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Teacher attitudes towards the *Skills for Life* national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills

In 1996 Tony Blair MP, leader of the opposition Labour Party, declared that his three priorities for government would be "education, education, and education".[1] Early in its first administration (1997-2001), the new Labour government instructed a working group under the chairmanship of Sir Claus Moser to investigate the state of adult basic skills in the UK and to suggest ways of reaching adults with literacy and numeracy needs. Lord Moser's *A Fresh Start: Improving Literacy and Numeracy* (1999) concluded that up to seven million adults (one in five of the adult population) in England had difficulties with literacy and numeracy – a higher proportion than in any other western country apart from Poland and Ireland.

In response to the Moser Report's recommendations, in March 2001 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) launched a new national strategy for improving the literacy and numeracy skills of adult learners. Known as *Skills for Life*, the strategy's target is to improve the literacy, language and numeracy skills of 1.5 million adult learners by 2007 and 2.25 million learners by 2010. *Skills for Life* emphasizes the needs of priority groups at risk of exclusion including unemployed people and benefit claimants; prisoners and those supervised in the community; public sector employees; low-skilled people in employment, and younger adult learners aged 16-19 years.

In addition to boosting the demand for courses through a highly successful advertising campaign, and providing the courses to meet this new demand, a core component of the *Skills for Life* strategy is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in literacy, numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision through a new national learning, teaching and assessment infrastructure. Through such infrastructural reforms, *Skills for Life* has brought about a great number of changes in the working lives of all those who teach on the courses coming under the *Skills for Life* banner. These include discrete and embedded courses in language, literacy and numeracy at Level 2 or below on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).[2]

The following chapter offers some findings and observations drawn from the first two waves of a large-scale longitudinal study examining the impact of the *Skills for Life* strategy on teachers. From this rich data source, this chapter focuses on the attitudes of teachers of *Skills for Life* subjects toward the strategy: what their attitudes are, what factors influence these attitudes, and what the implications of this may be for the strategy's successful implementation.

Research Context

In essence, *Skills for Life* aims to transform the quality of language, literacy and numeracy teaching and encourage a new professionalisation in a sector where previously provision was marginalized, and teachers operated without clear guidance on what was expected of them. With the strategy came consistent and robust national standards; screening and diagnostic assessments; new learning and teaching materials, and national tests which are now the benchmark for all literacy and numeracy achievement. The quality of teaching has been transformed by new

national core literacy, numeracy and ESOL curricula for adults, based on the national standards, which set out the specific literacy and numeracy skills that need to be taught and learned at each level within the NQF. The core curriculum for each subject area ensures consistency and continuity for the learner and helps teachers using focused teaching methods to meet the needs of individual learners. The introduction of this new approach was supported by induction and training courses for teachers, and during the life of the strategy thus far a range of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programs and initiatives have been offered at regional, national and local levels.

Prior to 2002 there was much variation in initial teacher training and in-service provision for basic skills teachers. As part of *Skills for Life*, the government developed teaching qualifications for new teachers, using a framework which recognised that adult literacy, adult numeracy and ESOL were specialist subjects. For new teachers of adult literacy, or adult numeracy, the requirement to gain one of these qualifications came into force on 1 September 2002 and for new teachers of adult ESOL on 1 September 2003. New teachers are required to have a generic teaching qualification such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (the PGCE is roughly the equivalent of a graduate diploma in education) *and* a Level 4 certificate in their subject specialisation.[3] Existing teachers are also being encouraged to take these qualifications. The publication of *Success for All* in November 2002, a strategy document which articulated the government's vision for the future of post-16 education and training, reinforced the principle that all teachers should be qualified to teach by 2010.

These changes to the teaching and learning infrastructure acknowledge that the goals of the *Skills for Life* strategy cannot be accomplished by top-down government initiatives alone.

Every relevant player on an individual or an organizational level can contribute by working to a common set of clear objectives.

According to Fullan (1991) teachers are essential to the implementation of educational reform, because making changes to existing institutions, structures and classroom practices is impossible without teacher participation. From this, Fullan (1999) argues that for an education reform to be successful, teachers must feel they have a personal investment in its outcomes. In effect, teachers are required to become agents of change. Teachers are best-placed to know students and to understand students' needs (Barth, 1990). The knowledge, skills and judgements that teachers bring to their role as "change agents" (Sanders, 1999) are integral to bringing about educational change.

