



**UCL**

Institute of Education

**EDUCATION & TRAINING  
FOUNDATION**

# **CURRENT PRACTICE IN USING A SYSTEM OF PHONICS WITH POST-16 LEARNERS**

## **FINAL REPORT AND RESEARCH**

**UCL RESEARCHERS – GEMMA MOSS, SAM DUNCAN, SINÉAD HARMEY AND BERNARDITA MUÑOZ-CHEREAU.  
COMMISSIONED BY THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOUNDATION.**

**JUNE 2018**



# CONTENTS

## 4 1. INTRODUCTION

- 4 1.1 Aims of the project
- 4 1.2 Methods
- 5 1.3 Scope of the report

## 6 2. THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE ON EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO USING PHONICS WITH ADULTS

- 6 2.1 Background to the literature review
- 6 2.2 Literature review: Scope
- 7 2.3 Literature review: Methods
- 7 2.4 Findings from the review of intervention studies
- 11 2.5 Findings from the grey literature and reviews of reviews
- 12 2.6 Concluding Summary

## 13 3. PRACTITIONERS' KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH

- 13 3.1 Method: Survey of adult literacy tutors
- 14 3.2 Characteristics of the sample
- 18 3.3 The structure and composition of respondents' adult literacy classes

## 20 4. SURVEY FINDINGS: APPROACHES TO PEDAGOGY, TUTOR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

- 20 4.1 Assessing priorities in meeting students' needs
- 22 4.2 Tutor approaches to teaching word level skills
- 25 4.3 Tutor knowledge of, and use of, phonics resources

## 28 5. ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO THE EFFECTIVE USE OF PHONICS WITH ADULT LEARNERS

- 28 5.1 Methods: Focus groups and interviews
- 30 5.2 Comparing focus group, tutor interviews and survey findings
- 31 5.3 Summary

## 32 6. FINDINGS: WHAT DO ADULT LITERACY TUTORS SEE AS THE MAIN BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF MAKING PHONICS APPROACHES CENTRAL TO ADULT LITERACY TEACHING?

- 32 6.1 Methods
- 32 6.2 Benefits
- 33 6.3 Drawbacks
- 33 6.4 Summary

## 34 7. KEY MESSAGES FROM THE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 34 7.1 The evidence on suitable approaches to phonics teaching post-16
- 35 7.2 What is a systematic approach to teaching phonics?
- 35 7.3 Building and maintaining teacher expertise
- 36 7.4 Assessing individual strengths and weaknesses
- 36 7.5 Recognising the differences between adult and child literacy development

## 37 APPENDIX ONE: SEARCH STRATEGY

## 40 APPENDIX TWO: WEIGHT-OF-EVIDENCE RATINGS

## 42 APPENDIX THREE: GREY LITERATURE SEARCH

## 45 APPENDIX FOUR: SURVEY

## 56 BIBLIOGRAPHY

### LIST OF FIGURES

- 15 Figure 1: Age of respondents
- 15 Figure 2: Employment
- 16 Figure 3: Organisation
- 16 Figure 4: Length of service
- 17 Figure 5: Qualifications
- 18 Figure 6: Functional skills level
- 18 Figure 7: Group composition
- 19 Figure 8: Diversity of learners
- 21 Figure 9: Assessing learner needs
- 23 Figure 10: Teaching word level skills
- 23 Figure 11: Best approach
- 24 Figure 12: Use of resources
- 25 Figure 13: Phonics resources used
- 26 Figure 14: Tutor confidence

### LIST OF TABLES

- 37 Table 1: Number of Studies, Geographical Locations, Educational Contexts, Adult Sub-populations and Type of Study
- 40 Table 2: Weight-of-evidence criteria
- 40 Table 3: Studies included in full review
- 42 Table 4: Studies found in search of Adult Literacy Organisations

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**The immediate background to this project is the revised subject content for the Functional Skills English curriculum (DfE, 2018). This now specifies using phonics to teach learners at Entry levels. It is generally recognised that the use of phonics with adults is under-researched; and that, unlike in the school sector, there are 'no clear guidelines as to how to set about using phonics systematically with adults' (Burton, 2011, p.5).**

The ETF commissioned this research to review the extent to which phonics approaches are currently used with Entry level learners across the sector and to identify how adult literacy tutors might be supported to use phonics approaches effectively. In turn, the research has reviewed the existing evidence base on the efficacy of using phonics approaches with adult learners, and explored the context in which adult literacy teaching at Entry levels takes place. This informs the recommendations made.

## 1.1 Aims of the project

This research project set out to explore current practice in using a system of phonics with post-16 learners. The project aims were:

1. To determine the most effective approaches to using phonics to teach reading and writing to adults
2. To determine teachers' knowledge and experience of using phonics to teach Functional Skills learners at Entry levels
3. To determine which kinds of interventions can best develop practice in using phonics to improve reading and writing with adults across a range of post-16 settings.

## 1.2 Methods

The project used the following methods:

- (i) A systematic literature review, using rapid evidence assessment (REA) techniques. The review identified peer-reviewed studies of phonics-based interventions, published in English between 2004 and 2018. Those that reported outcome measures from interventions using phonics approaches with adults were assessed independently for quality and relevance to this study by three members of the team. In addition the review identified previous high-quality meta-analyses that added depth to our assessment of the weight of the evidence in the field about effective approaches to using phonics with adults.
  - (ii) An online survey of adult literacy tutors. This was launched on the ETF website on 16 February 2018 and closed on 11 March 2018. The survey attracted 120 respondents.
  - (iii) Focus groups with adult learners following Entry level courses. These explored the range of resources in use with different groups, and their perceived benefits and challenges, from the perspective of the learners. In addition, the tutors working with each group were interviewed about their choice of materials for teaching, the history of the group, and their pedagogic priorities and approaches.
-

### 1.3 Scope of the report

The report is organised into five main sections, under these headings:

- Section 2.** Research evidence on effective approaches to using phonics with adults
- Section 3.** Practitioners' knowledge and experience of teaching Functional Skills English
- Section 4.** Findings: Approaches to pedagogy, tutor knowledge and expertise
- Section 5.** Findings: Enablers and barriers to the effective use of phonics with adult literacy learners
- Section 6.** Findings: Benefits and drawbacks of making phonics approaches central to adult literacy teaching.

Section 2 draws on the literature review; Sections 3 and 4 on the online survey of practitioners and Sections 5 and 6 on the online survey, the focus groups with adult learners and the interviews with their tutors.

The findings are brought together in the final section where we discuss:

- (i) Recommendations for a systematic approach to using phonics with adults, offering:
  - clear guidance on suitable approaches to phonics teaching post-16 that are well supported by the research evidence base
  - clear guidance on approaches to phonics teaching post-16 that show promise and which would benefit from further investigation
  - a clear assessment of any gaps in the evidence base where not enough is known.
- (ii) Guidance and support to successfully embed systematic approaches to teaching phonics in different post-16 settings, including:
  - an assessment of the current barriers and enablers to effective use of phonics instruction with adult learners
  - key principles upon which a successful implementation strategy can be built, taking into account the variation in learner profiles and differences in pedagogic contexts
  - guidance on how to tailor such a strategy to the particular setting.

## 2. THE RESEARCH EVIDENCE ON EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO USING PHONICS WITH ADULTS

In this section we provide the background to the literature review, a description of the scope and methods used in our search and our review findings.

### 2.1 Background to the literature review

This purpose of this review was to determine the most effective approaches to using phonics to teach reading and writing to adults through a rapid evidence assessment of the relevant literature.

At the outset we were aware of the work that had been undertaken in the UK by the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) during its lifetime. The NRDC was government-funded between 2002-08 and finally closed in 2015. The NRDC conducted a number of studies that documented and explored effective approaches to literacy instruction for adults, including the use of phonics (Torgerson et al 2004; Brooks et al, 2007, p67). This range of studies led to the development of guidance for practitioners to improve the quality of phonics instruction with adult learners (Burton, 2007; Burton et al., 2008; Burton, 2011). A pilot study trialled training and teaching strategies based on this guidance as part of a project designed to variously support: phonics; oral reading fluency; and sentence combining in the adult literacy classroom (Burton et al, 2010). Despite showing promise, this approach has not yet been fully tested.

Against a background of renewed policy interest in England in strengthening the role of phonics in the Functional Skills English curriculum, this literature review set out to establish the depth of evidence on the efficacy of phonics-based approaches with adult literacy learners upon which advice to the field could be based. The focus was on the period 2004-18.

### 2.2 Literature review: Scope

The primary purpose of the search was to identify studies of quality which reported on outcome measures for interventions using phonics instruction with adults. To ensure relevant studies were found, the review took account of Mesmer and Griffiths' (2005) categorisation of phonics instruction as either:

- Explicit: direct instruction with opportunities for drill and practice but not necessarily in a fixed sequence
  - Implicit/Embedded: Embedded in general reading instruction which might include reading texts, comprehension, fluency, or vocabulary
  - Systematic: Synthetic or analytic approaches covering the full range of letter-sound correspondences in a predefined sequence
  - Ad hoc: As the need arises.
-

The review also recognised that in the USA, phonics instruction is often treated as part of word study, or alphabets, a broader grouping of instructional methods focused on lexical or sub-lexical aspects of literacy (McShane, 2005). Curtis & Kruidenier (2005, p. 4) define alphabets as the 'process of using the written letters... to represent meaningful spoken words...[which] includes both phonemic awareness and word analysis'. This can include sight-word recognition. As a consequence, in the USA, systematic approaches to phonics teaching (defined as 'when all the major grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught and they are covered in a clearly defined sequence' Ehri, 2003) may also take into account additional structural characteristics of language, including orthography and morphology (Katz and Frost, 1992; Gray et al., 2018).

We took account of this in our search for peer-reviewed articles focused on phonics interventions with adult learners.

## 2.3 Literature review: Methods

To determine effective approaches to phonics instruction with adults the review had three stages: (1) a search of the peer-reviewed literature; (2) a weight-of-evidence assessment for peer-reviewed articles identified in the search; and (3) a search of reviews of reviews, including in the grey literature. The time frame for the searches (2004-18) was designed to build on earlier substantial reviews undertaken in the field (Kruidenier, 2002; Torgerson et al., 2004).

### 2.3.1 Stage 1: Search of the peer-reviewed literature

Databases were searched for peer-reviewed academic articles that described the use of phonics approaches with adults from 2004 to 2018 in English. This initial search was restricted to searching abstracts only (see Appendix 1 for a full summary of the search strategy).

Having located 49 articles for full review, the full articles were catalogued for consideration to keep or reject; 29 articles were kept and 20 were rejected. The rejected articles mainly dealt with descriptions of the nature of adult reading difficulties and adult reading profiles and did not report on interventions. The 29 articles were coded prior to a fuller weight-of-evidence review. See Table 1, Appendix 1 which provides a summary of the number of articles, geographical locations, adult sub-populations, educational contexts and type of study.

### 2.3.2 Stage 2: Weight-of-evidence review

We used a weight-of-evidence review strategy suggested by Cordingley in Basma and Savage (2017) to analyse the quality of the included peer-reviewed articles (see Appendix 2 for a description of this strategy and for a list of coded papers). Based on this strategy we concluded that one study fully met our criteria, being of high quality and relevant to the research questions posed in this study, five studies met our relevance criteria but were judged of medium quality, and 13 studies partially met our criteria and were of low quality. We excluded a further 10 studies that did not fulfil the criteria of quality and relevance to this study's research questions.

### 2.3.3 Stage 3: The search for grey literature and reviews of reviews

We used a hand search to check if there were any key references in our peer-reviewed articles to reviews of reviews. In addition, we identified 12 key organisations involved in the field of adult literacy internationally, many of which had been in receipt of government funding (see Appendix 3 for a list of organisations and papers located). From this search we identified three reviews of reviews that reported on phonics approaches with adult learners and had been published since 2004. These were Benseman et al. (2005), the National Research Council (2012) and Kruidenier, MacArthur, and Wrigley (2010). We also identified a few studies published on agency websites that reported on interventions which had not been published in peer-reviewed journals. One of these (Condelli et al, 2010) was included in the full review as a high quality study.

## 2.4 Findings from the review of intervention studies

The weight-of-evidence review considered:

- (i) whether the study findings answered the study question and the study itself was internally consistent
- (ii) whether the research design was appropriate for the review questions that had guided the search
- (iii) whether the focus of the study was also relevant to the review question.

The findings from the full review follow.

### 2.4.1 Only one study fully met our criteria and was of strong quality. It reported no statistically significant differences between treatment and control

Condelli et al. (2010) The impact of a reading intervention for low-literate adult ESL learners. The researchers conducted a randomised research design with adult ESL literacy learners funded by the Institute of Educational Sciences in the United States. The treatment group were ESL adult literacy learners following a teaching programme based on an adult reader, *Sam and Pat* (Hartel et al, 2006). The controls were students matched on attainment and enrolled in English as a Second Language literacy classes on a business as usual basis. Baseline equivalence was established between treatment and control at pre-test.

The researchers described the teaching programme based on *Sam and Pat* as ‘an approach to literacy development that is systematic, direct, sequential, and multi-sensory’ (p. xii). The approach involved 22 lessons that included phonics instruction using a predefined sequence and controlled texts, writing and spelling for phonics reinforcement, vocabulary, oral language, and pre-literacy skills (for example, learning letters of the alphabet). Phonics instruction was integrated into broader reading and writing activities based on the reader’s treatment of themes from adults daily life.

Reported outcomes were that the treatment group made statistically significant gains in reading with an effect size of  $d = 0.23$ . In addition to this, a sub-group of adult learners with the lowest literacy levels at the beginning of the intervention scored higher on standardised tests of decoding than the control group ( $d = 0.16$ ). However, there were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups in either of the outcomes described.

#### SUMMARY

This randomised control study describes the efficacy of an approach to phonics teaching with adult learners (albeit ESL learners). Although both groups made gains, there were no statistically significant differences between the treatment and the control group. It should be noted, however, that those with the lowest levels of literacy in the treatment group outperformed those with the lowest levels in the control group (those who scored below a grade 2 level on standardised tests of word attack skills).

### 2.4.2 Studies which met our criteria and were judged of medium quality. Several of these suffered from high attrition. They reported no significant differences according to instructional approach

A group of six studies stemmed from one programme of research funded in the United States by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). In this section we provide a full summary of three of the linked studies which most closely met our criteria.

#### 2.4.3 Sabatini et al. (2011) Relative effectiveness of reading intervention programs for adults with low literacy

As part of the large-scale programme of research funded in the United States, Sabatini et al. (2011) randomly assigned adult learners with basic reading skills to one of three tutoring programmes which focused variably on phonics and fluency. In this study, they only report on the participants that completed (148 of 300 participants) and the study suffered from attrition. It should be noted that as a multi-armed trial, there was no control group.

The three programmes were originally designed for children and, in the study, were adapted for adult populations. They focused on different aspects or combinations of two target skills; decoding and fluency.

These were:

- (i) a decoding programme, Corrective Reading (CR) (Engelmann, 1999)
- (ii) a decoding and fluency combined programme, Retrieval, Automaticity, Vocabulary Elaboration – Orthography (RAVE-O) (Wolf, Miller & Donnelly, 2000)
- (iii) a fluency-only programme, Guided Repeated Reading (GRR) (Shore, 2003 in Sabatini et al, 2010).

Of the three programmes, 80-90% of instruction in CR was phonics-based compared to 25-35% (RAVE-O) and 10-20% (GRR) in the other programme.

The CR intervention involved systematic phonics instruction, which was described as moving from teaching simple phoneme-grapheme correspondences to syllable types, and then word level practice with work on fluency, using decodable texts.

The GRR programme involved repeated reading to build fluency, with some embedded phonics instruction.

The RAVE-O programme involved a mix of decoding (stemming from the CR programme) with fluency instruction embedded within the lesson to theoretically address the rapid naming deficit that is frequently associated with persistent literacy difficulties.



## SUMMARY

The authors found small to moderate gains in reading measures but 'no significant relative differences across interventions' (p.1).

Scarborough et al. (2013) *Meaningful reading gains by adult literacy learners* re-analysed the data of the 148 adults who had completed the programme in Sabatini et al. (2011). They studied the performance of individual students within this cohort who made the highest gains on at least two of four reading measures. They found that these adults had higher pre-test scores for reading and phonological awareness and fewer had a history of special education. There were no differences according to instructional approach; that is, the proportion of phonics to which they were exposed.

A third study partially met our criteria. Greenberg et al. (2011) *A randomized control study of instructional approaches for struggling adult readers*. In this study, the authors trialled versions of the interventions described previously in Sabatini et al. (2011), with some adaptations. However, they only report on the participants who completed and had sufficient attendance (198 of 1,174 participants). This represents very high attrition, which affected our judgement of the study's quality.

The combinations were (1) decoding (CR) and fluency (GRR), (2) decoding (CR), fluency (GRR), and comprehension, (3) decoding (CR), comprehension, fluency (GRR), and extensive reading (ER), (4) extensive reading (ER), and (5) a comparison/control group. The decoding element in all interventions involved 'skills such as phonemic relationships, new sound combinations, word endings, and letter and sound combinations' (p.106). Extensive reading (Krashen, 1993) involves reading high interest/low vocabulary books, silent reading, read-alouds, and book discussions.

All participants made significant gains with small effect sizes ( $d = 0.03$  to  $0.18$ ) independent of the intervention group. The only statistically significant finding was that all other groups, including the control/comparison group, demonstrated stronger word-attack skills than the ER group; this means that all comparisons were either null or negative.

