more likely than women to leave early (5.3 per cent and 4.3 per cent, respectively) although this may reflect the fact that more men were claiming JSA rather than IB. Lone parents were much less likely than others to leave early (3.2 per cent compared with 5.9 per cent). This, again, is likely to be associated with the type of benefit claimed (IB) and duration of benefit claim (47 per cent of lone parents had been claiming benefit for 36 months or longer, compared with 24 per cent of customers who were not lone parents). There was a small difference between the exit rates of disabled and non-disabled customers (5.2 per cent compared with 4.8 per cent) while amongst ethnic groups, the lowest rates of early exit was from South Asians (1.2 per cent) and Black customers (4.1 per cent), while the exit rate of white customers was slightly above average (5.1 per cent) as were the exit rates of customers of mixed ethnic origin (eight per cent) and those who preferred not to state their ethnic origin or whose ethnic origin was unknown.

Table 3.8 reports on the exit rates of customers by benefit type. While the general pattern of exits is true of both types of customer, it is the case that customers claiming an IAB are more likely to fail to attend a meeting or leave without a reason being known (over 53 per cent of early exiting IAB customer leave for these reasons compared with 42 per cent of JSA early exits. JSA customers are more likely to leave early because they have entered a full-time job (32 per cent compared with 22 per cent), although IAB claimants are rather more likely to enter a part-time job (perhaps a reflection of the large proportion of women and lone parents amongst the IAB client group).

Table 3.8 Reasons for an early exit from Skills Coaching, by benefit type

	<i>Percentage</i>		
	Benefit type		Total
	Inactive benefit	JSA	
Reason not known	20.2	15.3	16.4
Entered full-time employment	21.7	32.0	28.8
Found part-time employment	10.1	6.7	7.8
Entered voluntary work	4.3	2.7	3.2
Self-employment	–	0.7	0.5
Failed to attend arranged meeting	33.3	26.7	28.8
Unable to find suitable provision	4.3	6.0	5.5
Did not complete training	2.9	5.3	4.6
Entered part-time education	1.4	4.0	3.2
Other	1.4	0.7	.9
All	100.0	100.0	100.0

3.5.2 Customers who leave Skills Coaching

The overall recorded exit rate from Skills Coaching was just under 14 per cent. This figure is misleading since no outcomes were recorded in Devon and Cornwall. Excluding Devon and Cornwall increases the overall exit rate to just over 17 per cent. While outcomes are recorded in all of the other six trial areas, the record of outcomes in the Manchester trial area is of concern, being remarkably low. This also has the effect of depressing the overall exit rate from the programme (see Table 3.9).

Table 3.10 reports the estimated overall exit rates from Skills Coaching by month of entry. Amongst those who entered Skills Coaching during the first seven months of the trial period, the exit rate is generally in excess of 20 per cent (the exception being the August 2005 cohort). As would be expected, those who have been in the programme longest are the most likely to have left (more than a quarter of customers who entered the programme in April-June 2005). Equally expected is that the rate of exit declines with each monthly cohort from around September-October 2005. These customers have had less time to access Skills Coaching services and less

time to leave the programme. Nonetheless, a proportion (albeit small) of customers have left Skills Coaching even where they entered the programme in February or March 2006.

Table 3.9 Exit rates from Skills Coaching, by area (excluding Devon and Cornwall)

	<i>Percentage</i>		
	Continuing on Skills Coaching	Left Skills Coaching	All
Birmingham and Solihull	87.4	12.6	100.0
Derbyshire	89.6	10.4	100.0
Leicestershire	62.5	37.5	100.0
Greater Manchester	97.0	3.0	100.0
North Yorkshire	73.5	26.5	100.0
Nottinghamshire	75.6	24.4	100.0
All areas (excluding Devon and Cornwall)	82.8	17.2	100.00

Table 3.10 Exit rates from Skills Coaching, by month of entry

	<i>Percentage</i>		
	Continuing on Skills Coaching	Left Skills Coaching	All
April 2005	74.1	25.9	100.0
May 2005	73.6	26.4	100.0
June 2005	70.4	29.8	100.0
July 2005	77.0	23.0	100.0
August 2005	83.2	16.8	100.0
September 2005	76.3	23.7	100.0
October 2005	77.5	22.5	100.0
November 2005	81.5	18.5	100.0
December 2005	86.3	13.7	100.0
January 2006	85.2	14.8	100.0
February 2006	92.0	8.0	100.0
March 2006	96.3	3.7	100.0

Just as is the case with early exits, there is virtually no difference in the exit rates of men and women (both around 17 per cent overall). Customers claiming IAB are more likely to leave (19.5 per cent) than JSA customers (15.4 per cent). People with a disability are more likely to leave (20.3 per cent) than non disabled people (15.8) as are older customers. Over 22 per cent of customers aged 55 year or above, and nearly 20 per cent of customers aged 45-54, had left the programme. This compares with just 14 per cent amongst customers aged 20-24 and 15.7 per cent amongst those aged 25-34. White customers were less likely to have left Skills Coaching (16.6

per cent) than any of the other broad ethnic minority groups (whose exit rates were around 19 per cent). Customers who had been claiming benefits for a short time only were more likely to have left Skills Coaching, and the proportion diminished as the length of benefit claim increased. Lone parents were much less likely to have left Skills Coaching (14.6 per cent compared with 19.6 amongst non-lone parents).

A number of different factors probably lie behind these differences. In some instances, a high exit rate may signal that the customer group has good employment or education prospects such that they leave for a job or an educational opportunity (for instance, short-term benefit claimants or the young benefit claimant). In other cases the differences may signal differences in the capacity of the customer group to accommodate the demands of learning and skill acquisition or the extent to which Skills Coaching was able to meet their needs. Where it was difficult to engage in learning or the customer felt their needs were not likely to be met, they might 'vote with their feet' and leave the programme. This may apply to members of ethnic minorities or people with disabilities. It should be noted that lone parents are more likely to remain on Skills Coaching despite their childcare responsibilities. This may indicate that where a group felt that Skills Coaching is particularly suitable for them and it meets their needs, they will remain on the programme. The low exit rate of people with NVQ Level 1 or NVQ Level 2 qualifications may be a case in point.

3.5.3 Time spent on Skills Coaching

Comparing the date of entry and exit for each customer who has a recorded outcome provides an estimate of the time spent on Skills Coaching. The distribution of time spent on Skills Coaching is skewed towards shorter spells so the appropriate measure of the average in this case is the median. Overall, the average (median) completed spell on Skills Coaching lasted around 109 days (approximately 3½ months). On average, women spent somewhat longer on Skills Coaching than men (116 and 105 days, respectively) as did customers on an IAB (IAB customers remained on the programme for 112 days while JSA customers remained for 100 days). Surprisingly, in the light of the above, there was virtually no difference between lone parents and other Skills Coaching customers but customers with a disability did participate longer (129 days on average) than non-disabled customers. Customers with no qualifications, or only level 0 qualifications, also spent an above average time on the programme (around 116 days) while customers with a qualification (on entry) at Level 2 or classified as 'other qualification' spent the least time (71 days in the case of those with Level 2 qualifications and 66.5 days in the case of other qualifications).

4 Skills Coaching activities

4.1 Skills Coaching services

The design of Skills Coaching is such that after being referred to the programme, all customers have an initial Entry Review interview with their Skills Coach. The purpose of this interview is for Skills Coaches to explore, with the customer, their expectations and barriers to skills development. The Entry Review interview provides both customer and coach with an opportunity to confirm that the individual is suitable for Skills Coaching and would benefit from it. Thereafter the customer can access a number of services. These are set out below:

- Skills Diagnostic;
- Skills Development Plan;
- Skills Passport;
- Learning Brokerage;
- In-learning Health Check;
- Progress Review interview;
- In-learning coaching/feedback.

The Skills Diagnostic, or assessment may take place at the same time as the Entry Review interview, or at a later date (as appropriate). The assessment takes into account the customer's characteristics and household circumstances, key skills, vocational skills relevant to the particular sector or occupation within which the customer wishes to work and personal attitudes and motivation. Account is also to be taken of local labour market conditions and whether the individual's skills, qualifications, remuneration requirements are consistent with the types of employment available. At this stage customers are encouraged to begin the creation of a Skills Passport that will provide a record of learning and achievement. The Skills Passport takes account of the Skills Diagnostic and Skills Development Planning activities between the individual and the Skills Coach.

The Skills Diagnostic leads to an agreement of a Skills Development Plan that sets out skills-related objectives for the customer, taking into account the local labour market, the individual's personal circumstances, beliefs and aspirations as well as their preferred learning styles. The Skills Coach will then seek to secure, or broker, appropriate provision (through local learning providers) that will enable the customer to meet their skill development plan objectives. If the customer enters some form of learning, their progress is checked by the Skills Coach and where necessary additional coaching may be provided.

This chapter examines the evidence relating to the main services offered as part of the Skills Coaching programme. The Entry Review interview was discussed in the previous chapter as part of the referral process and is not considered here. Before looking in detail at these services, however, evidence relating to the pattern of take-up of Skills Coaching services is examined by way of context.

4.2 Take-up of Skills Coaching services

4.2.1 Take of services by trial area

The number of customers accessing each service is reported in Table 4.1. The total number of customers recorded as receiving an Entry Review interview in the period from April 2005 to March 2006 was 4,307. This is a slightly lower number than the number of recorded customers and examination of individual customer records found that not every customer was recorded as having received such an entry interview. It is not known whether this difference was the result of a failure to record every Entry Review or whether a small proportion of customers moved directly to other stages of Skills Coaching without the crucial Entry Review element.

Table 4.1 Number of customers accessing Skills Coaching services April 2005-March 2006

	B'ham	Derbys	Devon	Leics	Manch	North Yorks	Notts	Total all areas
Entry Review	660	854	729	647	795	157	465	4,307
Skills Diagnostic	455	721	437	495	427	139	302	2,976
Skills Development Plan	289	496	203	525	206	98	141	1,958
Skills Passport	74	496	152	374	67	44	136	1,343
Learning Brokerage	206	438	183	228	304	78	158	1,595
In-learning Health Check	34	130	71	121	113	40	106	615
Progress Interview	33	61	46	167	43	27	31	408
In-learning coaching/ feedback	20	44	33	71	48	15	32	263

Source: LSC MI System.

The number of customers recorded as accessing later stages of the Skills Coaching process declines sharply in all trial areas. This reflects the fact that some customers

leave Skills Coaching before reaching the later stages (or those stages are deemed by the Skills Coach to be unnecessary). It also takes time to proceed through the Skills Coaching process so that some customers will not have yet reached the later stages. The latter factor is compounded by the fact that customers joined Skills Coaching at different times and those who joined in April or May of 2005 would be expected to have proceeded further than those who were referred to Skills Coaching in 2006. Table 4.2 shows the number of customers at each stage after an Entry Review expressed as a proportion of the number at Entry Review.

Table 4.2 Proportion of entrants progressing to later stages of Skills Coaching

	<i>Percentage of entry reviews</i>							
	B'ham	Derbys	Devon	Leics	Manch	North Yorks	Notts	All areas
Skills Diagnostic	68.9	84.4	59.9	76.5	53.7	88.5	64.9	69.1
Skills Development Plan	43.8	58.1	27.8	81.1	25.9	62.4	30.3	45.5
Skills Passport	11.2	58.1	20.9	57.8	8.4	28.0	29.2	31.2
Learning Brokerage	31.2	51.3	25.1	35.2	38.2	49.7	34.0	37.0
In-learning Health Check	5.2	15.2	9.7	18.7	14.2	25.5	22.8	14.3
Progress interview	5.0	7.1	6.3	25.8	5.4	17.2	6.7	9.5
In Learning coaching/ feedback	3.0	5.2	4.5	11.0	6.0	9.6	6.9	6.1

Source: LSC MI System.

Table 4.2 highlights some striking differences between trial areas. The proportion of customers who received a Skills Diagnostic was well below average in Devon and Cornwall and Greater Manchester and well above average in Derbyshire and North Yorkshire. There are significant differences in the sense that the Skills Diagnostic would generally be undertaken at the same time, or within a few days of, the Entry Review interview and the observed differences are unlikely to be the result of different rates of progression across trial areas. These differences indicate either that Skills Coaches in different areas were using the Skills Diagnostic to different degrees or that there were different rates of early exits from Skills Coaching.

Table 4.2 highlights other differences. For instance, in Derbyshire and North Yorkshire, around half of all customers got as far as entering the Learning Brokerage stage. In all other areas the proportion was only around a third while in Devon and Cornwall the proportion was only around a quarter. Another example relates to Skills Passports. Overall, less than a third (31 per cent) of customers are recorded as having accessed the Skills Passport element of Skills Coaching but this proportion was only 11 per cent in Birmingham and Solihull and only just over eight per cent in Greater Manchester (while almost 60 per cent of customers accessed Skills Passports in Derbyshire and Leicestershire). Similarly, the proportion of entrants who proceeded beyond the Learning Brokerage stages was generally low in all areas, but was notably so in Birmingham and Solihull and Devon and Cornwall (and high in North Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire).

4.2.2 A cohort analysis of progression

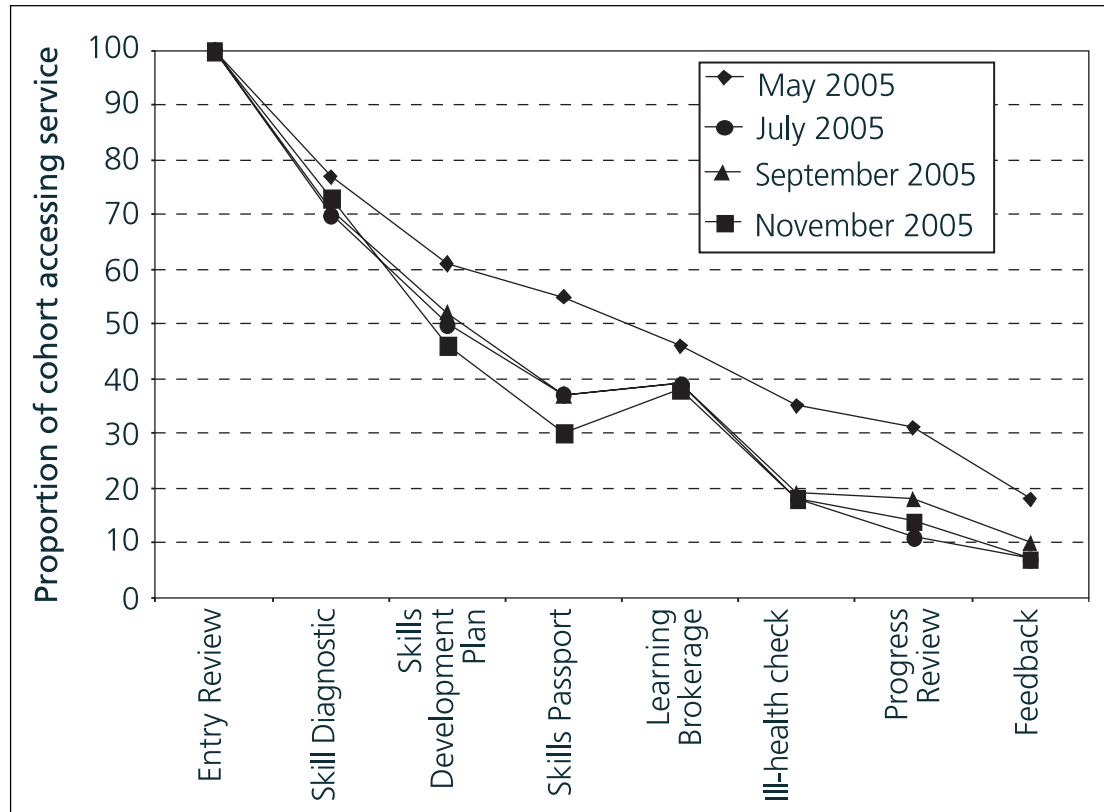
Differences in take up of Skills Coaching services across trial areas could result from differences in the timing of entry and speed of progression. In order to address this issue an analysis of progression by entry cohort was undertaken. Such an analysis not only has the benefit of standardising for the time available to progress within the programme but has the added benefit that it may reveal differences in the operation of Skills Coaching during the trial period (whether, for instance, customers progressed more or less quickly depending upon when they entered the programme). Table 4.3 reports on the proportion of entrants to the Skills Coaching programmes that subsequently progressed to each stage of the programme for the May, July, September and November 2005 cohorts. Figure 4.1 provides a graphical illustration of the same information.

Table 4.3 Proportion of entrants to later stages of Skills Coaching, by month of entry

	<i>Percentage</i>			
	Cohort			
	May 2005	July 2005	September 2005	November 2005
Entry Review	100	100	100	100
Skills Diagnostic	77	70	71	73
Skills Development Plan	61	50	52	46
Skills Passport	55	37	37	30
Learning Brokerage	46	39	39	38
In-learning Health Check	35	19	19	18
Progress Review	31	11	18	14
Feedback	18	7	10	7

The broad pattern revealed by Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1 is similar to Table 4.2, with substantial 'drop out' between stages of the programme, except that in this case the differences are observed amongst the same group of entrants to Skills Coaching (and not a mix of entrants). In all four cohorts the proportion of entrants who reached the stage of leaning brokerage is less than half. Whether this is a good outcome or not will depend on the reason for such drop out. If participants left Skills Coaching before taking up all the services because they had obtained a job or entered full-time education or training then such drop out should be viewed positively. If drop out occurred because participants did not, or could not, progress and remained on benefit, the interpretation of low progression would be less positive.

Figure 4.1 Proportion of entrants entering later stages of Skills Coaching, by month of entry



A different way to look at progression on Skills Coaching is to examine the time taken to pass from one stage of the programme to the next. Using information from the dates on which customers first accessed a service, it is possible to estimate the time taken to access a service (relative to the date at which they started on Skills Coaching). The time taken to access any one of the eight elements of Skills Coaching varies considerably across customers but is generally skewed towards short times. For instance, almost all customers are recorded as having received an Entry Review interview immediately on entry but a few are recorded as having their Entry Review later and some are not recorded as having such a review at all. Similarly, most customers had a Skills Diagnostic at the time of their Entry Review but in a minority of cases a period of time (and exceptionally a very long period of time) elapsed before the Skills Diagnostic was administered. With distributions of this type, the mean is greatly affected by extreme outlying observations and, in this case, would give a misleading impression of the 'average' time taken to access Skills Coaching services. The median time taken to access a service provides a much better guide to the time typically experienced by a customer.