Moreover, international research suggests that teachers' subjective perceptions of proposed change influence their behavior (Hargreaves, 1998; McNess, Broadfoot, & Osborn, 2003; Van den Berg, Vandenberghe, & Sleegers, 1999). Those seeking to instigate educational changes that teachers resist or dislike face serious obstacles. Therefore, it is essential to consider teacher attitudes toward any educational reform they are involved in, and to identify the factors that are associated with the attitudes teachers express.

Fullan goes on to argue that if teachers "are to push for systematic change" (1999, p. 579) then time-support and institutional-support are critical. Currently, the *Skills for Life* strategy requires teachers to improve their subject knowledge and pedagogy, to get new qualifications and, in some cases, to engage in practitioner research. Teachers are also responsible for administration, for curriculum revision, and for outreach. But research has shown that teachers need *time* to try new approaches, learn new skills, develop new attitudes, and engage in professional development activities (Cocoran 1995, Donohoe 1993). For example, Turnbull

(2002) found that teachers were more likely to support school reform when they had adequate training, resources, helpful support, participation in school decisions and control over the implementation of reform in their own classrooms. Organizational environment overall is viewed as a important predictor of teacher attitudes and commitment (Hargreaves, 1988; Reynes, 1992; Tam &Cheng, 1996).

This theoretical approach emphasises the critical role of social-organizational factors, with "attitudes" being the individual's response to structures and processes (Reynes, 1990). However, "attitudes" can also be seen as an appropriate fit between individual personality needs and the opportunities and demands of the reforms. Because attitudes link people and their behavior to their context, it is important for research on attitudes to explore the impact of personal characteristics (Reynes, 1990). In this chapter both the organizational context and the personal characteristics of *Skills for Life* teachers will be explored as they relate to the teacher's attitudes towards different aspects of the *Skills for Life* strategy.

Methods

The **National Research and Development Centre** (NRDC) was established in 2002 by the DfES as part of the *Skills for Life strategy in order to conduct the research the Moser Report called for.* A consortium of partners who are specialists in the fields of literacy, numeracy and ESOL, the NRDC is led by the Institute of Education, University of London. 'The longitudinal study of the impact of the Skills for Life national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills on teachers and trainers' (referred to as "The Teacher Study") is one of the largest projects in the NRDC's portfolio, and runs in tandem with a longitudinal study of the

strategy's impact on learners. The Teacher Study is an exploratory research project designed to follow teachers working on a range of post-16 education and training programs and, as one of the first large-scale studies of its kind, allows policy-makers to evaluate how the *Skills for Life* strategy affects teachers.[4]

The Teacher Study is a panel study, with quantitative data gathered in three waves via a respondent questionnaire. These data are supplemented by in-depth qualitative interviews with a sub-section of the respondent sample. Wave one quantitative fieldwork was carried out between May 2004 and August 2005, by means of a Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI), for 309 respondents, and, for 718 respondents, a self-completion web questionnaire.[5] The 1027 questionnaires contain information on teachers' demographic profile; their qualifications; prior experience; employment details; professional development activities and training needs; organizational / work environment; reasons for entering the profession; job satisfaction; perceptions of their job roles; and attitudes towards the new *Skills for Life* policies.

In wave two (May-December 2006) quantitative data were gathered solely through a self-completion web questionnaire. In the main, the second questionnaire is a truncated version of the first, designed to capture the changes taking place between survey waves; a very similar questionnaire will be used in wave three (started April 2007). Wave two fieldwork was ongoing at the time of writing, but to add a longitudinal dimension to this chapter, analysis has been carried out on a dataset of 600 wave two questionnaires. Although this dataset is partial the missing data are random, and the observations are representative of the wave one sample.

This said, readers should be aware of an important limitation of the Teacher Study. In the original study design, the sample was to comprise 1000 randomly selected teachers drawn from 245 adult education programs in six different funding streams (Further Education [FE]; Prison

Education; Adult and Community Learning; Work-based Learning; JobCentre Plus; learndirect).[6] These programs were themselves randomly selected from a sample of 18 (of 47) Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas that represented all 9 geographic regions of England.[7]

However, it proved extremely difficult to secure the participation of providers, managers, and teachers in the study, and especially for those in learning programs outside of FE. The problem of recruiting participants was partly connected to the very complexity of the *Skills for Life* sector: teachers on hourly paid contracts, for example, may have only periodic access to email, and may have no fixed office or telephone at work to be contacted on, and agency staff are not always known to Human Resources Departments. Teachers were therefore recruited on an opportunistic basic. To offset any reluctance on the part of busy teachers to complete what was a lengthy questionnaire, a web version of the first survey was offered as an alternative to a face-to-face interview, and incentives in the form of book tokens were given to all those who completed the survey.