A number of other studies stemming from this programme of research and focused on sub-groups, or different dimensions of the study, were considered, but none met our quality criteria sufficiently to be included here.

## 2.4.4 We identified two other studies of medium quality that met our criteria. They showed small to moderate gains from the intervention, but the studies suffered from high attrition or the absence of a control

Alamprese et al. (2011) *Effects of a structured decoding curriculum on adult literacy learners with low to intermediate literacy levels reading development*. This was a randomised control trial investigating the impact of Making Sense of Decoding and Spelling (MSDS), a research-designed programme, compared to a control and comparison group. Of the 561 adult learners who were pretested, only 349 had both pre- and post-test data. Due to the high attrition we included it in this section.

The MSDS programme included both decoding and spelling instruction and was designed to be part of a wider programme of literacy instruction. The curriculum focused on providing adult learners with knowledge of phonology, orthography and morphology. This meant they could 'make sense' of how decoding works so that spelling knowledge could be used to support decoding. Lessons were scripted, with short extracts that provided opportunity for participants to apply skills (Alamprese et al., 2011, p.158).

There were significantly greater gains for the treatment group relative to the control group on a measure of decoding skills ( $d = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). There were no differences between groups on measures of word recognition, spelling, fluency, or comprehension.

Vanderberg et al. (2011) *Reading intervention outcomes with disabilities in a vocational rehabilitation setting: Results of 3 year research and demonstration grant*. This study examined the efficacy of reading intervention for 57 adults with disabilities. Of the 89 adult learners who were pretested, only 57 had both pre- and post-test data. There was no comparison group.

The intervention involved targeted instruction on phonological processing, systematic instruction about phoneme-grapheme correspondence moving from parts to wholes, fluency and reading comprehension.

Results from paired sample t-tests demonstrated moderate to large gains in passage reading accuracy and comprehension and the gains were statistically significant.

## SUMMARY

Overall, these studies describe interventions which focus solely on phonics instruction or embed phonics instruction within broader approaches that target fluency, spelling or repeated reading. Results demonstrated that, while participants made gains, there was no significant difference between groups according to method of instruction in the case of those with controls, with only one study (Alamprese et al, 2011) showing a modest effect for an intervention that included morphology as well as phonology and orthography.

### 2.4.5 The remaining studies were judged as lower quality and only partially met our criteria

However, some of these studies did make contributions to theorising elements of effective approaches to adult phonics instruction.

Some of these studies described interventions that integrated instruction about morphology and orthography into word level instruction. Gray et al., 2018 suggested that drawing adult learners' attention to morphological features of words might provide a compensatory strategy for adults who have core phonological difficulties and that the instructor could usefully focus on 'the ways in which English orthography reveals deep semantics relationships... such as words that share the same root or base morphemes' (Gray, 2018, p.76). Gray et al. (2018) conducted an RCT to examine the efficacy of such an approach and students made gains in reading unfamiliar words. However, the intervention was short (8 hours) and the intervention group was small.

Massengill (2006; 2014) and Massengill and Berg (2008) used word study, an approach to phonics that, once a student has moved beyond learning about basic sound-symbol correspondences, utilises an integrated approach to study words that involves phonics, vocabulary and spelling instruction with a focus on layers of phonology, orthography and morphology in words (see Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton and Johnston, 2015). In these studies students made positive gains but sample sizes were too small to be generalisable.

Other studies described small interventions with specific populations. Kolinsky et al. (2017) *Completely illiterate adults can learn to decode in 3 months* reported on a specific phonics intervention with Romani adults described as 'illiterate'. The intervention was in Portuguese but the description of the phonics intervention was so detailed we deemed it helpful in terms of description of the intervention.

The intervention involved teaching phoneme-grapheme correspondences, the alphabetic principle, letter identification, and reading and writing activities. In this single case design, participants showed enhanced phonemic sensitivity. However, differences in the orthography of English and Portuguese make it difficult to assess the relevance of this study for adult learners in the UK.

Goddard and Rinderknecht (2009) presented a case study of a literacy intervention with an adult with a traumatic brain injury that involved instruction on segmenting, blending, letter-sound correspondence and decodable texts. Shippen (2008) presented a small study of 27 adult learners in a prison setting. One of the interventions was Corrective Reading, but the description of the intervention was not detailed enough and the sample too small and non-random.

McHardy and Chapman (2016) and Perin and Greenberg (2007) focused on adult literacy tutors in terms of their beliefs about literacy instruction and their approaches to instruction. McHardy and Chapman (2016) conducted a survey of adult reading teachers' beliefs and how they related to choice of approach to literacy instruction. Perin and Greenberg (2007) presented case studies of literacy instruction, specifically the Orton-Gillingham approach which emphasises direct sequential phonics instruction, in Adult Basic Education classrooms. Duncan (2009) explored adult literacy learners' perceptions of their reading practices. She highlighted the importance of the use of meta-language to allow learners to examine and develop their decoding, as well as for the value in reading as much as possible, and working from strong personal motivations, to develop adult reading skills and practices. Rodrigo et al. (2014) examined adult learners' perceptions of themselves as readers following two literacy interventions (one involving phonics and the other involving extensive reading of self-chosen literature). They found that adults who engaged in extensive reading were more motivated to read and this trend continued over time.

## SUMMARY

The papers that fell into this category either did not demonstrate efficacy, or did so with such a small group that the results could not be deemed generalisable.

Upon full review, the remaining papers (coloured in red in Table 3, Appendix 2) did not fulfil our weight of evidence criteria.

## 2.4.6 Overall summary

The search of the literature found very few high-quality intervention studies, capable of testing the efficacy of phonics-based approaches with adult literacy learners.

- As things stand, the studies showed little evidence that phonics is more effective than other approaches to word study, or that it is best delivered to the exclusion of other approaches.
- Many studies with an appropriate design of relevance to this project suffered from high attrition. This limited the conclusions that could be safely drawn from them.
- High attrition may reflect aspects of the learning environment that are intrinsic to working with adult learners and which act to the detriment of phonics-based interventions designed to be followed in a set sequence and for a given period of time.
- There are a few studies (see Condelli, 2011 and Alamprese et al. 2011) which would merit replication in the UK context and could be used to examine further which phonics-based approaches work best for whom, under what conditions.

## 2.5 Findings from the grey literature and reviews of reviews

The three reviews of reviews (Benseman et al., 2005; Kruidenier et al., 2010; National Research Council, 2012) identified from the search of the grey literature all commented on the limited number and quality of studies that have been conducted directly in the adult literacy field. Both Benseman et al (2005) and Kruidenier et al (2010) drew on studies based on younger age groups (K-12) to derive stronger conclusions on instructional efficacy than studies based on adults alone might allow. For this reason, we focus on the National Research Council (2012) review *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research*.

National Research Council (2012) reported on a 36-month study, commissioned by The National Research Council (U.S.), which had convened the Committee on Learning Sciences: Foundations and Applications to Adolescent and Adult Literacy to ‘review evidence on learning and literacy to develop a roadmap for research and practice to strengthen adult literacy education in the United States’.

### Key messages from the National Research Council (2012) review of research are:

1. Interventions designed to secure better outcomes for adult literacy learners seldom demonstrate more efficacy than ‘business as usual’, regardless of the pedagogic approach they adopt. Effect sizes are small or null. They comment specifically: interventions with a strong decoding component were no more effective in remediating componential or functional skills than interventions without a strong decoding component or business as usual. (ibid, p 87)  
This is in line with our own assessment of the studies we have reviewed.
2. Research studies need to acknowledge differences in the profile of ‘low literate adult’ learners and children following a normative pattern of development. They comment: low-literate adults appear to lack the fluent integration of word reading, language and comprehension skills shown by young children who learned to read on a normative timetable (ibid, p76).

From their assessment of the state of the field, the review identified a number of key areas which require further research. These included:

- Clearer guidance on which approaches are effective for identified subgroups of adults, including better explanations for why certain interventions are effective for some learners but not others
- Further development of assessment tools that are fit for purpose and can effectively support and monitor adult learning as well as help develop purposeful instruction
- Research to develop instructional materials that both build adult learners’ literacy skills and connect with their interests
- Research to equip literacy tutors with the necessary tools to develop effective teaching strategies, including the necessary technical knowledge and professional expertise.

In putting this agenda forward they also called for rigorous research designs with these characteristics:

- Research should address the diversity of [adult] populations for whom literacy improvement is a concern
- Research should use rigorous designs and integrated multidisciplinary perspectives that can clarify the effective components of instructional practice and why they work, with adequate experimental power to clarify both what does and what does not work for specific subgroups of the population
- Research should include longitudinal designs to determine which approaches produce substantial and durable literacy improvement
- Research should use the best methods for reducing attrition known to be effective in conducting research with difficult-to-study populations
- Research should determine that the approaches and effects are achievable and sustainable in the instructional context [in which they will be applied] (ibid, pp254-5).

---

## 2.6 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Looking across the range of studies identified through our literature review, this chapter concludes that there remains a clear need for more high-quality studies to be conducted if research is to offer clear advice on when, and under what conditions, phonics-based instruction can prove effective with adult literacy learners.

Such studies need to pay attention to the circumstances in which adult literacy learners enrol and attend literacy classes, and the fragmented learning opportunities these may lead to.

There are indications in the research that strengthening tutor professional knowledge and expertise may play a bigger role in developing systematic and effective approaches to the use of phonics with adult literacy learners than implementing any particular programme. This remains to be explored.

---

## 3. PRACTITIONERS' KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ENGLISH

In this section we consider the range of knowledge and experience that adult literacy tutors bring to teaching Functional Skills English, using data collected for this project.

### 3.1 Method: Survey of adult literacy tutors

To help develop relevant guidance and support that could lead to phonics approaches being successfully embedded across the FE sector, the research team developed an online survey for adult literacy tutors.

The aim of the survey was to explore:

- the current levels of knowledge about, and use of, phonics approaches among Functional Skills English practitioners
- practitioners' priorities in working with adult literacy learners
- any enablers and barriers that they thought might impact on the uptake of systematic phonics approaches in the post-16 sector.

The survey also collected information on the working context of respondents, including the composition of the learner groups they worked with.

The survey was distributed by ETF to its networks and the ETF Maths and English regional specialist leads. The UCL team contacted a range of other professional networks with a particular interest in adult literacy teaching, including RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacies), the UCL Institute of Education English, Mathematics, ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy network (EM&ELN), the UCL Institute of Education Post-14 Network, the Learning and Work Institute, The Reading Agency and NATECLA (National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages to Adults). Social media were used to promote the survey whilst it was open between 16 February 2018 and 11 March 2018. The survey was completed by 120 respondents.

#### 3.1.1 Respondents

Of the 120 respondents, a contingency question placed relatively early on in the survey determined that 32 respondents were not currently teaching adult literacy courses. This led to them answering a shortened version of the questionnaire. The remaining subset of 88 respondents who were currently teaching adult literacy learners answered a series of more detailed questions about their current working context and their priorities in teaching and learning. We chose this strategy to improve the validity of the responses from the field, although we realise this has meant a smaller sample.

The subsample of 88 tutors responded to the survey seriously, in the sense that they took on average more than half an hour to complete the 26 questions, giving special consideration to the open-ended questions. More precisely, the mean time to complete the survey was 36 minutes, with the median of 30 minutes and a mode of 13 minutes.

Few of the responses suggested that those taking the time to answer the survey were writing from a fixed position of either championing or being opposed to the use of systematic phonics approaches post-16. But, given this is a relatively small and self-selecting sample, we have to be cautious in interpreting this. We cannot say for certain that this is representative of the field as a whole.

### 3.1.2 Analysis

The data collected from the survey was measured at a binary, nominal and ordered categorical level. Quantitative analysis consisted of exploratory data analysis using basic descriptive statistics. We used bar graphs to explore, summarise and organise the data in meaningful ways. For simplicity and legibility reasons, we report frequencies and percentages in the graphs and discuss them in the text. When we allowed only one answer per question (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 6, Figure 9, Figure 11 and Figure 14) the frequencies and percentages correspond. When we allowed many answers per question ('tick as many as apply' as in Figure 5, Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 10, Figure 12 and Figure 13) the percentages represent the proportion of respondents that chose each answer. We also conducted exploratory cluster analysis but did not find distinctive patterns. We interpret this as supporting the finding that tutors were eclectic in their use of approaches, putting their analysis of the learners' needs ahead of a commitment to a particular method.

The survey included both closed and open questions, with seven questions giving respondents the opportunity to write detailed free text answers. Many of them did so. The free text answers were coded, and have been analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively to draw out key themes.

The qualitative data collected from the focus groups and interviews were analysed thematically.

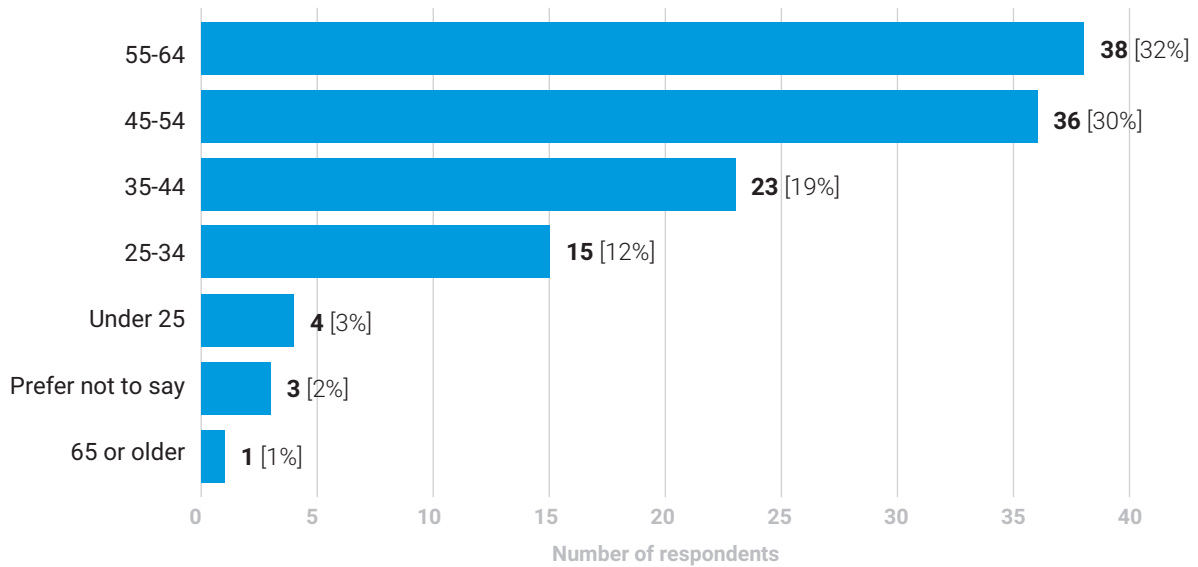
## 3.2 Characteristics of the sample

The age profile of our respondents was broadly in line with other surveys of those teaching Functional Skills, as was the number of years spent teaching adult literacy learners. However, the organisational profile of respondents was different, with fewer working in FE than is typically found in other surveys, slightly more working with a Local Authority service provider and a larger number working for independent providers.

The sections below set out more details about the respondent profile.

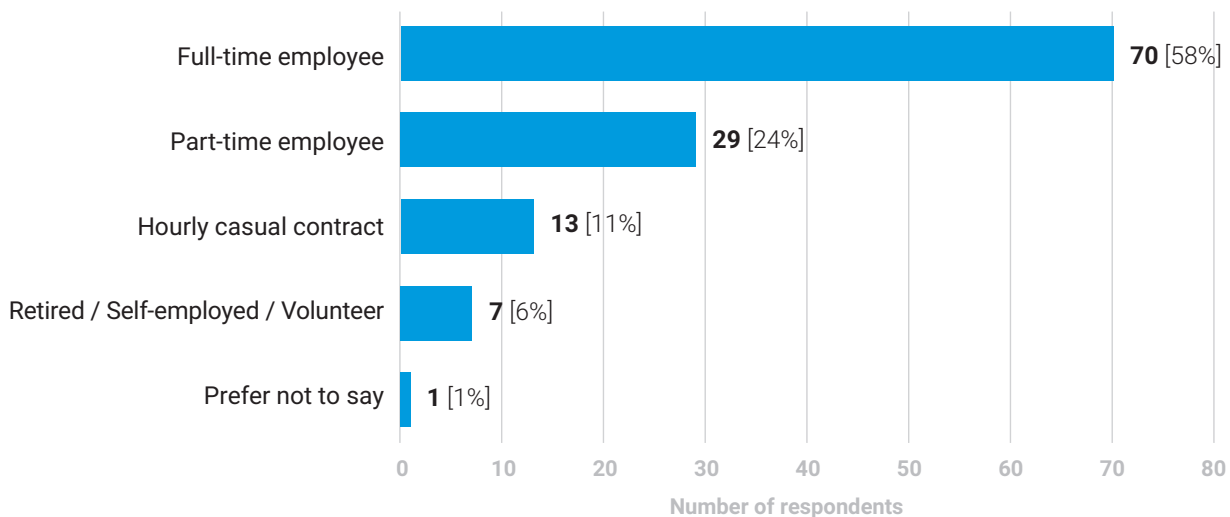
### 3.2.1 Age profile

Of the 120 respondents who answered the survey, just under a third were 55-64 years old (32%, n=38); just under a third were 45-54 years old (30%, n=36); and just under a third were between 25-44 years old (35-44 years old, 19%, n=23; and 25-34 years old 12%, n=15). Only four tutors (3%) were under 25 years old, and one was 65 or older. When comparing the age and experience of those that **were** currently teaching adult literacy courses (group 1) with those that **were not** (group 2), it is clear that group 2 were relatively older and more experienced than group 1. Focusing on experience, 75% (n=24) of group 2 had over five years of experience, compared with 66% (n=58) of group 1. However, in terms of age, group 1 is in line with the age distribution of the Staff Individualised Record (SIR) 2016/17, where 63% of English (Including Literacy) teachers are 45 or older, compared to 62% in group 1.