Table 4.4 reports on the time taken from the date of entry to access the eight Skills Coaching services (measured in days after entry). The information has been estimated for five cohorts of entrants: those entering May, July, September, November and December 2005 together with January 2006 and the same information for all customers irrespective of their date of entry.

Table 4.4 Median time from month of entry to access services by entry cohort

<i>Days from first entry to Skills Coaching</i>							
Date of entry	Skill Diagnostic	Skills		In-learning			
		Development Plan	Skills Passport	Learning Brokerage	Health Check	Progress Review	Feedback
May	7.0	20.0	31.0	42.0	116.5	153.0	127.0
July	3.0	15.0	21.0	32.0	85.0	128.0	103.0
September	3.0	10.0	14.0	17.0	50.0	88.0	61.0
November	0.0	11.0	14.0	16.0	60.5	81.0	72.0
December	0.	25.0	28.0	28.0	62.0	66.5	63.0
January	0.0	7.0	10.0	6.0	27.0	44.5	35.5
All entrants	0.0	10.0	14.	15.0	55.	85.0	75.0

Table 4.4 highlights two patterns: First, as would be expected, it takes time to progress through the Skills Coaching process. For instance, on average it took a month for those who entered Skills Coaching in July 2005 and had reached the Learning Brokerage state to do so and almost four months to reach the Progress Review stage. Second, the time taken to access services appears to have decreased with each successive cohort of entrants. The obvious interpretation of this is that Skills Coaches became more efficient at processing customers with the passage of time and that the whole Skills Coaching process was speeded up as the trials progress. Caution, however, is required here for two reasons: First, some members of later cohorts may still be on Skills Coaching but yet to access some services and by definition, such customers will be those who are eventually recorded as having taken a long time to reach those services. The analysis of time to access a service can only consider customers with a record of accessing the service and therefore, excludes these potential long-duration customers with the result that estimated access times are biased in a downward direction (especially for later cohorts). The January 2006 cohort exemplifies this since the period covered by the records is only three months so that only those who access services quickly (in less than 90 days) will appear in the administrative data. Second, the lower level of progression on later cohorts (noted earlier in this section) might be associated with exits by customers who otherwise would have progressed slowly to later stages of Skills Coaching. This might happen if Skills Coaches became better able to identify those who would not benefit from Skills Coaching and precipitated their early exit from the programme. Removing such customers from the programme would reduce the average time to access later services.

4.3 Progression by customer group

Figure 4.2 describes the pattern of progression for two cohorts of customers when benefit type is distinguished. The diminishing rate of progression to later services is evident for both customer groups and in both cohorts. However, it is also evident

that JSA customers were less likely to progress to later services than other Skills Coaching customers in either cohort. The same caveats apply to this analysis as to the earlier analysis of progression. The lower rates of progression of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers might be explained by a higher rate of exit from Skills Coaching than is the case with inactive benefits (IAB) customers and this would be a positive outcome if those exits were to employment or education and training. A higher progression rate might signal that IAB customers were more in need of support than JSA customers, hence their need to progress further through Skills Coaching in order to benefit from its support.

Figure 4.2 Progression on Skills Coaching, by customer benefit group

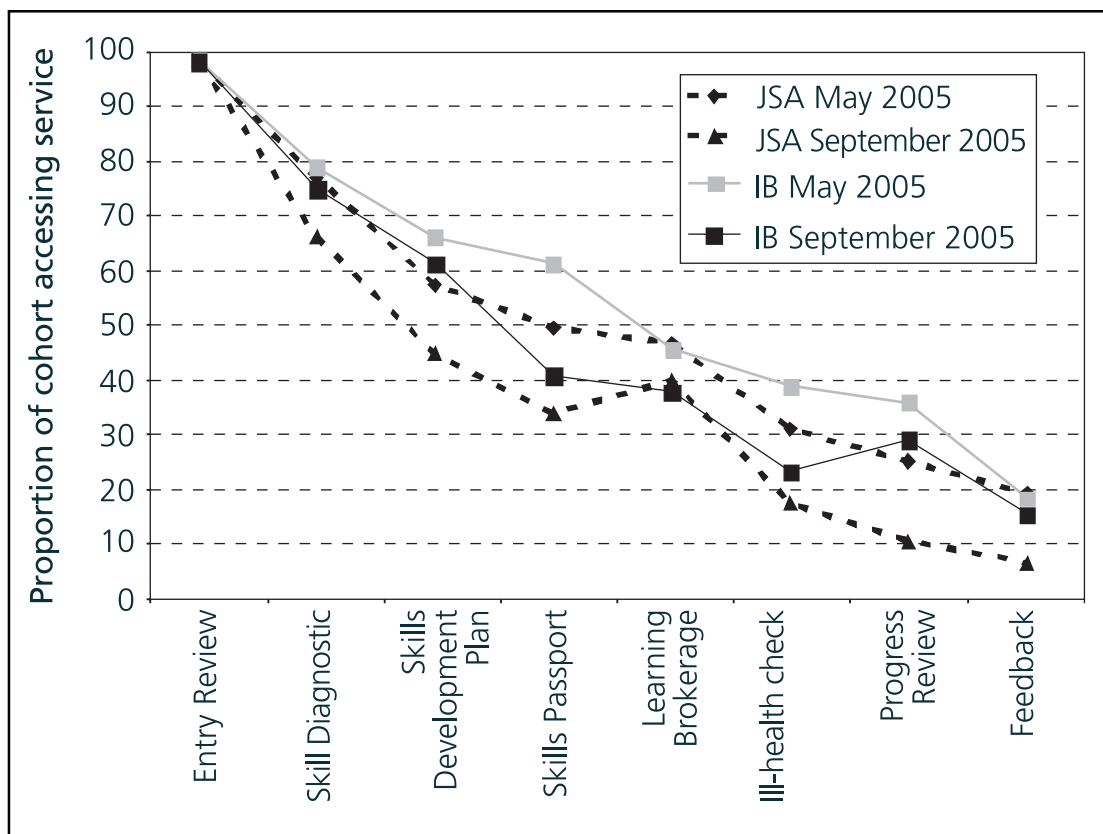


Table 4.5 describes the median times taken to access Skills Coaching services by customer benefit group. The table suggests that whatever the benefit type of the customer, those entering Skills Coaching at the start of the pilot (May 2005) took a lot longer to access services than those entering later (September 2005). The key finding from this table is that although the time taken to access services was generally less for the September cohort, JSA customers did not progress at a faster rate than IAB customers, indeed, in the early stages (for instance, in agreeing a Skills Development Plan), IAB customers appeared to progress more quickly than JSA customers. The table also suggests that the probable explanation for the general speeding up of the Skills Coaching process is that the time taken to complete the early stages (Skills Development Plan, Skills Passport and Learning Brokerage) was much compressed and many customers appear to have accessed all three of these services at, or around, the same time.

Table 4.5 Median time from date of entry to access services, by benefit type and cohort

Date of entry	Skill Diagnostic	Skills			In-learning		
		Development Plan	Skills Passport	Learning Brokerage	Health Check	Progress Review	Feedback
<i>Days from first entry to Skills Coaching</i>							
May 2005							
JSA	7.5	17.0	27.0	54.0	81.0	120.0	127.0
IAB	7.0	26.5	41.0	49.5	129.0	155.5	127.0
September 2005							
JSA	3.0	14.0	14.0	14.0	50.0	88.0	55.0
IAB	2.0	5.5	13.0	20.0	51.5	85.0	62.0

Figures 4.3-4.8 describe the characteristics of Skills Coaching customers who entered Skills Coaching in May-July 2005 and who accessed post-Entry Review services. The charts show the proportion of each customer group (claimants by claim length, age group, disability status, lone parent status, ethnic origin and qualification level) who accessed each of the services offered by Skills Coaching. The May-July cohort was chosen as a representative cohort that has had sufficient time for customer to access services from the later stages of Skills Coaching.

