The SOUL (Soft Outcomes Universal Learning) Project
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Thanks from the whole SOUL partnership must go to The Big Lottery Fund (formerly the Community Fund) for funding the research from September 2003 to February 2006. Additionally, the SOUL Project has benefited greatly from the enthusiasm, commitment, help and support of a wide cross section of organisations in the voluntary and community sector in Norfolk. Over the period of research, the issue of measuring soft outcomes has continued to grow in importance. The consortium which responded to this issue by developing a research proposal, is therefore to be congratulated on its foresight and for the learning opportunities, effective advice and guidance it provided.

We thank all the people who participated in the research for providing us with marvellous case studies which graphically illustrated the impact achieved through informal learning. Participants readily agreed to be interviewed and even photographed and all were very open and honest in their responses.

The SOUL Record is a tribute to the determination of organisations and individuals who took part in this considerable learning process and it has a continuing value to the voluntary and community sector in providing evidence of their achievements. We would like to acknowledge the members of staff, whether paid or voluntary, of all the organisations involved in the research who have been unstintingly patient and supportive. The project team have both enjoyed and benefited from the experience of working with people whose efforts mean so much to the socially excluded and can often seem to be undervalued by society. We sincerely thank them for their outstanding contribution to the research. They richly deserve our respect for their dedication.

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FOREWORD

I am so pleased to be writing this foreword to the SOUL Record, the culmination of five years of innovation, enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism by all those involved.

The SOUL project was conceived in 2001 in response to the frequently heard message in voluntary and community organisations “we must find ways of measuring informal learning”. This coincided with the formation of the Learning and Skills Councils, and with changes to both the priorities of funders and to statutory sector agendas. Recognising in the sector that learners benefit from being able to chart their progress, we were motivated to develop a method to measure this progress in a way which would be ‘non-threatening’ to the people we work with across a great diversity of voluntary sector organisations.

An alliance was formed between the SOUL Consortium and The Research Centre, City College Norwich, to seek appropriate project funding. When the Community Fund, (now the Big Lottery) launched its new Research Fund at just the right time, we all felt that the SOUL initiative ‘was meant to be’! This has been borne out by how well the SOUL Record has been received and how useful it has proved to many voluntary and community organisations in Norfolk and the region.

The Research Centre team spent months working alongside participants in voluntary sector projects, giving them an essential insight into the benefits accruing to learners. It also highlighted ways to help organisations understand the value of their work, particularly with vulnerable people. This methodology formed the basis of the SOUL Record’s unique flexibility and relevance to a wide range of learners and providers.

The input of more than 40 Norfolk Voluntary Sector Organisations into the piloting and refinement of the final Record means that it really is a product of the Voluntary Sector for the Voluntary Sector.

Our aim now is to help make this available not just in Norfolk but across the Eastern Region and it, clearly, has potential for use nationwide.

A timely and successful Norfolk project we can all be proud of.

LYN TOOKE
Chair of the Steering Group
SOUL Consortium
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION
The SOUL (Soft Outcomes Universal Learning) Project, funded by The Big Lottery Fund, grew out of the needs of both funding organisations and voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups in relation to informal learning. This is learning which does not lead to a recognised qualification and takes place in a wide variety of settings. For the purposes of the project, the term includes personal development initiatives and situations where an individual might not even appreciate at the time that they are learning.

Whilst sector groups active in this area can point anecdotally to considerable gains by clients in terms of ‘soft’ outcomes, such as increased confidence and self esteem, there is a need for an effective system to provide evidence of the learning taking place. There is also concern that funding is being concentrated on ‘hard’ outcomes, such as formal or accredited learning opportunities and access to paid employment. Valuing ‘soft’ outcomes only as a pathway to such ‘hard’ outcomes is considered by many in the sector to miss the positive nature of informal learning.

Equally, funding organisations such as The Big Lottery Fund are increasingly recognising that ‘hard’ outcomes do not give a complete picture of a client or learner’s progress and therefore of a project’s success. There is, in consequence, a growing requirement that groups receiving funding should provide evidence of ‘soft’ outcomes to complement ‘hard’ data.

A group of voluntary organisations in Norfolk therefore took the initiative of devising a research project with The Research Centre, City College Norwich, to achieve a number of objectives, one of which was the development of a system to monitor and measure progression in ‘soft’ outcomes. The SOUL Project received funding from The Big Lottery Fund and commenced in September 2003, continuing to the end of February 2006.

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES
• To examine, analyse and document the informal learning process and the resultant soft outcomes in six identified voluntary organisations.
• To use this data to investigate the development of a model or a process for mapping progression and soft outcomes through the use of soft indicators.
• To pilot this model/process through 40 voluntary organisations supported by workshops.
• To produce a final report which will give an in-depth insight into informal learning, its processes and the resultant soft outcomes with the aim of enabling others to learn from the research.
• To make recommendations as to the viability of a soft outcomes process or model using soft indicators and its possible further development and dissemination.