As a result the sample of this study is now a volunteer (non-probability) sample. It is non-random and thus non-representative, although in many key areas the profile of our sample (see Tables 1 and 2 below) accords both with what available data from previous research tells us about similar kinds of teachers, and with analysis of the Staff Individualised Records (SIR) datasets kept by the LSC.

In fact, it is worth noting that until recently *no* robust analysis of the *Skills for Life* workforce profile had been carried out. The data used in all previous research were not based on representative, random samples of the whole population of *Skills for Life* teachers, but on the substantial or less substantial numbers of teachers who agreed to participate. Moreover, the SIR analysis itself presents challenges. Firstly, the complexity of provision and the diverse nature of

teacher contracts make precise identification of *Skills for Life* teachers within the dataset problematic, and it is also impossible to distinguish between literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers. Secondly, the SIR data includes teachers working in FE colleges only and no information is collected about community or work-based learning organisations. Without robust evidence on the staff numbers and distribution that characterise the total population of *Skills for Life* teachers it is currently impossible to weight the findings from the Teacher Study to make them more representative. By the time of our final analysis on the Teacher Study, however, this will be resolved, for in September 2006 Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) was commissioned by the DfES to carry out a snapshot survey of the *Skills for Life* workforce in England.[8] This survey is designed to find out the total number and profile of specialist *Skills for Life* teachers, tutors or trainers, and our data will be weighted to reflect findings from the LLUK survey.

One other limitation of the Teacher Study is that although our questionnaire is detailed, it does not include any variables that measure the teachers' psychological characteristics. Early analysis suggests that such variables may explain the biggest variance in teacher attitudes.

Nevertheless, the data gathered in the Teacher Study are very rich and there are many possibilities for analysis. This chapter will focus on three main research questions:

i. What are the attitudes of teachers towards certain aspects of the *Skills for Life* national strategy?

ii. Which teacher or organizational characteristics are associated with which attitudes?

iii. How are these attitudes changing over time and what factors explain such changes?

By way of conclusion, we discuss a number of practical implications for policy makers.

Instruments/measurements

In the Teacher Study quantitative questionnaire, attitude measurements are obtained through a 30-item scale developed by Giannakaki (Giannakaki, 2005). Each item was rated using a 5-point scale of agreement-disagreement, where responses were designated 5 – "strongly agree"; 4 – "agree"; 3 – "uncertain"; 2 – "disagree"; 1 – "strongly disagree", and questions were phrased to elicit both positive and negative views. An initial set of 77 measurements was piloted with a small sample of teachers (N=178) in 2004 and was included in a reduced format in the main stage fieldwork. Giannakaki performed a factor analysis so as to cut the number of attitudinal items for analysis, and she explored into which and how many groupings these attitudes could be divided. The seven main factors were extracted and labelled "Curriculum"; "Inclusion"; "Resources and Support"; "National Tests and Learner Morale"; "Teacher Qualification Requirements"; "Inspections/Quality Assurance"; and "Validity of Assessment".[9]

As Giannakaki acknowledges, a possible weakness in her analysis is that the number of cases (N=178) is relatively small compared to the total number of items that were factor-analysed (77). With this in mind, a separate factor analysis was carried out on the 30-item attitude scale used for the 1027 teachers sampled in wave one, which gave results broadly similar to those seen in Giannakaki's pilot study.

The 30 different attitudinal statements were next arranged in six larger groupings (or factors).[10] For the purpose of this chapter's analysis, four of these six factors will be used as dependent variables: "Curricula and *Skills for Life* Initiatives"; "Teacher Qualification Requirements"; "Validity of Assessment"; "National Tests and Learner Morale". The final scores of the scales are presented in Table 1.

[INSERT Table 1]

On average, teacher attitudes towards the curricula and other *Skills for Life* (*SFL*) initiatives are quite positive. Attitudes towards the new teacher qualification requirements, to the validity of assessment, and to the national tests are more neutral with some negative qualities. In later analysis each of the six factors was used as a separate subscale. Scale scores were standardised and used as outcome variables in regression models to examine the effect of different individual and organizational characteristics on the attitudes of the *SFL* teachers.