Figure 4.3 Access to Skills Coaching services, by benefit claim length

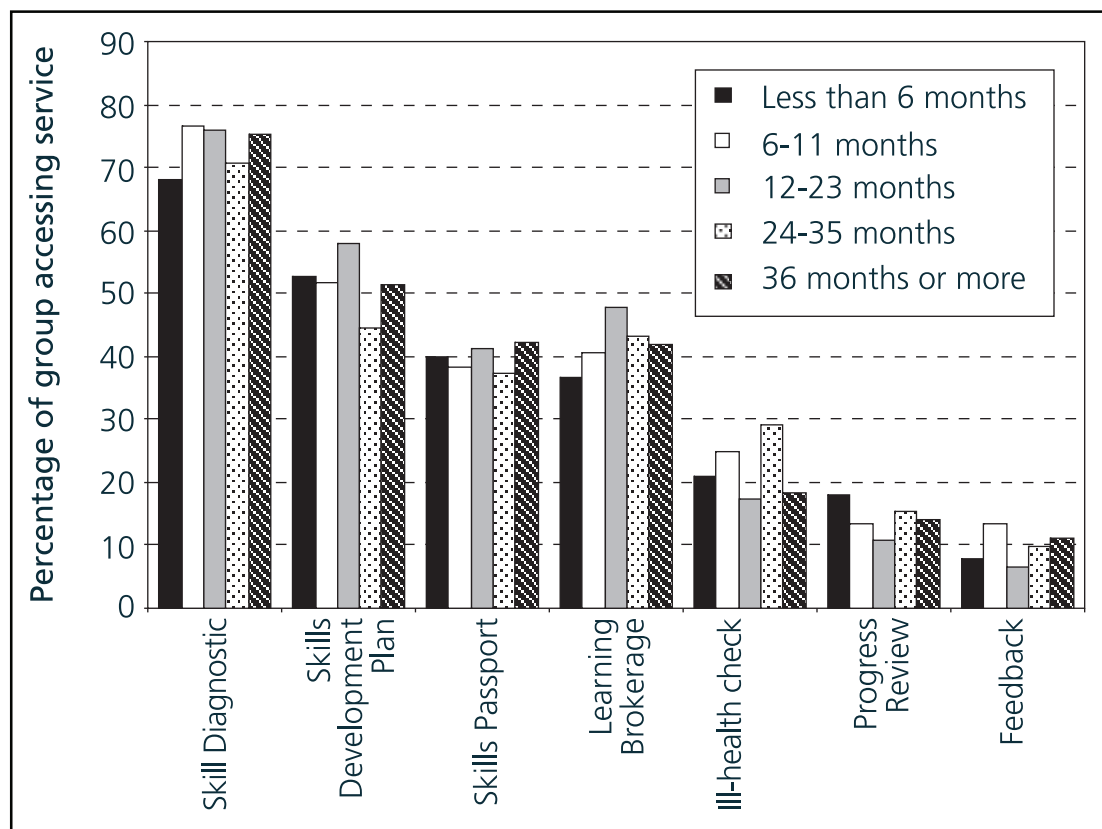


Figure 4.4 Access to Skills Coaching services, by age range

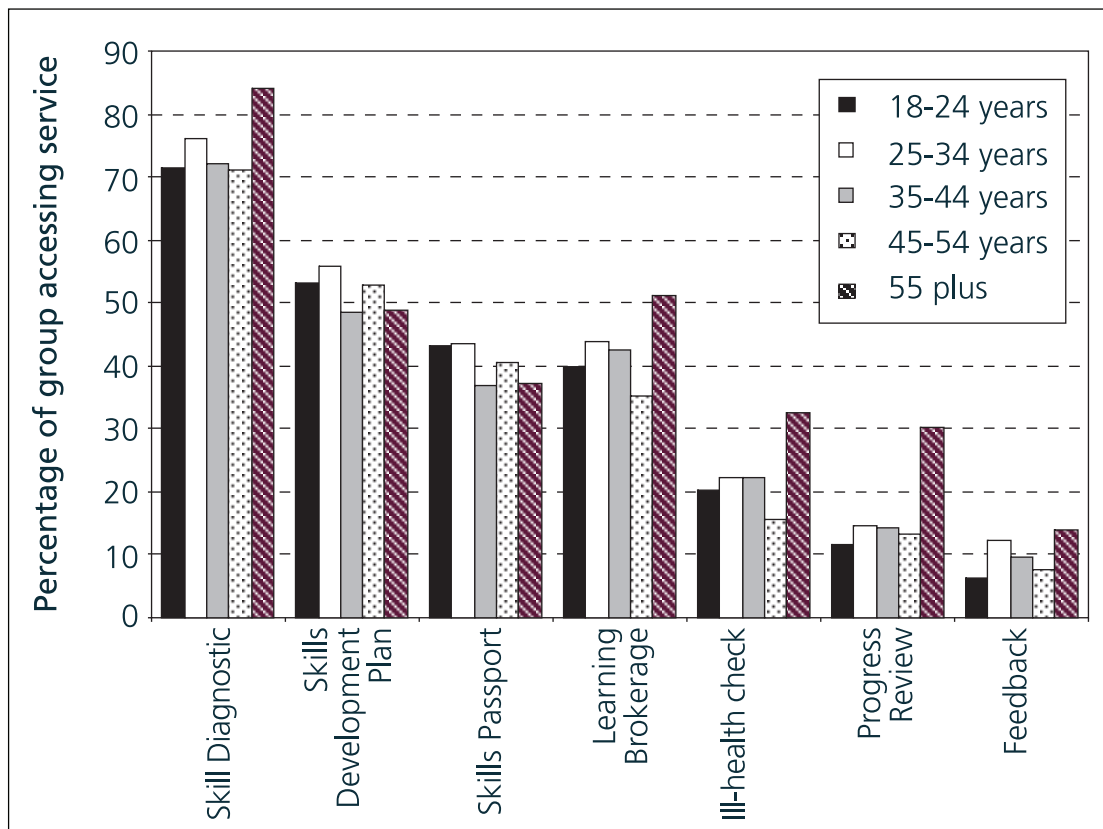


Figure 4.5 Access to Skills Coaching services, by disability status

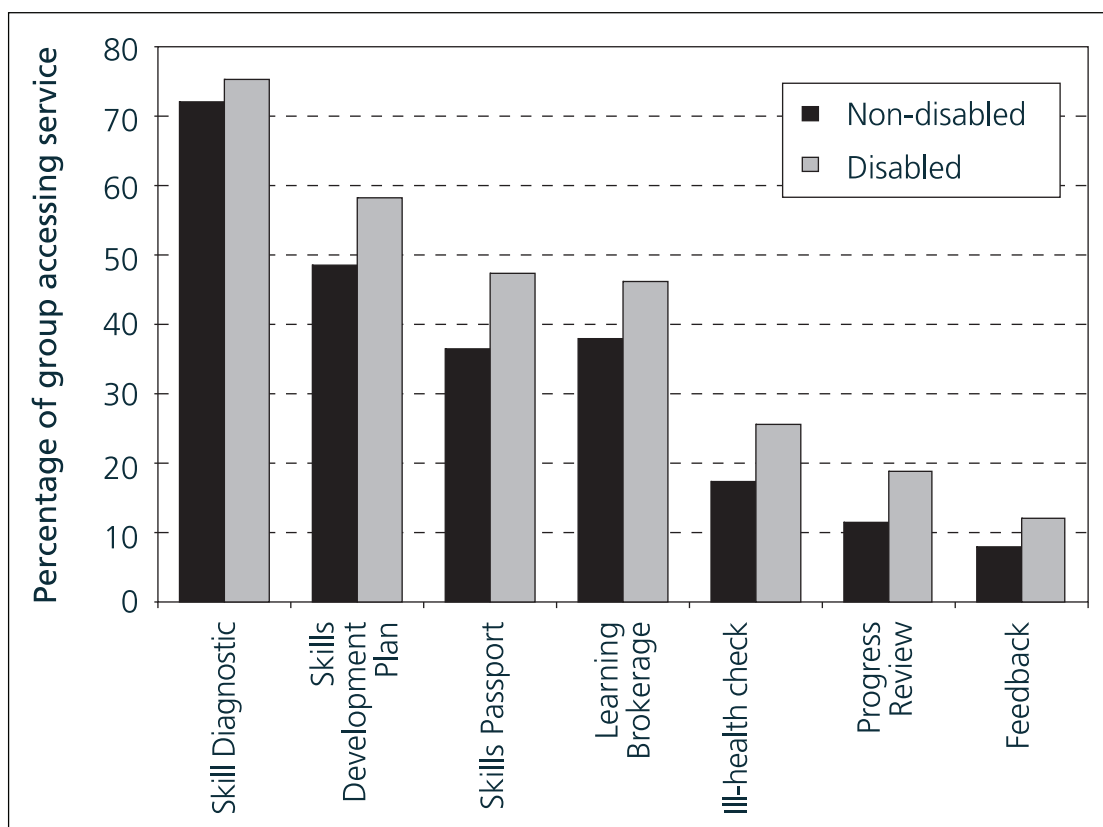


Figure 4.6 Access to Skills Coaching services, by lone parent status

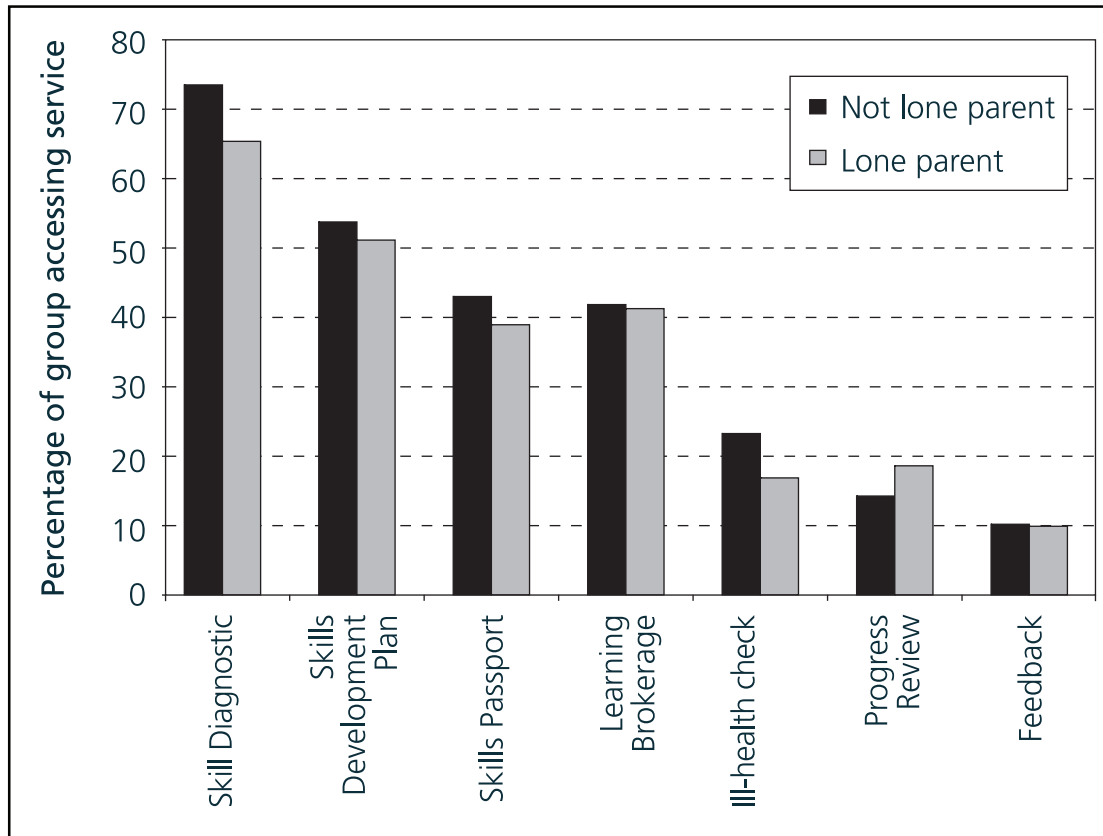


Figure 4.7 Access to Skills Coaching services, by broad ethnic origin

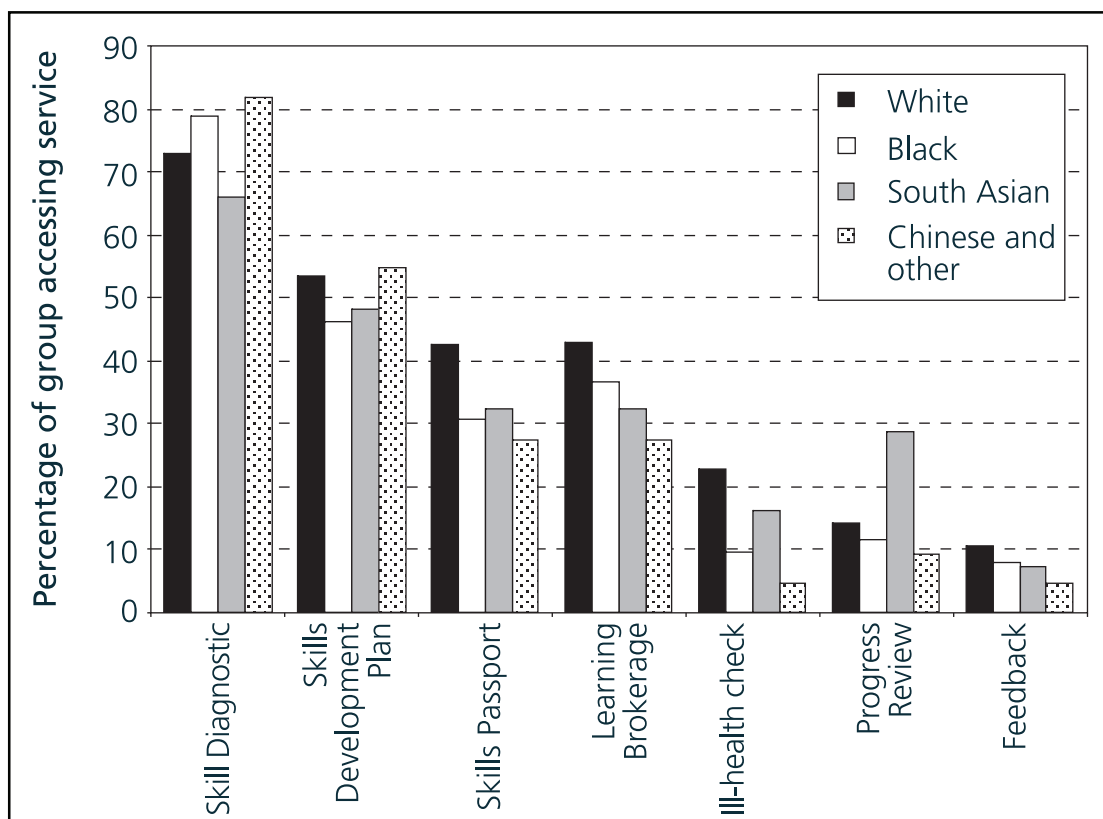
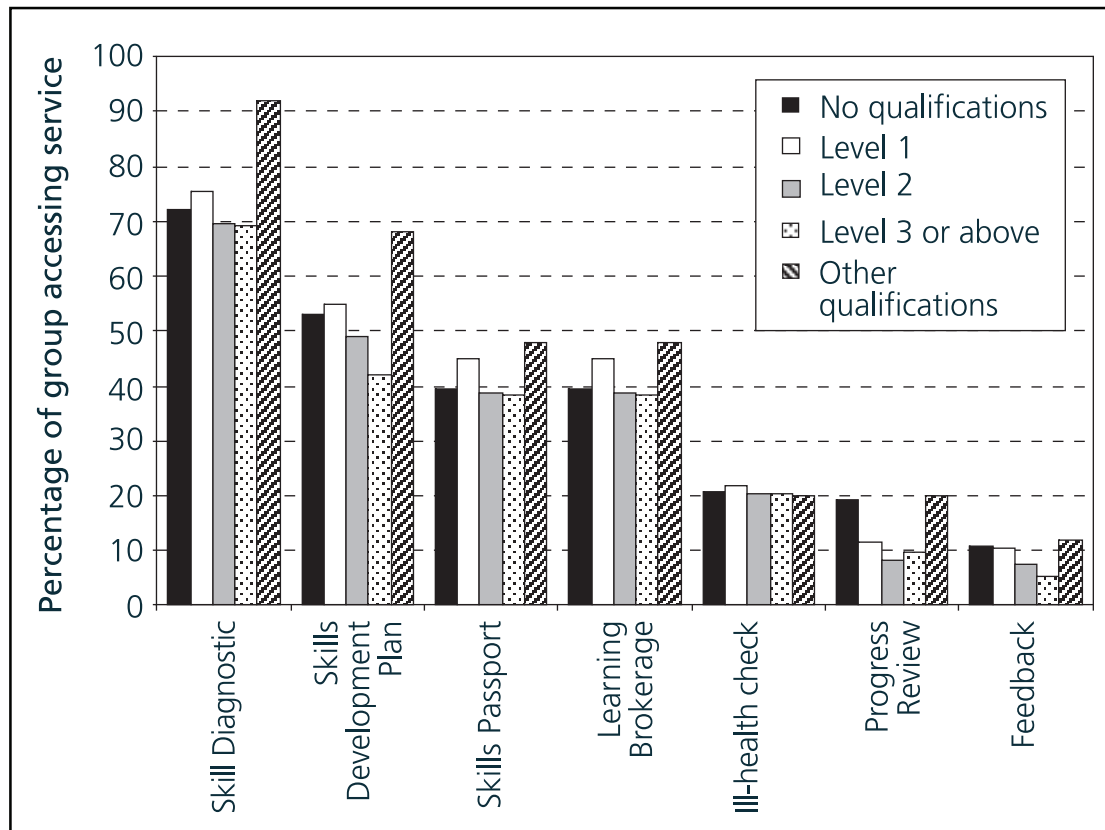


Figure 4.8 Access to Skills Coaching services, by qualification level



There are few striking differences in the characteristics of Skills Coaching customers accessing services. The exceptions to this are older (50 plus) customers and customers who were unqualified who were present in all post-Entry Review services in greater proportions than other customer groups. There is also a less obvious shift in the balance of customers accessing later services towards lone parents and people with disabilities. However, since many of the characteristics of Skills Coaching customers are associated with one another, it requires multivariate analysis (using a logistical regression model) to identify the customer characteristics most associated with accessing any particular Skills Coaching service.

The analysis indicates that women, customers with a disability and those whose ethnic origin is classified as Chinese or other were more likely than other customers to have accessed the Skills Diagnostic while those with qualifications at NVQ Level 3 or above and customers with benefit claims of less than six months, were less likely to access that service. The Skills Development Plan was more likely to be completed by women, disabled customers, customers of South Asian ethnic origin and customers with NVQ Level 2 qualifications. Customers with short, or very long, benefit claims were less likely to complete a Skills Development Plan. Disabled customers and women were most likely to have accessed Skills Passports, but not lone parents who were less likely to access that service. Black customers and those with qualifications at NVQ Level 3 or above were also less likely to access Skills Passports.

The characteristic most strongly associated with Learning Brokerage was qualification level with both those with no qualifications and those with other qualifications (generally low level qualifications) more likely than other customers to have accessed the service. Women and customers with disabilities were, again, more likely than others to have accessed an In-learning Health Check, while customers of Black or South Asian ethnic origin and those with a qualification at Level 3 or above were less likely. Access to a Progress Review interview was most strongly associated with age and qualification level. Older customers (aged 45 plus) and those with NVQ Level 2 were most likely to have had a Progress Review. Customers of South Asian ethnic origin were less likely to have accessed that service.

The pattern of access to Skills Coaching services is clearly a complex one. Whatever the processes involved, differential access to the stages of Skills Coaching means that the customer population that entered Skills Coaching is gradually filtered down, not just in numbers, but also in terms of the characteristics of customers in the latter stages of participation. Those who gain a benefit early on drop out, as do those who see little benefit from the programme, leaving behind a group of customers who either feel that Skills Coaching has something to offer them or who have few other options but to continue.

4.4 The Skills Diagnostic

The Skills Diagnostic is a key element of the Skills Coaching design and along with the Entry Review interview is the only element of the Skills Coaching service that Coaches are required to provide. The Skills Diagnostic is intended to help the Skills Coach identify the skills-related barriers that need to be addressed but it also has the function of helping customers recognise the skills and experience they already possess (and thus, boost their confidence).

Most customers interviewed found the Skills Diagnostic to be useful, many citing the narrowing down of options, the opening up of choices and the boosting of confidence as benefits. Nonetheless, other customers found the Diagnostic off-putting and a reminder of school, while a minority did not like the Diagnostic, saying it was too difficult to understand or that it was too basic. Some customers felt the job suggestions arising from the Diagnostic to be unsuitable or too general to be useful.

Skills Coaches are generally satisfied with the skills diagnostic. They felt it raised customers' awareness of their skills levels; motivated customers at Level 2 or below and could be a good foundation for the Skills Coaching process. Criticisms of the Skills Diagnostic included that it:

- was too difficult for customers with no or little IT skills;
- intimidated customers with low self-esteem and lacking confidence; and
- was too simple and 'patronising' for customers of Level 3 ability and above.

Perhaps for these reasons, there was evidence that some Skills Coaches only used the Skills Diagnostic if they felt it was appropriate to the customer, despite the fact that Skills Coaches were required to deliver the Skills Diagnostic to all customers.

The time taken by the Skills Diagnostic varied considerably, probably reflecting some of the factors mentioned above. The Diagnostic could take anything from ten minutes to more than two hours, with the majority of coaches reporting that it took around one hour. It generally took longer for customers who lacked basic IT skills. Some customers need help completing the Skills Diagnostic and few Skills Coaches had not needed to provide such support to at least some customers

Despite the difficulties presented by the Skills Diagnostic, most Skills Coaches interviewed believed that it identified the right issues for customers. Identifying numeracy problems and literacy levels created a good starting point for the Skills Coaching process. Inevitably, there were dissenting voices and some Skills Coaches did not think that the skills diagnostic is identifying the right issues for customers as it is based on an individual's perceptions of themselves and their abilities. One Skills Coach noted that it is only reaffirming an individual's ideas, whilst another believed that it is very unspecific.

4.5 Skills Passport

Opinion was divided about the Skills Passport. Most customers found it useful, especially the requirement to create a CV. Others reported that it helped build confidence. Creating a record of skills and achievements was valued by many but was less so for others who did not like to revisit their past work experiences or who thought that their past was a poor guide to what they aspired to in the future. Customers who were critics of the Skills Passport tended to be the more experienced and better qualified/skilled customers who felt the Skills Passport was too basic or constraining. Few customers thought the Skills Passport would not be useful to employers, although some were unsure about this.

Skills Coaches were less enthusiastic about Skills Passports. Few expressed positive views about them and the majority expressed negative views. The Skills Coaches who had positive views stated that it gave a good overview of a customer's skills and qualifications and provided a portfolio that could be taken away. They indicated that the way in which the Skills Passport required customers to record their skills had helped those customers realise just what skills they actually possessed and had helped them improve their confidence. Overall, the skills passport was thought to be useful to customers as it:

- provided evidence of their achievements;
- got them to think about and focus on their skills;
- organised certifications and a CV;
- set out an action plan.

Skills Coaches were, however, unsure of the overall value of the Skills Passport to every customer and some customers were reported as finding it difficult to understand. Not all Skills Coaches felt that the Skills Passport improved a customer's confidence. Often, their skills were under-rated by customers, who consequently felt demotivated. The great majority of Skills Coaches were unsure or sceptical about the usefulness of the Skills Passport for employers. They reported that employers did not understand or were not interested in the Skills Passport, as it is too lengthy. A CV is considered more useful. In some instances, customers were not using the Skills Passport and would not be taking it to an employer.

In terms of a preference for the online or paper version of the Skills Passport, the opinion of Skills Coaches appeared evenly divided. However, most Skills Coaches believed that customers preferred the paper version although some customers were thought to be comfortable with either version. Customer preferences concerning the Skills Passport appeared to depend on the level of their IT skills and their ability to access a computer.

Generally, Skills Coaches felt that the Skills Passport could be developed and improved, but would need to be:

- optional;
- appropriate to the customer;
- more flexible;
- combined with the workfile, as it becomes repetitive;
- less complicated and less intimidating;
- more focused on an assessment of soft skills.

4.6 Learning brokerage

Brokering learning for customers is a key element of the Skills Coaching service. The success of this element of the programme is dependent on a number of factors. These include the:

- availability of suitable provision;
- Skills Coaches' awareness of provision;
- Skills Coaches' ability to identify customer's needs and match those needs to available provision;
- customer's ability to take up identified learning opportunities.

All the Skills Coaches interviewed felt they had a sound knowledge of the learning provision available in their district through their own knowledge and experience of working in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG). Most kept their knowledge up-to-date by means of networking with colleges and local providers; using professional

links; researching online and in hard copies of prospectuses and local directories; and by contacting local colleges. However, at least half of those interviewed identified a need for further information. Such additional information included:

- a directory or database of learning and training provision (including a list of free/funded national, regional and local training provision provided by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Jobcentre Plus, together with a list of provision for people with mental health problems);
- further information on specific provision (including availability of work-based provision, privately provided training, local projects, soft skills courses, and anger management courses);
- information on funding for childcare and transport costs.

4.7 Training and learning opportunities

Early qualitative research found evidence from both customers and Skills Coaches of a lack of suitable training courses and long waits for availability of courses. These problems were not simply initial 'teething' problems as they remained evident at the second round of interviews. The great majority of Skills Coaches were concerned about the existence of sufficient learning provision to which they could refer customers and several considered the lack of provision a major problem.

The number of training providers interviewed as part of the evaluation of Skills Coaching was small (just six at the second round of interviews) and although they represented a cross-section of types of provider, they could not be regarded as representative in a statistical sense. Nonetheless, their views provide an important counterpoint to those of customers and Skills Coaches. Three of the providers interviewed already worked under contract for next**step** and had simply added Skills Coaching to their portfolio of activities. Not surprisingly, these providers were familiar with Skills Coaching and very supportive of its aims. They saw Skills Coaching as offering an opportunity to provide structured support over a period of time. Such an extended timeframe was regarded as essential to progress more challenging customers.

Not all of the providers were positive about Skills Coaching, although their reason was less about the aims and purpose of Skills Coaching and more about the lack of referrals being made. One provider said that their referrals only came directly from their own staff employed as Skills Coaches and, because they stuck rigidly to the original eligibility guidelines by referring only customers at Level 1, the number of referrals was much lower than other trial areas where referrals to training were being made for customers at all levels of educational attainment.

All but one of the training providers thought that those customers who were referred to them were well matched to the training they could offer. In an exceptional case it emerged that customers were seeking provision of a type not available at all in the region and so were being referred to other courses as a compromise or 'second best'. There was evidence of some instances of poor liaison

between Skills Coaches and providers, the latter not having sight of the results of the Skills Diagnostic and being aware of little or no support from the Skills Coach during the period of training.

If the training providers interviewed were typical, then a wide range of provision for Skills Coaching customers would appear to be available. Training and learning opportunities on offer included:

- an Open University 'opening' course;
- assertiveness training;
- supported employment (for those with learning disabilities);
- CV building;
- job search skills;
- employability skills;
- business management;
- skills for life;
- ICT;
- catering;
- business administration;
- building;
- printing;
- repair and maintenance; and
- personal development.

In addition to these courses, some providers were planning to add to their portfolio of training opportunities. Potential additions included mini-bus driving, retailing, and training for information, advice and guidance.

The training capacity of the six training providers varied from a maximum of 140 places to Skills Coaching customers on relevant programmes to 50 places. One training provider offered all their courses on-line, so considered that there was no limit to their training capacity. Most providers indicated that they did not have any current difficulties relating to the number or types of customers referred (the problem was not enough referrals) but if capacity was to be increased in the future, it would be necessary to plan increased provision with care and also depend on the terms of any future contracts.

Even where suitable learning provision was available to which Skills Coaches could refer customers, there was often no funding available. This acted as a critical barrier, preventing customers from taking up provision. Skills Coaches noted that it was difficult to keep customers motivated to learn when there was no funding, a lack of training provision or a long waiting list to get on a course.