RESEARCH METHODS
Qualitative and quantitative research methods employed included a literature review, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, observation sessions, workshops, site visits, focus groups and questionnaires involving staff and/or clients in the voluntary and community sector. Specifically there were three phases to the research.

The first phase of research involved a comprehensive literature review of soft outcomes and related themes within a European context and saw the researchers...
working closely with six local organisations in Norfolk, selected for geographic spread and diversity of client group, with the purpose of mapping the soft outcomes relevant in this sector. Over 80 were identified and enabled a framework for monitoring and measuring soft outcomes to be developed, called ‘The SOUL Record’. The phase concluded with dissemination events in both Norwich and King’s Lynn which were heavily subscribed and well received, with the dual purpose of inviting participation in the second phase of research.

‘The SOUL Record’ was trialled and developed during the second phase of research from October 2004 to September 2005 through 42 local organisations, providing a good spread in terms of both geographic location and client group. The organisations involved agreed to become action researchers in this phase, trialling the embryonic system and reporting back to the full-time researchers their experiences of using the system. Participating organisations were encouraged to trial the generic system and develop it in consultation with the researchers to reflect the specific needs and distinctive contribution of their own organisation. Organisations were given necessary support and provided the researchers with feedback via three workshops held over the course of the year (allowing for two complete action research cycles between workshops) and through site visits, observations, group interviews, e-mail and telephone contact. The overwhelming response from participant organisations concerning the nature of the model being developed was positive.

The third phase witnessed the write-up of the project, research into the long-term sustainability of The SOUL Record and the development of a business plan.

‘THE SOUL RECORD’

Drawing on the conclusions of the first phase of research, the original version of The SOUL Record was developed as a learner or client centred system based on positive affirmation. Through use of a numerical score it would provide a method of clearly demonstrating the degree of individual achievement in terms of soft outcomes, however, there were some limitations. For example, it would not be possible to directly compare one client with another, or one voluntary sector organisation with another. The system was designed to be as generic and flexible as possible to cater for the wide disparity in client groups. As a result individual organisations would need to select only those parts of the system relevant to an individual client and to be consistent in their use of those parts.

Questionnaires and worksheets for both adults and children were devised. The adult questionnaires) covered 21 positive statements mapping the three areas of soft outcomes identified by the research (i.e. attitude, personal/interpersonal and practical). The questionnaire entitled ‘Getting to know you’, provided a baseline measure, whilst the subsequent ‘Getting to know you better’, provided a follow-up measure. Clients were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with each statement (where ‘1’ was strongly disagree and ‘6’ was strongly agree). The questionnaires were also intended as diagnostic devices, demonstrating the areas in which efforts between client and the organisation in raising soft outcomes needed to be focussed. ‘Distance travelled’ could be demonstrated between the two questionnaires where a higher numerical score was reached on the second questionnaire.

A total of nine worksheets were formulated, designed to be used where there was an individual relationship between client and member of staff for the purposes of monitoring progress and setting goals. Staff members would select the sheets relevant to the individual client, and then use the same sheets at all review sessions. Each worksheet consisted of ten positive statements, which were ticked if an
individual felt it referred to them. Specific examples of the manner in which skills had improved in the relevant area would be recorded, with prompts given for consideration by the client. Goals were set for the next review and recorded. A points system valued all these areas, but was deliberately weighted in favour of goals achieved since the last review. The scoring system enabled progress to be monitored and measured.

The adult version of The SOUL Record was mirrored in the format for children. In this case, however, the system was directly linked to the areas of outcomes for young people identified in the 2004 Children Bill. Questionnaires featured 20 statements instead of the 21 statements in the adult version (i.e. to map four of the outcome areas, ‘Being healthy’, ‘Staying safe’, ‘Enjoying and achieving’ and ‘Making a positive contribution’) and the already simple and straightforward language used was further modified for young people. A total of eight worksheets, two for each area of outcome, were designed.

As organisations reported back their experience of using the system with their own client groups in the second phase of research, The SOUL Record was further developed. Participants found the SOUL Record framework an effective tool for measuring soft outcomes but felt that it should be more wide ranging to reflect the diversity of the sector.

As a result, the final SOUL Record incorporates the two earlier versions for adults and children which have been improved by firstly, changing the statements and secondly, incorporating an action plan which can be presented on the reverse side of each questionnaire or worksheet. Further developments include supplementing the generic ‘Getting to know you’ questionnaire with others on raising aspirations, parenting and community. The worksheet format was continued and developed to include new worksheets on confidence, self-esteem, raising aspirations, developing potential, parenting, skills for life, and economic well-being. The scoring system was changed to weight actual achievement by increasing the points awarded for each goal. The generic questionnaires for children and young people were developed to include soft outcomes for the ‘Economic well-being’ section of the Children’s Act 2004 which had been omitted in the original version.

Other additions include three observational sheets, combining the principles of questionnaires (i.e. scoring methods) and worksheets (i.e. goal setting and evidential requirements), intended to overcome the problem of measuring soft outcomes where workers are unable to work on a one-to-one basis with clients. These seek to measure progress where clients are either engaged in outdoor activities, cared for learners or learners in group situations. Workers observe and score the client in response to a series of ten positive statements. Progress is indicated by the change in scores between reviews.