**Figure 1: Age of respondents**

### 3.2.2 Employment

Most of our respondents (58%, n= 70), worked full-time and 24%, n=29, part-time. A smaller number (11%, n=13) had an hourly casual contract, the rest (6%, n=7) were either retired, self-employed or volunteers.

**Figure 2: Employment**

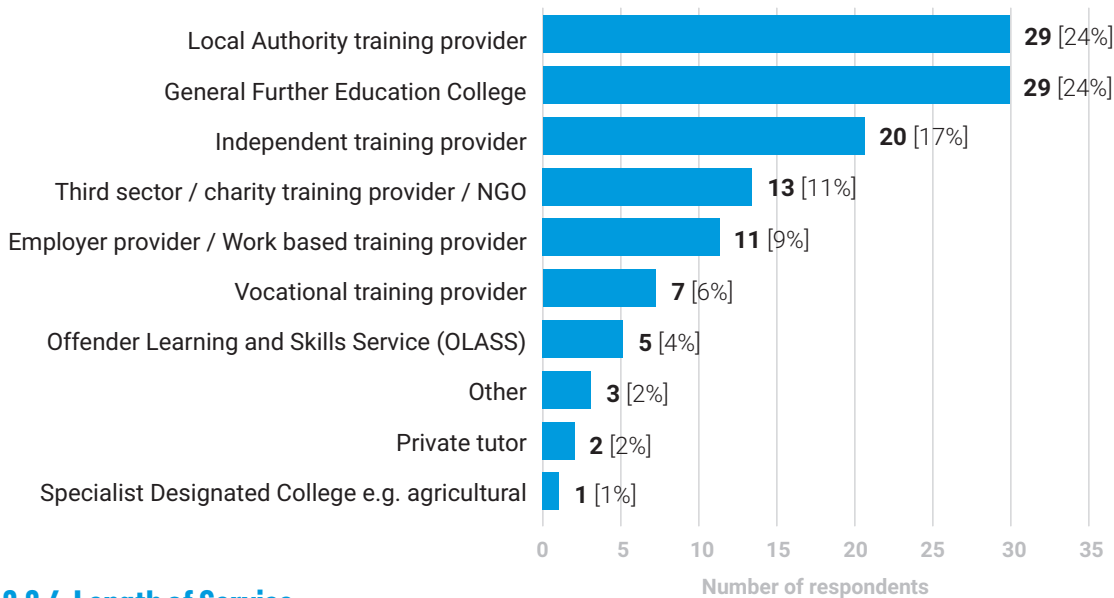
Most of those who were working full-time taught adult literacy learners for more than 15 hours per week (48%, n=34). Most of those working part-time taught adult literacy learners for less than 15 hours per week (45%, n=13).

Most of our respondents were teaching Functional Skills English (68%, n=82). Almost a quarter were teaching Functional Skills English in combination with non-accredited courses (20%, n=24), with only 4% (n=5) teaching non-accredited courses only.

### 3.2.3 Organisation

Almost half of the respondents were employed by General Further Education Colleges (24%, n=29) or Local Authority Training Providers (24%, n=29). 17% (n=20) were employed by Independent training providers or worked in the Third sector/Charities/ NGOs (11%, n=13). The rest variously worked for an Employer provider (9%, n=11); Vocational training provider (6%, n=7); the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) (4%, n=5). 2% (n=2) were Private tutors and 1% (n=1) worked on Specialist Designated College e.g. agricultural / performing arts.

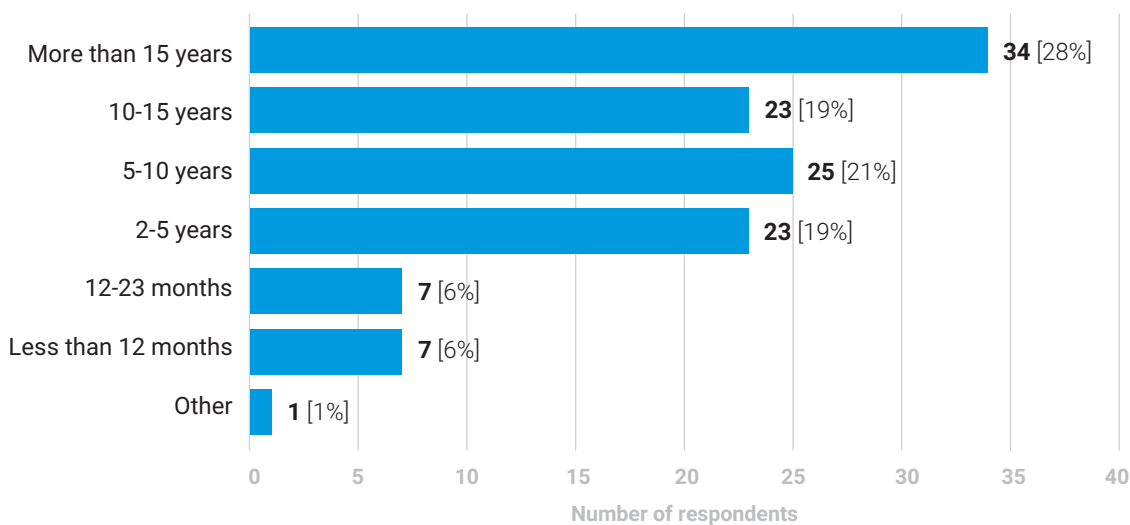
**Figure 3: Organisation**



### 3.2.4 Length of Service

Our respondents were experienced tutors. Almost 70% (n=82) had been teaching literacy to adults for more than five years, with almost 30% (n=34) having more than 15 years' experience. Only 12% (n=14) had taught for less than two years.

**Figure 4: Length of Service**

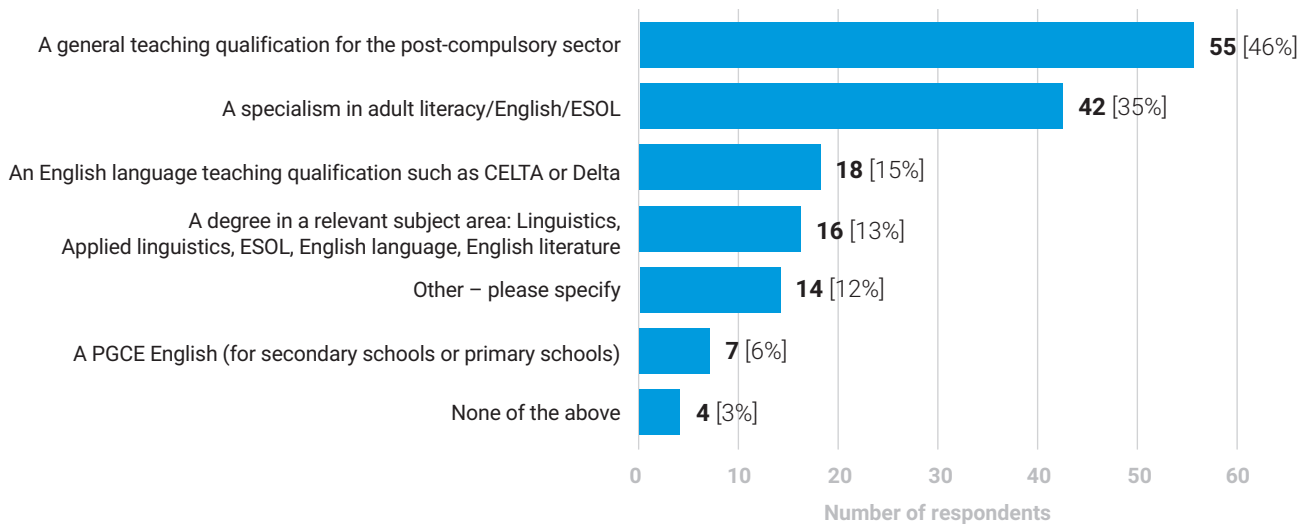




### 3.2.5 Qualifications

Most of our respondents held either a general teaching qualification for the post-compulsory sector (46%, n=55) or a specialism in adult literacy/English/ESOL (35%, n=42). Almost a quarter held both (n=29). 15%, n=18 held an English language teaching qualification such as CELTA or DELTA, while a few (13%, n=16) also held a degree in a relevant subject area, such as English Literature. Over a third were without sector-specific training (35% n=42).

**Figure 5: Qualifications**



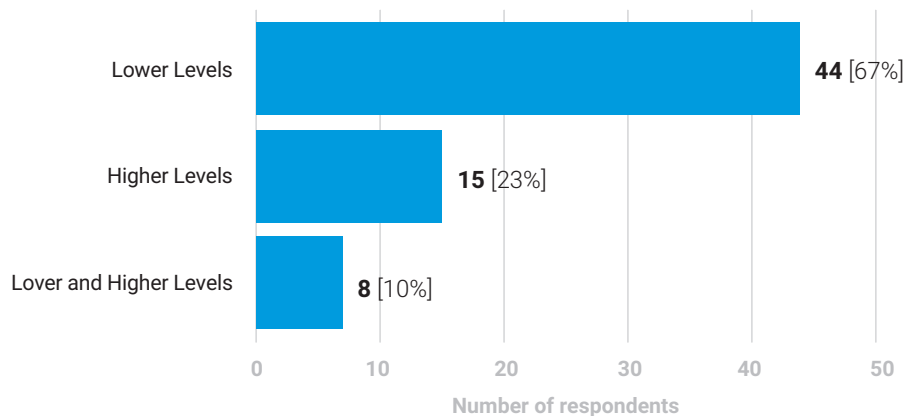
### 3.2.6 SUMMARY

Our respondents were experienced adult literacy tutors, who were teaching Functional Skills English in a variety of settings. The majority, though not all, had specialist qualifications in teaching post-16, with over a third having a specialist qualification in teaching adult literacy/English and/or ESOL.

### 3.3.1 The structure and composition of respondents' adult literacy classes

Of those who answered this question, (67%, n=44) say they mostly teach Entry level groups, with only a quarter reporting they mostly teach higher level learners. Of those who reported teaching Entry level groups, the most common way of teaching was in a mixed Entry level group (39%, n=26), or in a dedicated group working at Entry level 1 only (18%, n=12).

**Figure 6: Functional Skills level**

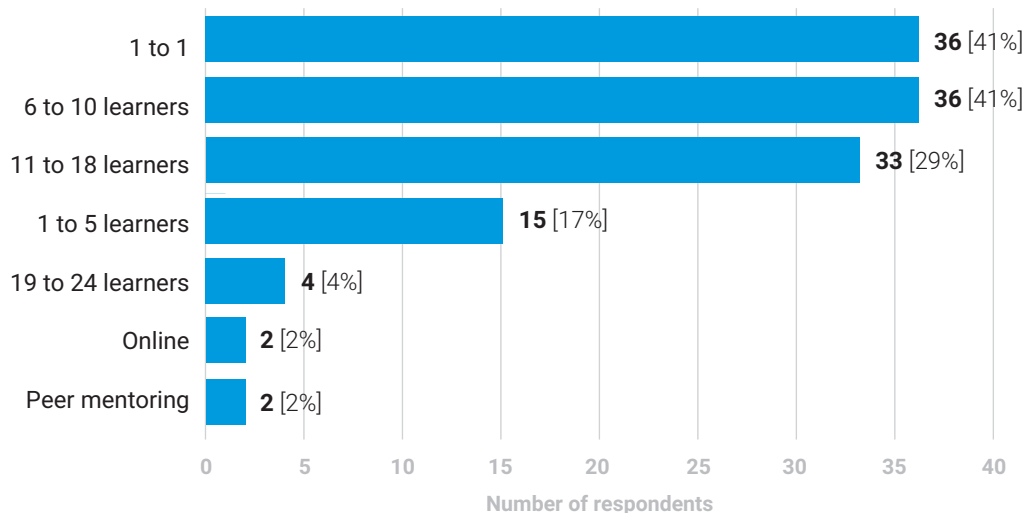


**Key:** Lower levels are Entry levels 1-3. Higher levels are level 1/2/GSCE.

As many respondents reported typically teaching one to one (41%, n=36) as in small groups of 6-10 (41%, n=36). Almost a third of respondents (29%, n=33) reported typically teaching large groups of 11-18 students, whilst 17% (n=15) said they typically taught in small groups of between 1-5 students.

Most of the tutors (70%, n=61) worked mainly in one way (for example, with one to five learners, or with six to ten learners, etc.), with just 30% (n=27) typically working with groups of different sizes.

**Figure 7: Group composition**

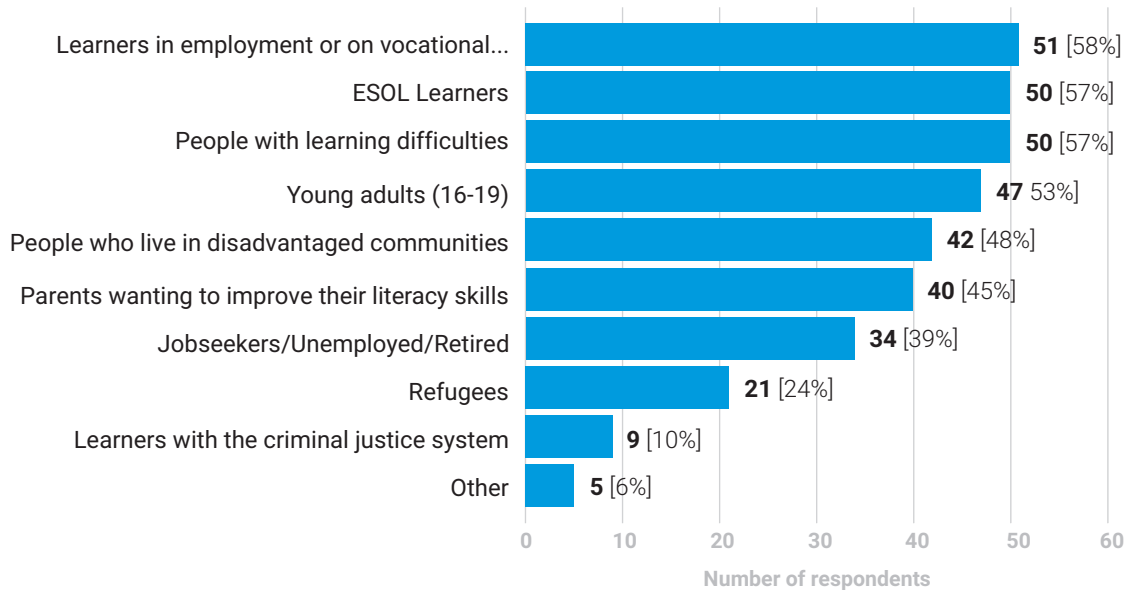


Note: 128 answers given by 88 respondents

### 3.3.2 The diversity of adult learners

Respondents worked with learners with a variety of needs and from diverse backgrounds. More than half reported they were working with learners in employment, ESOL learners, people with learning difficulties, and /or young adults. Just under half were working with people who lived in disadvantaged communities and parents wanting to improve their literacy skills. Almost 40% (n=34) were working with people who were out of the job market. Just under a quarter were working with refugees, while 10% (n=9) were working with learners in the criminal justice system and ex-offenders.

**Figure 8: Diversity of learners**



Note: 349 answers given by 88 respondents

Comparatively few respondents (16%, n=14) worked exclusively with one group of learners. When they did so, these were most commonly learners in employment or on vocational training courses, or parents wanting to improve their literacy skills). The majority of respondents (84%, n=74) worked with a mix of between two and nine different kinds of learner, the most common pattern being working with four. Most therefore had to meet a range of complex and often diverse needs in their teaching groups.

### 3.3.3 SUMMARY

Most of our respondents taught Entry-level learners Functional Skills English in classes that were either mixed Entry level or dedicated Entry level 1 classes. They most commonly taught one-to-one, in small groups of 6-10 learners, or in classes of 11-18. Learners' needs were diverse, and respondents typically taught groups that encompassed multiple factors that might impact on their learning.

## 4. SURVEY FINDINGS: APPROACHES TO PEDAGOGY, TUTOR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

To assess practitioners' current levels of knowledge about, and use of, phonics approaches, respondents were asked a series of questions about:

- their priorities in the early stages of working with an individual adult learner (Qs 12 and 13)
- their familiarity with and preference for using different approaches to teaching word level skills, including phonics-based resources (Qs 14-20) and their confidence in adopting phonics-based approaches (Q 21)
- any consequence respondents foresaw from a greater emphasis being placed in the Functional Skills English curriculum on phonics-based approaches (Q22).

Of these 10 questions, five were open-ended and gave respondents the opportunity to write freely in reply.