5 Outcomes and impacts

5.1 Introduction

A key aim of the Skills Coaching programme is for Skills Coaches to add value to existing Jobcentre Plus support for individuals to improve their skills and opportunities of sustainable employment. The Skills Coaching design recognised that for some customers the outcomes or impact of the service might take some time to come to fruition. While an obvious goal of the programme is to see customers entering employment, intermediate outcomes, such as entering a course of full-time education or gaining work experience through voluntary work, may be just as important in the long-run as they build a foundation from which the individual can eventually progress to sustainable employment.

Evidence from interviews with customers and Skills Coaches found that skill barriers were often combined with other barriers to employment that were unrelated to skill. Skills Coaching, through learning brokerage, can help address some customers' skill needs and through the counselling function, also address some of the other barriers faced by customers, such as lack of confidence or understanding of how to obtain employment. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that customers vary greatly, from those who are very close to job ready to those who face very considerable impediments to employment, and Skills Coaching offers only a limited amount of support (in terms of access to learning, finance or solutions to non-skills barrier to work).

In this context, while an entry to a job may be the most desirable outcome of participation in Skills Coaching, it will not happen in every case. Skills Coaching is a means of enhancing an individual's employability so that the outcome may be that a customer is helped a little further towards the goal of job readiness. It may take further support by Jobcentre Plus to complete that task of helping the customer into paid work. There are, thus, several aspects to Skills Coaching outcomes: First, there is the issue of whether the service did in fact help customers on the path towards employability. The notion of 'distance travelled' is well recognised but is difficult to measure in an objective manner. This chapter begins by considering such evidence gleaned from interviews with customers and Skills Coaches. Second, Skills Coaching

may launch a customer onto a path that embraces future learning as a stepping stone to future employment. The evidence of this, and job entry, is examined in the next section. Finally, the evidence on outcomes is used to provide some indicators of the cost of Skills Coaching.

5.2 Qualitative outcomes from Skills Coaching

5.2.1 Meeting customer needs

The views of Jobcentre Plus Advisers were that Skills Coaching met the needs of individual customers. Advisers commented that Skills Coaches were accessible to customers, allowed them to decide what they want to do with their working lives, dealt with their problems and built confidence. Skills Coaching was flexible and able to meet the needs of individuals and help them get back into work. In the main, Advisers believed that the impact of Skills Coaching on customers depended more on the individual and their desire to find work than the specific benefit they were on. Nonetheless, Advisers pointed out that those on Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS) were able to commit more fully to the programme as their benefits were not dependent upon looking for work. Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers, on the other hand, were still required to be actively seeking work and this could lead to customers leaving Skills Coaching for a job (perhaps an unsuitable or unsustainable job) before their underlying skill needs had been fully addressed.

Skills Coaches too were very positive about the impact of the programme. The majority of Skills Coaches interviewed indicated that they felt the skills and employability of their customers had improved following participation in Skills Coaching although some pointed to the considerable variability between customers, so this would not be true in all instances. Improvements in relation to 'soft' outcomes such as confidence were felt to be particularly significant. Most felt that customers completing Skills Coaching would have a greater chance of securing sustainable employment as a result, although it might take a longitudinal follow-up study to confirm this was the case. Some negative views were expressed. These included the comment that the lack of training provision had prevented some customers from completing the programme. Some Skills Coaches also expressed concern at the type of jobs that customers were expected to seek and at least one felt that the primary focus of the initiative was not sustainable employment but any employment. This Skills Coach also indicated that sustainable employment was more likely to be determined by the characteristics of the local labour market than something that could be achieved through effective Skills Coaching.

The ultimate test of the outcomes from Skills Coaching is not so much the views of Advisers and Coaches but what actually happened to customers. Interviews were conducted with customers on two occasions, at around four-five months into the trials and again at around nine to ten months into the trials. On the second occasion the sample of customers was split into 'new' customers who had joined Skills Coaching since the first survey and re-interviews of customers contacted in the first survey. As a broad generalisation, the majority of Skills Coaching customers were

very positive about the initiative. There was, however, a contrast in response between customers interviewed in the early stages of delivery of Skills Coaching (whether interviewed at five months or ten months) and the responses of customers who were interviewed for a second time and therefore, had a longer experience of the programme.

Where customers had recently been referred to Skills Coaching, the great majority were full of praise for the idea of skills coaching and the support they had received from their Skills Coach. Many were just impressed that someone was taking an interest in them, that the service appeared to be tailored to meet their needs in terms of when and where meetings were held; and the majority said they found Skills Coaching useful. These customers said that Skills Coaching had assisted their skills development, provided access to resources and training, increased their confidence and motivation and helped them develop new perspectives and helped with job search. Few customers expressed serious reservations and most were satisfied with the help provided by Skills Coaching. In addition to the benefits of Skills Coaching these customers also remarked on the professionalism of the Skills Coaches as an additional reason to be satisfied. Where there was dissatisfaction, the reason was that Skills Coaching had not led to the training the customer had wanted.

When customers were interviewed for a second time and therefore, had more experience of Skills Coaching, a greater proportion of customers were critical of some aspect of the initiative and their experience of it. Most customers remained very positive about the efforts and professionalism of their Skills Coach but a number felt that the initiative had not delivered all that it promised. In some instances this was due to a failure to find suitable training provision or that the wait for such provision had been too long (sometimes to the point where a place on a course could not be taken up). For other customers the problem appeared to stem from the inability of the Skills Coaching programme to provide financial support for the learning or training they required. Finally, some customers complained that despite the training brokered through Skills Coaching they still had not been able to obtain a job.

Thirty-nine customers were interviewed for a second time and 26 indicated that they had completed or left Skills Coaching. While this is too small a sample to allow robust generalisations to be made about outcomes, it is indicative that of these customers only six had entered paid work. Three had obtained a full-time job, two obtained part-time employment and one had become self-employed. Several had taken up voluntary work of one sort or another and many of these indicated that voluntary work had been taken because paid work could not be obtained. At least half of customers interviewed who had left Skills Coaching were still out of work and on benefit, although two of these had on-going health problems that made job entry difficult or impossible. Only two customers had gone on to vocational education or training. As will be seen later, this pattern of outcomes is not inconsistent with the evidence from Skills Coaching management information (MI).

The evidence from those who obtained full-time jobs is illustrative of both the strength and weakness of Skills Coaching (although caution is needed because the numbers were so small). Two were full of praise for the support that their Skills Coach had given them and said that they had obtained the job they really wanted and could not have envisaged doing so without the support of the Skills Coaching service. The other said that she had waited so long for the training course brokered by her Skills Coach that in the end she had been forced by financial pressure to leave the programme and take a job in a factory rather than obtain the skills she needed for the job she really wanted.

5.2.2 Adding value

Whatever the outcomes for customers, a key question for the evaluation of Skills Coaching was whether such outcomes could have been achieved under existing support arrangements or whether Skills Coaching had added value to existing support. Jobcentre Plus Advisers were almost universally positive about the value added by Skills Coaching. Many commented that Skills Coaching provided 'another option' to which they could refer customers. Additionally, many Advisers explicitly commented that Skills Coaching provided in-depth help and quality time for customers, which boosted the customer's self-confidence and motivation.

Skills Coaches highlighted the complementarity of the Skills Coaching process with that of **nextstep** services. Many Skills Coaches felt that Skills Coaching performed the role of an extension of **nextstep** provision, as customers could be given greater in-depth support over a longer period of time than was available through **nextstep** provision. Skills Coaching also complemented and extended **nextstep** services in the sense that a wider range of customers could receive support.

The majority of Skills Coaches also felt that Skills Coaching added value to existing provision for customers on JSA, IS and IB. Many thought that JSA customers faced greater pressure to return to employment and Skills Coaching added value to existing provision because it enabled customers to access training immediately, whereas they would normally have to wait until they became eligible for New Deal. In the case of young people that was at least six months, while for adults it was at least 18 months.

For all customers, the Skills Coaching process added value to exiting services in a number of ways. These included:

- giving access to guidance;
- giving more in-depth support and help;
- helping a wider range of customers, regardless of their attainment level;
- enabling long term goals and plans for learning and returning to employment to be considered and set in place;
- increasing an individual's self-confidence and motivation;

- allowing the time and space for individuals to talk on a one-to-one basis;
- addressing barriers to entering the labour market; and
- supporting progression.

A substantial majority of Jobcentre Plus Advisers believed that Skills Coaching would add value to New Deal provision, although some expressed reservations. The main concern in this regard was that participation in New Deal is mandatory whereas participation in Skills Coaching is voluntary and needed to remain so if it is to be effective. Some Advisers felt there was already sufficient provision on the New Deal and thus, extension of Skills Coaching to New Deal customers was not necessary.

5.3 Evidence from management information on outcomes

Outcomes from Skills Coaching are recorded on the LSC MI system by Skills Coaching contractors who periodically up-load data on participants. Unfortunately, this administrative data is flawed in a number of respects and this is particularly true of outcomes. Most seriously, there were no reported outcomes for Devon and Cornwall (as of June 2006) while outcomes for Birmingham and Solihull only became available in May 2006. Even where outcomes have been recorded, the completeness of the records is questionable, especially in Greater Manchester where an implausibly low number of outcomes have been recorded. This section presents the evidence as best it can in the light of these data difficulties. In the analysis that follows, data from Devon and Cornwall has been excluded (unless otherwise stated).

By March 2006 (almost 12 months after the launch of Skills Coaching) around 11 per cent of participants were recorded as having achieved some form of 'outcome'. This amounts to around 522 customers out of a total 4,135. The proportion of recorded outcomes increases to over 17 per cent if Devon and Cornwall are excluded (since no outcomes are recorded from that trial area).

5.3.1 Qualifications obtained

The main aim of Skills Coaching is to provide support to adult claimants who face a skills-related barrier to employment. Of course, it must be acknowledged that not all skills-related barriers require a new qualification to be obtained (some barriers are about finding the right job opportunity in which to use existing skills) and that some skills cannot be accredited through a qualification. Nevertheless, it would be expected that a key outcome measure of the Skills Coaching programme would be the extent to which participants in the programme were able to gain a qualification (since unaccredited skills tend to have a low value in the job market).

Before examining the evidence relating to qualifications gained, it is necessary to note, yet again, some data reporting issues. Not surprisingly, there were no reported qualification outcomes for the Devon and Cornwall trial area (since this area does not report any outcomes of any type). In addition, while the Birmingham and Solihull

trial has reported outcomes, no associated qualifications are reported. It should also be noted that no qualifications were recorded for early leavers from Skills Coaching, so the qualifications reported relate only to participants for whom there is a record of an outcome (302 customers) and not to total exits from the programme. Table 5.1 presents information on the number of reported qualification outcomes by qualification level and type of outcome (together with the relevant percentages).

Table 5.1 Qualifications gained from Skills Coaching outcomes

	Outcome from Skills Coaching			Total
	Work	Education	Other	
Entry level	0	1	0	1
Level 0	5	3	68	76
Level 1	2	16	4	22
Level 2	0	4	0	4
Level 3	2	3	0	5
Level 4	0	3	0	3
Level 5	0	1	0	1
Other qualification	1	6	0	7
No qualifications	32	13	41	86
Not known	39	9	49	97
Total	81	59	162	302
Entry level		1.7%		.3%
Level 0	6.2%	5.1%	42.0%	25.2%
Level 1	2.5%	27.1%	2.5%	7.3%
Level 2		6.8%		1.3%
Level 3	2.5%	5.1%		1.7%
Level 4		5.1%		1.0%
Level 5		1.7%		.3%
Other qualification	1.2%	10.2%		2.3%
No qualifications	39.5%	22.0%	25.3%	28.5%
Not known	48.1%	15.3%	30.2%	32.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The most striking feature of Table 5.1 is that less than 40 per cent of outcomes were associated with a record of a qualification gained (just 119 qualifications from 302 known outcomes). This is very likely to be an underestimate since, as mentioned above, two trial areas do not record any qualifications gained. Nonetheless, it is striking that where records of outcomes and qualifications were kept, a large proportion of outcomes were recorded as having no associated qualification. The large number of unknown and 'no qualification' may be explicable in the case where customers leave Skills Coaching for employment or voluntary work but it is less explicable that 22 per cent of education and learning outcomes, and 25 per cent of 'other' outcomes, were not associated with gaining a qualification.

The second striking feature of Table 5.1 is that where a qualification has been gained, most were at very low level (Level 0) and from an outcome recorded as 'other'. Indeed, well over half (57 per cent) of all recorded qualifications were in this category. Qualifications gained from education and learning outcomes were less numerous but concentrated on Level 1 qualifications. A very small number of educational outcomes were associated with higher level qualifications at Levels 3-5.

On the face of it, the relatively low number of qualifications attained from outcomes is disappointing. More positively, this is as likely to be the result of the non-recording of qualifications by some trial areas as it is of non-attainment (but it is impossible to know the extent of non-recording). The generally low level of qualifications gained is less surprising given that such a large proportion of participants have no qualifications at all on entry to the programme and it would be very optimistic to expect such individuals to overcome their skill and qualification gaps in a single attempt.

5.3.2 Job entry and other outcomes

Overall, around a quarter (24 per cent) of outcomes involved taking up a full-time job and a further nine per cent involved taking up a part-time job. A small proportion (3.5 per cent) left Skills Coaching to undertake voluntary work and an even smaller proportion left to go into self-employment. Almost ten per cent entered further education and a further five per cent entered some form of full-time education. The proportion entering higher education was small (below two per cent). Overall, around 19 per cent were recorded as returning to benefit. A large proportion of outcomes were classified as 'other'.

Outcomes by benefit type

The circumstances of JSA customers, especially those with long benefit claims, are likely to be rather different to those of inactive benefits (IAB) customers (and IAB customers with long claims). JSA customers with long claims who are referred to Skills Coaching have 'survived' as unemployed in a benefit regime that requires them to be actively seeking and available for work from the start of their claim. Any JSA claimant who remains unemployed after 12 months or more (let alone 36 months or more) can be expected to have some serious barriers to job entry. These barriers include demotivation and inappropriate attitudes to employment engendered by protracted job search. Skills Coaching IAB customers are likely to be rather different. There is no obligation on IAB claimants to be actively seeking work. Some IAB claimants may have long periods of claim because they face serious barriers to employment (such as chronic illness or disability). Other IAB claimants may have opted to remain out of work (albeit often an enforced choice) in order to meet other responsibilities such as childcare or other caring responsibilities. If the latter group decides to return to work, some barriers (such as lack of motivation) may be absent, although others (like a lack of job search skills or lack of recent work experience) may be present. In the light of all of this, it can be expected that IAB customers will exhibit a greater variety of, and different, barriers to those of JSA customers.

The broad pattern of outcomes for customers claiming different types of benefit is summarised by Table 5.2. The table highlights a clear difference between JSA and IAB customers in terms of outcomes. JSA customers are much more likely to experience a work-related outcome (in fact they are twice as likely to enter a full-time job as IAB claimants) and more likely to engage in some form of education or learning outcome.

Table 5.2 Broad outcome, by benefit type

	<i>Percentage</i>		
	Inactive benefit	JSA	All
Work	30.1	44.4	36.9
Education	21.2	15.4	18.4
Other	48.7	40.2	44.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

There is a considerable body of evidence to show that skills and job-readiness deteriorate over time while employers may use time out of work as an indicator of these aspects of employability. As a consequence, Skills Coaching customers with long benefit claims would be expected to find it more difficult to enter employment directly from the Skills Coaching programme but might require, instead, the intermediate step of some form of education or training. Table 5.3 describes Skills Coaching outcomes by length of benefit claim, while Table 5.4 presents similar information but distinguishes between IAB customers and JSA customers.

Table 5.3 Skills Coaching outcomes, by time claiming benefit

	<i>Percentage</i>					
	Less than 6 months	6-11 months	12-23 months	24-35 months	36 months or more	All
Full-time employment	35.7	26.8	21.1	14.7	10.8	24.0
Part-time employment	9.2	9.8	6.6	2.9	10.8	8.9
Voluntary work	1.6	4.9	2.6	11.8	3.6	3.5
Self-employed	1.1	1.2		5.9	.7	1.2
Returned to benefit	13.5	18.3	18.4	20.6	28.1	19.4
Entered further education	9.2	7.3	14.5	5.9	9.4	9.5
Entered full-time education	2.7	11.0	5.3		5.0	4.8
Entered higher education		2.4		5.9	2.2	1.4
Continued existing learning	3.8	1.2	2.6	2.9	1.4	2.5
Other	23.2	17.1	28.9	29.4	28.1	24.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

Table 5.4 Skills Coaching outcomes, by time claiming benefit and benefit type

	<i>Percentage</i>					
	Less than 6 months	6-11 months	12-23 months	24-35 months	36 months or more	All benefit claims
Inactive benefit customers						
Full-time employment	27.1	14.3	8.6	8.3	11.9	15.4
Part-time employment	11.4	20.0	2.9	4.2	9.2	9.9
Voluntary work	2.9	2.9	5.7	8.3	4.6	4.4
Self-employed	1.4			8.3	.9	1.5
Returned to benefit	5.7	17.1	14.3	16.7	24.8	16.8
Entered further education	10.0	5.7	22.9	8.3	7.3	9.9
Entered full-time education	1.4	17.1	5.7		5.5	5.5
Entered higher education		5.7		8.3	1.8	2.2
Continued existing learning	8.6		2.9	4.2	.9	3.3
Self-employed	1.4			8.3	.9	1.5
Other	31.4	17.1	37.1	33.3	33.0	31.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
JSA customers						
Full-time employment	40.9	36.2	31.7	30.0	6.7	33.7
Part-time employment	7.8	2.1	9.8		16.7	7.8
Voluntary work	.9	6.4		20.0		2.5
Self-employed	.9	2.1				.8
Returned to benefit	18.3	19.1	22.0	30.0	40.0	22.2
Entered further education	8.7	8.5	7.3		16.7	9.1
Entered full-time education	3.5	6.4	4.9		3.3	4.1
Entered higher education					3.3	.4
Continued existing learning	.9	2.1	2.4		3.3	1.6
Other	18.3	17.0	22.0	20.0	10.0	17.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

Table 5.3 confirms the expectation that the proportion of customers who had been claiming benefit for less than six months would have a greater likelihood of an outcome (that likelihood was three times that of customers who had been claiming benefit for 36 months or longer). Correspondingly, the proportion of those out of work for 36 months or more who were recorded as returning to benefit was double that of the very short claim group (28 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively).