A Spreadsheets Results Package (SRP) has been developed in order to record and calculate progression for individuals and/or groups of learners. This has proved to be particularly useful for producing graphs and other spreadsheets which evidence effective project management for funding bodies.

**CONCLUSIONS**
All research aims and objectives were met through the following research outcomes:
- Over 80 soft outcomes were mapped in six voluntary organisations giving an insight into the informal learning process documented through six case studies. Soft outcomes were grouped according to attitude, personal / interpersonal and practical skills.
Subsequently, the researchers were able to develop an initial model to measure soft outcome progression and pilot this in over 40 voluntary organisations. Feedback from participant organisations regarding the usability of this model was collected via three series of workshops to further develop the model.

The research demonstrated that although a generic measurement model is not effective, a generic framework that is learner centred, usable and supported by practitioner training provides a successful means to evidence achievements in terms of soft outcomes.

Additionally, the following concluding remarks apply:

- The worth of voluntary sector organisations delivering informal learning has been considerably undervalued because of the focus on hard outcomes such as accreditation and employment.
- The promotion of social inclusion is a valid generic description of the activities of VCS organisations participating in the research.
- Informal learning should be valued for the degree to which it promotes social inclusion.
- Individuals predominantly regard soft outcomes, such as personal and social skills, as the primary benefit of their informal learning and can perceive that accredited courses entail formality and pressure on the individual. For many informal learners, accessing an accredited course is not a relevant choice until their confidence and self esteem have been developed.
- The measurement of soft outcomes was regarded as important by all stakeholders, but training and support for practitioners is required if they are to utilise new techniques.
- Although the measurement system for soft outcomes that has been developed is client centred, the needs of other stakeholders, such as funding organisations, have also been taken into account. In order to recognise the resource constraints in the voluntary and community sector, the system is simple and straightforward to use and should therefore become an integral part of service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Informal learning should be valued as an important means of increasing social inclusion, rather than being valued simply as a stepping stone to a hard outcome such as getting a job or qualification. This needs to be clearly endorsed in national and regional policy making.
- More funding should be directed at supporting informal learning in the voluntary and community sector, because of the important role it plays in promoting social inclusion and in facilitating wider participation in accredited learning.
- A focus on outcomes and distance travelled is beneficial to service users, volunteers, practitioners, managers and funders. An outcomes focus helps service providers to identify need, target resources, inform action planning and demonstrate effectiveness. All community and voluntary sector organisations should therefore be encouraged to produce evidence of their outcomes.
- The SOUL Record has been shown to be a highly effective and acceptable means of measuring soft outcomes with the voluntary and community sector in Norfolk. Funding should be sought for it to be further disseminated within the sector, whether regionally and/or nationally.
- The research suggests that The SOUL Record could be of use within other sectors, such as education, health, local government and the private sector.
(e.g. for staff appraisal reviews). However further research is required to evaluate its transferability and adapt the framework for other sectors.

- The SOUL Record has demonstrated that a generic framework for measuring soft outcomes works successfully, providing that there is the flexibility to make small modifications to the statements to suit individual organisations and client groups. Such modifications need to be made or approved by the research team involved with its development to ensure that the integrity of the system is retained. Any future dissemination of The SOUL Record should take account of these issues.

- The study has also shown that practitioners require training and a small amount of ongoing support to make best use of The SOUL Record. Again, this should be incorporated in future dissemination plans.

- Voluntary and community organisations are generally willing to pay some amount for use of The SOUL Record, because of its clear value to them. However it is important that charges remain affordable for small organisations. Given that minor modifications may need to be made to The SOUL Record to ensure it is always relevant to the user and reflects contemporary policy, charging would provide the means to sustain such support.

- The SOUL Record has been successfully trialled as a paper based system which includes a software spreadsheet results package and should now be developed to become fully computerised. It is envisaged that a computer system would hold individual client records and allow organisations to select statements to use with a client from a pre-defined, drop down menu. This would allow tracking of individual client progress. The computer system would also enable organisations to collate groups of users to identify total distance travelled. Such a system could be produced as software on CD, or as an interactive, password protected website.
GLOSSARY

**Action research** aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework (Rapoport, 1970). It is empirical and responsive to evidence and is therefore an organic research tool. It enables practitioners to reflect, in a structured way, on their actions and the developments emanating from these actions.

**Distance travelled** means the progress or degree of achievement an individual client makes in terms of identified soft outcomes as a consequence of participating in a project. Measurement clearly requires assessment on at least two separate occasions to gauge improvement.

**Hard outcomes** are the clearly-definable and quantifiable results that show the progress a beneficiary has made towards achieving desirable outcomes by participating in a project. Typically they include obtaining a qualification, finding work, or securing a place on a course. ‘Hard outcomes’ are usually straightforward both to identify and measure (WEFO, 2003).

**Impact**
Whereas an outcome is a change resulting from project outputs, ‘impact’ refers to broader, longer-term change and relates to your overall aim. We call this ‘long-term change’. It can be difficult to assess long-term change in the lifetime of a short project (Cupitt and Ellis, 2003).