In designing the survey questions, we drew on previous research exploring how teachers' beliefs influence their approach to teaching adult literacy learners (Beder, Lipnevich and Robinson-Geller, 2007; Belzer, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2011; Bingham and Hall-Kenyon, 2013; Van Kan, Ponte and Verloop, 2013; McHardy and Chapman, 2016). McHardy and Chapman (2016) argue there are four main approaches to teaching adults reading:

- reassurance (focused on the learner's confidence, self-esteem and motivation)
- task-based (centred on teacher-directed activities)
- theory-based (driven by a theory of reading development, whether top-down or bottom-up)
- responsive (the tutor adapts their theory to take account of individual needs).

Our analysis showed that our respondents' views cannot be so easily compartmentalised. Only very few consistently championed a particular approach to teaching reading and writing. Most were prepared to draw from a wide range of approaches, adjusting what they planned to do depending upon how they saw the needs of the learner. (See Appendix 4, p48).

### 4.1. Assessing priorities in meeting students' needs

To explore respondents' primary orientation to the business of teaching and learning we presented them with a vignette which gave a few details about an adult learner and their motivations for joining an adult literacy class. Respondents were asked:

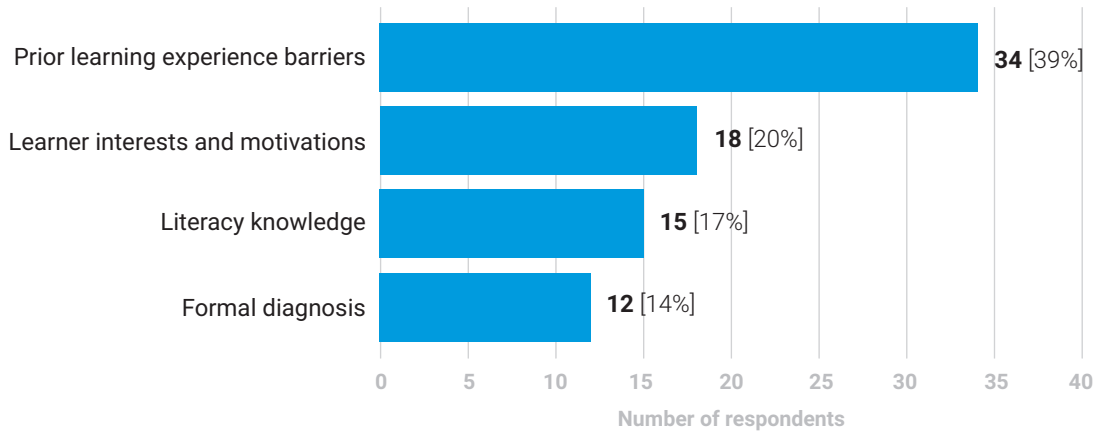
**Q 12** What further information might you seek from Sam to identify and assess her needs?

**Q 13** What would you do with Sam in the next session and why?

### 4.1.1 Quantitative analysis of the responses to Q 12

Answers to Question 12 were coded according to the kinds of further information respondents said they would seek and are set out in the figure below.

**Figure 9: Assessing learner needs**



In assessing Sam's needs, almost 40% of respondents (n=34) wanted to know more about her previous educational experience or other barriers to learning that might explain her current level of functioning:

- *I would ask if she had ever had any learning needs identified. I would also ask whether she had missed chunks of school in the past. Basically I would try to get a feel for why she struggles to read.*

20% (n=18) wanted to explore her motivation and any interests that might encourage her to develop her reading and writing skills:

- *The age of the daughter so that I can structure the learning to meet her needs and bring some work which is relevant to her. I would find out about her interests – is there anything that she likes to read: magazines, catalogues, twitter etc.? Her family situation – any other support – partner, family? Her job – what sort of literacy skills does she need in her current employment? Her aspirations.*

17% (n=15) would focus in on her literacy skills:

- *Can she write days of the week/months of the year? Can she write the alphabet? Does she know any phonic sounds? Can she match uppercase and lowercase letters? Can she identify rhyming words (read out loud by tutor)?*

14% (n=12) would prioritise making a more formal diagnosis, including of dyslexia and special educational needs:

- *I would like a diagnostic assessment to be completed to gain a better understand[ing of] what the learner can and can't currently do.*

But many also combined approaches. So the previous respondent who suggested a formal diagnostic assessment added:

- *I would also like to gain a better understanding of the low level and how this occurred to build rapport and break the embarrassment barrier. I would also find out more information about the daughter's age and homework level to understand the level that the learner is currently wanting to achieve to improve her situation. The daughter's learning could also be useful to the learner and ensure development between sessions.*

### 4.1.2 Qualitative analysis of the responses to Q 13

In imagining the follow-up activity that they would plan for the next session, a similar pattern emerged. Many respondents prioritised approaches that built from the learner's interests and which would help boost her self-confidence. At the same time they began to home in on more specific areas of literacy knowledge that might need addressing:

- *Identify any interests or hobbies as a potential basis for lesson plans that will spark her interest. Cover the basics such as letters and phonic sounds.*

Some thought that building on from the strategies that the learner currently used was important:

- *A lot would depend on how Sam presented her needs, but I would attempt to base any teaching on the strategies that Sam already has for learning words.*

A quarter of respondents considered a more formal assessment as the next best step:

- *Initial and diagnostic literacy assessments and an ILP to establish level, need and requirements.*

A smaller number would engage Sam in tasks and activities that would maintain confidence and engagement whilst allowing for informal assessment:

- *In the following session, to encourage and engage Sam, I would attempt some informal type of assessment through games/activities in order to gain a further insight into her phonic knowledge, general high frequency reading.*

Others orientated more precisely to the gaps they perceived in the learner's literacy knowledge and began to plan a teaching sequence. This example is particularly detailed:

- *After assessment I would start to teach reading and spelling at word level starting: CVC or CVCC, (depending on the results of her assessment). I would teach the first sounds of a,i,s,t,m,p,n, building words with appropriate support ensuring she mapped words (i.e. saying the sounds as she spelt) which I think is a key to progressing. I would ask her to write sentences as soon as possible, manipulate phonemes to create new words and read text.*

More commonly, respondents suggested a holistic response geared to assessing individual needs and engaging the learner:

- *Complete a full diagnostic, with and without a reader, to screen for possible learning difficulties, boost confidence and work towards buy-in by covering sight words and other commonly used words.*

---

### 4.1.3 SUMMARY

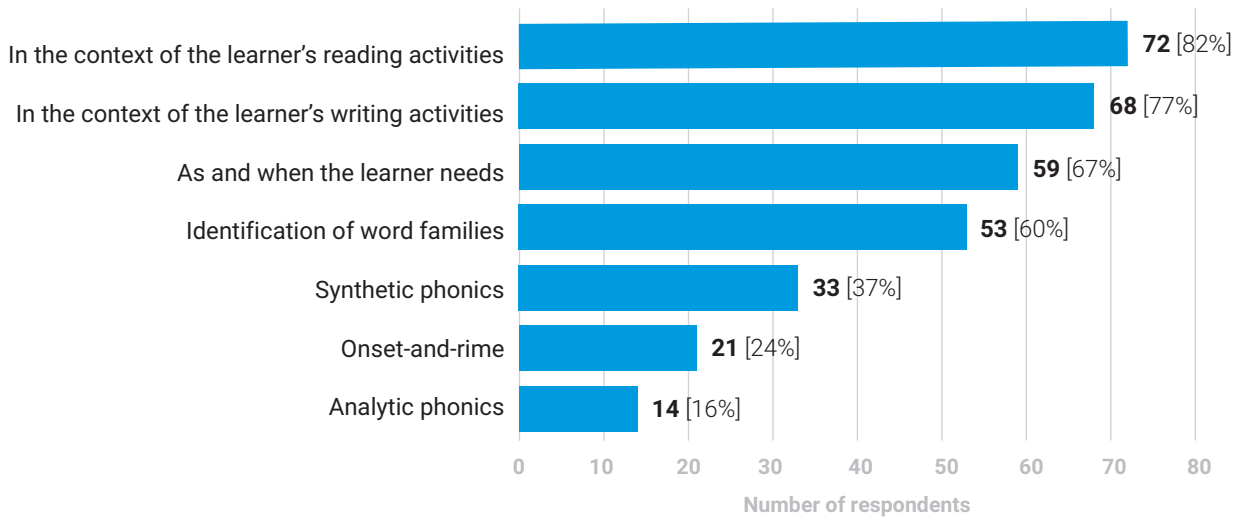
In planning to meet an individual's needs respondents were very attuned to the daunting task adults face in addressing substantial difficulties in learning to read and write. In the first instance, most geared towards the individual learner and their needs, keeping in mind their interests and motivation and any substantial barriers to learning that might shape the progress they can make. Faced with the scenario we gave them, most respondents adopted a pragmatic approach, showing themselves to be eclectic rather than doctrinaire about choice of method. In general at this early stage they prioritised strategies that would help keep the learner engaged and confident.

## 4.2 Tutor approaches to teaching word level skills

On the understanding that phonics-based approaches may be taught more or less explicitly, and on an ad-hoc as well as systematic basis (Mesmer and Griffiths, 2005), respondents were asked about their approach to teaching word decoding (lexical and sub-lexical skills), including, but not specific to, phonics-based approaches.

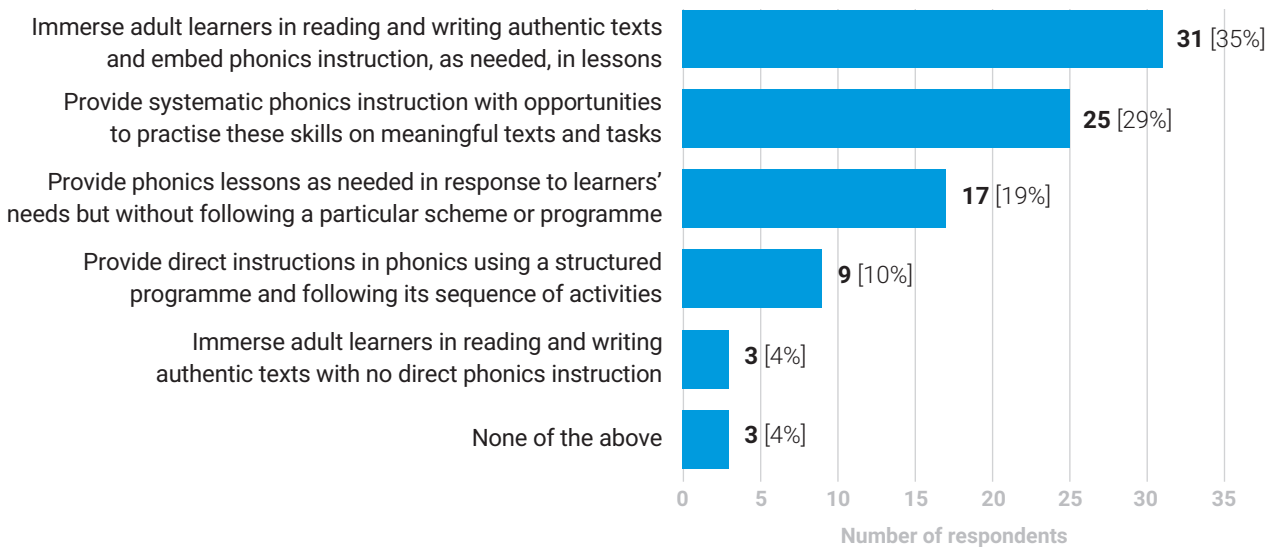
### 4.2.1 Teaching word decoding

The majority of respondents reported that they taught word level skills in the context of learners' reading and writing activities (82%, n=72; and 77%, n=68, respectively), with many also saying they taught word level skills "as and when the student needs" (67%, n=59). Identification of word families was the commonest method employed to teach word levels skills (60%, n=53), although some respondents also reported embedding synthetic and analytic phonics approaches in the context of learners' reading and writing activities or on a need-to-know basis.

**Figure 10: Teaching word level skills**

Note: 320 answers given by 88 respondents

Asked how they thought word level instruction **should** be organised, respondents gave a very similar range of responses. Interestingly, relatively few respondents championed either following only a structured phonics programme (10%, n=9) or immersing adults in authentic texts with no direct phonics instruction (3%, n=4).

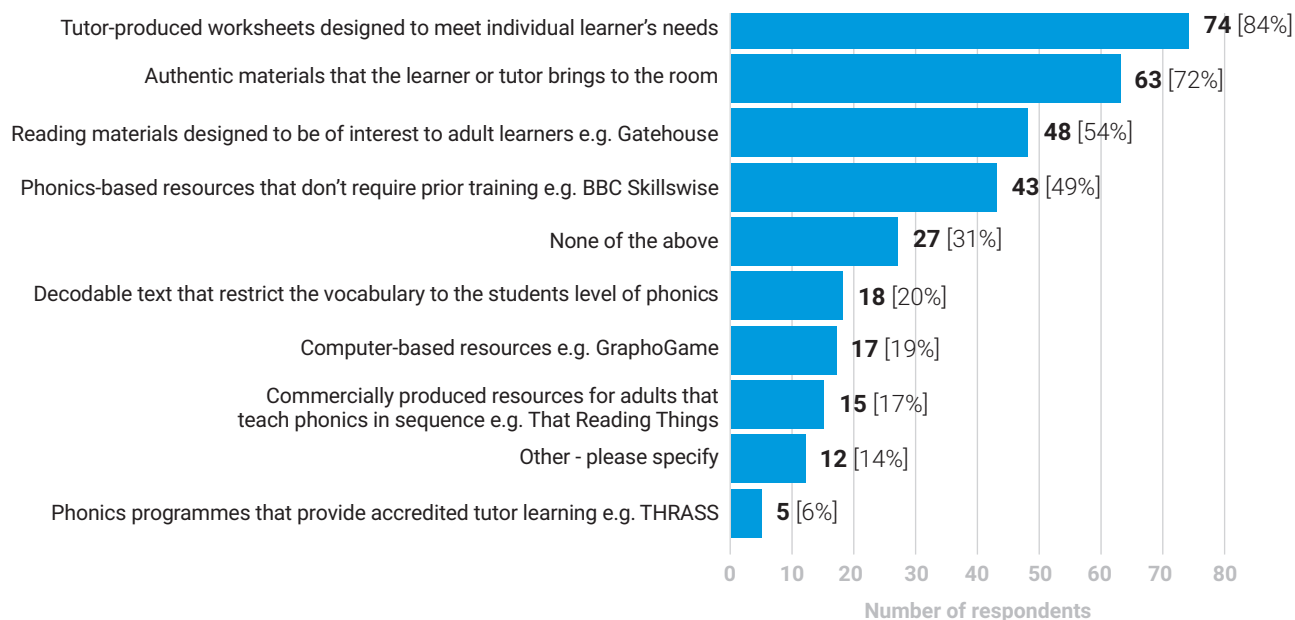
**Figure 11: Best approach**

Note: % based on a single answer from 88 respondents

## 4.2.2 Resources for teaching word decoding skills

The resources most respondents reported using with adult learners were teacher-produced worksheets, designed to meet adult needs (84%, n=74). The next most popular choices were authentic materials (72%, n=63) and reading materials designed to be of interest to individual learners (54%, n=48). Just under half (49%, n=43) also reported using phonics-based resources that don't require prior training.

Figure 12: Use of resource



When asked to nominate just one of these resources, the most popular were again teacher-produced worksheets (36%, n=32), authentic reading materials (29%, n=26) and reading materials designed to be of interest to individual learners (16%, n=14), in that order.

The main reasons given for choosing tutor-produced worksheets were the ability of the tutor to tailor the content to individual needs, and ensure the level of challenge was appropriate:

- *Worksheets can be adapted to be more challenging or basic depending upon the needs of the learner.*
- *Every learner has unique needs so one size doesn't fit all. Sometimes a non-reading learner can recognise some quite unusual words related to a particular interest, so it is important to build on that. Also adult learners have a lot more vocabulary than a child so have a different starting point than children.*
- *The tutor knows the learner best and can tailor worksheets to target needs without killing self-esteem whilst still stretching and challenging.*

Many of those championing authentic materials did so because they thought they would positively impact on learner motivation:

- *This makes it more learner led and if the learner has brought it, they should/may be more engaged with it.*

Those opting for reading materials designed specifically for adult learners used very similar arguments:

- *Learners relate to the subject content. Content can then inform written work and free writing, also discussions.*

Some of those who preferred authentic materials thought they provided an important context in which to practise word-focused skills, whilst having the advantage of introducing learners to a wider range of text types:

- *Because you are helping the learners to access more in the world around them and showing them how to break down / decode real texts (and basing exercises on such texts) gives them a sense of achievement and empowerment and helps keep learning relevant to what they need.*

One respondent thought that authentic texts could provide too much of a challenge for learners, and so made decodable resources their first choice of resource instead:

- *Authentic texts are really important but I find they can overwhelm some of my learners. I don't restrict vocabulary too much on the decodable resources I produce, but have found the learners get disheartened if they cannot read most of a text themselves. I do use a variety of resources in reality.*



Another respondent chose well-sequenced phonics resources as their first choice, but thought they should be combined with authentic materials as well as more directed blending skills in class:

- *It is good to set learners up to succeed but this should be done in conjunction with authentic and meaningful texts. I use a buddy reading system that involves a literacy partner at home. This encourages independent learning.*

### 4.2.3 SUMMARY

Taken as a whole, these answers suggest our respondents' thinking is multidimensional, balancing different elements in their assessment of the learner's needs in order to draw conclusions about the most effective use of resources in each individual case.