Variables about individual teachers include demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, and age); education and training (for example, new qualifications; highest qualification; professional development); and employment experience (for example, years of post-16 teaching experience; salary; contract type; main teaching subject; teaching program). Some relevant descriptive statistics on these characteristics are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

[INSERT Table 2]

On an organizational level, five attitudinal variables were also added to the model. The first of these, *job satisfaction* (a measure based on 11 items) reflects satisfaction with different aspects of the teaching job, such as job security, benefits, professional development opportunities, learners and so forth. The second variable includes 4 items on teacher perception of *help and support received from managers*. A third variable, again based on 4 survey items, shows *the extent to which teachers collaborate with colleagues*. The fourth variable, an 8-item

scale, measures how teachers perceive their *degree of influence on decision-making* in their employing organisation. Finally, a fifth variable measures the *clarity of their professional role*, using answers to 7 statements such as "I have clear, planned goals and objectives for my job" or "I know exactly what is expected of me". (Again, measurements for all items used a five-point agreement-disagreement scale.) These items were collapsed into a sum score for each relevant variable. (A summary of the descriptive statistics for these variables is presented in Table 1.) Scale scores were then standardised and used as independent variables in regression models to explore what association they have with teacher attitudes towards *Skills for Life*.

Findings

Correlation analysis revealed that salary; number of years teaching in the post-16 sector; number of days per year spent on CPD activities; length of time working for the employing organisation; job satisfaction; influence on decision-making; collaboration with colleagues; managerial support, and clarity of role all had a statistically significant association with teacher attitudes towards *SFL* core curricula. Moreover, other statistical tests showed that gender; main teaching subject; teaching sector (for example, FE or work-based learning); holding a new Level 4 subject specialist qualification, or an ESOL, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL (English as a Second Language) teaching qualification, as well as a generic teaching qualification such as PGCE had a statistically significant group effect on teacher attitudes towards *SFL* core curricula.

Our discussion of the multivariate analysis begins by examining the covariates of teacher attitudes towards the *SFL* curricula and other initiatives (see Table 3). When gender and qualifications were entered into the equation, having a new Level 4 subject specialist

qualification was related to attitude towards the *SFL* curricula and other initiatives. Gender and generic teaching qualifications were statistically insignificant, meaning that these two variables might be connected to new Level 4 qualifications or some other salient fourth variable, or that they explain the same variance in teacher attitudes as the new Level 4 qualification. The next step, entering "has another ESOL qualification", was statistically significant. Then salary, years worked for the employing organisation, and main teaching subject were entered. While all these variables, except salary, had a significant effect on predicting teacher attitude towards the *SFL* curricula, their effect was not very strong on explaining the variance in attitudes. As a teacher's salary is often associated with the years worked for their employing organisation, we cannot see any significant effect of salary on teacher attitudes. When teaching sector and years of teaching experience in post-16 education were introduced as the next predictors in the regression equation, only the coefficient of teaching sector was statistically significant. Years worked for the employing organisation became insignificant when teaching sector was entered in the equation. During the next step, the number of days spent in professional development per year was entered. Job satisfaction and clarity of job role have a statistically significant effect on teacher attitudes towards the *SFL* curricula and other initiatives.

Overall, the analysis shows that teachers with the new level 4 subject specialist qualifications and those teachers who have participated in a higher number of days of CPD are more positive about the *SFL* curricula. Moreover, teachers who are more satisfied with their job, and teachers who understand their role more clearly, are also more positive about the *SFL* curricula and other initiatives. By contrast, those teachers in our sample who have other ESOL qualifications (such as the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults [CELTA]); ESOL

teachers (compared to literacy teachers), and more experienced teachers are slightly inclined to have a more negative attitude towards the *SFL* curricula.

The next stage of our analysis examined teacher attitudes towards new teaching qualification requirements. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test showed that the variables of having a Level 4 subject specialist qualification and main teaching subject had a statistically significant group effect on teacher attitudes towards new qualifications. The correlation analysis demonstrated that the degree to which teachers experience job satisfaction, experience managerial support, and have clarity about their job role are also associated with their attitude towards the new teaching qualification requirements.

All the control variables were associated with teacher attitudes towards the new teaching qualifications, with all measures being statistically significant, except for degree of managerial support (see Table 3). Those teachers who had, or were working towards, a new level 4 subject specialist qualifications, experienced more positive attitudes towards these qualifications. If teachers were more satisfied with their job and had a clearer idea about their professional role they were also more positive about the new teaching qualifications even when controlled for their teaching subject and job satisfaction. Teachers whose main subject was numeracy had slightly more negative attitudes compared to teachers whose main subject was literacy.