**Informal learning** is any learning that is uncertificated, flexible, client centred, short term, responsive to needs and organised and delivered in local settings and informal ways (Vorhaus, 2001).

**Inputs** are the resources you put into your project to deliver its outputs. ‘Inputs’ include time, money and premises (Cupitt and Ellis, 2003).

**Monitoring**
The systematic and regular collection and recording of information.

**Non accredited learning** represents learning which does not lead to a recognised qualification such as an NVQ (National Vocational Qualification).

**Outcomes** are all the changes and effects that happen as a result of your work. The term ‘outcomes’ is often confused with other terms used during project planning such as ‘inputs’, ‘outputs’ and ‘impact’ (Cupitt and Ellis, 2003).

**Outputs** are the services and facilities you deliver. ‘Outputs’ include training courses, support sessions and publications (Cupitt and Ellis, 2003).

**Progression** in the context of adult learning can mean several things: a personal progression, social progression, economic progression and educational progression. These frequently overlap (Vorhaus, 2001).

**Soft indicators**
There is interplay between indicators and outcomes, in that indicators are the means by which we can measure whether the outcomes have been achieved. The term ‘soft
indicators’ therefore can be used when referring to the achievements which may ‘indicate’ acquisition or progress towards an outcome (Dewson et. al. 2000a).

**Soft outcomes** are outcomes from training, support or guidance interventions, which unlike hard outcomes, such as qualifications and jobs, cannot be measured directly or tangibly. ‘Soft outcomes’ may include achievements relating to:
- Interpersonal skills (e.g. social skills and coping with authority)
- Organisational skills (e.g. personal organisation and the ability to order and prioritise)
- Analytical skills (e.g. the ability to exercise judgement, managing time or problem solving)
- Personal skills (e.g. insight, motivation, confidence, reliability and health awareness) (Dewson et. al. 2000a).

**Social exclusion** is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, unfair discrimination, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown (ODPM, 2004).

**Social inclusion**

“...is the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life. To achieve inclusion income and employment are necessary but not sufficient. An inclusive society is also characterised by a striving for reduced inequality, a balance between individuals’ rights and duties and increased social cohesion” (Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2002).

**VCS**
Voluntary and Community Sector.
1. INTRODUCTION

Monitoring systems for informal learning initiatives have traditionally focused on ‘hard’ or quantitative outcomes. These include the number of people gaining qualifications and the number progressing to further training or paid employment. Providing evidence of such outcomes has been relatively simple and straightforward.

A view widely held in the voluntary and community sector is that such ‘hard’ outcomes fail to adequately illustrate the progression achieved with clients in terms of ‘soft’ outcomes such as increased confidence and self esteem. The dilemma has been that providing evidence of such outcomes has proved particularly difficult, with no agreed approach amongst community and voluntary organisations.

There is also concern that voluntary and community organisations may be driven to implement more formalised provision of learning opportunities in order to access funding. The consequences are thought to be increased dropout rates from programmes and projects and therefore continued, and possibly permanent, social exclusion of the individuals involved.

Funding agencies such as The Big Lottery Fund are increasingly recognising that ‘hard’ outcomes do not give a complete picture of clients’ progress and therefore of the project’s or programme’s success. Applicants will therefore in the future be required to provide evidence of ‘soft’ outcomes to complement the ‘hard’ outcome data.

In response to the emerging debate, a number of Norfolk voluntary organisations approached The Research Centre at City College Norwich. They wished to understand more effectively how their work with clients nurtured soft outcome progression and how this could be demonstrated.

The intention was to inform their work and to access and justify the financial support they receive from funding bodies. They feared that if ‘soft’ outcomes were not formally recognised, voluntary and community sector organisations and their projects might lose some of their innovative and dynamic qualities.

From this liaison The SOUL project emerged which received funding from the Big Lottery Fund. The project commenced in September 2003 and continued to the end of February 2006.

The project was guided by a steering committee. This had representation from voluntary and community organisations including umbrella bodies. Other members were from organisations having an interest in the debate, such as the Learning and Skills Council, Norfolk. The lead partner was Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services who provided the project manager and the chair of the steering committee was the chief executive of a voluntary sector agency. The research team recruited for the project was based at The Research Centre, City College Norwich.

There were three phases to the project:

- **Phase one** commenced in September 2003 and involved data collection and ongoing analysis within six identified voluntary sector organisations. This provided a longitudinal study and analysis of the non-accredited learning process and resultant soft outcomes. Through this, the organisational needs of any soft outcome measure, model or process, together with the soft indicators which could be used were identified. The phase culminated with two seminars in September 2004 which disseminated learning to that date
and raised awareness of phase two of the project, in which the model developed in phase one was piloted.

• **Phase two** commenced in October 2004 and involved over 40 local organisations recruited from the voluntary sector in the implementation and testing of the model. Workshops were organised and support offered as requested by the organisations participating. Data gathering continued and included information gathered via workshops and individual support (e.g. enquiries from and visits to organisations). This data provided the means to evaluate the model and the sustained building of longitudinal case studies of informal learning, its outcomes and its relationship with the developed model. Analysis of the data was a feature of the phase, allowing adjustments to be made both to the piloted model and the data gathering methods.