The impact of the length of claim on outcome is even starker when the two customer groups are separated (Table 5.4). Just over 40 per cent of JSA customers with a claim of less than six months leave Skills Coaching for a full-time job, whereas the proportion of JSA customers with a claim in excess of 36 months is well below

average at just under seven per cent. The latter group is more likely to enter a part-time job than short-term JSA claimants. Just as significantly, 40 per cent of the long-term JSA claimants return to benefit from Skills Coaching compared with just 18 per cent of very short-term JSA customers.

Outcomes for different customer groups

Tables 5.5-5.8 describe the outcomes for men and women, disabled and non-disabled, lone parents and others, and for qualification level. The analysis points to men being slightly more likely than women to enter a full or part-time job, but are also more likely to be recorded as returning to benefit. Women were more likely to have entered further education or left to some 'other' destination. People with disabilities were much less likely to have entered a full-time job (18 per cent compared with 28 per cent of non-disabled) but more likely to have entered a part-time job. There was little difference in their education related outcomes but disabled people were less likely to return to benefit but more likely to exit to an 'other' outcome. Few lone parents had any type of work-related outcome and they were most likely to enter full-time education or return to benefit. Customers with no, or low level, qualifications were least likely to enter a full-time job and most likely to leave to an 'other' outcome. This information is summarised in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Outcomes by gender, disability and lone parent status and level of qualification

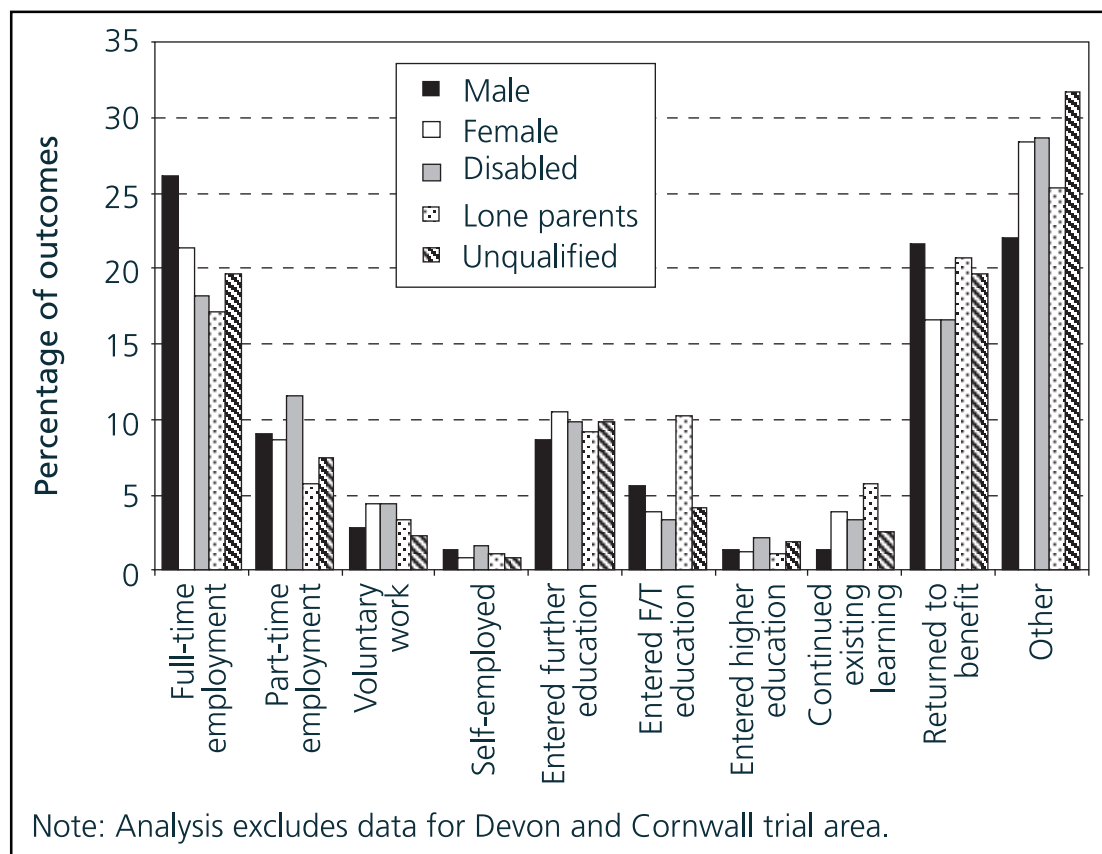


Table 5.5 Skills Coaching outcomes, by gender

	<i>Percentage</i>		
	Male	Female	Total
Full-time employment	26.1	21.4	24.0
Part-time employment	9.1	8.7	8.9
Voluntary work	2.8	4.4	3.5
Self-employed	1.4	.9	1.2
Returned to benefit	21.6	16.6	19.4
Entered further education	8.7	10.5	9.5
Entered full-time education	5.6	3.9	4.8
Entered higher education	1.4	1.3	1.4
Continued existing programme of learning	1.4	3.9	2.5
Other	22.0	28.4	24.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

Table 5.6 Skills Coaching outcomes, by disability status

	<i>Percentage</i>		
	Non-disabled	Disabled	Total
Full-time employment	28.3	18.2	24.7
Part-time employment	7.5	11.6	8.9
Voluntary work	3.1	4.4	3.6
Self-employed	.9	1.7	1.2
Returned to benefit	21.1	16.6	19.5
Entered further education	8.7	9.9	9.1
Entered full-time education	5.9	3.3	5.0
Entered higher education	.9	2.2	1.4
Continued existing programme of learning	2.2	3.3	2.6
Other	21.4	28.7	24.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

Table 5.7 Skills Coaching outcomes, by lone parent status

	<i>Percentage</i>		
	Non-disabled	Disabled	Total
Full-time employment	25.4	17.2	23.8
Part-time employment	9.9	5.7	9.1
Voluntary work	3.6	3.4	3.6
Self-employed	1.1	1.1	1.1
Returned to benefit	17.4	20.7	18.0
Entered further education	10.2	9.2	10.0
Entered full-time education	3.3	10.3	4.7
Entered higher education	1.4	1.1	1.3
Continued existing programme of learning	1.4	5.7	2.2
Other	26.2	25.3	26.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

Table 5.8 Outcomes by highest qualification on entry to Skills Coaching

	<i>Percentage</i>					
	No qualifications	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3 or above	Other qualifications	All
Full-time employment	19.6	22.9	36.4	33.7	11.8	24.0
Part-time employment	7.5	12.5	7.3	7.2	23.5	8.9
Voluntary work	2.3	4.2	1.8	8.4		3.5
Self-employed	.8	1.0		3.6		1.2
Returned to benefit	19.6	18.8	21.8	16.9	23.5	19.4
Entered further education	9.8	9.4	12.7	4.8	17.6	9.5
Entered full-time education	4.2	7.3	1.8	6.0	5.9	4.8
Entered higher education	1.9			2.4		1.4
Continued existing learning	2.6	4.2	3.6			2.5
Other	31.7	19.8	14.5	16.9	17.6	24.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

Age and ethnicity are also characteristics associated with different patterns of outcomes. These patterns are summarised in Tables 5.9-5.10. Table 5.9 indicates that customers who were White or of Mixed ethnic background were the most likely to enter a full-time job from Skills Coaching, while customers of South Asian ethnic origin were the least likely. The latter group also had a very low rate of exit to part-time jobs and none of this ethnic minority group left Skills Coaching for voluntary work. South Asian customers were more likely than any other ethnic group to enter further education or to exit to 'other' destinations. Customers from Black ethnic

minority groups had a relatively high rate of exit to work related destinations (over 40 per cent when full-time and part-time employment, voluntary work and self-employment are added together) and a much of the voluntary work and self-employment outcomes are concentrated amongst this group. On the other hand, Black customers were less likely to have an education-related outcome (although if they did, this often involved an entry to full-time education).

Table 5.9 Skills Coaching outcomes, by broad ethnic group

	<i>Per cent</i>						
	White	South Black	Asian	Chinese and other	Mixed	Prefer not to say	All
Full-time employment	25.4	21.4	12.1	18.2	44.4	33.3	24.0
Part-time employment	9.2	10.7	5.2	18.2	11.1		8.9
Voluntary work	4.0	7.1					3.5
Self-employed	1.0	3.6	1.7				1.2
Returned to benefit	18.0	21.4	25.9	27.3	22.2	22.2	19.4
Entered further education	10.0	3.6	12.1			11.1	9.5
Entered full-time education	4.2	7.1	5.2	27.3			4.8
Entered higher education	1.2		3.4				1.4
Continued existing programme of learning	3.0	3.6					2.5
Other	23.9	21.4	34.5	9.1	22.2	33.3	24.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

The pattern of work-related outcomes by age described in Table 5.10 is quite striking. The likelihood of entering full-time employment diminishes sharply with age, with the proportion of customers aged 50 plus entering a full-time job being around half that of customers in younger age groups (the corresponding proportion of 18-24 year olds was 34 per cent while that of customers age 25-34 was 29 per cent). While the prospect of entry to a full-time job decreases with age, the likelihood of entering a part-time job increases with a remarkable 21 per cent of outcomes for the 50 plus age group taking the form of part-time employment. Whether this pattern is a consequence of choice by the individual customer (for instance part-time work might better fit in with caring commitments or the customer might have access to an occupational pension) or is imposed by the job market (older customers might not be able to cope with full-time employment or employers might discriminate against them) cannot be determined from this evidence. Nonetheless, the fact that the pattern is evident across the age range suggests that individual choice is probably less significant than job market factors.

Table 5.10 Skills Coaching outcomes, by age group

	<i>Percentages within area</i>				
	18-24 years	25-34 years	Total		All
			35-49 years	50 plus	
Full-time employment	34	29	22	18	24
Part-time employment	7	2	8	20	9
Voluntary work		3	4	5	4
Returned to benefit	20	20	19	19	19
Entered further education	10	8	12	7	10
Entered full-time education	3	3	6	5	5
Other	26	29	23	22	25
Entered higher education		2	2	1	1
Continued existing learning		3	3	3	3
Self-employed		1	1	2	1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

5.4 The factors associated with positive outcomes

The analysis of the preceding sub-section identified a number of patterns of outcomes associated with personal characteristics and benefit history. Many of these characteristics are associated with one another. For instance, the great majority of lone parents are women claiming an inactive benefit. They are likely to be in the younger age groups but have long benefit claims. In these circumstances it is difficult to know to what to attribute the observed differences in outcomes between customer groups.

In order to attempt to separate out the most important factors associated with positive outcomes multivariate analytical techniques were used. The basic model specification is of a binary dependent variable taking the value of 1 if there is a positive outcome and zero otherwise. The (log of the) odds of this positive outcome occurring is then regressed against a number of explanatory variables using logistical regression. A range of explanatory variables were used, including variables representing the gender, age, disability status, lone parent status, ethnic origin and level of entry qualification of participants. These personal characteristics were supplemented by variables representing the type of benefit being claimed (JSA or IB) and the length of benefit claim. Other variables included represented the Skills Coaching trial areas and the services accessed by participants. This type of analysis measures the impact of variables against a **base case**. In this case the base case was as follows:

- male;
- aged 35-44 years of age;

- qualified at NVQ Level 2 (or equivalent);
- white ethnic origin;
- not disabled;
- not a lone parent;
- claiming JSA for 12-23 months;
- resident in Greater Manchester;
- has received an Entry Review interview.

It is important to note that the choice of base case is entirely arbitrary and makes no difference to the statistical significance of the results, although it does affect the sign and magnitude of estimated coefficients.

5.4.1 The likelihood of any positive outcome

In the main, having different personal characteristics from the base case made no difference to the odds of leaving Skills Coaching for a positive outcome. The exceptions to this were disability, being of South Asian ethnic origin and being qualified at NDQ Level 3 or above on entry. In the case of participants with a disability, the odds of them experiencing a positive outcome were around 25 per cent higher than those of a non-disabled person (all other things being equal). Participants of South Asian ethnic origin were less likely to achieve a positive outcome; their odds of doing so being around 30 per cent less than that of White participants. Members of other ethnic groups were possibly more likely to achieve a positive outcome but the coefficients were not statistically significant. Finally, the odds of a participant with qualifications at NVQ Level 3 or above were almost 40 per cent greater than base case.

The other key group of explanatory variables were those representing the trial areas (excluding Devon and Cornwall). These were all positive and highly significant. The significance of these area variables means that even after standardising for a range of personal and benefit characteristics, the odds of obtaining a positive outcome were largely associated with the Skills Coaching trial area in which the participant lived. Clearly, some additional but unobserved factor is at work here. There are three main possibilities. These are:

- different practices (and levels of error) in regard to the recording of outcomes by the teams delivering Skills Coaching in each trial area;
- some specific local labour market factor (such as the number and type of job opportunities); or
- differences in the form or effectiveness of delivery across trial areas.

Leicestershire stands out as being associated with the largest increase in the likelihood of positive outcomes. The use of different referral routes varies across trial areas so it is difficult to separate out the effect of referral on outcomes. In Derbyshire

all referrals are made via nextstep and while this trial area performs well compared with Greater Manchester, it performs no better than other areas apart from Leicestershire. The analysis cannot exclude any of the three possibilities (and it may be a combination, to some degree, of all three). What can be said is that a customer who receives a Progress Review interview will have (other things being equal) a much greater likelihood of a positive outcome.

5.4.2 The likelihood of entering employment

In terms of the odds of leaving Skills Coaching for a full-time job, although many personal characteristics had the expected signs (for instance, negative for women, lone parents, people with disability and no or low qualified customers), none of these coefficients were statistically significant. What was significant was benefit claim length. Skills Coaching customers with very short claims (less than six months) had a much greater likelihood of entering a full-time job (their odds almost doubling compared to someone claiming benefit for 12-24 months). Similarly, the odds of a customer who had been claiming benefit for 36 months or longer entering a full-time job were almost halved. Customers who had a Skills Development Plan were much less likely to enter a full-time job, while those who had a Skills Passport were much more likely. As before, customers who participated in a Progress Review were much more likely to enter a full-time job.

Entry to part-time employment was significantly associated with age, with younger customers (particularly those aged 25-34 years) being much less likely to enter this type of job while older customers (55 years plus) were much more likely to enter a part-time job. Also associated with increased odds of entering part-time employment was the possession on entry to Skills Coaching of 'other' qualifications. Compared to Greater Manchester, the indications of the model were that all trial areas were less likely to observe entries to part-time jobs, although these coefficients were only significant in the case of Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire. Given the close geographical proximity of these to areas it may be that this points to a local labour market factor as the explanation of the difference. No Skills Coaching variables were significant in the case of part-time employment.

5.4.3 The likelihood of an education or learning outcome

Being a lone parent, age and qualification level were the only personal characteristics significantly associated with the odds of having an education or learning outcome. Lone parents were significantly more likely to have this outcome with the odds of them doing so more than double those of non-lone parents. Customers aged 18-24 appeared more likely to enter an education outcome but the estimated coefficient was not significant. Customers aged 50 plus are, however, very unlikely to enter an education outcome with the odds of that happening less than half those of a person aged 35-44. It is notable that customers who entered Skills Coaching with no qualifications were much less likely to enter an educational outcome than a base case customer. Those with qualifications at Level 3 or above were also less likely to leave to an education-related outcome. As before, some trial area variables were

significant, with educational outcomes more likely in North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Birmingham and Solihull than in Greater Manchester, Derbyshire and Leicestershire.

Several programme services appear significantly related to the odds of entering an education outcome. Customers who accessed a Skills Passport, Learning Brokerage or an In-learning Health Check were both significantly more likely to enter an education outcome. Counter intuitively, accessing a Skills Development Plan was associated with a smaller likelihood of entering an education outcome.

5.4.4 The likelihood of returning to benefit

The risk of a customer leaving Skills Coaching and returning to their normal benefit regime appears to be most strongly associated with benefit type and claim length, area and programme services. The odds of a customer leaving Skills Coaching and returning to benefit almost doubles if they are claiming IAB rather than JSA. Where benefits have been claimed for 36 months or longer (whichever benefit is claimed) the odds of returning greatly increases, in this case more than doubling compared to a JSA claimant unemployed for 12-23 months. The odds of returning to benefit appear to decrease as claim length decreases but the estimated coefficients are not significant.

Compared to the base case (Greater Manchester) the odds of a customer leaving Skills Coaching and returning to benefit are significantly lower in Derbyshire, Leicestershire and North Yorkshire but no different in Birmingham and Solihull or Nottinghamshire. Again, these differences may result from reporting differences, local labour market differences or differences in efficiency. The model also found that the estimated coefficients on programme variables such as the Skills Passport, Learning Brokerage and the Progress Review were all significantly related to a reduction in the odds of returning to benefit.

5.5 The cost effectiveness of Skills Coaching

The direct cost of the Skills Coaching programme arises from payments to contractors based on the number of customers accessing Skills Coaching services. The 'price' of each service is as follows:

Entry Review interview	£50
Skills Diagnostic	£120
Skills Development Plan	£40
Skills Passport	£40
Learning Brokerage	£35
In-learning Health Check	£30
Progress Review interview	£50
Feedback	£100

There are likely to be other costs associated with the Skills Coaching trials, not least because it is a trial and therefore, involves a degree of central management and evaluation that would not be expected once the programme is rolled out as a mainstream or national programme. The extent to which the unit 'price' of Skills Coaching services is a true reflection of the resources being used is also open to question. Qualitative evidence from the Skills Coaching trials (Hasluck, Bimrose et al., 2006) suggests that the true cost of delivery may differ from the unit price. There is, however, no robust evidence on this from which an estimate of the true cost could be made. Since these indirect costs cannot at present be estimated, and because some of these costs can be regarded as a 'one off' investment in the design, implementation and evaluation of the trials, they are ignored in the present exercise.

5.5.1 Overall costs of the Skills Coaching trials

The total direct cost of the seven Skills Coaching trials over the 12 month period from April 2005 to March 2006 was just under £1 million (£907,690). On average, the cost per customer who entered the programme was around £200 (mean cost equals £195, median cost equals £205).

