

# Summary

## Background

Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) is a voluntary training programme which aims to help adults without work, and with poor employability skills, into sustained employment. While WBLA is primarily aimed at JSA claimants, around 15 per cent of participants were claiming other benefits. Of these, the largest group comprised of lone parents in receipt of Income Support, who accounted for almost one half of non-JSA participants. This study focused upon these participants. It provides an insight into their characteristics, experiences of WBLA and views on how helpful they found the programme.

## Methodology

The study examined one particular cohort of WBLA participants – those who started their training between 1 January 2002 and 30 April 2002 and who participated in either SJFT, LOT or BET. The sample was drawn from those participants marked as being eligible for New Deal for Lone Parents and claiming Income Support. In total, 474 lone parent participants were interviewed between April and June 2003, giving a response rate of 63 per cent. A face-to-face computer assisted interview was conducted with the respondents. On average, this lasted 54 minutes.

## Key findings

- The vast majority of lone parent participants were women (88 per cent) and had dependent children under the age of 16 (86 per cent).
- Prior to participating in WBLA, many had no, or low level, skills and qualifications. Forty-two per cent had either never used a computer or had only done so a few times, 32 per cent had no qualifications and 19 per cent reported having difficulties with reading, writing or numeracy.

- There were notable differences between those who participated in the different WBLA opportunities. Participants in BET tended to be the most disadvantaged and compared with SJFT and LOT participants, a greater proportion of BET participants had poor basic skills.
- SJFT and LOT participants were more similar to each other, but, even among these groups, there were still sizeable proportions with poor IT skills and no qualifications.
- Since starting WBLA, almost one half of lone parent participants had improved their human capital by either attending a course which had improved their English, reading, writing, numeracy or IT skills, or by gaining a qualification. Those who participated in BET were most likely to have reported such human capital gains, with 59 per cent doing so compared with 37 per cent of SJFT participants and 50 per cent of LOT participants.
- In addition to these skill improvements, 27 per cent of the participants had gained a qualification. This was most common among LOT participants
- Not only did a substantial proportion of lone parents have low level skills when they started on the programme, the majority had no recent work experience. This was less common among those who participated in BET (of whom only 28 per cent had done so compared with 53 per cent of SJFT participants and 52 per cent of LOT participants).