• **Phase three** commenced in October 2005 and continued until the end of February 2006. In this phase the final analysis, report writing and further dissemination of the findings was undertaken. This included managing the growing interest in The SOUL Record, developing a business plan and securing funding for its future.

This report is structured to provide a discussion of anecdotal evidence gathered through contact with participant organisations and of the literature review, covering themes such as the issue of employment and accredited learning, informal and non-accredited learning, social inclusion and defining and measuring soft outcomes. It then moves on to an in-depth appraisal of the three phases of research, including the overall methodological approach and the outputs and outcomes of each. The report closes by presenting the conclusions and recommendations of the research project.

### 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The project aims and objectives are:

- To examine, analyse and document the informal learning process and the resultant soft outcomes in six identified voluntary organisations.
- To use this data to investigate the development of a model or a process for mapping progression and soft outcomes through the use of soft indicators.
- To pilot this model/process through 40 voluntary organisations supported by workshops.
- To produce a final report providing an in-depth insight into informal learning, its processes and the resultant soft outcomes with the aim of enabling others to learn from the research.
- To make recommendations as to the viability of a soft outcomes process or model using soft indicators and its possible further development and dissemination.

### 3. METHODOLOGY: DEVELOPING THE SOUL RECORD

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The research was undertaken using case study methodology. This approach enables the collection of qualitative and, where appropriate, quantitative data using a variety of research techniques. The aim of the research is to enhance understanding of the informal learning process and experiences of project participants.
Through this means, the researchers sought to portray a holistic view of the people, action and processes with enough of the context to promote understanding and offer learning opportunities to those interested in the soft outcomes of informal learning.

Paradox and ‘multiple realities’ (Stake, 1995) are to be expected in a case study approach. The object is to use methods which can handle the complexities of real life situations. This is helped by systematically eliciting from participants their particular perceptions and experiences. The researchers were thus enabled to develop the ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of the projects studied. These direct personal experiences are an efficient, comprehensive and satisfying way of creating understanding (Delamont, 1992).

Analysis of the data began from the premise of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1969, 1973). The researchers did not, therefore start with preconceived questions but used the analysis of the data throughout the life of the project to enable issues and patterns to emerge. These were in turn used to focus subsequent data collection.

Prior to data collection being undertaken an evaluation protocol was developed and agreed with the steering group and project participants. This addressed ethical issues including ownership of data, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. A shortened and simplified version (i.e. participant information sheet) was produced for distribution to individuals directly involved in the research.

The Research Centre, City College Norwich, operates under the strictest of democratic principles and is accountable to the ethical guidelines of Anglia Polytechnic University. Specific consent was obtained from all those interviewed. All data collected is being stored in accordance with the legal requirements relating to data protection. Participants were given the right to withdraw themselves and their data from the research at any time without penalty, although none did.

In order to ensure that the research was rigorous, the researchers gave detailed attention to triangulation. This is the method by which qualitative researchers seek to confirm issues and avoid the most obvious biases of their analysis.

The three approaches to triangulation were as follows:

- **Methodological triangulation**: this is the process of using multiple data sources as described above. Comparing and contrasting the data obtained helps the researchers to illuminate or minimise outside influences and examine what people do as opposed to what they say they do.

- **Data source triangulation**: through this process the researchers had the opportunity to see the effects of the same event or phenomena occurring at different times, in other places or with different people.

- **Investigator triangulation**: the two researchers involved with the initial phase of the project (Dr. Butcher and Dr. Marsden) regularly attended an observation together or jointly conducted a focus group. Similarly, one would act as an observer whilst the other recorded an interview. This enabled them to look at some of the issues and data together, to explore alternative meanings (Denzin, 1984). The researchers undertook a continuous process of discussing and reflecting on the data. Monthly meetings were held with the The Research Centre Manager and regular contact maintained with the Project Manager at NVS.
Reports and discussion took place at the bi-monthly meetings of the steering committee.

The linking of data collection and analysis resulted in the flexibility to alter the course of the research to focus on the most informative areas.

Analysis involved a search for meaning within the data, through identifying and aggregating patterns and themes (Stake, 1995). Issues were clustered by conceptual groupings to illuminate connections.

The researchers sought plausibility and to make intuitive sense of the data through ‘theoretical sensitivity’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The analysis also used the techniques of comparing and contrasting data and noting the relationship between variables, tactics which can sharpen understanding and assist in the generation of meaning.

3.2 FIRST PHASE OF RESEARCH
The researchers negotiated access individually with each of the six selected organisations, contact with which allowed relevant soft outcomes to be mapped. A deliberate attempt was made to ensure the widest range of client groups and the widest possible geographic spread within Norfolk (Section 4.2).

The attention given to selection of the six organisations was seen as enhancing the validity of findings. Whilst the researchers gained full access and co-operation, there was understandably some sensitivity to be addressed in the first instance. This meant a number of preliminary meetings and discussions, which included question and answer sessions with staff teams where appropriate.