If customers had accessed all eight of the Skills Coaching services, the cost per customer would have been the sum of all payment for contracts (£465) but the average per customer was well below that figure, largely because most customers did not access every service as some customers left Skills Coaching before accessing all services while in other cases, Skills Coaches may have opted to skip a stage in the Skills Coaching process. It is also the case some customers have had enough time since entry to access later stage services. Whatever the reasons, the numbers accessing services falls rapidly, especially beyond the learning brokerage stage. This resulted in the total cost of the later stages being relatively small, as can be seen from Table 5.11 below.

Table 5.11 Total cost of Skills Coaching, by programme stage

	Number of participants accessing service	Cost
Entry Review Interview	4,647	232,350
Skills Diagnostic	3,239	388,680
Skills Development Plan	2,164	86,560
Skills Passport	1,528	61,120
Learning Brokerage	1,746	61,110
In-Learning Health Check	729	21,870
Progress Review Interview	534	26,700
Feedback	293	29,300
Total cost	4,657	907,690

Because customers have different propensities to leave or remain on Skills Coaching, there are corresponding differences in average cost (reflecting differences in the

services accessed). These differences are, however, not great but are recorded in Table 5.12. The largest differences in average costs are across the trial areas. This reflects the different composition of participants and the different extent of progression in these areas. Average costs were greater for customers who entered Skills Coaching in mid 2005 but this simply reflects the fact that these customers have had more time in which to access services (and, not surprisingly, the average cost of a customer in 2006 is relatively low for the opposite reason). Inactive benefit claimants were slightly more costly; as were female participants (these two characteristics are related). Older customers cost slightly more than the average (especially those age 50 plus) mainly because they were less likely to leave Skills Coaching. Customers with a disability had an above average cost while the reverse was the case for lone parents. Customers of South Asian ethnic origin cost more than the average, again reflecting their propensity to remain on Skills Coaching. Finally, those with no qualifications and other qualifications had above average costs. It must be noted that these differences are entirely due to differences in the extent to which services are accessed since the unit cost of a service is fixed.

Table 5.12 Average cost of Skills Coaching for different customer groups

	N	Median (£)	Mean (£)	Sum (£)
Trial area				
Birmingham and Solihull	650	170	171.43	111,430
Derbyshire	857	250	222.95	191,070
Devon and Cornwall	725	170	159.86	115,895
Leicestershire	723	250	244.11	176,490
Greater. Manchester	794	170	157.30	124,895
North Yorkshire	215	210	228.10	49,040
Nottinghamshire	463	205	214.60	99,360
Start month				
April 2005	27	250	247.96	6,695
May 2005	82	260	248.90	20,410
June 2005	250	215	219.54	54,885
July 2005	491	210	200.09	98,245
August 2005	341	210	204.94	69,885
September 2005	411	210	208.15	85,550
October 2005	467	205	200.88	93,810
November 2005	597	205	200.36	119,615
December 2005	326	170	192.33	62,700
January 2006	523	205	192.78	100,825
February 2006	501	170	185.34	92,855
March 2006	581	170	160.11	93,025

Continued

Table 5.12 Continued

	N	Median (£)	Mean (£)	Sum (£)
Benefit type				
IAB	2,106	205	199.34	419,815
JSA	2,321	205	193.18	448,365
Gender				
Male	2,508	205	193.48	485,240
Female	1,919	205	199.55	382,940
Age range				
18-24 years	665	205	189.80	126,220
25-34 years	1,201	205	198.79	238,745
35-49 years	1,801	205	195.64	352,355
50 plus	751	205	197.71	148,480
Disability status				
Non-disabled	3,128	200	190.50	595,880
Disabled	1,234	210	208.33	257,080
Lone parent status				
Not lone parent	2,761	205	197.07	544,115
Lone parent	927	205	193.34	179,225
Ethnic groups				
White	3,701	205	195.64	724,055
Black	196	170	187.48	36,745
South Asian	321	210	205.70	66,030
Chinese and other	91	205	193.13	17,575
Mixed	75	205	193.13	14,485
Qualification on entry				
No qualifications	2,013	210	202.40	407,430
Level 1	1,075	205	195.02	209,650
Level 2	751	170	184.29	138,405
Level 3 or above	691	170	181.53	125,435
Other qualifications	127	210	210.79	26,770
All customers	4,657	205	194.91	907,690

5.5.2 The cost of achieving outcomes

Participation in Skills Coaching is not an end in itself. The purpose of Skills Coaching is to help benefit claimants overcome skills-related barriers to work and help them enter employment. As already noted, around 17 per cent of Skills Coaching participants were recorded as achieving an 'outcome' (excluding Devon and Cornwall for which there is no outcome data). Not all of these outcomes can be regarded as positive in the quantitative sense that they did not lead to job entry or entry to education. Some participants left Skills Coaching and returned to their normal benefit regime. A key question is, therefore, what did it cost to achieve these outcomes?

There are a number of ways of measuring the cost of achieving a Skills Coaching outcome. Key indicators are those that related to positive outcomes as resources spent on customers who leave early or who return to their normal benefit regime are a form of deadweight cost. Key measures of cost are thus:

- total cost (all customers) divided by number of positive outcomes = average total cost per positive outcome;
- total cost of customers with an outcome divided by number of positive outcomes = average cost of a positive outcome;
- total cost of customers with outcomes divided by the number of specific outcomes (e.g. full-time employment) = average cost of a specific outcome.

These indicators can be interpreted as revealing different aspects of the costs of the Skills Coaching trials that are akin to an economist's notion of average and marginal cost.

Average total cost per positive outcome is a measure of the cost of achieving a positive outcome taking into account the deadweight cost of participants who do not reach such an outcome. This provides an indication of what the likely cost of an outcome would be should the Skills Coaching programme be rolled out nationally. This measure is sensitive to the ratio of positive outcomes to number of participants and this in turn reflects the composition of participants in terms of their personal characteristics and the date on which they entered the Skills Coaching programme and, so long as Skills Coaching is a continuing programme, this measure will always overstate the true average cost of a positive outcome. In contrast, the overall cost of achieving a positive (or a specific) outcome provides a measure of the 'unit' cost of a positive/specific outcome. This cost indicates the marginal cost of achieving a positive outcome and suggests what it would cost to achieve one more positive outcome.

The analysis presented below is based on Skills Coaching MI that excludes Devon and Cornwall, since there are no recorded outcomes for that trial area. The effect of excluding Devon and Cornwall is to slightly increase the average total cost across the remaining six trial areas (from £195 to £203).

5.5.3 The global cost of achieving a positive outcome

For the six trial areas examined, the total cost of Skills Coaching was estimated as being £752,285 over the period April 2005 to March 2006. During that period there were 516 recorded outcomes. Of these, 416 can be regarded as positive outcomes on a broad definition (only customers recorded as returning to benefit are excluded) or 288 on a narrow definition (only work and education related outcomes are counted while 'other' outcomes are excluded). On this basis the average total costs were as follows:

- Average total cost of an outcome £1,458
- Average total cost of a positive outcome (broad definition) £1,808
- Average total cost of a positive outcome (narrow definition) £2,612

5.5.4 The marginal cost of a positive outcome

The total cost of the 516 participants who were recorded as reaching an outcome was estimated to be £132,635. Of these 516 outcomes, 416 were positive (broad definition) and 288 positive (narrow definition). There are two ways of looking at the marginal cost of achieving a positive outcome. The first takes account of the cost of the negative outcomes while the second considers only the costs directly related to the individual customer who achieved the positive outcome.

Taking account of the cost of negative outcomes (in other words the total cost was the cost across all outcomes), the marginal cost of a positive outcomes was:

- Marginal cost of a positive outcome (broad definition) £319
- Marginal cost of a positive outcome (narrow definition) £460

If the cost of negative outcomes are not taken into account and only those costs directly attributable to the individual with positive outcomes are considered, then the average costs fall as indicated below:

- Unit cost of positive outcome (broad definition) £268
- Unit cost of positive outcome (narrow definition) £278

The costs of individual or specific outcomes (ignoring deadweight cost) vary to some extent, reflecting the fact that some positive outcomes (entry to a job, for instance) can occur from an early exit (and therefore, cost less to achieve) while others (such as entry to full-time education) may require the customer to progress through more stages of Skills Coaching in order to achieve the outcome. The average unit cost of specific types of outcomes is shown below in Table 5.13. These are based on the costs associated with the individual customers who achieved these outcomes (the cost of all other participants is ignored).

Table 5.13 Average unit cost of Skills Coaching outcomes

Outcome	Mean (£)	Median (£)	N
Full-time employment	255	250	124
Part-time employment	270	290	46
Self-employed	209	228	6
Voluntary work	270	263	18
Entered further education	363	415	49
Entered full-time education	276	285	25
Entered higher education	218	245	7
Continued existing programme of learning	273	250	13
Returned to benefit	212	228	100
Other	246	260	128

Note: Analysis excludes data for Devon and Cornwall trial area.

6 Key findings and conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This report has presented the findings of an evaluation of the first 12 months of the Skills Coaching trials. Skills Coaching is a programme designed to provide support to adult benefit claimants who wish to return to work and for whom a lack of skill, or an inability to apply their skill in the job market, is the barrier to employment. Skills Coaching trials were launched in April 2005 in eight trial areas (subsequently reduced to seven through the merger of Manchester East and West districts) but is to be extended by a further 12 trial areas by September 2006.

The evaluation is based on both qualitative and quantitative evidence. The quantitative evidence was collected on two occasions (at around five months and around ten months after the launch of the trials) and comprised a large number of in-depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus Advisers, **nextstep** Advisers, Skills Coaches, Skills Coaching customers and training providers. Quantitative evidence was drawn from the Jobcentre Plus Labour Market System (LMS), although this had very limited data on Skills Coaching, and from the Learning and Skills Council management information (LSC MI) system. The qualitative evidence provides a rich source of information about the implementation and delivery of Skills Coaching and the experiences of the various stakeholders. Such evidence is not capable of providing robust and generalisable conclusions about the population of Skills Coaching participants or their progress and outcomes. Quantitative analysis of MI has provided a bigger picture of participation and outcomes. Analysis of this data can reveal patterns and associations that may not be obvious to individual customers or other stakeholders. Since MI covers all recorded participants in Skills Coaching it is not subject to sampling error, although it most definitely is subject to measurement error. Both the qualitative and quantitative evidence have been reported separately in detail. Both approaches have their strengths and weaknesses and for that reason the results of the quantitative analysis must be seen in the context of the findings from the qualitative interviews with Skills Coaching customers, Jobcentre Plus Advisers, Skills Coaches and other stakeholders. This report provided that synthesis.

6.2 Key findings

There were a number of serious problems relating to the recording of data on both the Jobcentre Plus LMS and the LSC Skills Coaching database. In the former case, there appeared to be an under-recording of referrals by Advisers to Skills Coaching, with at least one trial area recording no referrals at all. The LSC Skills Coaching database, while containing comprehensive records regarding customers and the services accessed, appears to under-record outcomes. One trial area recorded no outcomes at all, while two trial areas report no data on qualifications associated with outcomes. In addition, the nature of the Skills Coaching process sometimes makes it difficult to determine the status of customers (and the dates on which events happened), particularly in regard to whether some customers are still participating or have left the programme.

If an accurate picture of the demand for Skills Coaching and the operation of the trials in the future is to be obtained, steps need to be taken to improve the accuracy of data on referrals and outcomes. This might take the form of more training for those responsible for data collection at the local level, the creation and rigorous application of definitional rules (such as when a customer has left Skills Coaching) and better monitoring of the data collection process. Having said this, it should be noted that such a tightening up needs to be handled with tact since Skills Coaches already complain about the time-consuming nature of Skills Coaching reporting.

The definition of eligibility for Skills Coaching, with its emphasis on skill as **the** barrier, means that the need for a Skills Coaching service can only be judged subjectively by Jobcentre Plus Advisers. Referrals by Advisers can, therefore, be taken as the measure of need for Skills Coaching amongst the benefit claimant population. Unfortunately, the unreliability of records of referrals makes an assessment of the scale (or incidence) of need for Skills Coaching problematic. Because of the poor recording of referrals, the only consistent measure of the need for Skills Coaching is the take-up of the service by customers but this is likely to underestimate the true scale of need. Such evidence as there is suggests that around half of those referred (and thus in need) will take up the Skills Coaching programme.

Participation in Skills Coaching has, in reality, diverged significantly from the original design of the programme. Over the period April 2005 to March 2006, around 4,580 people entered the Skills Coaching programme. Although not an insignificant number, it was well short of programme design target of 7,630 participants. One consequence of this under-recruitment was that few Skills Coaches reported high workloads or other capacity problems and some were concerned about the lack of referrals to the initiative. In addition, the intended balance of 75/25 per cent of inactive benefits (IAB)/Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers has never been achieved. Although the proportion of entrants from IAB increased during the latter half of the trial period, the proportion of JSA customers has never been less than 40 per cent. Moreover, many of these JSA customers were long-term JSA claimants who were not originally intended to be targeted by Skills Coaching.

A large proportion of participants were people likely to be facing barriers other than just a lack of skills. A quarter of JSA participants and half of all IAB customers on Skills Coaching had been claiming benefit for two years or longer. Around 40 per cent of IAB participants were lone parents, while the proportion of participants with a disability was significantly greater than that of the general claimant population in the trial areas. There are two potential explanations for this: First, individuals facing particular difficulty in obtaining employment may see Skills Coaching as offering them some additional benefit and hence, they volunteer for it. Alternatively, Jobcentre Plus Advisers may refer 'hard to help' claimants to Skills Coaching because they lack alternatives to which to refer such individuals. The qualitative evidence supports the latter explanation, with many Jobcentre Plus Advisers seeing Skills Coaching as additional provision for customers for whom they had run out of options.

The qualitative interviews provided a substantial body of evidence to suggest that Skills Coaching was popular with customers, Advisers and Coaches and that this enthusiasm remained throughout the trial period. Jobcentre Plus Advisers generally saw Skills Coaching as offering them useful additional support to offer their customers (although not always the correct ones) while customers reported that Skills Coaching had been delivered in a professional manner that suited them in terms of the location and frequency of their meetings with a Skills Coach. Where problems were encountered, these typically took the form of a failure of service provision, such as when their Skills Coach had left the service, training provision was not available or customers had not been followed up. There was some evidence that customers with greater experience of Skills Coaching were more likely to be dissatisfied, although not with the Skills Coaching service itself but by the lack of suitable training provision, long waits for training provision, lack of funding for training and other support and, ultimately, where no job had followed participation in Skills Coaching.

Most referrals were made after discussion and agreement between the Adviser and customer and most customers who entered Skills Coaching appeared to do so willingly. However, there was some evidence, both from administrative records and from Jobcentre Plus Advisers, that as many as half of all those referred never actually entered the programme. Little is known about those who fail to attend an Entry Review interview (because of poor records of referrals) but they are likely to be a mix of customers who had 'second thoughts' and those who left benefit for a job or otherwise. Based on those whom they saw on entry, most Skills Coaches thought that referrals were appropriate.

The proportion of participants who progress from one Skills Coaching service to another falls rapidly. Despite being mandatory for contractors to undertake a Skills Diagnostic, only two-thirds of all entrants had done so. Less than half of all customers completed a Skills Development Plan, and only around a third completed a Skills Passport or received Learning Brokerage. This rapid 'drop out' from Skills Coaching is evident even when account was taken of the date of entry (earlier

cohorts have a greater chance to progress). JSA customers were less likely than IAB customers to progress to later stages of Skills Coaching as were people who were unqualified, older (50 plus customers) and, to a lesser extent, lone parents and disabled customers. These patterns reflect a filtering process in which those customers most able to leave Skills Coaching for a job leave early, as do those who face the greatest barriers, leaving a middle group for whom skill is a barrier to employment but who do not face insurmountable additional barriers to work.

Opinions differed greatly concerning the Skills Diagnostic. Many customers found it useful and, by highlighting their strengths as well as their weaknesses, it had boosted their confidence. Others found it difficult to complete the Diagnostic (usually customers with low levels of educational attainment or poor IT skills) or considered it too simplistic or inappropriate (usually customers with high educational attainment).

The rate of early exits from Skills Coaching was around five per cent over the whole trial period but appears to have dropped rapidly since the launch of the programme in April 2005. The most common reason for an early exit was that the customer had entered some form of employment or voluntary work. The second most common reason was failure to attend an arranged interview. The former can be regarded as a positive outcome.

Around 600 Skills Coaching participants were reported to have had an 'outcome' during the first 12 months of the trials. This represented a rate of around 17 per cent (when Devon and Cornwall are excluded because they recorded no outcomes). Analysis by date of entry indicates that even amongst those who entered Skills Coaching within the first three months, barely a quarter of participants are recorded as having any form of outcome. Around a third of outcomes were work- or employment-related and one in five related to an education or learning outcome. A further quarter were classified as 'other', while the remainder returned to benefit.

Positive outcomes were found to be associated with a number of personal characteristics, benefit type and history, Skills Coaching services and residence in particular trial areas. Three key findings emerged from the multivariate analysis. These were:

- the length of benefit claim was strongly related to outcomes, with an exit to a job more likely for those with a short benefit claim and a return to benefit more likely for those with a long benefit claim;
- customers who had completed a Skills Passport or accessed Learning Brokerage were more likely to leave for employment or an education outcome and less likely to return to benefit; and
- even after standardising for other factors, individual trial areas were associated with differences in outcomes.

Differences in outcomes across trial areas (after accounting for other factors) can be explained by differences in:

- the way that outcomes are recorded;
- local labour market conditions and job and education opportunities;
- the delivery and effectiveness of the Skills Coaching programme.

Whether the area differences were related to the process of referral (directly to Skills Coaches or indirectly via **nextstep**) has not been established.

Despite the fact that Skills Coaching was intended to address skill-related barriers to employment, the number of outcomes associated with any gain in qualifications was comparatively small. Only 40 per cent of outcomes (or less than seven per cent of all Skills Coaching participants) was associated with a new qualification and many outcomes were classified as achieving no qualification (although a large proportion was recorded as 'not known'). Moreover, the majority of qualifications obtained were at a very low level (almost 60 per cent at level 0).