## 4.3 Tutor knowledge of and use of phonics resources

To explore respondents' familiarity with, and use of, different kinds of phonics resources, they were asked about a range of materials designed specifically for adult learners, including phonics programmes that introduce phoneme-grapheme correspondences systematically (That Reading Thing; Turning Pages); decodable texts and phonics-based reading schemes (Gatehouse Books); and phonics-based resources designed to be used as adjuncts to other classroom activities (BBC Skillswise English). They were also given the opportunity to recommend a phonics resource and explain their choice. Finally, respondents were asked about their confidence in teaching different aspects of encoding and decoding skills.

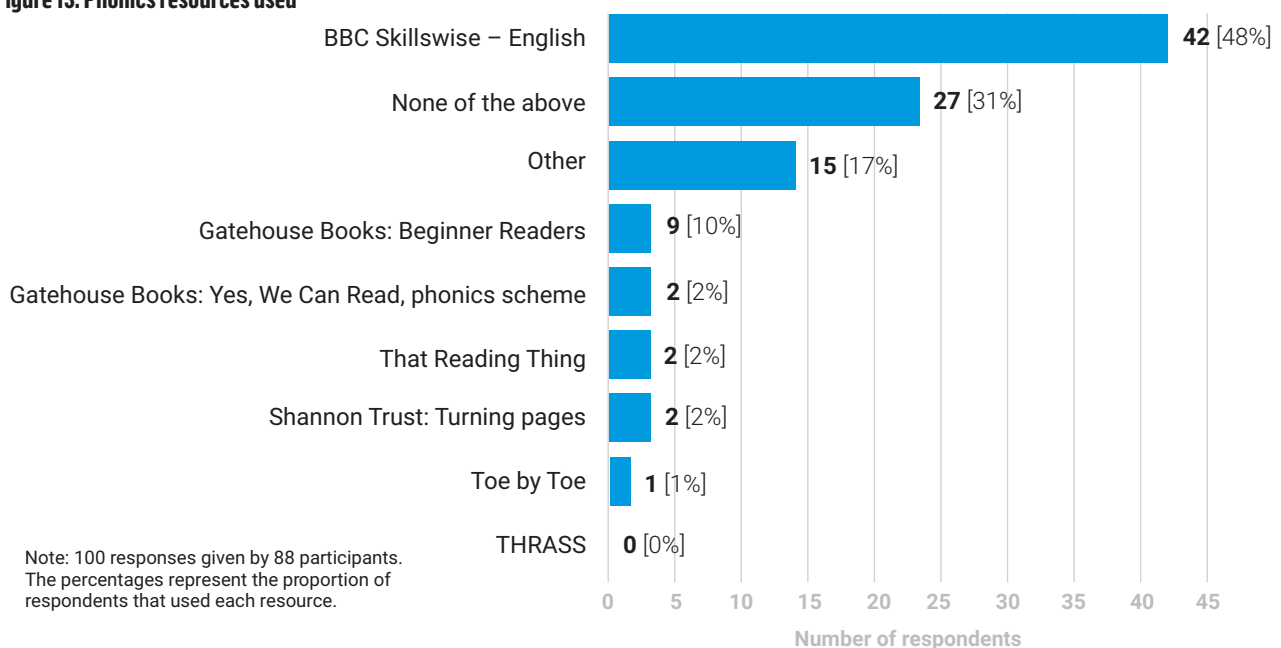
### 4.3.1 Phonics resources in use

Of the listed resources, BBC Skillswise English was the most frequently used. This may reflect the fact that it can be incorporated relatively easily into planning and will fit alongside other activities to reinforce particular teaching points, as and when. But it also covers a wider range of topics such as grammar, reading comprehension and punctuation. It may be more widely used precisely because of this breadth, in contrast to the other named materials, which are more specifically phonics-based.

Those nominating other resources variously named computer-based phonics resources developed for school use, other school-age resources they had adapted for adult learners, or phonics resources they had devised themselves.

- *I developed my own Phonics program using a variety of materials and tend to use these as a base.*

**Figure 13: Phonics resources used**



Just under a third (31%, n=27) said they used none of the named resources, though several of the respondents in this group (n=7) did go on to recommend an alternative phonics-based resource in a later question. These included resources designed specifically for ESOL learners.

### 4.3.2 Recommended phonics resources

Comparatively few of our respondents recommended particular phonics resources (30%, n=27). As one commented in response to the question:

- *Is there a particular phonics resource you would recommend to other adult literacy tutors?  
No – and that's an issue.*

Those who recommended a particular phonics resource often liked the systematic coverage of their chosen resource, particularly if it appealed to adults or suited the conditions in which adults learn:

- *Fast Phonics. It is a step-by-step approach with an adult focus. It suits the needs of an adult who only attends English classes once a week, unlike a programme like Toe by Toe, which is excellent but is not a practical solution for a weekly English group.*
- *That Reading Thing. It is fast. It works. The learners like it. The learners understand it. It is not babyish. It uses real words and real text. It builds confidence and is supportive and structured.*

Ease of use and the capacity of learners to work their way through resources on their own were also mentioned as advantages:

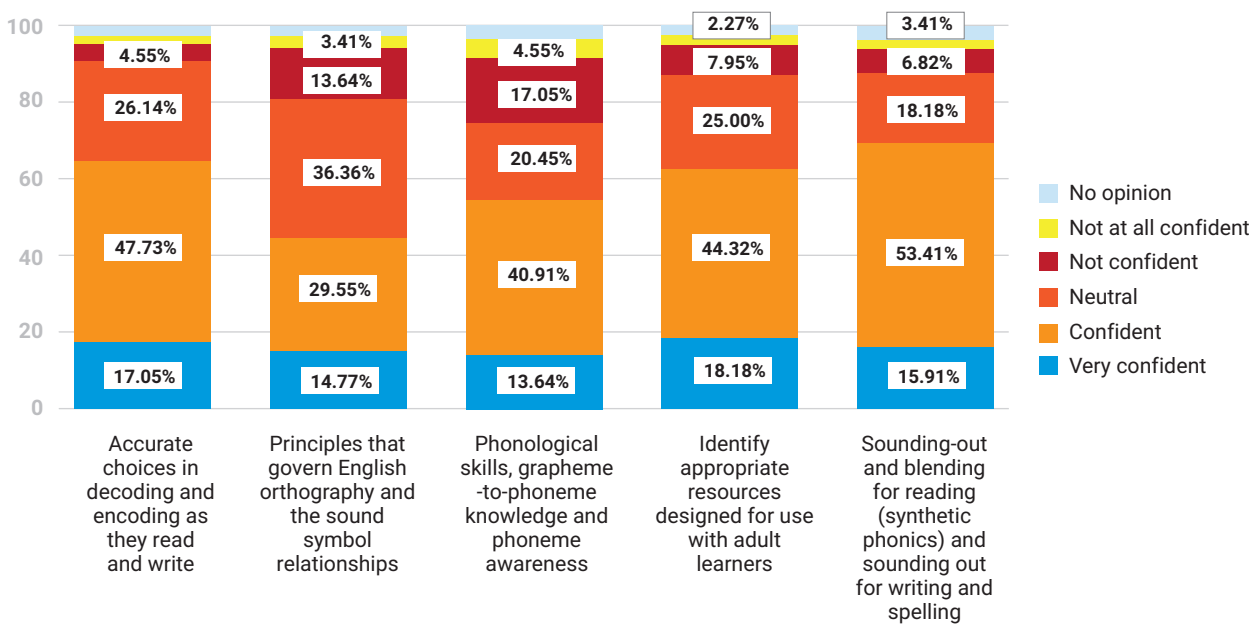
- *BBC Skillswise – English resources. I find them useful for my lower ability learners, especially online game-based activities. They are fun and easy to use by learners themselves.*

Various online resources. All the above are visual and auditory resources – quick and easy to use and can be sent as links for learners to use on their own.

### 4.3.3 Confidence in teaching decoding and encoding.

When asked how confident they felt in teaching word level skills in various ways, most respondents expressed their confidence in teaching sounding-out and blending. Many were also confident that they could help students to make accurate choices in decoding and encoding, and identify appropriate resources designed for use with adult learners. Conversely, less than half said they were confident in helping students understand the principles that govern the sound-symbol relationships in the English writing system. Roughly a fifth were not confident that they could teach phonological skills, including grapheme-to-phoneme knowledge and phoneme awareness.

Figure 14: Tutor confidence



Asked to comment on their answers, respondents divided fairly evenly into those who thought more training in applying phonics approaches would be helpful (30%, n=27):

- *When I have used a phonics approach with adult learners it has tended to be in short bursts, perhaps to support a learner in spelling a word or pronouncing an unfamiliar word. It is useful for this, but I would feel I'd need training if I needed to teach phonics directly.*
- *Phonics was not part of any of the training I did – both at generic and specialist level and it's an area I know a lot of my team want to develop.*

And those who felt confident they knew enough already (33%, n=29):

- *I've used many approaches to teaching phonics and reading and I know which ones adults like.*
- *My L3 qualification covered phonemes, graphemes, digraphs and trigraphs.*

A smaller number (12%, n=11) did not think phonics approaches would be appropriate or useful for the learners they worked with. They gave a variety of reasons for their views:

- *I see synthetic phonics as an option to help learners improve their literacy skills. I do not believe it should be mandatory.*
- *I am confident that I could do parts of this but not confident that it would meet the needs of the learners.*
- *My students (16-19s) would not like a programme that they would consider 'childish'. Also their knowledge is very patchy but they don't like being taught anything they already know. So I tried to find the gaps.*

In addition, some reported that they were teaching groups operating at a more advanced level, where an emphasis on decoding and encoding skills was less relevant:

- *It is some time since I used resources at E1 E2.*
- *Many of the learners that I work with are at a higher starting point in their own reading and writing. The need for this type of support is minimal and therefore I haven't practised these teaching methods as much as some.*

#### 4.3.4 SUMMARY

The responses suggest that most tutors working with Entry level learners are familiar with and use some phonics-based approaches as part of their teaching.

This may be on an ad hoc basis, or to meet individual students' needs. The use of phonics is often embedded in other work in the class. Only a minority of tutors report working through a systematic phonics programme as a central part of their teaching.

The priority placed on the use of authentic materials and tutor-designed worksheets links to the perception that adult literacy learners are often under-confident and lack self-esteem and motivation. This leads tutors to prioritise teaching approaches they think will engage the learner. Some consider systematic phonics approaches may be seen as childish or boring by adult learners, and thus lead to disengagement, or may simply take up too much time, leading to learners missing out on a wider range of literacy experiences they also need. (See also Section 6 below.)

It is in this context that most respondents see phonics and sub-lexical approaches as part of a mix, to be used as appropriate, rather than as the sole answer to their learners' needs.

## 5. ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO THE EFFECTIVE USE OF PHONICS WITH ADULT LEARNERS

In this section of the report we consider a range of contextual factors that might impact on the effective use of phonics approaches with adult learners. To do so, we combine findings from the final section of the survey with data collected from focus groups conducted with Entry level adult learners and interviews with their tutors. We use this data to reflect on how best to develop practice in using phonics to improve reading and writing with adults across a range of post-16 settings.

### 5.1 Methods: Focus groups and interviews

Focus groups were conducted with three adult literacy classes. In each case their tutors were interviewed separately. The sample focus groups were chosen to reflect a variety of approaches to teaching literacy at Entry levels, with one group taught using a systematic phonics-based approach.

The focus groups varied in their composition and profile, though not in group size (seven in each group). Participants were mostly women. The age profile was 30 and above, with some groups containing more elderly members. Some had grown up abroad speaking other languages or varieties of English, and this included some who had missed out on formal education altogether in their countries of origin. Others had experienced repeated failure during their school education in Britain. Some were in the process of learning English, and wanted to acquire reading and writing skills as part of this. Each group had some students with identified learning difficulties.

The focus group participants were asked about what they wanted from their literacy class, the familiar pattern of teaching activities in class, their use of different kinds of resources, and what they considered to be the most helpful strategies. Tutors were also asked about the composition of the group, their use of resources and any enablers and barriers to effective practice with adult literacy learners. The data were analysed thematically.

#### 5.1.2 Focus group findings: Motivation

The focus groups were all composed of learners working at or towards Entry levels. The main reasons students gave for joining an adult literacy class included:

- Recognition that literacy mattered in their place of work, and that not being able to read and write was hampering their capacity to carry out their job or, in some cases, gain employment
  - A desire to be able to read and write text messages and communicate in this way with family and friends
  - A desire to read to their children
  - A need to navigate official forms more confidently.
-

Some of the more elderly members wanted to gain a skill that had eluded them in their earlier life. Many expressed frustration or embarrassment at not being able to do what others seemed to find easy:

- *As adults, we know everything, just not how to read, so you know the words and meaning but just not the spelling, or how to read it, so it's hard, you have to come back and be a kid, put your pride down.*

Some were relatively confident with their reading, but experienced particular difficulties with spelling and writing. Others placed equal emphasis on improving their reading and writing skills. Many were aware of the difference between reading a text and understanding what it meant, particularly in the case of official documents:

- *I'm nervous about forms, need someone to help. Once you've got it down, it's down so you have to be really careful... you can't put anything down – they are going to find out if you lie. You have to find someone. It's OK reading it but understanding it is different.*

They wanted to feel more confident in dealing with this kind of material.

### 5.1.3 Focus group and interview findings: Pedagogy and resources

Each group's activities included opportunities to read for meaning and compose their own texts, alongside regular sessions dedicated to word decoding and encoding.

The resources that the groups had opportunities to use on a regular basis included:

- reading books for adults
- tutor-designed worksheets
- a variety of commercially produced resources to support decoding/ encoding
- and in some cases access to computer programmes supporting literacy learning or CDs.

Sessions that focused on decoding and encoding might include working with phonics-based resources that introduce phonemes and graphemes in a set sequence; personal spelling dictionaries; look, cover, write, check worksheets; resources based on word families or using onset and rime; lists of regular and irregular verbs with past and present tenses; and activities such as word searches. Sometimes learners could access computers to compose their own texts or to work through suitable online literacy resources. Dedicated sessions were seen as reinforcing aspects of reading and writing that learners would be using elsewhere.

Tutors commented on the benefits of setting up regular routines for their learners in these sessions, and of repeating activities to reinforce learning. Learners enjoyed feeling they had made progress. All learners saw distinct advantages in working with others facing similar difficulties and appreciated being able to be honest about what they could and couldn't do. Tutors were keen to provide opportunities for individuals to work with each other and reflect together on their learning.

### 5.1.4 Focus group and interview findings: Barriers and enablers to learning

Learners commented favourably on their interest in reading books they could relate to, especially if they captured something of their own lives and where they could bring their knowledge to bear on the text. They enjoyed writing activities which were based on the reading books (such as summarising, rewriting or writing their own versions or endings). Of the dedicated encoding and decoding sessions, almost all the students said they found remembering what they had been doing from week to week hard. Many had busy home lives, and weren't always able to work on their skills in between sessions, despite having been given regular homework by their tutors.

Time spent in class was seen as very valuable and many wanted more:

- *My confidence is getting better, though I can only come on Mondays. When I leave here I feel like I have achieved something. Can recognise the words, but it's writing them and remembering them that is hard. I don't have the confidence to do it on my own, that's what I need, someone to push.*

The difficulty of transferring what they had learnt from the specific task into long-term memory was well put by one learner who commented, in response to a question about the usefulness of the resources they had been provided with:

- *When you are writing sentences, spelling, you use the patterns in your mind, not direct from the sheet – you need to remember, you need to use your head, it's got to be in your head.*

In other words, it wasn't the resource itself but its impact on memory and the ability to recall what had been learnt that mattered most.

Groups identified particular strategies that they had been introduced to in class as helping them meet their goals. One group said that Look Cover Write Check was the best way of remembering the words they needed:

- *Look, cover, say, write, check, – you can practise all the time, and test yourself and practise again, repetition, looking, remembering and saying it, break it down – and testing yourself.*

However, one group member added that this worked best when the words were personally useful.

The group working systematically on phoneme-grapheme relations were keen to explain why focusing on the range of ways of spelling particular sounds was useful:

- *Sounds are good for us to learn.*
- *I used to know A, the capital letter name, now I know the sound a. I hadn't realised that two letters could make one sound together [others agree] and I didn't know that three letters could add together to make one sound.*
- *And you can find the same letters at the start and the end like "sh"; and that k sound written ck is only at the end of a word.*

However, one of the group did also comment:

- *But it is still difficult to understand what you read, to make meaning from it.*

This acts as a reminder that, although the participants all thought they had benefitted from their classes, they were also acutely aware of the gulf between what they wanted to be able to do and their current level of functioning.

Tutors were very alert to the diversity of needs in their groups. They were aware of the particular problems that individuals faced and adapted their strategies accordingly, creating time for both whole-class teaching and more individualised support. As experienced tutors they had developed particular pedagogic preferences over time. One tutor preferred to use authentic texts and mainly taught decoding using visual strategies. Two others had developed a more systematic approach to using phonics, experimenting over time with different systems and resources to refine their approach. They dedicated particular parts of each teaching week to working on a given set of phonemes and graphemes. They were convinced that working as a pair had really helped them continually challenge each other, and find ways of improving what they were doing. Both stressed that it would have been much harder to experiment successfully in this way if they had been working alone.

The capacity to adapt to the needs of the group was recognised by all the tutors as important. Working on one's own, without recourse to input from other colleagues or easy access to training, seemed to make this more daunting. Tutors commented on the perceived low status of the work they were doing. This seemed increasingly to be the case if tutors were working with teaching groups that were unlikely to progress a level in a year. Increasingly, groups are becoming marginalised institutionally following changes in funding.