It was resolved to collect data by a number of methods:

• An examination of the material culture
• By observations
• Through unstructured and semi-structured interviews with clients, employed staff and volunteers. Apart from the projects directly involved in the research, the opportunity was taken to interview relevant people in the community sector with whom the researchers came into contact
• By facilitating focus groups
• Through questionnaire surveys.

The technique of naturalistic observation involves gathering impressions through all relevant faculties. The naturalness of the observer’s role coupled with its non-direction makes it the least noticeably intrusive of all research techniques (Adler and Adler, 1998).

Over the first phase of research, both participant and non-participant observation techniques were used as appropriate to the situation. Observations were undertaken in situations where the researchers intentionally placed themselves. They also observed behaviour in situations occurring naturally around them whilst working on the research. Observations focussed on trends, patterns, styles of behaviour and other themes which emerged as the research progressed.

Wherever possible, the researchers participated in the activities being observed. Whilst there clearly remains the possibility of bias, there is little doubt that this was minimised in comparison with non-participant techniques. The researchers did not therefore record field notes at the time of the observation, but wrote these up as soon
as possible after the event. Learners themselves strongly supported participant techniques and would clearly have found it intrusive to have an observer outside the process visibly making notes.

Interviews gave the research two perspectives. A medium term longitudinal aspect arose from the same individuals recording their perceptions through time. A cross sectional aspect was gained from many individuals recording their perceptions on the same issue in an attempt to chart the dynamic social context of the project. Interviews also gave participants the opportunity to provide insight into events that had been observed by the researchers. Interviews were recorded wherever possible, with a transcript being provided to the interviewee.

Focus groups gave the opportunity for groups of learners to reflect on their experiences and provide feedback to the researchers on emerging themes and trends. Learners found this a particularly positive process and rated highly the opportunity to express their views.

Questionnaires gave the opportunity to gather data from larger groups of learners. It also provided the researchers with an opportunity to gain the views of clients on different styles of questionnaires.

3.3 SECOND PHASE OF RESEARCH

The researchers negotiated with individual organisations for inclusion in the second phase of research with the aim of piloting the soft outcomes mapped and the associated measurement ‘tool’ developed in the first phase. An original target of 40 organisations was exceeded because of the enthusiasm for participation. A deliberate attempt was again made to ensure the widest possible spread in terms of both geography and client groups (Section 4.3). Given the number of organisations involved, a considerably wider selection of client groups were possible than in comparison with the first phase.

The principles of the methodology applied in the first phase of research were carried forward to the second phase. This was structured so as to give two complete action research cycles explained below.

Action research consists of a cyclic or spiral process which follows action with reflection. Methods, data and interpretation are refined in the light of that reflection and lead in turn to renewed action (Dick, 1999).

The two action research cycles were incorporated in the second phase of SOUL research through three sets of workshops. The first set, commenced shortly after the dissemination events in September 2004. This set was concerned with the underpinning of knowledge necessary to measure soft outcomes, the practical implementation of The SOUL Record and planning for the first action research cycle. The degree to which organisations planned to implement the model and the part they would use was a matter of discussion and agreement with the researchers.

Following the first set of workshops, the researchers were available for consultations, discussions on progress and the provision of support as required by participants. Emphasis was given to the fact that those implementing the model were themselves researchers. This builds on the usual features of action research in that it is participative and that change is usually easier to achieve when those affected by change are involved in the process (Dick, 1999). Individuals were therefore encouraged throughout the year to bring forward suggestions for amendment and
development to The SOUL Record. All such contacts were recorded and provided
data for analysis.

The second set of workshops followed six months after the first. Participants were
encouraged to reflect on their experience in implementing The SOUL Record. They
worked in co-operation with colleagues from other organisations in designing
amendments to the system and planned for the second action research cycle.

Between the second and third set of workshops, further data collection took place via
site visits, telephone and e-mail contact and the collection of sheets that
organisations were using. Continued support was provided to all participants.

The third set of workshops followed six months after the second. Participants were
again encouraged to reflect on their experience and work on developing The SOUL
Record. Their views on the effectiveness of the model and its wider relevance to the
voluntary and community sector were clarified in order to aid the final analysis and
production of the project report.

3.4 THIRD PHASE OF RESEARCH
The third phase of research involved offering sustained support to organisations
continuing to use The SOUL Record, producing the final report, formulating a
business plan in order to further disseminate The SOUL Record beyond Norfolk and
the project participant organisations and working collaboratively with the Project
Manager to organise and deliver the final dissemination conference.

4. VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS
PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH

4.1 INTRODUCTION
The organisations approached for each phase of research were purposively selected,
based on the researchers’ judgement and the guidance of the steering committee as
to typicality of interest. This was done to satisfy the particular needs of the project
(Robson, 1993) and to enhance the validity of any conclusions.

All the organisations in both phases of research offered informal learning
opportunities for their clients. Some accomplished this on discrete occasions such as
courses or workshops, whilst others were involved with longer term development and
support activities. One first phase organisation would not regard itself as participating
in learning and yet the development of its activities and the social impact achieved
pointed to that conclusion.