[INSERT Table 3]

In our next stage, correlation analysis showed that the number of years a respondent had taught in the post-16 sector and the number of years they had worked for a particular employer, as well as job satisfaction, degree of managerial support, and clarity of job role had statistically

significant associations with teacher attitudes towards the validity of assessment. In addition, the ANOVA test showed that gender, ethnicity, main teaching subject, teaching sector, another teaching qualification, and experience of curriculum management, had a statistically significant group effect on teacher attitudes towards validity of *SFL* assessment. It is interesting that when years of teaching experience was entered into the model, salary and years worked for the current employer became statistically insignificant predictors of attitudes towards the validity of assessment. The highest percentage of variance in attitudes was explained when attitudinal variables were entered.

Multivariate analysis (see Table 3) showed that those respondents who taught numeracy, or whose main teaching subject was not a *SFL* subject, had more positive attitudes towards the validity of assessment than those who taught adult literacy, had managerial experience, a clearer understanding of their professional role, and higher job satisfaction. Having an ESOL or EFL qualification, coming from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background, and higher salary had negative associations with teacher attitudes towards the validity of assessment.

The last model examined teacher attitudes towards national tests, with specific focus on how these tests affect learner morale (see Table 3). The statistical tests showed that the variables for main teaching subject, teaching sector, having a Level 4 subject specialist qualification, having an ESOL, EFL or ESL teaching qualification, and attendance at the *SFL* core curriculum training had a statistically significant group effect on teacher attitudes towards national tests and learner morale. Correlation analysis revealed that salary, age, pay, job satisfaction, managerial support, clarity of professional role and influence on decision-making had statistically significant associations with teacher attitudes towards national tests and learner morale.

Teacher characteristics did not explain a great deal of variance in attitudes in this model. Teachers with a Level 4 qualification or who were working towards one, those teaching ESOL (as compared to literacy), those who attended core curriculum training, and those with higher job satisfaction perceived that national tests were connected with higher learner morale. A more negative attitude was associated those whose main teaching subject was not a *SFL* subject (as compared to literacy) and those working in FE.

We added a longitudinal dimension to our analysis by looking for any changes in teacher attitudes towards the *SFL* strategy between the two waves of fieldwork. An analysis of the partial dataset from wave two reveals significant changes in teacher attitudes towards the *SFL* core curricula and other initiatives and in teacher attitudes to the validity of assessment. In both cases, teacher attitudes became slightly more negative (see Table 1).

Since analysis of wave one revealed that a teacher's qualifications, and some attitudinal measures, had the greatest effect on teacher attitudes towards the *SFL* strategy we wondered if these factors also influenced attitudes in wave two and any attitudinal changes between two waves.

Data analysis of wave two showed that teachers who had, or were working towards, a Level 4 subject specialist qualification in wave one, and those who had gained this qualification or were working towards it by wave two, were more positive about the core curricula and other *SFL* initiatives than those without the new qualification. There was no difference in attitudes towards the validity of assessment between these two groups of teachers. In addition, teachers with other ESOL teaching qualifications had a more negative attitude towards both the *SFL* curricula and the validity of assessment. Here having an ESOL qualification could also serve as a proxy for being an ESOL teacher.

Turning to the longitudinal analysis, firstly we observed no significant attitudinal change in teachers without a Level 4 subject specialist qualifications and those without generic teaching qualifications. Yet the analysis revealed that in wave two the attitudes of teachers with Level 4 or generic teaching qualifications became slightly less positive compared to their attitudes in wave one. For teachers with ESOL qualifications, who in wave one had slightly less positive attitudes towards the *SFL* curricula and other initiatives, attitudes remained less positive in wave two in comparison with the attitudes of other teachers. Their attitudes towards the validity of the *Skills for Life* assessment also became less positive. The downward change in attitudes towards the *SFL* curricula of teachers with ESOL qualifications was smaller than in those without these qualifications: however, downward change in their attitudes towards the validity of the assessment was slightly greater.

Furthermore, combining data from both waves, teachers with generic teaching qualifications were also slightly more positive about the *SFL* core curricula and other initiatives. Correlation analysis showed that job satisfaction, influence on decision making, clarity of professional role, managerial support, and satisfaction with organisational resources were associated with more positive teacher attitudes towards the core curriculum and other *SFL* initiatives in both waves. In addition, teachers who were more satisfied with their jobs and with organisational resources, who received more managerial support and were clearer about their role also had a more positive attitude towards validity of *SFL* assessment.