Estimates of the direct cost of Skills Coaching indicate that the costs of the programme were modest. By March 2006, the cost of providing the service to 4,657 participants averaged around £200. This figure was so low because so few customers accessed multiple services. Looking at the costs of achieving a positive outcome (including 'other' as a positive outcome), the following were estimated:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| • average cost of achieving a positive outcome | £1,898 |
| • marginal cost of achieving a positive outcome | £319 |
| • the unit cost of achieving a positive outcome | £268 |

6.3 Key messages

A key message from the evaluation of Skills Coaching is that the initiative has provided a service that has been enthusiastically received by all involved, be they Jobcentre Plus Advisers, **nextstep** Advisers, Skills Coaches or customers. Enthusiasm for the initiative remained strong throughout the 12 month trial period. Importantly, Skills Coaching appears to have offered something in addition to existing support arrangements for benefit claimants. This was the case in both qualitative terms – Skills Coaching seemed to be tailored to fit the customer and Skills Coaches appeared genuinely interested in supporting the customer and helping them achieve something positive (both of which contrasted with experiences of visiting a Jobcentre) – and qualitative terms in the sense of more regular, and in-depth, contact with someone who was a professional adviser and counsellor as well as the possibility of access to a greater number of learning opportunities.

Overall, Skills Coaching is a complex process necessitating effective engagement between Jobcentre Plus Advisers, **nextstep** advisers, Skills Coaches and training providers. In some trial areas the process has been simplified by cutting out the referral stage between Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep**, although this carries the risk that the advice, guidance and coaching expertise that resides in **nextstep** is excluded from Skills Coaching. The evidence suggests that, in practice, this has not been a problem because of the good working links that exist between Jobcentre Plus, **nextstep** and Skills Coaching in most trial areas. The effectiveness of delivery also appeared to be enhanced where Skills Coaches were either located in a jobcentre, or visited regularly, thus facilitating co-operation between Adviser and Coach. In contrast, engagement between training providers and Skills Coaching appears more problematic. Coaches and customers frequently complained of a lack of suitable local training provision or that the provision was available at times and in a manner that did not suit Skills Coaching customers. Training providers reported that insufficient referrals were being made from Skills Coaching. Providers also commented that sometimes customers wanted skills and training for which there was little demand in the local job market. This would appear to be an aspect of the process that could be improved.

It is clear that, in a number of respects, Skills Coaching has evolved at the individual trial area level into something rather different from the initial programme design. The initiative appears to have been serving a rather different client group from that originally envisaged. This is not necessarily a bad thing and the relatively high participation of long-term JSA claimants, lone parents and people with disabilities suggests that the programme may be offering support to key Jobcentre Plus customer groups. There is evidence from the qualitative interviews that Jobcentre Plus Advisers often see Skills Coaching as something they can offer to customers when nothing else is available and customers often commented that Skills Coaching had offered support they had otherwise felt lacking from Jobcentre Plus mainstream services.

The implications of this change in Skills Coaching need to be recognised. Many participants are likely to be entering Skills Coaching facing more than just skills barriers to employment. They will require a much greater level of support, probably much greater levels of support than originally envisaged and, crucially, more than was budgeted for. The presence of a large proportion of generally disadvantaged customers also means that it will be likely that progress through the programme is slower, more will fall by the wayside and fewer will achieve positive outcomes. The extent to which customers remain on Skills Coaching, even after nine to 12 months, has already been remarked upon, as has the low level of work or education-related outcomes, the even lower rate of gaining qualifications and the very low level of qualifications gained. If these outcomes seem disappointing, it should be noted that for many customers on Skills Coaching these will be considered major achievements. For others who have yet to achieve an outcome, it is the impact of Skills Coaching on their journey towards being fully employable that is important. While the administrative data is incapable of saying anything about that, there is strong

evidence from Skills Coaches and customers that the programme has, in most cases, boosted confidence and motivation and raised aspirations. For many customers the experience of Skills Coaching has been of a liberating and highly supportive nature. This is a view that is backed up by the opinions of Skills Coaches, Advisers and others involved in the programme.

Appendix A

Profile of Skills Coaching trial areas⁴

A.1 Selection of trial areas

Generally, clear criteria are specified to guide the selection of trial areas (e.g. low employment rates, entrenched unemployment, etc – for a policy designed to combat labour market disadvantage). Conversely, if the efficacy of a particular policy intervention is to be tested for universal applicability, it could be expected that trial areas might be selected in order to capture the full range of prevailing conditions.

In practice, the selection of trial areas for Skills Coaching followed neither of these approaches. Rather, trial areas were chosen from amongst ‘volunteers’.

The implication of this ‘voluntary’ approach is that neither clear, pre-specified criteria are available to inform the selection of trial areas, nor is the full range of socio-economic and labour market conditions existing nationwide likely to be covered by the trial areas selected (as is apparent from Section A.3 and A.5).

A.2 The trial areas

Eight areas have been selected as trial areas (see Table A.1). These areas are Jobcentre Plus districts, each of which contains a number of Jobcentre Plus offices.

⁴ This is an edited version of a technical paper prepared at the start of the evaluation. In the event, area comparisons were not used as part of the evaluation because the poor recording of referrals to Skills Coaching in trial areas prevented the creation of comparable programme and control groups of benefit claimants.

The trial areas are regionally concentrated: three of the eight are from the East Midlands (Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire), two are from the North West (Greater Manchester East and Greater Manchester West), and one each is from the South West (Devon and Cornwall), the West Midlands (Birmingham and Solihull) and Yorkshire and the Humber (North Yorkshire). Four regions – the North East, East of England, South East and London – have no representative amongst the trial areas.

From a labour market perspective, the omission of the South East, East of England and London is particularly important. These regions have a more 'professionalised' employment structure (i.e. a greater proportion of total employment is in higher level non-manual occupations) than in other regions (in the East Midlands, by contrast, there are concerns about the 'low skills equilibrium' (i.e. a lack of demand for higher level skills)). Moreover, the south-eastern part of England has the most dynamic labour market in England. London is especially distinctive, in that high levels of non-employment occur in the context of unfilled vacancies and, as a global city, it has a large, complex and specialised labour market. Moreover, London is the most ethnically diverse region (although Birmingham and Leicester could be amongst the first 'majority minority' (i.e. have a majority of their population from minority ethnic groups) cities in England and parts of Greater Manchester have sizeable ethnic minority populations).

A.3 Implementation of Skills Coaching in the trial areas

In theory, skills coaching may be implemented in any part of a trial area. However, in practice, it could well be the case that efforts are focused on particular geographic sub-areas within the wider trial area. For instance, it is understood that in Devon and Cornwall, efforts are to be focused on Plymouth and Torquay.

Likewise, it is understood that in Leicestershire Skills Coaching is getting underway from Loughborough, Hinckley, Coalville and two Leicester city centre offices (i.e. at least at the outset, it appears that the eastern part of Leicestershire is not being covered). This illustrates a more general issue for the evaluation and, more specifically, for the selection of comparison areas, that implementation of skills coaching is likely to be influenced by issues such as numbers of claimants at particular offices, facilities, etc. Moreover, it is understood that in the city of Leicester there is a job brokering scheme, with which skills coaching might link. This is illustrative of the fact that the presence of other activities in local areas/other local initiatives will affect the way that Skills Coaching operates.

It remains to be seen whether and where (e.g. in North Yorkshire or parts of Derbyshire, perhaps) skills coaching is delivered in a rural context (larger numbers of eligible claimants are concentrated in urban areas, and three of the eight trial areas (Greater Manchester West, Greater Manchester East and Birmingham/Solihull) comprise parts of large urban conurbations).

A.4 Possible area comparisons

Table 1 also shows the most similar local authority districts to those that form the Skills Coaching trial areas. The former might be considered as possible comparison areas for analysis.

Table A.1 Trial areas and most similar corresponding authorities (from National Statistics 2001 Area Classification for Local Authorities)

Trial area	Local authority	Corresponding authorities most similar
Greater Manchester West	Bolton	ROCHDALE
	Bury	STOCKPORT
	Wigan	WAKEFIELD
Greater Manchester East	Oldham	ROCHDALE
	Rochdale	OLDHAM
	Stockport	TRAFFORD
	Tameside	STOKE-ON-TRENT
North Yorkshire	York	BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET
	Craven	SOUTH HAMS
	Hambleton	TYNEDALE
	Harrogate	SALISBURY
	Richmondshire	Kennet
	Ryedale	SOUTH SHROPSHIRE
	Scarborough	CONWY
	Selby	SOUTH KESTEVEN
Derbyshire	Derby	BOLTON
	Amber Valley	EREWASH
	Bolsover	BARNLEY
	Chesterfield	DARLINGTON
	Derbyshire Dales	SOUTH HAMS
	Erewash	FLINTSHIRE
	High Peak	CHORLEY
	North East Derbyshire	SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE
	South Derbyshire	NORTHWESTLEICESTERSH

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Trial area	Local authority	Corresponding authorities most similar
Leicestershire	Leicester	<i>Birmingham</i>
	Blaby	HINCKLEYANDBOSWORTH
	Charnwood	Broxtowe
	Harborough	SOUTHNORTHAMPTONSHIR
	Hinckley and Bosworth	NORTHWESTLEICESTERSH
	Melton	SOUTHKESTEVEN
	North West Leicestershire	NORTHWARWICKSHIRE
	Oadby and Wigston	Charnwood
	Nottinghamshire	Nottingham
Ashfield		BOLSOVER
Bassetlaw		NEWARKANDSHERWOOD
Broxtowe		GEDLING
Gedling		BROXTOWE
Mansfield		BARNSLEY
Newark and Sherwood		BASSETLAW
Rushcliffe		SOUTHCAMBRIDGESHIRE
Birmingham and Solihull	Birmingham	Wolverhampton
	Solihull	STOCKPORT

Appendix B

Stage 1 interview proformas

Customer consent and Interview Proforma

SKILLS COACHING EVALUATION: CUSTOMER CONSENT

You have been invited to participate in an important study evaluating skills coaching. If you are willing to help, this will involve:

- Answering some questions about your experiences of the skills coaching scheme.
- Having your interview recorded so that the researcher can review the interview. Your identity will be treated in the strictest confidence by the research team.
- Probably being contacted next year by telephone, post or email to find out how you are getting on with the skills coaching scheme. So that we can contact you, please give details below (this information will not be used for any other purpose).

For agreeing to participate you will receive a payment of £20 which will not affect your benefits.

All the information you provide will be treated in strictest confidence, in conformity with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, 1998. No information that could identify individuals will be passed to any third party.

Name:

.....

Telephone and mobile numbers:

.....

Email (if available):

.....

Please sign below.

I confirm that I have received the sum of £20
 from

in connection with an interview. I confirm that my involvement in the study has been explained and that I have agreed to take part.

Signature: **Date:**

Name (please print):

.....

Interview Questions for Customers

Name:	
Location:	
Interviewer:	
Date:	
Referral process	
1.	How did you first hear about the skills coaching?
2.	What benefit(s) are you on? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JSA • Incapacity Benefit • Income Support
3.	Who referred you to the skills coach? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JCP adviser, or • nextstep adviser
4.	Did you ask to be referred?
Delivery process	
5.	Where do you see your skills coach? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you satisfied with the arrangements?
6.	How long did you have to wait before you saw the skills coach for the first time?
7.	How often do you see your skills coach?
8.	Do you have any particular problems in getting to see your skills coach, (e.g. difficulty with childcare or transport?)
9.	Has skills coaching helped you progress in anyway? If so , how?

Quality of service & complementarity		
10.	Has the skills coaching service been useful? If 'yes', how? If 'no', why not?	
11.	Have you been pleased with the skills coaching service? If 'yes', why? If 'no', why not?	
12.	How did you find the skills diagnostic?	
	• How long did it take you to complete?	
	• Did you need help understanding what was required?	
13.	What is the next step in skills coaching process for you?	
14.	What other support would you find helpful during and after the skills coaching?	
Skills Passports		
15.	Have you completed a skills passport?	
16.	If yes, is it useful?	• Explain/give examples.
17.	Has it helped you: • Develop personally?	
	• Record your skills and achievements?	
	• Other? (examples)	

18.	Do you think it will be useful to employers? If 'yes', how? If 'no', why not?	
19.	Would you prefer: • a paper based version, or • the on-line purple version?	
Barriers to work		
20.	What has prevented you from finding employment? • Do not have the right skills or qualifications • Skills/qualifications need updating • No job opportunities • Others (examples)	
Overall impression of skills coaching		
21.	What is your overall impression of skills coaching so far?	
22.	Is there anything else you wish to add?	

Customer consent and interview proforma

SKILLS COACHING EVALUATION: CUSTOMER CONSENT

You have been invited to participate in an important study evaluating skills coaching. If you are willing to help, this will involve:

- Answering some questions about your experiences of the skills coaching scheme.
- Having your interview recorded so that the researcher can review the interview. Your identity will be treated in the strictest confidence by the research team.
- Probably being contacted next year by telephone, post or email to find out how you are getting on with the skills coaching scheme. So that we can contact you, please give details below (this information will not be used for any other purpose).

For agreeing to participate you will receive a payment of £20 which will not affect your benefits.

All the information you provide will be treated in strictest confidence, in conformity with the requirements of the Data Protection Act, 1998. No information that could identify individuals will be passed to any third party.

Name:

.....

Role in the skill coaching scheme

.....

Address

.....

.....

.....

Telephone and mobile numbers:

.....

.....

Email (if available):

.....

Please sign below to confirm that your involvement in the study has been explained and that you have agreed to take part.

Signature: **Date:**

Name (please print):

.....

Interview Proforma for Skills Coaches

Name:	
Location:	
Interviewer:	
Date:	
Referral process	
1.	How long have you been involved in the skills coaching pilot?
2.	What is your current caseload? (find out if other customers make up part of their caseload).
3.	Where do you get referrals from? If both, JC+ and nextstep: Are there differences between nextstep referrals and referrals from Jobcentre Plus?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which works better for the customers?
4.	Are the right customers being referred to skills coaching?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give me any examples of both good and bad practice?
5.	Do you think the referral process works?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the benefits of the process?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any weaknesses in the process?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the process be improved?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are customers happy to be referred?

6.	What area do you cover?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many skills coaches are there working in your area? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this enough? <p>If 'no', how many are needed?</p>	
Delivery process		
7.	<p>Where do you undertake skills coaching?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobcentre offices • nextstep premises • Connexions premises • Somewhere else (where) 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is where you interview suitable? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is time an issue? 	
8.	Does the customer have a say (i.e. number and frequency of meetings, length or location)?	
9.	<p>What is accessibility for customers to skills coaching like?</p> <p>Are there any particular issues for the specified groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled • Lone parent • Those living in rural areas • Those with English as a second language 	
10.	How many times do customers meet with skills coaches?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it restricted? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who decides how many times? 	

11.	How is the skills diagnostic working?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long does it take, typically? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are you finding that you have to give customers support to complete this stage? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it identifying the right issues for customers? 	
Learning provision and referral		
11.	Is there sufficient learning provision for skills coaches to refer customers to?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you find out about this provision? 	
12.	Where else do you refer customers?	
13.	What further information do you require? (i.e. information for customers regarding training and learning provision)	
Impact on delivery agencies		
14.	What impact do you think skills coaching has on nextstep?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased demand for services Staffing implications <p>General resource implications (e.g. materials needed, like labour market information)</p>	
15.	Are there particular ways that you think skills coaching adds value to existing provision for the following customer groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JSA
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incapacity Benefit
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income Support customers

Skills coaching		
17.	Is skills coaching diverse enough as a service to meet the needs of individual customers? If 'yes', examples	
18.	Are there any improvements that can be made to the way that the skills coaching service is delivered?	
19.	Do customers require additional support during or after skills coaching?	
Skills coaches		
20.	What qualifications and training have you had? i.e. Dip CG, NVQ 3, NVQ4, QCG, other	
21.	Have you had any particular training for the role of a skills coach? If yes, what was it? Was it sufficient?	
22.	What further training or support do you need?	
Quality of service & complementarity		
23.	What is the quality of the service provided in terms of:	• Customer satisfaction?
		• Progress of customer?
		• Quality of advice given?
24.	How does the skills coaching service complement nextstep?	
Skills Passports		
25.	Are you involved in the skills passports? If 'yes', what is your view of the skills passports?	• Explain/examples. Any examples of good practice

26.	What is useful/of value to employers?	
27.	Does the skills passports achieve its aims of helping customers develop and record their skills?	
28.	What aspect do you think is most useful/of value to customers?	
29.	Does the skills passports help customers improve their confidence?	
30.	Did you get any training to support customers complete skills passports? If 'yes', was this sufficient? If 'no', what else do you need?	
31.	Would you prefer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a paper-based version, or • an on-line version? 	
32.	Do customers prefer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a paper-based version, or • an on-line version? 	
Overall impression of skills coaching		
33.	What is your overall impression of skills coaching?	
34.	Is there anything else you wish to add?	

Interview Proforma for Jobcentre Plus Advisers

Name:		
Location:		
Interviewer:		
Date:		
Referral process		
1.	What is your role in the skills coaching pilot?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length of involvement in skills coaching pilot? 	
2.	Do you refer direct to skills coaches or via nextstep? If using both methods of referral, which works better and why?	
3.	For those who refer direct to skills coaches: How do you decide who to refer to skills coaches? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is this according to formal criteria? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it easy to identify those who might benefit from skills coaching? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are customers happy to be referred? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think that the referral process is working? 	
4.	Are the right customers being referred to skills coaching? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you give me examples of what does not work? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the benefits of the process? 	
5.	How do you think the process could be improved?	

Delivery process		
6.	What training/briefing/preparation did you get for the skills coaching pilot?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was it sufficient? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can it be improved? 	
7.	Is the coaching pilot linked with other agencies (such as voluntary groups) to engage and refer inactive people?	
Impact on delivery agencies		
8.	Has the skills coaching service affected your workload?	
	If so, how?	
9.	Does skills coaching provide added value generally to existing provision?	
	If so, can you say how?	
10.	Are there particular ways that you think skills coaching adds value to existing provision for the following customer groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JSA
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incapacity Benefit
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income Support customers
Skills coaching		
11.	Does skills coaching meet the needs of individual customers?	
	If 'yes', how? If 'no', why not?	
12.	Are there any improvements that can be made to the way that the skills coaching service is delivered?	
Skills Passports		
13.	Are you involved at all in the skills passports?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain/examples. Any examples of good practice
	If 'yes', what is your view of the skills passports?	