4.2 FIRST PHASE ORGANISATIONS
The six organisations for the initial phase of research provided an interesting and
relevant spread geographically and in terms of client groups. These included
Benjamin Foundation, BREAK, Creative Arts East, College in the Community,
Norwich Community Workshop and North Lynn Discovery Project. Details about each
organisation can be found in Appendix 1. They covered the main urban areas in
Norfolk and a rural location in the centre of the county. The organisations provided
services to young people and adults and some clients had a range of physical and
mental health needs. All were therefore subject to potential social exclusion,
including the issue of rural isolation.
4.3 SECOND PHASE ORGANISATIONS
The 42 organisations which participated throughout the second phase of research were similarly geographically dispersed to those in the first phase. They provided an even greater spread of client groups than was possible in the first phase. This is demonstrated by Tables 1 and 2. It should be noted that other organisations initially also took part in the research but were unable to continue to participate and have not been included in Tables 1 or 2. Unfortunately this meant that representation for the ‘unemployed’ client group was subsequently lost.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children (up to 13)</th>
<th>Young people (14 -18)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ormiston Children &amp; Families Trust</td>
<td>The Benjamin Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk YMCA Schools Team</td>
<td>North Lynn Discovery Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwich &amp; District Carers’ Forum</td>
<td>Broadland Council Training Services/Prince’s Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Carers’ Schools Project</td>
<td>The NR5 Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body, Mind and Spirit</td>
<td>Creative Arts East</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norfolk Education, Industry and Commerce Group (NEICG)</td>
<td>Earlam Youth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Norfolk ACRO (clients aged 17-21)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents/Families</td>
<td>Mental Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sure Start Learning Centre</td>
<td>Norwich Community Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>NACRO/Families at Bowthorpe</td>
<td>One to One Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Families’ House</td>
<td>West Norfolk MIND (A Piece of Mind Project)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Matters</td>
<td>Great Yarmouth and Waveney MIND</td>
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<tr>
<td>FWA Well Family Service</td>
<td>OMNIA</td>
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<td>Home-Start</td>
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<td>Embrace Young Mums</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Connections</td>
<td>Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (NMAS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim Support Norfolk</td>
<td>Community Music East (CME)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Yarmouth Community Trust</td>
<td>Bizfizz</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Norwich Partnership</td>
<td>Norfolk Eating Disorders Association</td>
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<td>Women</td>
<td>Disabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olive Tree Project (2 Projects)</td>
<td>Thalia Theatre Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Magdalene Group</td>
<td>INDIGO Dyslexia Services</td>
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<td>Learning difficulties</td>
<td>Elderly</td>
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<tr>
<td>BUILD</td>
<td>Age Concern Norwich (3 Projects)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forward and Futures</td>
<td>Pabulum</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Garden Science Trust</td>
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<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minority Ethnic Group Apprenticeship</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participating organisations in the second phase of research, by client group.
Table 2: Participating organisations in the second phase of research, by geographic spread.

Where possible, sources of further information about the second phase organisations has been provided in Appendix 1.

It should also be noted that other organisations were also interested in The SOUL Record but the majority of enquiries of this nature were received after the second phase when training could not be offered. In order to ensure that this interest was sustained for any future dissemination of The SOUL Record, presentations and/or information was provided to a number of organisations, such as Acorn Grants and Great Yarmouth Borough Council.

5. RESEARCH PHASE ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

5.1 INTRODUCTION
An extensive literature review was one of the first stages of the project to be completed, although this was supplemented throughout the course of the research as more recent relevant material was published.

One of the purposes of the literature review was to inform, to some extent, the nature of the research, but also to provide a context within which any issues identified during the action research cycles could be discussed. Therefore, where appropriate, anecdotal evidence gathered through discussions with participant organisations is also cited where it supports significant issues highlighted in the literature.

A considerable body of material on informal learning, soft outcomes and distance travelled was accessed, although no overall consensus on the issues was found. The debate on this subject has been described as increasingly ‘articulate’ by one commentator, who points out:
“At its simplest the debate concerns the need to identify more coherent and sophisticated measures of organisational effectiveness than the crude use of hard, quantitative measurements regardless sometimes of relevance or validity of the evidence…” (Kent, 2002, p.5).

There is, nevertheless, a continuing and fundamental confusion in the debate about how informal learning is to be valued. ‘Lip service’ is paid to the concept of lifelong learning and the manner in which learning can promote social inclusion. The main thrust, however, is towards achieving hard outcomes, such as gaining employment or a formal qualification. That is certainly where public money is targeted. Crucially for The SOUL Project, this lack of clarity and consistency also applies to the measurement and monitoring of soft outcomes. There are a number of systems and approaches available, but none are dominant.

The extent to which any soft outcomes achieved are attributable to the work of a particular organisation is vital. Those systems currently available which depend on a general quality of life questionnaire have a difficulty in establishing such a link. Use of these measures may provide a diagnosis of relevant issues to be addressed, but evidence is necessary of the interventions which have produced any change detected by the measurement model.