Furthermore, our data suggests that teachers were slightly less satisfied with their jobs and managerial support in wave one than in wave two. Moreover, there was a correlation in attitudinal changes: teachers who became more negative about the core curricula also became slightly more negative about the validity of assessment. There also was a statistically significant

association between changes in teacher attitudes towards core curriculum and their job satisfaction. If teachers became more satisfied with their job their opinion about the core curricula became more positive. Even if change in evaluation of managerial support did not correlate with change in teacher attitudes towards the *SFL* curricula or assessment, it correlated significantly with change in job satisfaction. Teachers who became less satisfied with their job also evaluated the managerial support they received at their employing organisation in a slightly less positive way.

After establishing the independent effect of our variables, we considered their relative effect and the extent to which one may account for the other. A regression analysis was performed for two attitudes from wave two where attitudinal changes were significant. Teacher qualifications and attitudinal variables measured in wave two were entered as independent variables. Wave one attitudes were entered in the first step and qualifications and other attitudes in the second and third. Teacher attitudes in wave one had the biggest effect on attitudes in wave two. However, even taking into account these attitudes, subject specialist qualifications, ESOL qualifications, collaboration with the colleagues, and job satisfaction were still associated with teacher attitudes toward the core curricula. After adjusting for attitude measurement in wave one, teacher attitudes towards the validity of assessment were related to job satisfaction and ESOL qualifications, but not to subject specialist qualifications.

[INSERT Table 4]

Discussion

This final section considers some of the methodological challenges we faced with this analysis. We also look at patterns that run across our analysis of the four dependent variables measuring teacher attitudes towards different aspects of *SFL* strategy. We then offer some conclusions and policy discussion points about which personal characteristics and which organizational climates appear to have the greatest effect on attitudes.

The first important methodological challenge of this chapter is its longitudinal aspect. To add a longitudinal dimension, we used data from two waves of the panel survey. (The final response rate for wave two was 74 %.) A statistical analysis of the probability of a wave one respondent being included in the wave two sample suggests that the only statistically significant difference is for the sector of the main employing organisation (that is FE, work-based learning and so on). Accounting for and comparing this difference is complicated by the fact that teachers may change their employer, and their employer type, between waves. Overall the analysis of attrition suggests that the missing data are random, and our observations are representative of the first wave sample for those teacher characteristics that we can account for.

Secondly, all the models we used have quite low R-squared values, that is, they have low explained variability in dependent attitudinal variables, especially when only socio-demographic or contextual variables were entered. Adding in some attitudinal variables to serve as proxies for teachers' psychological profiles improved the models, but explained variability remained low, especially in wave one data analysis. In wave two analysis, explained variability increased, but again this resulted from controlling for the wave one teacher attitudes and thus for some factors that formed attitudes in the first place. This illustrates the complicated structure of attitude formation, where factors other than socio-demographic or contextual variables explain the greatest proportion of the variability.

Lastly, our main attitudinal scales were created using exploratory factor analysis as opposed to confirmatory factor analysis. Since our scales have not been used in any previous studies, and no other theoretical framework was available, we could not specify the number of factors and factor structure before our analysis for this chapter. When data for all three waves are gathered, we will look at a fit of the hypothesized factor structure using confirmatory factor analysis. At this interim stage of analysis (final report to be submitted in December 2007) our main aim was to discover the factor structure of teacher attitudes and examine its internal validity.

Turning now to the early messages emerging from the Teacher Study, it is important to note that the *SFL* teaching population exhibits specific characteristics that may influence attitudes towards the strategy. From both SIR data analysis and previous research we know the workforce is predominantly female, and *SFL* teachers are, on average, older than compulsory education teachers.[11] A high proportion of *SFL* teachers work on part-time contracts (either fractional or hourly-paid contracts) and historically there have been fewer full-time employment opportunities in this sector than in other FE programs or in the compulsory education sector. Moreover, a culture of change and new requirements contribute to a lack of stability in the workforce, a higher turnover of staff, and challenges for new entrants to the profession, all of which may bring about negative attitudes.

Although we considered a range of socio-demographic characteristics for the teachers in our sample, few of these proved to have a significant effect on attitudes towards *Skills for Life*. Only ethnicity had an impact on teacher attitudes towards the validity of *SFL* assessment procedures: in our sample, BME teachers tend to be slightly more negative about current assessment procedures. Gender and age *do* seem to be important in univariate analysis, yet when

other variables are used as controls, they do not appear to be significant, indicating that gender and age are associated with certain other attributes, such as teaching qualifications and experience, or attitudes towards aspects of organizational climate.