There was general recognition that using phonics approaches well with groups who might not attend regularly, or be able to work at a rapid pace, required flexibility and adaptability on the part of tutors. Tutors would also need to be sufficiently knowledgeable to implement such a phonics-based programme well and persuade their students of its value.

## 5.2 Comparing focus group, tutor interviews and survey findings:

The closing section of the survey asked respondents to reflect on a series of statements about potential enablers and barriers to the adoption of systematic phonics approaches with post-16 learners. The statements focused successively on adult learners, tutor knowledge and the working context (see Appendix Four p49). This section was open to the full sample of 120 respondents.

### 5.2.1 Barriers and enablers for adult learners

Many of the issues raised in the focus groups and the tutor interviews found their reflection in the choices that survey respondents made. Almost all of them agreed that:

- *Irregular attendance makes it difficult for adult learners to successfully follow structured phonics approaches.*

Only 5%, n= 6 expressed any disagreement with this statement.

Just under a half (48% n=58) thought that it would be difficult to find phonics resources that would interest adult learners and connect to their lives.

Relatively fewer respondents (44%, n=53) either agreed or disagreed with the statement:

- *Adult learners who were taught by whole-word approaches will make rapid progress when introduced to phonics now.*

A slightly larger number (47%, n=56) were neutral on this matter.

## 5.2.2 Enablers and barriers in tutor knowledge

Most of the respondents (74%, n=89) agreed that:

- *Knowing how to make informed decisions about which pedagogic approach is best suited to which learner is an essential part of adult literacy tutors' professional practice.*

The commitment to exercising professional judgement, and enabling tutors to bring their knowledge to bear when deciding on a strategy that will work best for their learners, came across very strongly in both tutor interviews and the survey.

Just under a half of respondents said they felt confident in tailoring a phonics programme to an individual learner's needs (48%, n=58), but this statement also attracted the most disagreement (26%, n=31). Just over half of respondents (51%, n=61) agreed that it is hard to tell which phonics schemes are robustly evidence-based. This suggests that the professional knowledge base in this area remains relatively weak.

## 5.2.3 Enablers and barriers in the working context

Surprisingly, a majority of respondents (63%, n=76) agreed that:

- *Most students in my working context are there to brush up on their skills in reading and writing, rather than starting from the most basic levels.*

Just under a quarter (24%, n=29) disagreed with this statement. It may be that this reflects the changing composition of Entry level groups and their make-up. Our tutor interviewees certainly commented upon this.

Just over half of respondents (51%, n=61) thought that they had too little time in a busy working context to help keep individual learners on track. Just 50%, n=60 thought it would be difficult to access suitable training to update their skills. Most were neutral or uncertain (43%, n=52) on whether the revised Functional Skills curriculum would make it easier to know what or how to teach.

## 5.3 SUMMARY

Adult literacy tutors work in complex environments with groups of students whose needs are rarely straightforward. The circumstances in which they teach are very different from those that hold in the early years of schooling. Whilst one of the focus groups made clear the benefits that can come from adopting a systematic approach to phonics teaching, successful implementation in that context rested on the commitment of the tutors, and the deep knowledge and understanding they brought to that task. Their systematic use of phonics resources ran alongside a wider range of activities designed to incorporate speaking and listening into the classroom, develop reading fluency, and encourage imaginative writing amongst the students. By contrast, many of the survey respondents seemed less confident in adopting a systematic approach that would meet the needs of their learners and work in their own context.

## 6. FINDINGS: WHAT DO ADULT LITERACY TUTORS SEE AS THE MAIN BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF MAKING PHONICS APPROACHES CENTRAL TO ADULT LITERACY TEACHING?

In this section of the report we consider the range of views expressed on the benefits and drawbacks of making phonics approaches central to adult literacy teaching. To do so, we combine findings from the survey with data collected from focus groups conducted with Entry level adult learners and interviews with their tutors.

### 6.1 Methods

There were two points in the survey when respondents could comment directly on the benefits and drawbacks of making phonics approaches central to adult literacy teaching. Question 22 asked respondents to comment directly on whether they thought there were significant benefits or drawbacks from making phonics approaches central to adult literacy teaching. From the 83 tutors that answered this question, 34% (n=30) identified only drawbacks, 23% (n=21) reported only benefits, and just over 35% (n=31) identified both benefits and drawbacks.

The last section of the survey also provided a free text comment box and asked respondents to contribute any further reflections they might have on the most effective approaches to teaching word level skills. Out of the full sample, 30% added comments. 50% of respondents **not** currently teaching adult literacy used the comments box, and 22% of those currently teaching adult literacy did.

### 6.2 Benefits

By and large, those most convinced of the benefits of phonics were also those who said they already incorporated them into their teaching:

- *The benefit is that it gives learners the skills to decode any words they come across. It is a comprehensive way of teaching reading and writing. This benefit is so clear that I use phonics as the central part of my teaching.*

Yet those advocating for the benefits of phonics also recognised that adopting such an approach wasn't always straightforward:

- *Phonics has a huge impact on my teaching. It can be a challenge and there may be some learners who are unable to learn in this way and need different methods – but the vast majority can, so phonics should always be tried consistently first.*

Others understood that the benefits of phonics were conditional on it being adapted for the particular learners it was intended to help:

- *If presented in a manner and rate appropriate to the learner, phonic approaches are essential to provide learners with the tools necessary to decode and build words for reading and spelling.*



Yet for this group, the advantages outweighed any disadvantages:

- *From my experience, students who have a holistic approach to reading find segmenting sounds difficult. It is therefore important to start from the beginning and teach phonic-based reading in order to see progress.*

### 6.3 Drawbacks

It would be misleading to stereotype those who saw only drawbacks to making phonics more central to adult literacy teaching as being opposed to phonics in principle and deeply committed to alternative pedagogic approaches. This was the case for some:

- *Adult learners usually have coping strategies and strategies which they are less confident with, usually stemming from school. When teaching adults, it is important that the methodologies that you apply meet their individual needs. The most important thing is the boost in confidence and in skills, not in the methods used by the adults. I find it very strange that anyone who had ever been involved with teaching adults would prescribe specific methods.*

But many of those who most strongly voiced doubts about the benefits of making phonics more central to adult literacy teaching were themselves successfully using phonics-based approaches. This was the case for this respondent, who commented of the drawbacks:

- *I totally despair that this is being promoted and very much hope that some common sense will kick in to prevent this becoming part of the Functional Skills standards.*

In fact the main concern seemed to be at any one approach being promoted at the exclusion of others. Indeed, alarm at the prospect of adopting a 'one size fits all' approach was repeatedly mentioned in many of the most critical comments:

- *I feel that, while it can be touched on, it would be detrimental to the learner and the tutor to have a centralised phonics programme. This is an important aspect for lower level learners but should not be focused on entirely. There is more to their literacy needs than just phonics.*
- *I think phonics is important, but it doesn't work well with all students. Teachers should be flexible and be ready to adapt their methods to students' needs.*
- *It should never be a one size fits all, there will be people that phonics doesn't work for. Learners with hearing problems would be an example.*

Some thought phonics would be off-putting for learners because they had already experienced failure with the method at school. Many thought this was the case for dyslexic learners. Others thought the method itself could be construed as childish and demeaning by adult learners. Those who saw clear benefits from using phonics were aware that they needed to actively promote the approach:

- *I make it clear to learners that phonics is used with adults and for ESOL learners and explain the benefits to them at the start of the course (and throughout if necessary). Some learners find it very difficult to learn how to blend, and can be reluctant to try.*

Concerns were raised that mandating a phonics-based approach without supplying appropriate training might do more harm than good:

- *Teachers and tutors will need special training or could do more harm than good by, for example, 'sounding out' words incorrectly or insisting on phonics when it just doesn't work for some students. Some dyslexic learners (I'm also a specialist dyslexia support tutor) cannot 'hear' individual phonemes or certain phonemes/blends etc.*

These comments highlight the complexity of the issues involved from the tutor perspective.

---

### 6.4 SUMMARY

Those who saw benefits to making greater use of phonics-based approaches were often convinced of the efficacy of the method from their first-hand experience of using a systematic approach with adult learners. Some were also concerned that successfully adopting a phonics-based approach would require a level of linguistic expertise and knowledge that they did not feel they possessed. Many respondents also used the opportunities the survey gave them to highlight the risks they thought would follow from making phonics a one-size-fits-all approach, to the exclusion of any others. In particular, respondents were concerned that any such policy might inhibit tutors from exercising their professional judgement and adapting their approach to their assessment of individual learners and their needs.

---

## 7. KEY MESSAGES FROM THE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section we look across the range of evidence we have collected and outline the key messages and recommendations from the study.

We used a systematic review of the evidence to distinguish between a) clear guidance on suitable approaches to phonics teaching post-16 that are well supported by the research evidence base and b) clear guidance on approaches to phonics teaching post-16 that show promise and which would benefit from further investigation. We also assessed any gaps in the evidence base where not enough is currently known.

In addition, we used an online tutor survey, focus groups with learners and interviews with their tutors to make an assessment of: the current barriers and enablers to effective use of phonics instruction with adult learners; key principles upon which a successful implementation strategy can be built, taking into account the variation in learner profiles and differences in pedagogic contexts; and to clarify how such a strategy might be tailored to the particular setting.

### 7.1 The evidence on suitable approaches to phonics teaching post-16

Examination of the literature confirms that too little high-quality research is being carried out into systematic approaches to teaching phonics that might benefit adult learners. Our review suggests a number of reasons why the evidence base is so thin, including:

- *the difficulty of conducting RCT or quasi-experimental studies with adult literacy learners, without studies suffering from high attrition;*
- *and the lack of attention paid to distinguishing between the learning needs of "low-literate adults" (National Research Council, 2012) and normally developing children and/or children with literacy difficulties.*

This last point may in part explain why well-designed studies show so little difference in outcomes for adult learners from the various instructional methods employed, including decoding skills.

#### **Message:**

- *There is not currently sufficient evidence upon which to base guidance to the field on the most effective approaches to teaching adult learners phonics. Approaches that show promise and would benefit from further investigations include those that integrate systematic phonics instruction into a broader literacy curriculum (Condelli et al., 2010) or that combine knowledge of phonology, orthography, and morphology (Alamprese et al., 2011).*

**Recommendation:**

- *More high-quality research studies need to be conducted, based on research designs that can yield clear outcome measures. This will require longer-term and more sustained investment, including in the necessary researcher expertise. This is essential for the future development of effective adult literacy instruction and to inform the Functional Skills English profession.*

**7.2 What is a systematic approach to teaching phonics?**

The debate over literacy pedagogy in the UK has become highly polarised, particularly over the role of phonics in teaching school-age children to read. In practice, this has often led to the assumption in schools that systematically teaching phonics means adopting a particular synthetic phonics scheme and adhering to its programme. By contrast, in the US the concept of word study or alphabetics has kept open a broader research agenda that treats phonics as an important part of teachers' repertoire, but not the only ingredient. This has led to more precise exploration of which combinations of word study approaches might prove most effective with adult learners.

**Message:**

- *A systematic and explicit approach to phonics is useful and important in the development of adult emergent literacy. Systematic certainly implies a well-planned sequence to the introduction of phoneme-grapheme correspondences which can build learners' knowledge over time. But the principles of sequence and pace that will prove most efficacious for adult learners need fuller exploration.*

**Recommendations:**

- *More research needs to be carried out into how systematic phonics-based approaches can be most effectively paced and sequenced to benefit adult learners;*
- *Research is also needed to explore the terms under which phonics can be most successfully combined with other approaches that have also been found efficacious for adult literacy learners, including those which are designed to promote learner engagement, foster reading fluency, and enhance reading for meaning.*

**7.3 Building and maintaining teacher expertise**

The existing literature indicates that the key to the successful use of a systematic phonics approach with adults will lie in the strengthening of teacher expertise in this area, not just the introduction of specific schemes or materials (Burton et al., 2010).

**Messages:**

- *Tutor expertise is a crucial component in appropriately selecting and systematically pacing the use of phonics resources in ways that gain learner confidence and develop learner skills.*
- *The questionnaire and focus group data suggest that a key barrier to the effective implementation of phonic work with adults is a lack of opportunities for tutors to develop appropriate expertise.*

**Recommendations:**

- *Funds need to be made available for the development and running of CPD courses that provide tutors with the necessary understanding of the English spelling system, including: the phonetics of English, phonological awareness, phoneme-grapheme and grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and the orthographic and morphological layers of the spelling system.*
- *Adult literacy tutors should have access to appropriate training on how to choose appropriate phonics approaches to support diverse learners, and to understand and use this knowledge as one of many strategies that form part of a fuller teaching programme.*
- *Finding ways of strengthening peer support and adult literacy networks is important. They may play a crucial part in expanding tutor knowledge, developing new approaches and refreshing skills*

## 7.4 Assessing individual strengths and weaknesses

Adult learner needs are often complex. Accurately assessing individual strengths and weaknesses and identifying appropriate areas for development are not always straightforward. This is a comparatively under-researched area of professional practice that would benefit from more attention, enabling tutors to more easily access appropriate resources that can best support their practice.

### Message:

- *The questionnaire and focus group data indicate that tutors sometimes find it challenging to identify learners' specific barriers and needs in relation to emergent reading and writing. This can lead to some learners not receiving the most appropriate forms of support.*

### Recommendation:

- *We recommend more time and attention is paid to assessment processes by providers and networks, both at the start of, and during, provision.*

## 7.5 Recognising the differences between adult and child literacy development

The research literature, questionnaire and focus group data highlight differences in learning to read as an adult and learning to read as a young child. These include marked differences in learning contexts, such as contact time and attendance patterns, as well as learner characteristics, including world knowledge and experience.

### Messages:

- *Decoding and encoding skills will be strengthened if they are taught in such a way that they engage adult learners.*
- *Taking an existing phonics scheme designed for use in primary schools and importing it into the adult context is unlikely to be effective. Adult learners do not study under the same conditions as children. They also have clear preferences for materials which are aimed at them and make reference to adult life.*

### Recommendation:

- *There is a range of materials devised specifically for teaching adults, including reading schemes based on decodable text and systematic approaches to introducing phoneme-graphemes in sequence. Our survey suggests they attract relatively little use as yet. We recommend that networks of practitioners explore through action research which materials work best for their learners and compare findings.*

## APPENDIX ONE: SEARCH STRATEGY

**Table 1. Number of Studies, Geographical Locations, Educational Contexts, Adult Sub-populations and Type of Study**

	Description	N
Number of studies kept		29
Number of studies rejected		20
Total Studies		49
Countries	United States	23
	Portugal	1
	Australia	2
	Australia and New Zealand	1
	United Kingdom	2
Institutional Locations	Adult basic education	14
	Adult ESL classes	2
	Adult FE	1
	Adult GED classes	1
	Adult literacy centres	1
	Forensic Hospitals	1
	Jail	2
	One-to-one tuition	1
	Post-school adult education	1
	University Research	1
	Vocational Rehabilitation	1
Adult Sub-population	Adults (General)	14
	ESL Learners	3
	Adult reading teachers	2
	Adults with intellectual disability	2
	Adult offenders with intellectual disability	1
	Adults with brain injury	1
	Adults with SPLD	1
	Romani	
	Adult offenders	2
	Adults with disabilities	2
Type of study / Method	Case Study	2
	Description of Intervention	2
	Literature Review	2
	Mixed Methods	2
	Pre-test/post-test group comparison not RCT	6
	Qualitative	3
	RCT	8
	Single case designs	3
	Surveys	2

## Stage 1: Search strategy (peer-reviewed articles)

### 1. Electronic Searches

#### EBSCOHOST US

- Academic Search Complete
- Ebook Collection
- ERIC
- Psychological and Beh Sc
- PsycInfo
- Econlit
- Education Full text
- Education Research Complete
- National Criminal Justice Reference Service Abstracts
- Professional Development Collection

#### EBSCOHOST UK

- Child development and adolescent studies
- Econlit
- Education abstracts
- ERIC
- Teacher reference centre
- British education index

#### PROQUEST

- Australia and New Zealand
- Education Database

#### SCOPUS

#### WEB of SCIENCE

### 2. Key Terms

We used the following terms in a search of abstracts only refining all results to 2004-18 and English only.