14.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is useful/of value to customers? 	
15.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is useful/of value to employers? 	
16.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How could the skills passports be improved? 	
New Deal		
17.	<p>Would skills coaching be useful for those in the New Deal programmes?</p> <p>If 'yes':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • should it be made a compulsory element of the mandatory New Deal? • should it offered as optional for those on voluntary New Deal Programmes? 	
Overall impression of skills coaching		
18.	What is your overall impression of skills coaching?	
19.	Is there anything else you wish to add?	

Interview Proforma for nextstep Advisers

Name:	
Location:	
Interviewer:	
Date:	
Referral process	
1.	<p>What is your role in the skills coaching pilot?</p> <p>If involved, what is your length of involvement in skills coaching pilot?</p>
2.	<p>Have you been involved in the referral of customers to skills coaches?</p> <p>If 'no', should customer referrals for skills coaching be via nextstep? Go to question 8.</p> <p>If 'yes' then, carry on with question 3.</p>
3.	<p>Have your experiences of the referral process been generally positive?</p>
	<p>Are you able to comment on the differences between nextstep referrals and referrals from Jobcentre Plus?</p>
	<p>Which do you think would be of most benefit to the customer?</p>
4.	<p>How do you decide who to refer to skills coaches?</p>
	<p>Is this according to the formal criteria for referral?</p>
	<p>Is it easy to identify those who might benefit from skills coaching?</p>
	<p>Are customers happy to be referred?</p>

5.	Are the right customers being referred to skills coaching?	
	Are there any examples of good and bad practice?	
6.	Do you think that the referral process is working?	
	How can the process be improved?	
	Can you give me examples of what does not work?	
	What are the benefits of the process?	
7.	Are there enough skills coaches in place in your region?	
Impact on delivery agencies		
8.	What impact does skills coaching have on:	The guidance process?
		Your role and your workload?
9.	Does skills coaching provide added value to existing provision? Is 'yes', examples.	
10.	Are there particular ways that you think skills coaching adds value to existing provision for the following customer groups:	JSA
		Incapacity Benefit
		Income Support customers
Skills coaching		
11.	Does skills coaching meet the needs of individual customers? If so, how? If not, why?	

12.	Are there any improvements that can be made to the way that the skills coaching service is delivered?	
Quality of service & complementarity		
13.	How does the skills coaching service complement nextstep?	
Skills Passports		
14.	Are you involved in skills passports? If 'yes' , what is your view of the skills passports?	Explain/examples. Any examples of good practice
15.	What is useful/of value to customers?	
16.	What is useful/of value to employers?	
17.	How could the skills passports be improved?	
Overall impression of skills coaching		
18.	What is your overall impression of skills coaching?	
19.	Is there anything else you wish to add?	

Interview Proforma for Training Providers

Name:		
Location:		
Interviewer:		
Date:		
<p>Note to interviewer: Ask if training provider has heard of skills coaching as it can not be assumed that they know about the scheme.</p> <p>If so, go to question 1.</p> <p>If 'no', summarise skills coaching. Go to question 4.</p>		
Skills coaching		
1.	How did you hear about skills coaching?	
2.	What are your overall impressions of this service?	
Referral process		
3.	Have you had any Jobcentre Plus customers referred to you by skills coaches?	
	If 'yes', how many?	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have they been appropriate referrals for the type of training offered? 	

Training capacity	
4.	What training are you offering?
5.	What training capacity can you offer? (How many types of course; how many places on the courses)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you anticipate any difficulties regarding your capacity and the number of Jobcentre Plus customers referred to by you? (based on available resources)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If skills coaching was to result in more referrals of Jobcentre Plus customers, would you have the capacity/resources to meet the demand?
6.	Could you offer different training courses, if there were a demand?
	<p>If so:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What types of training could you offer?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the resource implications?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long would you need before you could accept customers on new training courses?

Appendix C

Stage 2 interview proformas

Follow-up interview questions for Customers

Name:

Location:

Interviewer:

Date:

Note to interviewer:

Ensure that you have familiarised yourself with responses given during the initial interview and refer to these where appropriate.

They are participating in a research study that is taking place over about a year and a half. This is an important study feeding into the current policy making process about Skills Coaching – so they can really make a difference!

Check their situation and probe life changes and changes in their circumstances e.g. caring responsibilities, and/or health

Section A: Current status – for all interviewees

1. We're really interested to find out how you've been getting on since we talked last summer.

2. When we spoke last year, you were seeing a skills coach. Are you still seeing your skills coach?

If 'yes', please answer sections B, D, E and F

If 'no', please answer sections C, D, E and F

Section B: Customers still involved in Skills Coaching

3. What stage have you reached in the Skills Coaching process?

4. What is the next step in Skills Coaching process for you?

5. Are you on benefit(s)?

If 'yes', please specify:
(JSA/IB/IS/Other)

6. a) Do you still see your skills coach at the same venue as previously?

b) Are you satisfied with the arrangements?

If 'no', please comment:

-
7. a) How often are you seeing your skills coach currently?

b) Is this the same frequency as when we spoke to you before?

If 'no', why is this?

-
8. Have you experienced any particular problems in getting to see your skills coach?

If 'yes', please specify:
(e.g. difficulty with childcare or transport?)

-
9. a) Do you think that Skills Coaching has helped you progress in anyway?

If so, how?

b) Has the Skills Coaching service been useful?

If 'yes', how?

If 'no', why not?

c) Have you been pleased with the Skills Coaching service?

If 'yes', why?

If 'no', why not?

Section C: For those customers no longer involved with Skills Coaching

10. What are you doing now:

a) training?

- did Skills Coaching play a role here?

b) employment?

Prompt

- did Skills Coaching play a role here?
- is it a better quality job than you'd have got before?
- did it help you get a job quicker than you would have before?

c) Other?

11. a) Do you think that Skills Coaching helped you progress in anyway?

If so, how?

b) Was the Skills Coaching service useful?

If 'yes', how?

If 'no', why not?

c) Were you been pleased with the Skills Coaching service?

If 'yes', why?

If 'no', why not?

Section D: Skills diagnostic (for those customers who had not completed this previously)

12. Did you complete the skills diagnostic?

If 'yes':

- How long did it take you to complete?
- Did you need help understanding what was required?
- What did you think of it?
- How helpful was it?

Section E: Skills Passports (for those customers who had not completed this previously)

13. Have you now completed a Skills Passport?

If 'yes':

- Have you found it useful? (probe how)
- Were all the sections in the passport helpful?
- Did you complete all the sections
- Will you continue to maintain/update it?
- Has it helped you? (probe how)
- Will you continue to maintain/update it?
- Any other comments:

If 'no', why not? (then - go to section F).

14. Do you think it will be useful to employers?

If 'yes', how?

(probe if they think it will help get a job)

If 'no', why not?

15. Would you have preferred:

- a paper based version, **or**
- the on-line purple version?
- how could it be improved?

Section F: Overall impression of Skills Coaching – for all interviewees

16. Looking back, what is your overall impression of Skills Coaching?

17. What other support would you find helpful during and after the Skills Coaching?

18. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Interview questions for new Customers

Name:

Location:

Interviewer:

Date:

Referral process

19. How did you first hear about the Skills Coaching?

20. What benefit(s) are you on?

- JSA
- Incapacity Benefit
- Income Support

21. Who referred you to the skills coach?

- JCP adviser, **or**
- Nextstep adviser

22. Did you ask to be referred?

Delivery process

23. Where do you see your skills coach?

- Are you satisfied with the arrangements?
-

24. How long did you have to wait before you saw the skills coach for the first time?

25. How often do you see your skills coach?

26. Do you have any particular problems in getting to see your skills coach, (e.g. difficulty with childcare or transport?)

27. Has Skills Coaching helped you progress in anyway?

If so, how?

Quality of service & complementarity

28. Has the Skills Coaching service been useful?

If 'yes', how?

If 'no', why not?

29. Have you been pleased with the Skills Coaching service?

If 'yes', why?

If 'no', why not?

30. How did you find the skills diagnostic?

-
- How long did it take you to complete?

-
- Did you need help understanding what was required?

31. What is the next step in Skills Coaching process for you?

32. What other support would you find helpful during and after the Skills Coaching?

Skills Passports

33. Have you completed a Skills Passport?

34. **If yes**, is it useful? • Explain/give examples.
35. Has it helped you:
- Develop personally?

 - Record your skills and achievements?

 - Other? (examples)
36. Do you think it will be useful to employers?
- If 'yes'**, how?
- If 'no'**, why not?
37. Would you prefer:
- a paper based version, **or**
 - the on-line purple version?

Barriers to work

38. What has prevented you from finding employment?

- Do not have the right skills or qualifications
- Skills/qualifications need updating
- No job opportunities
- Others (examples)

Overall impression of Skills Coaching

39. What is your overall impression of Skills Coaching so far?

40. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Interview questions for Skills Coaches

Name:

District & Location:

Interviewer:

Date:

Note to interviewer:

Ensure that you have familiarised yourself with the responses given during the initial interview and refer to these where appropriate.

Referral process

1. How long, overall, have you now been involved in the Skills Coaching trial?

2. What is your current caseload?

Probe:

- how this has changed since the last interview

- whether this has affected other aspects of their role (e.g. other client caseloads)

3. a) From where do you currently get referrals?

If both, JC+ and Nextstep, are there differences between Nextstep referrals and referrals from Jobcentre Plus?

-
- b) From your experience, which works better for customers?

-
- c) Has this changed since the last interview?

If so, how and why?

4. Are the appropriate customers being referred to Skills Coaching?

If 'no', please comment:

5. Do you think the referral process is working?

Probe:

- Are there any weaknesses in the process?
- Can the process be improved?
- Are customers generally happy to be referred?
- Has this improved since the last interview?

-
6. a) Are you still covering the same area?

Probe any changes

-
- b) How many skills coaches are there working in your area?

- Has this changed?

-
- c) Is this enough?

If 'no', how many are needed?

Delivery process

7. a) Do you undertake Skills Coaching in a different location from when you were last interviewed?

- Jobcentre offices
- Nextstep premises
- Connexions premises
- Somewhere else (please specify)

b) Is the available accommodation suitable?

c) Do you have sufficient time with customers?

8. a) How many times do customers meet with skills coaches?

b) Is it restricted?

c) Who decides how many times?

d) Could you consider the time you spend on specific aspects of the process; is it more, less, the same as expected?

Learning provision and referral

9. a) Is there sufficient learning provision to meet customer need?

b) Are there any new mechanisms for finding out about this provision?

For example, new directory or online resource.

c) Do you require any further information? (e.g. information for clients regarding training and learning provision)

-
10. Have you found any new sources to where you can refer customers?

Impact on delivery agencies

11. What impact do you think the current level of demand for Skills Coaching has had on Nextstep?

For example:

- Increased demand for services
- Staffing implications
- General resource implications (e.g. materials needed, like labour market information)

Skills Coaching

12. Are there any improvements that can be made to the way that the Skills Coaching service is delivered?

13. In light of your experience to date, do customers require additional support during or after Skills Coaching?

Training support Skills coaches

14. Are you receiving training or on-going support to fulfil your role as skills coach?

If 'yes', please specify:

If 'no', please say what you need:

Skills Passports

In light of your experience, what is your view now of the Skills Passports?

Do you prefer the paper based/CD or online version of the passport?

What is the reason for your preference?

15. Do you think that the Skills Passport achieves its aims of helping customers develop and record their skills?

If 'no', please comment:

16. What aspect do you think is most useful/of value to:

- customers?
- Training providers?
- employers?

Has it helped customers when applying for jobs?

Have you had any feedback from Employers?

How could they be improved?

17. Has it helped customers when applying for jobs?
18. Have you had any feedback from Employers?
19. Do you prefer the paper based/CD or online version of the passport?
 - Can you say why?
20. How could they be improved?

Overall impression of Skills Coaching

21. What is your overall impression of Skills Coaching?

Have the skills/employability of your customers improved following participation on Skills Coaching?

If so, how?
22. Do you think customers completing Skills Coaching have a greater chance of securing sustainable employment?

If so, what do you think the main reasons are for this?
23. What is your overall impression of Skills Coaching?
24. Is there anything further you wish to add?

Interview questions for JC+ advisers (NB restricted time.)

Name:

District & Location:

Interviewer:

Date:

Note to interviewer:

Ensure that you have familiarised yourself with responses given during the initial interview and refer to these where appropriate.

Referral process

1. a) Is your role in the Skills Coaching trial the same as when we interviewed you last summer?

If 'no', how has this changed?

- b) Overall length of involvement in the Skills Coaching trial?

2. Has the way in which you refer customers to skills coaches changed since we last interviewed you?

If 'yes', please say how?

NB: probe:

- how they decide who to refer
- whether referral is according to formal criteria
- whether it is easy to identify those who might benefit
- whether customers are generally happy about being referred
- whether the referral system is working

3. Do you think that the right customers are being referred to Skills Coaching?

If 'yes', what are the benefits of the process?

If 'no', can you give me examples of what does not work?

4. Can this process be improved?

Delivery process

5. Are you receiving any ongoing support or training for the Skills Coaching trial?

If 'yes', please say:

- what this is
 - if it's sufficient
 - whether it could be improved (& how)
- if so, how?

-
6. Is the coaching trial linked with other agencies in your district (such as voluntary groups) to engage and refer inactive people?

Impact on delivery agencies

7. Looking back, do you think that Skills Coaching service has affected your workload?

If so, how?

Skills Coaching

8. Do you think that Skills Coaching meets the needs of individual customers?

If 'yes', how?

If 'no', why not?

9. Can the delivery of the Skills Coaching service be improved?

If 'yes', how?

New Deal

10. Do you think that Skills Coaching would be useful for those in the New Deal programmes?

If 'yes':

- should it be made a compulsory / voluntary element of the mandatory New Deal?
- should it offered as optional for those on voluntary New Deal Programmes?

Work Focused Interviews (WFIs)

11. a) Does your office conduct Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) for:

- IB customers
- IS customers

If 'yes', please comment on whether you think that the WFI regime (which offers more frequent contact with inactive benefit recipients) affects the value of the Skills Coaching service to the customer?

b) At present, the most frequent contact through WFIs is every quarter for lone parents with a youngest child aged 14/15. In 'Pathways to Work' pilot areas, IB recipients will receive a WFI at the eighth week of their claim and then 5 more at monthly intervals.

Do you think the increased frequency of difference in contact with a Jobcentre Plus adviser affects the value of the Skills Coaching service to you or the customer?

If 'yes', please comment:

Skills Passports

12. Have Skills Passports helped identify/broker skills and help you identify appropriate employment opportunities?

13. How has it helped customers when applying for jobs?

If 'yes', how?

If 'no', why not?

14. Have you had any feedback from employers?

If 'yes', please comment.

15. Have you any further comments?

Overall impression of Skills Coaching

16. Overall impressions of Skills Coaching?

Prompts:

- Do you think Skills Coaching has helped any of your customers move into employment?
- Have the skills/employability of your customers improved following participation on Skills Coaching?

17. Do you think customers completing Skills Coaching have a greater chance of securing sustainable employment?

If so, what do you think the main reasons are for this?

Skills Passport

Have Skills Passports helped identify/broker skills and help you identify appropriate employment opportunities?

How has it helped customers when applying for jobs?

What feedback from Employers?

Further comments?

Interview questions for Nextstep advisers

Name:

District & Location:

Interviewer:

Date:

Note to interviewer:

Ensure that you have familiarised yourself with responses given during the initial interview and refer to these where appropriate.

Referral process

1. a) Is your role in the Skills Coaching trial the same as when we interviewed you last summer?

If 'no', how has this changed?

- b) Overall length of involvement in the Skills Coaching trial?

2. Has the way in which you refer customers on for Skills Coaching changed since we last interviewed you?

If 'yes', please say how:

(NB: probe:

how they decide who to refer

whether referral is according to formal criteria

whether it is easy to identify those who might benefit

whether customers are generally happy about being referred

whether the referral system is working)

3. Do you think that the referral process is working?

If 'no', please say why not:

-
4. Can this process be improved?

-
5. Are there enough skills coaches currently available in your area for referral?

If 'no', what are the consequences:

Impact on delivery agencies

6. Please comment on the impact of Skills Coaching on:

The guidance process?

Customers skills and employment and training options

Your role and your workload?

7. Do you think that Skills Coaching adds JSA value to existing provision for the following customer groups:

If 'yes', please explain:

Incapacity Benefit

Income Support customers

Skills Coaching

8. Do you think that Skills Coaching meets the needs of individual customers?

'If yes', how?

If 'no', why not?

9. Can the delivery of the Skills Coaching service be improved?

Quality of service & complementarity

10. Looking back on your experience of Skills Coaching, please comment on how Skills Coaching complements Nextstep:

Overall impression of Skills Coaching

11. What is your overall impression of Skills Coaching?

On customers skills/employability

On customers job prospects

On working with Jobcentre Plus services

12. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Interview questions for Training Providers

Name:

District & Location:

Interviewer:

Date:

Skills Coaching

1. Are you aware of the Skills Coaching service?
 - a. What is your involvement in Skills Coaching?
2. How long have you been involved in Skills Coaching?
3. What are your overall impressions of this service?

Referral process

4. a) Have you had any Jobcentre Plus customers referred to you by skills coaches?

If 'yes', how many?

b) Have they been appropriate referrals for the type of training you offer (i.e. had the skills coach correctly diagnosed the needs of these learners?)

5. Did you have to do any further diagnostics?
-

11. a) What training capacity can your organisation offer?

(Types of course; places on the courses; etc.)

- b) Do you anticipate any difficulties regarding the number / and type of Jobcentre Plus customers referred to you?

(e.g. maximum/minimum numbers required to make training courses viable)

If 'yes', please specify:

- c) If demand for training from Skills Coaching customers increased, would you have the capacity/resources to meet this demand?

12. a) Could you offer training provision different from your current offer, if there were a demand?

If 'yes', what types of training could you offer?

- b) What are the resource implications?

c) How long would you need before you could accept customers on new training courses?

13. Does the timing of any course impact on customers' ability to undertake training starting provision?

14. Any other comments?