In accordance with previous research (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Tsitouridou & Vryzas, 2003) which shows more highly-qualified teachers are more positive in general than their less-qualified peers, the qualifications held by the teachers in our sample appear to be quite strongly associated with their attitudes towards *Skills for Life*. Firstly, engagement in professional development activities, through attending a higher number of CPD days or core curriculum training, had a positive effect on teacher attitudes. Secondly, the single strongest effect in all models concerning different aspects of the attitudes came from the variables concerned with the new Level 4 subject specialist qualification. Teachers who held, or were working towards these qualifications had more positive attitudes towards *Skills for Life*. However, teachers who held a different form of ESOL qualification had a slightly more negative attitude in both waves. Although on the face of it ESOL teachers seem to be the most qualified and experienced in our sample, this negative attitude may reflect uncertainty about the currency of these other ESOL qualifications in relation to the new teaching qualification requirements

This observation may also be connected to other issues specific to the ESOL field, including course funding uncertainties. A respondent's main teaching subject, which is likely to be connected to teaching qualifications, came out as significant in all models controlling for teaching qualifications. ESOL teachers had a tendency to be slightly more negative about the *SFL* core curricula, but were more positive about the effect of national tests on learner morale. Also, numeracy teachers were less satisfied with the new teaching qualifications. One possible explanation for this is that when our wave one fieldwork was conducted there was less

availability of Level 4 subject specialist courses in numeracy than in the other subject specialisms, and a poorer quality of teacher training provision.

A lack of pedagogy in the Level 4 subject specialist courses is now being addressed and subject specialism courses will include subject specific pedagogy from September 2007. Our research supports the idea that a key factor in the successful implementation of *Skills for Life* lies in encouraging teachers to gain these qualifications, which includes making sure that teachers are informed about them, and about the availability of courses and funding opportunities, and that employing organizations support their staff. Moreover, practitioners should have a role to play in teacher training programs; the classroom experiences of "change agents" should feed into course design, for very often those studying for these new qualifications have many years of experience in the field. Practitioners also need to be kept up-to-date on changes to the teacher training courses and requirements and any impact these may have on the qualifications they currently hold. A recent focus group conducted as part of the qualitative strand of the Teacher Study highlighted the insecurities many teachers have about such changes: teachers need to know that the new qualifications they are encouraged to take will continue to have value, and not be rendered obsolete by further reforms to the qualifications framework.[12]

Consistent with other educational research, our analysis found that the characteristics of the strategy implementation context (that is, the features of the school, college or other organisation where a teacher works) influence attitudes towards educational reform and towards the changes it means for a teacher's professional life. It is notable that of the factual variables connected to employment, only teaching sector appears significant in a model explaining how teachers perceive national tests to influence learner morale: teachers working for employers other than FE colleges judge their learners to be more satisfied and positive about national tests.

A number of studies suggest that teachers are more positive about reforms and more motivated to put reforms into practice if their organization is characterised by a shared vision, by collaboration between staff members, support from management and administration, shared decision-making, adequate resources, and training opportunities (Fullan, 1991; Geijsel, Sleegers, Van den Berg, & Kelchtermans, 2001; Turnbull, 2002). Our study also show that the greatest variance explained in all models comes from the attitudinal variables that address teachers' perceptions of the organizational climate and working environment. In the Teacher Study, job satisfaction and clarity of professional role had the strongest positive effect on teacher attitudes towards *Skills for Life*. This could be explained in two ways. Firstly, of course, the explanation may lie in psychological characteristics not measured in this study, such as underlying optimism or pessimism. An alternative explanation is that having a clear and secure vision of a future teaching career path is associated with positive opinions about different *Skills for Life* initiatives. If teachers feel involved, if they receive managerial support and their role is explained to them, if they have some autonomy over the hours that they work and over what and who they teach, rather than being obliged to teach courses and classes according to organizational and funding pressures, job satisfaction is higher, and attitudes toward *Skills for Life* are more positive.

Skills for Life has brought many positive changes into the working lives of those who teach literacy, language and numeracy to adults. Overall, teachers of *SFL* subjects appreciate that the new standards have helped to professionalise the *SFL* workforce. It is important to acknowledge the concerns, as voiced by one respondent who felt that "bright" and "creative" practitioners entering the system were under pressure "to conform…meet targets…[and] fit figures." However, although these new standards and systems have increased the teaching workload, particularly with regard to bureaucratic procedures and paperwork, and in many

situations, instituted a more hierarchical structure between managers and teachers – factors often associated with decreased job satisfaction and more negative attitudes – national tests, new teaching and learning materials, and the core curricula are viewed on the whole as helpful tools. When, in a series of qualitative interviews conducted with a sub-section of our sample between September and November 2006, we explored the use of these tools in greater depth, teachers repeatedly reported that a main strength lay in their flexibility and the fact that tools could be adapted for different learners and different teaching situations. As one teacher remarked, "I don't use it prescriptively, but when we have learners they are always initially assessed, and we do the diagnostics, etc, and then we always use the curriculum to refer to. Sometimes they have good ideas as well, and we think, 'yes I will do that'. It isn't a case of sticking to it to the letter. Basically you use it as background guidance really but you are guided by what the learners do in the group."