**EBSCO** – Restricted to abstract only

**WEB of SCIENCE** – Topics

**SCOPUS** – Title, Abstract, Keyword

Phonics

Adult AND phonics

Adults AND phonics

Adult AND decoding

Adult AND phonics instruction

Adult education AND phonics

Adult Basic Education AND phonics

Adults or Adult AND reading intervention

Reading intervention AND roma or traveller or roma

Reading intervention AND EAL

Reading intervention AND esol or english second language or english language learners

Remedial and Special Education AND phonics

Adult literacy programs

Word study instruction AND adults

Adult AND phonics

Phonics AND Adult

Reading instruction AND adult

Phonics AND spelling

Adult basic education AND reading

Reading programme AND MAINSUBJECT.EXACT

('Library programs') OR MAINSUBJECT.EXACT

('Reading programs') OR

MAINSUBJECT.EXACT('Literacy programs') AND adults

Reading intervention AND adults

Adult AND phonics AND NOT Tourette or Tourettes

Adult AND spelling intervention

Scanned: 305

Kept for secondary review: 51

2 duplicates (author using a double-barrelled name (Shaw/Massengill) Final N for review 49

### 3. Coding

All articles were entered into a database and coded as follows:

1. Study Number
2. Authors
3. Title
4. Location – by country
5. Institutional funder of research/ teaching programme
6. Name of instructional programme if it has one e.g. THRASS
7. Context
  - a. One-to-one tuition
  - b. Adult basic education
  - c. Adult ESL classes
  - d. Adult GED classes
  - e. University research setting
  - f. Post-school adult education
  - g. Forensic Hospitals
  - h. Jail
  - i. Vocational Rehabilitation
  - j. Adult FE
  - k. Adult Literacy Center
  - l. NA
8. Adult Population – if focused on sub pop e.g. prisoners/ learning difficulties or 'general adult'
  - a. Adults with brain injury
  - b. Adult
  - c. Romani
  - d. Adults with low intermediate reading level
  - e. Low literate ESL learners
  - f. GED students
  - g. Adults with SPLD
  - h. Adult poor spellers

- i. Adults with intellectual disability
  - j. Adult offenders with intellectual disability
  - k. Adults with moderate intellectual disability
  - l. Adult offenders
  - m. Adults with disabilities
  - n. Adult ESL
  - o. Adult reading teachers
9. Number of participants and locations
  10. Methods – adopted for the study
  11. Review status – systematic/ meta analysis/  
single study
  12. Duration
  13. Pedagogy – how the pedagogy describes itself
  14. Phonics Instructional Focus– whether this is
    - a. A named scheme (eg. THRASS) or unspecific
    - b. A recognised approach – synthetic/ analytic/  
focus on morphology
    - c. Unspecific embedded (approach not replicable)  
or unspecific explicit (approach replicable)
    - d. Systematic or ad hoc
  15. Makes a contribution to theorising reading
  16. Results
  17. Notes
-

## APPENDIX TWO: WEIGHT-OF-EVIDENCE RATINGS

**Table 2. Weight-of-evidence criteria (Cordingley, 2007 as cited in Savage and Basma, 2017, p.7).**

	Description
<b>WOE A</b>	Did the reported findings in the study answer the study question and was it internally consistent?
<b>WOE B</b>	Is the research design appropriate for the review questions?
<b>WOE C</b>	Was the focus of the study relevant to the review question?
<b>WOE D</b>	The answers to these questions were reported by an overall WOE D rating of each study as 'High', 'Medium', or 'Low'.

### Scoring:

Studies that scored LOW on WOE A were deemed LOW on all WOE criteria.

Studies that reported High or Medium WOE A were evaluated on all criteria and given an overall code in WOE D.

For example, if a study has two High and Medium, then WOE D is 'High'.

If a study has one High, one Medium, and one Low, then WOE D is 'Medium'.

**Table 3. Studies included in full review (n = 29) weight-of-evidence ratings**

**Key: Green – High Yellow – Medium White – Low Red - Excluded**

Authors	Year	WOE A	WOE B	WOE C	WOE D
<b>High Quality</b>					
Condelli, Cronen, Bos, Tseng, and Altuna	2011	H	H	H	H
<b>Medium Quality: High attrition, no differences according to approach</b>					
Sabatini, Shore, Holtzmann, and Scarborough*	2011	H	H	M	M
Scarborough, Sabatini, Shore et al.*	2013	H	M	M	M
Greenberg et al.*	2011	M	M	M	M
<b>Medium Quality: Small to moderate gains, high attrition, absence of control</b>					
Alamprese, MacArthur, Price and Knight*	2011	M	H	M	M
Vanderberg, Pierce and Disney	2011	H	M	M	M
<b>Lower Quality: Partially met criteria and/or contributed to theory</b>					
Kolinsky, Leite, Carvalho, Franco, and Morais	2017	H	L	L	L
Perin and Greenberg	2007	L	L	L	L
Gray, Ehri, and Locke	2018	M	L	L	L
Hock	2012	H	L	L	L
Massengill	2006	M	L	L	L
McHardy and Chapman	2016	H	L	L	L
Rodrigo, Greenberg, and Segal*	2014	M	L	L	L
Massengill	2014	L	L	L	L
Shippen	2008	L	L	L	L
Duncan	2009	H	L	L	L
Massengill and Berg	2008	L	L	L	L
Massengill and Berg	2009	L	L	L	L
Goddard and Rinderknecht	2009	L	L	M	L

\*Studies stemming from Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) grant



Authors	Year	WOE A	WOE B	WOE C	WOE D
<b>Excluded after review</b>					
Bangs and Binder*	2009	L	L	L	L
Belzer	2006	H	L	L	L
Hock and Mellard	2011	L	L	L	L
Morgan, Moni and Jobling	2006	L	L	L	L
O'Sullivan, Grindle, Hughes	2017	L	L	L	L
Purrazzella and Mechling	2018	M	L	L	L
Ziegler, Callum, and Bell	2009	M	L	L	L
Iacono	2004	L	L	L	L
Shore, Sabatini, Lentini and Holtzmann*	2013	H	L	L	L
Shore, Sabatini, Lentini and Holtzmann*	2015	H	L	L	L

\*Studies stemming from Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) grant

## APPENDIX THREE: GREY LITERATURE SEARCH

### Grey Literature: Key organisations identified

1. COPIAN (Canada)
2. National Adult Literacy Agency (Republic of Ireland)
3. National Centre of Literacy and Numeracy for Ireland (New Zealand)
4. National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence (New Zealand)
5. Tertiary Education Commission (New Zealand)
6. European Basic Skills Network (Europe)
7. National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Australia)
8. Literacy Information and Communication System (United States)
9. National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (United States)
10. National Research and Development Centre (United Kingdom)
11. NIACE (United Kingdom)
12. OECD (International).

**Table 4. Studies found in search of Adult Literacy Organisations**

Document	Year	Author	Link
Effective literacy strategies for immigrant students	2009	Canadian Council on Learning	<a href="http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/immigrant_students/immigrant_students.pdf">http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/immigrant_students/immigrant_students.pdf</a>
Alberta Reading Benchmarks - Sharing the Journey with Adult Indigenous Learners: A Teaching Reading Strategies Guide (2013)	2013	Patricia Pryce	<a href="http://en.copian.ca/library/learning/bowvalley/ab_reading_benchmarks/ab_reading_benchmarks.pdf">http://en.copian.ca/library/learning/bowvalley/ab_reading_benchmarks/ab_reading_benchmarks.pdf</a>
Adult literacy and Learning Disabilities: Simple Assessment and Proven Techniques	2011	Literacy BC	<a href="http://en.copian.ca/library/learning/lbc/simple_assessment/simple_assessment.pdf">http://en.copian.ca/library/learning/lbc/simple_assessment/simple_assessment.pdf</a>
Reading the future: Planning to meet Canada's future literacy needs	2008	Canadian Council on Learning	<a href="http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/future/future.pdf">http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/future/future.pdf</a>
Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities: Best Practices for Success – A Resource Manual for Practitioners	2007	Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick	<a href="http://en.copian.ca/library/learning/alld/alld.pdf">http://en.copian.ca/library/learning/alld/alld.pdf</a>
Read all about it again: action learning project with adult literacy tutors	2015	NALA	<a href="https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/readallabout_print_-_copy.pdf">https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/readallabout_print_-_copy.pdf</a>
Read it all again: Case Studies	2014	NALA	<a href="https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/nalacs_report_pdf_for_web.pdf">https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/nalacs_report_pdf_for_web.pdf</a>
Adult literacy and numeracy in action: six case studies of practice work in Ireland	2013	NALA	<a href="https://www.nala.ie/resources/adult-literacy-and-numeracy-action-six-case-studies-practice-work-ireland">https://www.nala.ie/resources/adult-literacy-and-numeracy-action-six-case-studies-practice-work-ireland</a>
Developing Curriculum in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Education – a report from the NRDC on a research project in Ireland 2006-07	2009	NRDC for NALA	<a href="https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/developing_curriculum_in_adult_literacy_and_numeracy_educations_-_a_report_from_the_nrdc_on_a_research_project_in_ireland_2006-2007.pdf">https://www.nala.ie/sites/default/files/publications/developing_curriculum_in_adult_literacy_and_numeracy_educations_-_a_report_from_the_nrdc_on_a_research_project_in_ireland_2006-2007.pdf</a>
Starting Points: Supporting the Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy	2011	NCLNA	<a href="http://www.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com/resources/354557">http://www.literacyandnumeracyforadults.com/resources/354557</a>

Document	Year	Author	Link
Working in the light of evidence, as well as commitment. A literature review of the best available evidence about effective adult literacy, numeracy and language teaching	2005	Tertiary Education Commission, New Zealand.	<a href="http://unitec.researchbank.ac.nz/handle/10652/2051">http://unitec.researchbank.ac.nz/handle/10652/2051</a>
Adult refugee learners with limited literacy: needs and effective responses	2012	John Benseman	<a href="https://akoaooteaoroa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-5/adult-refugee-learners-with-limited-literacy-needs-and-effective-responses.pdf">https://akoaooteaoroa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-5/adult-refugee-learners-with-limited-literacy-needs-and-effective-responses.pdf</a>
Adult Literacy and Numeracy: An Overview of the Evidence Annotated Bibliography	2013	NCVER	<a href="http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ng-v%3A61400">http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ng-v%3A61400</a>
Integrated approaches to teaching adult literacy in Australia: on adult language, literacy and numeracy	2005	NCVER	<a href="https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0024/4749/nr3l04.pdf">https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0024/4749/nr3l04.pdf</a>
Building sustainable adult literacy provision. A review of international trends in adult literacy policy and programs	2004	NCVER	<a href="https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0026/4985/nr2l07.pdf">https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0026/4985/nr2l07.pdf</a>
Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research	2012	NAP	<a href="https://www.lincs.ed.gov/publications/NAS_report">https://www.lincs.ed.gov/publications/NAS_report</a>
Adult English Language Learners with Limited Literacy	2010	NIL	<a href="https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ELLpaper2010.pdf">https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ELLpaper2010.pdf</a>
Making Sense of Decoding and Spelling: An Adult Reading Course of Study	2010	NIL	<a href="https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/MSteachers2010.pdf">https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/MSteachers2010.pdf</a>
Learning to Achieve A Review of The Research Literature on Serving Adults With Learning Disabilities	2010	NIL	<a href="https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/L2ALiteratureReview09.pdf">https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/L2ALiteratureReview09.pdf</a>
A summary of scientifically based research principles: Teaching Adults to Read	2005	NIL	<a href="https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/teach_adults.pdf">https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/teach_adults.pdf</a>
Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults First Steps for Teachers	2009	NIL	<a href="https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/applyin-gresearch.pdf">https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/applyin-gresearch.pdf</a>
Adult literacy instruction: A review of the research	2010	LINCS	<a href="https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED521229">https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED521229</a>
Improving Adult Literacy Instruction	2012	National Research Council	<a href="https://www.nap.edu/catalog/13242/improving-adult-literacy-instruction-options-for-practice-and-research">https://www.nap.edu/catalog/13242/improving-adult-literacy-instruction-options-for-practice-and-research</a>
Research in Spelling: Implications for Adult Basic Education	2006	Sawyer and Joyce	<a href="http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/comings_ch4.pdf">http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/comings_ch4.pdf</a>
Adult Literacy Policy, Scientifically Based Research, and Evidence-based Practice	2005	Mikulecky	<a href="http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/rall_v5_ch2.pdf">http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/rall_v5_ch2.pdf</a>
The Study of Effective Practice in The Teaching of Reading to Adult Learners, 2003-2006	2013	Brooks et al	<a href="http://www.nrdc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Brooks-et-al-Effective-practice-teaching-reading-to-adults.pdf">http://www.nrdc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Brooks-et-al-Effective-practice-teaching-reading-to-adults.pdf</a>

Document	Year	Author	Link
Review of Research and Evaluation on Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills	2011	Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills	<a href="http://www.nrdc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/BIS_Review-of-Research-and-Evaluation-on-Improving-ALN.pdf">http://www.nrdc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/BIS_Review-of-Research-and-Evaluation-on-Improving-ALN.pdf</a>
Progress for adult literacy learners Research report	2010	NRDC - BURTON	<a href="http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/21956/1/doc_4685.pdf">http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/21956/1/doc_4685.pdf</a>
Improving Reading – Phonics and Fluency	2008	NRDC - BURTON	<a href="http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/21964/1/doc_4338.pdf">http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/21964/1/doc_4338.pdf</a>
Effective Teaching and Learning: Reading	2007	NRDC - Brooks	<a href="http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22305/1/doc_3343.pdf">http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22305/1/doc_3343.pdf</a>
Adult literacy and numeracy interventions and outcomes: a review of controlled trials	2004	NRDC - Torgerson	<a href="http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22477/1/doc_2850.pdf">http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22477/1/doc_2850.pdf</a>
Work, Society and Lifelong Literacy Report of the inquiry into adult literacy in England	2011	NIACE	<a href="http://www.learningandwork.org.uk.gridhosted.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Work-Society-and-Lifelong-Literacy.pdf">http://www.learningandwork.org.uk.gridhosted.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Work-Society-and-Lifelong-Literacy.pdf</a>
Adults with low literacy and numeracy skills	2015	Windisch OECD	<a href="http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/adults-with-low-literacy-and-numeracy-skills_5jrxnjdd3r5k-en">http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/adults-with-low-literacy-and-numeracy-skills_5jrxnjdd3r5k-en</a>

# APPENDIX FOUR: SURVEY

## Introduction.

Welcome to the UCL-ETF questionnaire on current practice in using phonics post-16.

We would like to invite all those who teach reading and writing at Entry level to adult learners to tell us about your current experiences of teaching word level skills to adult learners.

The data will be used to help ETF provide good guidance to the field in the run-up to the reform of the Functional Skills English curriculum.

### **We would particularly like to hear about:**

- your experience, working as an adult literacy tutor
- the different groups of learners you work with
- how you identify and assess learner needs
- the teaching approaches and resources you currently use to teach word level skills
- and what you see as the main enablers and barriers to teaching word level skills effectively with adult learners in your context.

All the data that we collect will be stored securely and only used for research purposes.

All responses to this online survey are anonymous, and if we quote any of your text responses in any published reports, we will ensure that they do not identify you.

The data will form part of a report that the UCL research team are compiling for ETF on current approaches to using phonics in the post-16 sector. This will also include a review of the research evidence on the use of phonics with adult learners.

### **Q1. How did you find this link?**

- Via ETF
  - ETF Regional Leads for English and Maths
  - The RaPAL (Research and Practice in Adult Literacies)
  - The Learning and Work Institute
  - The Reading Agency
  - UCL Institute of Education Centre for Post-14 Education and Work network
  - UCL Institute of Education English, Maths, ESOL, Literacy and Numeracy network
  - NATECLA
  - By word of mouth
  - Through social media
  - Other – please specify
-

## SECTION 1 ABOUT YOU

In this section the questions focus on you and your working environment. This information will help us understand the context for adult literacy learning and teaching.

### Q2. (Compulsory) Which age group do you belong to? Select one:

- Under 25 years
- 25-34 years
- 35-44 years
- 45-54 years
- 55-64 years
- 65 years or older

### Q3. (Compulsory) What is your current working pattern? Tick one. I mainly work as:

- a full-time employee
- a part-time employee
- On an hourly or casual contract
- Not currently employed
- Self-employed, full-time
- Self-employed, part-time
- Volunteer
- Other - please specify
- Prefer not to say

### Q4. (Compulsory) Which of the following best describes the organisation you currently work for? Tick any that apply:

- General Further Education College
- Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) provider
- Third sector / charity training provider/ NGO
- Employer provider / work-based training provider
- Specialist Designated College  
e.g. agricultural / performing arts
- Local Authority training provider
- Independent training provider
- Vocational training provider
- Other - please specify
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to say

### Q5. (Compulsory) How long have you been working with adult literacy learners? Select one:

- Less than 12 months
- 12 -23 months
- 2-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- More than 15 years
- Not Applicable

### Q6. (Compulsory) Does your current role involve teaching reading and writing to Entry level adult learners?

Yes  No

If they answer no, they move straight to the final page, Enablers and Barriers.

### Q7. In a typical week, how many hours do you teach Entry level adult learners? Select one number of hours for accredited and non-accredited courses:

- Functional Skills English?  
(Entry levels 1-3, Level 1 and 2)
- Less than 15 hours
- 15 to 24 hours
- From 25 to 34 hours
- From 35 to 40 hours
- More than 40 hours
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to say

### Non-accredited courses?

- Less than 15 hours
- 15 to 24 hours
- From 25 to 34 hours
- From 35 to 40 hours
- More than 40 hours
- Not applicable
- Prefer not to say

In a typical week, how many hours do you teach adult learners literacy?

**Q8. (Compulsory) Please tick the qualifications you hold that directly inform your work with adult literacy learners:**

- A general teaching qualification for the post-compulsory sector
- A specialism in adult literacy/English/ESOL
- An English language teaching qualification such as CELTA or DELTA
- A PGCE English (for secondary schools or primary schools)
- A degree in a relevant subject area: Linguistics, Applied linguistics, ESOL, English language, English literature
- Other: please specify
- None of the above
- Prefer not to say

## SECTION 2. YOUR LEARNERS

This section focuses on the learners you teach. The information you provide will help us understand how different teaching contexts organise to meet learner needs

**Q9. (Compulsory) Do you typically teach: Tick any that apply:**

- one-to-one
- via peer mentoring
- in a group of less than 5
- in a group of 5-10
- in a group of 11-18
- in a group of 18-24
- more than 24 students in a class
- Other - please specify
- Non Applicable

**Q10. (Compulsory) If you teach adult learners in groups, are they mostly: Tick one:**

- Entry level 1
- Entry level 2
- Entry level 3
- Lower levels - mixed
- Higher levels - mixed
- Level 1
- Level 2
- GCSE
- Non Applicable
- Other - please specify

**Q11. (Compulsory) I work with: Tick as many as apply:**

- Young adults (16-19)
- People with learning difficulties
- Refugees
- Learners in employment or on vocational training courses
- Jobseekers/ unemployed/ retired
- Parents wanting to improve their literacy skills
- Learners within the criminal justice system and/ or ex-offenders
- ESOL learners
- People who live in disadvantaged communities
- Other - please specify
- Prefer not to say

## SECTION 3. SCENARIO

This section asks you to think about how you react to individual learners' needs in the early stages of working with them.

We have written a brief outline, giving a few details about a learner and their motivations for joining an adult literacy class.

We would like you to read through the following scenario and then comment on

- how you might identify and assess this learner's needs and
- how you would plan to address them.

There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to suggest what you think some of the initial priorities might be.

Your suggestions will help us understand the range of possible ways of responding to learners and thinking about their needs.

### Scenario

You teach an Entry 1 adult literacy/FS English class. A new student, Sam, joins the group. She is a 32-year-old mother who has grown up speaking only English. At the first session she says that she can't read at all, but really wants to 'get a grip' of her reading so that she can help her daughter with homework and read letters from school. In your initial chat, you found that she could read and write her name and address, several local place names and some words on the sheet you were both looking at ('This' 'week') but struggled with others ('light' 'paper') and did not want to try to read any more.

### Q12. What further information might you seek from Sam to identify and assess her needs?

### Q13. What would you do with Sam in the next session and why?

---



## SECTION 4. TUTOR KNOWLEDGE

This section focuses on the approaches to teaching word level skills that you use or are familiar with. We are aware that there are a range of different approaches to teaching word level skills, and that some may be more widely used with adult learners than others. We are interested in understanding your priorities and what matters to you in teaching these skills.

**Q14. (Compulsory) I currently teach word level skills in these ways: (Please refer to the glossary below). Tick as many as apply:**

- Synthetic phonics
- Analytic phonics
- Onset-and-rime
- Identification of word families
- As and when the student needs
- In the context of the learner's reading activities
- In the context of the learner's writing activities
- Other - please specify
- None of the above

**Q15. In your opinion, when planning a scheme of work, is there anything else you need to take into account to successfully teach word level skills?**

**Q16. (Compulsory) Of these 5 statements, which best summarises how you think word level instruction should be organised for adult learners? Tick one:**

- Immerse adult learners in reading and writing authentic texts with no direct phonics instruction.
- Immerse adult learners in reading and writing authentic texts and embed phonics instruction, as needed, in lessons.
- Provide phonics lessons as needed in response to learners' needs but without following a particular scheme or programme.
- Provide systematic phonics instruction with opportunities to practise these skills on meaningful texts and tasks.
- Provide direct instruction in phonics using a structured programme and following its sequence of activities.
- None of the above

# GLOSSARY

**Synthetic Phonics:** Systematic instruction in which students are taught letter-sound correspondences and how to blend them to decode words.

**Analytic Phonics:** Systematic instruction in which students are taught some words first and then phonics generalisation from these words.

**Onset-and-rime:** Sounding out and blending larger units than single letters/graphemes, e.g. /k-at/ rather than /k-a-t/.

**Word Families:** Identification of word families with common endings (rime/phonogram - e.g. -all, -ind).

**As needed:** Not systematic instruction – students are taught phonics analysis skills as the need arises.

**In the context of reading:** Phonics skills are presented and taught through reading materials.

**In the context of writing:** Phonics skills are presented and taught through writing and spelling

**Authentic Texts:** Any text that has not been altered or simplified for instruction (literature, recipes, magazines).

**Systematic Phonics:** Phonics instruction that has a specified sequential set of phonics elements.

---

## SECTION 5. TUTOR KNOWLEDGE

This section asks about the resources you currently use to teach adult learners word level skills. We are interested in which ones are most familiar, which ones seem most valuable, and why, in your opinion, that might be the case.

### Q17. (Compulsory) Which of these resources do you use when working with adult learners on their word level skills? Tick as many as apply:

- Reading materials designed to be of interest to adult learners  
e.g. Gatehouse Reading Books
- Commercially produced resources for adults that teach phonics in sequence  
e.g. That Reading Thing
- Authentic materials that the learner or tutor brings into the room
- Tutor-produced worksheets designed to meet individual learner's needs
- Phonics programmes that provide accredited tutor learning e.g. THRASS
- Computer-based resources e.g. GraphoGame
- Phonics-based resources that don't require prior training e.g. BBC Skillswise
- Decodable texts that restrict the vocabulary to the student's level of phonic knowledge
- Other - please specify
- None of the above
- Prefer not to say

### Q18. Of the resources that you use, which one do you consider to be the most important? Choose just one. Please comment on your choice.

## SECTION 6. PHONICS

This section focuses more precisely on resources for teaching phonics. We are interested in which phonics resources are most familiar, which ones seem most valuable, and why, in your opinion, that might be the case.

We would also like to know more about your current knowledge. Are you familiar with and confident in some of the principles used to underpin phonics-based teaching?

**Q19. Are you currently using any of following phonics schemes/ resources? (Those on the list have been designed for use with adult learners.) Tick as many as apply:**

- THRASS
- Shannon Trust: Turning pages
- 'That Reading Thing'
- Gatehouse Books: Beginner Readers
- Gatehouse Books: Yes We Can Read, phonics scheme
- Toe by Toe
- BBC Skillswise - English
- Other - please specify

**Q20. Is there a particular phonics resource you would recommend to other adult literacy tutors? If so, what is it?**

**Can you say why you would recommend it?**

**Q21. (Compulsory) How confident are you that you could...****Select one place on the scale for each item:**

	Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Not confident	Not at all confident	Don't know / not sure
Teach phonological skills, grapheme-to-phoneme knowledge and phoneme awareness						
Teach sounding-out and blending for reading (synthetic phonics) and sounding out for writing and spelling						
Help students understand the principles that govern English orthography and the sound symbol relationships it is based on						
Help students make accurate choices in decoding and encoding as they read and write						
Identify appropriate resources designed for use with adult learners						

**Please comment on your answers.****Q22. (Compulsory) In your opinion, are there any significant benefits or drawbacks from making phonics approaches central to adult literacy teaching?**

## SECTION 7. ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

This section asks you to consider the enablers and barriers to the adoption of systematic phonics approaches with learners post-16. We have included a selection of statements designed to capture some of the key arguments in the field.

Please can you use the 5 point scale to express your own view on the key issues facing adult learners, for tutor knowledge and in your working context? We have also provided a comment box at the bottom of the facing page in case we have missed something you think is important.

### Q23. (Compulsory) Adult learners

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / not sure
Irregular attendance makes it difficult for adult learners to successfully follow structured phonics approaches.						
Adult learners who were taught by whole word approaches will make rapid progress when introduced to phonics now.						
Adult learners benefit most from one-to-one tutoring that allows them to work at their own pace.						
It is easy to find phonics-based curriculum materials that interest adult learners and connect to their lives.						

### Q24. (Compulsory) Tutor knowledge

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / not sure
It is hard to tell which phonics schemes are based on rigorous research and demonstrate an accurate knowledge of phonetics, and which are not.						
Knowing how to make informed decisions about which pedagogic approach is best suited to which learner is an essential part of adult literacy tutors' professional practice.						
I feel confident in tailoring phonics teaching to individual learners' needs.						
Phonics approaches help beginning learners rapidly decode regular CVC words. They work less well when learners have to deal with not yet decodable and tricky words later on.						

### Q25. (Compulsory) My working context

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / not sure
Most students in my working context are there to brush up on their skills in reading and writing, rather than starting from the most basic levels.						
The Functional Skills Reform programme will make it easier to know what and how to teach adult learners.						
There is too little time in my working context to properly negotiate an individual teaching programme and then keep students on track.						
It is difficult for me to update my skills by regularly accessing CPD and training specifically designed for literacy tutors.						

### Q26. If you have any further reflections on the most effective approaches to teaching adult learners word level skills, please fill in the box below.

## THANK YOU FOR FILLING IN THIS SURVEY.

The research report that the UCL team will write will be made available on the ETF website in April 2018. Please look out for it then.

In the meantime, if you would like to contact any of the research team for further information on this project, you may email: [gemma.moss@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:gemma.moss@ucl.ac.uk).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- \*Alamprese, J. A., MacArthur, C. A., Price, C., & Knight, D. (2011). Effects of a structured decoding curriculum on adult literacy learners' reading development. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 4(2), 154–172.
- Basma, B. & Savage, R. (2017). Teacher professional development and student literacy growth: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-017-9416-4>
- Bear, D., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2015). *Words their way: word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction*. Portsmouth, MA: Heinemann.
- Beder, H., Lipnevich, A., & Robinson-Geller, P. (2007). A typology of adult literacy approaches. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal*, 1(2).
- Benseman, J., Sutton, A., & Lander, J. (2005). *Working in the light of evidence as well as aspiration: A literature review of the best available evidence about effective adult literacy, numeracy, and language teaching*. Tertiary Education Commission, New Zealand.
- Bingham, G. E., Kenyon-Hall, K. M. (2011). Examining Teachers' Beliefs about and Implementation of a Balanced Literacy Framework. *Journal of Research in Reading*. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9817.2010.01483.x
- Brooks, G., Giles, K., Harman, J., Kendall, S., Rees, F. and Whittaker, S. (2001a). *Assembling the fragments: A review of research on adult basic skills*. London: Department for Education and Employment Research Report no.220.
- Brooks, G., Davies, R., Duckett, L., Hutchison, D., Kendall, S. & Wilkin, A. (2001b). *Progress in adult literacy: Do learners learn?* London: Basic Skills Agency.
- Brooks, G., Burton, M., Cole, P. & Szczerbiński, M. (2007). *Effective teaching and learning: Reading*. London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.
- Burton, M. (2007). *Developing adult teaching and learning: Practitioner guides. Reading*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Learning.
- Burton, M. (2011). *Phonetics for phonics: Underpinning knowledge for adult literacy practitioners*. Leicester, UK: NIACE.
- Burton, M., Davey, J., Lewis, M., Ritchie, L. & Brooks, G. (2008). *Improving reading: Phonics and fluency. Practitioner guide*. London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.
- Burton, M., Davey, J., Lewis, M., Ritchie, L. & Brooks, G. (2010). *Progress for adult literacy learners*. London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy.
- \*Condelli, L., Cronen, S., Bos, J., Tseng, F., & Altuna, J. (2010). *The impact of a reading intervention for low-literate adult ESL learners* (NCEE 2011-4003). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S.
- Curtis, M., & Kruidenier, J. (2005). *A summary of scientifically based research principles: Teaching adults to read*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. Retrieved April 17 2018, from <http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/>
- Department for Education. (2018). *Subject content functional skills: English*. Reference: DFE-00047-2018. Retrieved April 17 2018, from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/682834/Functional\\_Skills\\_Subject\\_Content\\_English.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/682834/Functional_Skills_Subject_Content_English.pdf)
- \*Duncan, S. (2009). 'What are we doing when we read?' – adult literacy learners' perceptions of reading. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 14(3), 317–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596740903139420>
- Ehri, L. (2003). Systematic phonics instruction: Findings of the National Reading Panel. Retrieved April 17 2018, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED479646.pdf>
- Engelmann, S., Becker, W., Carnine, L., Eisele, J., Haddox, P., Hanner, S., Johnson, G., Meyer, L., Osborn, J., & Osborn, S. (1999). *Corrective Reading Series*. Columbus, OH: SRA McGraw- Hill.
- \*Goddard, Y., & Rinderknecht, L. (2009). Using basic reading skills instruction and formative assessments to teach an adult with traumatic brain injury to read: A case study. *Remedial and Special Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932508321008>
- \*Gray, S., Ehri, L., & Locke, J. (2018). Morpho-phonemic analysis boosts word reading for adult struggling readers. *Reading & Writing*, 31, 75–98.
- \*Greenberg, D., Wise, J. C., Morris, R., Fredrick, L. D., Rodrigo, V., Nanda, A. O., & Pae, H. K. (2011). A Randomized Control Study of Instructional Approaches for Struggling Adult Readers. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 4, 101–117.



- Hartel, J., Lowry, B., & Hendon, W. (2006). *Sam and Pat*. Boston: Thompson/Heinle.
- \*Hock, M. F. (2012). Effective Literacy Instruction for Adults with Specific Learning Disabilities: Implications for Adult Educators. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 45*, 64–78.
- \*Iacono, T. A. (2004). Accessible reading intervention: A work in progress. *AAC: Augmentative and Alternative Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07434610410001699744>
- Katz, L. & Frost, R. (1992). Reading in different orthographies: The orthographic depth hypothesis. In R. Frost & L. Katz (Eds.), *Orthography, phonology, morphology, and meaning* (pp. 67–84). *Advances in Psychology*. North- Holland, Elsevier.
- Krashen, S.D. (1993). The case for free voluntary reading. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 50*(1), 72–82.
- Kruidenier, J. (2002). *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy, Partnership for Reading.
- Kruidenier, J. R., MacArthur, C. A., & Wrigley, H. S. (2010). *Adult Education Literacy Instruction: A review of the research*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.
- \*Kolinsky, R., Leite, I., Carvalho, C., Franco, A., & Morais, J. (2017). Completely illiterate adults can learn to decode in 3 months. *Reading and Writing, 1*–29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11145-017-9804-7>
- \*Massengill, D. (2006). Mission accomplished... it's learnable now: Voices of mature challenged spellers using a Word Study approach. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 49*(5), 420–431. DOI: 10.1598/JAAL.49.5.8
- \*Massengill, D. (2014). The impact of word study intervention on adult English learners spelling and reading. *Journal of Teaching and Research, 5*, 245–252. DOI: 10.4304/jltr.5.2.245-252
- \*Massengill, D., & Berg, M. (2008). Effects of a Word Study intervention on spelling accuracy among low-literate adults. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal, 2*, 131-139.
- \*Massengill, D. & Berg, M. (2009). Jail Participants actively study words. *Journal of correctional education, 60*, 100–119.
- McHardy, J. & Chapman, E. (2016). Adult reading teachers' beliefs about how less skilled adult readers can be taught to read. *Literacy & Numeracy Studies, 24*(2), 24–42.
- McShane, S. (2005) *Applying research in reading instruction for adults*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.
- Mesmer, H. & Griffiths, P. (2011). Everybody's selling it – but just what is explicit, systematic phonics instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 59*, 366–376. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.59.4.6>
- National Research Council. (2012). *Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Options for Practice and Research*. Committee on Learning Sciences: Foundations and Applications to Adolescent and Adult Literacy, A.M. Lesgold and M. Welch- Ross, Eds. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- \*Perin, D., & Greenberg, D. (2007). Research-Based Reading Instruction in an Adult Basic Education Program. *Adult Basic Education & Literacy Journal, 1*(3), 123–132.
- \*Rodrigo, V., Greenberg, D., & Segal, D. (2014). Changes in reading habits by low literate adults through extensive reading. *Reading in Foreign Language, 26*, 73–91.
- \*Sabatini, J. P., Shore, J., Holtzman, S., & Scarborough, H. S. (2011). Relative effectiveness of reading intervention programs for adults with low literacy. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 4*, 118–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2011.555290>
- \*Scarborough, H. S., Sabatini, J. P., Shore, J., Cutting, L. E., Pugh, K., & Katz, L. (2013). Meaningful reading gains by adult literacy learners. *Reading and Writing, 26*, 593–613. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-012-9385-4>
- \*Shippen, M. E. (2008). A pilot study of the efficacy of two adult basic education programs for incarcerated males. *Journal of Correctional Education, 59*(December), 339–348.
- \*Shore, J. R., Sabatini, J. P., Lentini, J., & Holtzman, S. (2013). Changes in Reading Practices and Perceptions in Low-Literacy-Level Adult Learners. *Reading Psychology, 34*(6), 550–568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2012.660371>
- \*Shore, J., Sabatini, J., Lentini, J., Holtzman, S., & McNeil, A. (2015). Development of an Evidence-Based Reading Fluency Program for Adult Literacy Learners. *Reading Psychology, 36*(1), 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2013.835294>

Smith, M. & Dalheim, Z. (1990). Project READ. *A study of twenty reading disabled adults*. Massachusetts: Pittsfield Public Schools.

Torgerson, C., Brooks, G., Porthouse, J., Burton, M., Wright, K & Watt, I. (2004). *Adult literacy and numeracy interventions and outcomes: a review of controlled trials (research report)*. London: National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. Retrieved April 17 2018, from <http://www.nrdc.org.uk/?p=145>

\*Vanderberg, L. E., Pierce, M. E., & Disney, L. J. (2011). Reading intervention outcomes for adults with disabilities in a vocational rehabilitation setting: Results of a 3-year research and demonstration grant. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034355211402518>

Wolf, M., Miller, L., & Donnelly, K. (2000). RAVE-O: A comprehensive fluency-based reading intervention program. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *33*, 375-386.

\*Studies include in literature review.

---



## OUR PARTNERS



157-197 Buckingham Palace Road,  
London SW1W 9SP

020 3740 8280  
enquiries@etfoundation.co.uk  
ETFUNDATION.CO.UK

Company registration number  
(England and Wales): 08540597.  
Charity number: 1153859