Teachers, then, are appreciative of the fact that they have the opportunity to be creative and use these standardised materials in an innovative way. This observation appears to be another factor key to the successful implementation of *Skills for Life*. More often than not, teachers working in this field are motivated by a clear sense of purpose, even moral purpose, and a commitment to social justice. If teachers are to function as agents of change, and agents of the social, cultural and, particularly, the, economic transformations that the government trusts *Skills for Life* will achieve, then they must not only feel *included* in the reform process, but share *ownership* of the reform initiatives. Retaining the power to feed a wealth of classroom experience into teaching and learning materials is one aspect of this; being offered the opportunity take these "contact time" messages back to the strategy-makers is another. As another respondent remarked when interviewed: "There has to be more bottom up feedback.

They have really got to shake things and stop the top-down things coming down, and do bottom-up feedback. And really listen to what is happening and be prepared."

Reflecting on the changes in attitudes between our first two survey waves, we acknowledge that *Skills for Life* provision itself is continuously subject to change. More detailed analysis, and the results of our third wave research, will demonstrate which of the various attitudes reported here are sustained. Of course time-support and institutional-support are critical to whether teachers are satisfied or not with the changes that have been made to the adult literacy and numeracy field. However, *what* these changes *are* may actually matter less in terms of teacher attitudes than whether teachers feel that they have ownership of these changes, and believe that they have the power and the autonomy to continue "making a difference".

1ENDNOTES

. Tony Blair, Speech to the Labour Party Conference, 1 October 1996

2. A Level 2 qualification is equivalent to an A*-C grade in a GCSE qualification – the General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations taken in England and Wales at the end of compulsory secondary education (aged 16).

3. A Level 4 qualification is equivalent to a professional diploma, certificate or award.

4. To be eligible for the Teacher Study, teachers and trainers had to work in post-16 education and training in England and have responsibility for the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, writing, numeracy, or maths skills at Level 2 or below of the NQF. These include: (a) teachers and trainers of Adult Literacy, Language, ESOL, EFL, ESL, or Key Skills in Communication, (b) teachers and trainers of Adult Numeracy or Key Skills in Application of Number, (c) teachers and trainers of GCSE English or Maths, and (d) vocational teachers and trainers, who are involved in embedded provision of one or more of these subjects.

5. Although differences to the programming of the CAPI and web instruments meant very slight differences between the two questionnaires, comparing the data collected by the two methods, we found some variation for the mean value of the key variables, but the differences are generally not statistically significant.

6. JobCentre Plus is the government-funded employment agency facility and the social security office in the UK; learndirect is a not-for-profit organisation created in 1998 to take forward the UK Government's vision of a University for Industry (Ufi Ltd) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – it offers online *Skills for Life* courses.

7. The Learning and Skills Council is the non-departmental public body responsible for planning and funding education and training for everyone in England other than those in universities.

8. The research is being carried out on behalf of LLUK by NRDC, the London Strategic Unit for the Learning and Skills Workforce (LSU) and independent consultants SQW Limited.

9. Reliability coefficients for each scale were calculated and ranged from 0.70 to 0.84.

10. Alpha coefficients of reliability across subscales ranged from 0.63 to 0.88.

11. “Forecasting future skills needs in the development of literacy, language and numeracy skills provision in the post-16 sector” (Host Policy and Research, 2001); “New initial teacher education programmes for teachers of literacy, numeracy and ESOL 2002/3: an explanatory study” (NRDC, 2004b); “Qualifications of Staff in LSC-funded provision” (Host Policy and Research, 2004); “Recruitment and retention in the post-16 learning and skills sector” (York Consulting, 2005) ; “Skills for Life core curriculum training programmes 2001/03: characteristics of teacher participants” (NRDC, 2004a); “Survey of staffing in literacy, numeracy and language provision” (NIACE and TES, survey return date 10 March 2006).

12 The qualitative strand of the Teacher Study consists of a focus group and 63 in-depth interviews with teachers from the quantitative sample.