Defining ‘informal learning’ is important. This is arguably much wider than a course which does not lead to a recognised qualification. There might be an extension to the daily experiences through which people gain ‘knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights’ (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974, p.8).

Such a wide definition of ‘informal learning’ was not appropriate for The SOUL Project. The term is however, taken here to include the knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights gained within the community, which are directly attributable to the activities of the sector. Those voluntary and community sector organisations committed to the personal development of clients, for example, are also facilitating learning in an informal manner and were included within the SOUL research. Clients in such situations may not even appreciate at the time that they are learning, until an opportunity occurs to reflect on their experience.

The worth, value and overall quality of an accredited course can be judged through the acquisition of a qualification. This does not apply to informal learning, although the necessity of assessing its worth has been recognised for some years. In 1999 the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), now the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), initiated a series of workshops and conferences examining the issue of informal learning, in preparation for the advent of the Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), who are responsible for planning and funding education and training for those aged 16+ in England. These workshops were undertaken by NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning and the Workers Education Association. The resulting report (McGivney, 1999) emphasises the importance of finding means other than accreditation for measuring value in informal education.

Some of the questions which might need to be asked in determining this value were identified by Vorhaus (2001) as:

- How do we measure (as distinct from verify) non-accredited learning?
- How do we take account of soft outcomes?
- How do we devise benchmarks to allow for reliable comparison between providers?
• How do learners perceive attempts to record and validate what they are doing?

With one exception, this diagnosis of the relevant issues will be widely shared in the VCS. Any suggestion, however, that comparisons need to be made between providers will be strongly resisted by most sector organisations who point to the diversity of the services provided and the wide variation in client groups. During The SOUL research, for example, client groups ranged from those unable to communicate in words to professional people addressing rural isolation (e.g. Appendix 1).

There is a strong concern in the sector that if soft outcomes are not formally recognised for their own sake, organisations and projects may lose some of their innovative and dynamic qualities. This would seem particularly to be the case where they are constrained and incorporated into a more formalised education system and accreditation process in order to access funding. There is a clear perception in the sector that this is precisely the situation they face.

Such views were consistently expressed throughout the first phase of research by clients and organisations. The implication is simply that any rigid formalisation of informal learning risks reducing, rather than increasing, participation in education.

As a recent European report concluded:

“In general, it seems that demotivated learners everywhere in Europe are not only learning detached but are also inclined to be socially detached, that is, they are unlikely to participate actively in the public sphere, whether this be on the labour market or in community life. Further, incentives for learning which appear promising for the majority of the population do not seem to attract them. Key features are indecision, poor self confidence and negative previous experiences with learning.”

(CEDEFOP, 2004, p.17)

A lack of an overall consensus on the issues extends to the notion of ‘soft’ outcomes. There is some agreement that these are the intangible changes and effects that happen as a result of an organisation’s work with an individual. Confidence and self esteem are just two of many examples. It is accepted by some that such ‘soft’ outcomes do not result directly in a ‘hard’ outcome.

Where a divergence of views begins, is that for many contributors to the debate, soft outcomes and informal learning have a value solely as part of a pathway into accredited training and employment. These constitute ‘hard’ outcomes but the issue is whether they alone indicate worth and value. The assumption that they do is supported by official funding being targeted at projects having such a pathway.

The issue was brought into sharper focus during 2004 by a LSC consultation paper (LSC, 2004a), Investing in Skills. This deals with reform of the funding and planning arrangements for ‘first steps’ courses (e.g. those encouraging people to return to learning) and personal and community development learning for adults.

‘First steps’ learning has a clear remit of encouraging individuals to progress to more formal or accredited learning. Adult and community learning (ACL) is recognised as having a social and personal benefit. The variable nature of current provision is identified in the paper; it is not seen as planned in response to local needs or national priorities and is funded in a variety of ways.
Whilst the positive benefits of ACL are stated in the document, the discussion over funding seems to question their importance. This particularly applies to the indication that participants should contribute significantly towards the cost of their learning. The document makes no promise that even current funding will be affordable in the future. In other words, the £0.2bn devoted to ACL within the overall LSC budget (NIACE, 2004a) is potentially at risk.

As NIACE point out in their response to the consultation paper:

“NIACE does not believe that publicly-subsidised opportunities for personal and community development should be confined to those with the deepest pockets.” (NIACE, 2004a, p.4)

The response by NIACE gives strong support to the argument that greatest public value would be derived from concentrating public subsidy towards potentially socially excluded groups.

More recently, feedback received by the LSC from respondents to the consultation paper (LSC, 2004a) has been published (LSC, 2005a). This demonstrated that nearly 68% agreed with how the LSC were proposing to fund non-accredited first steps provision (LSC, 2005a, p. 5) but like NIACE (2004a), respondents to the consultation raised various concerns over the proposed funding approach for personal and community development which included a loss of learners and provision and increased costs to learners.

5.2 THE ISSUE OF EMPLOYMENT AND ACCREDITED TRAINING

The view that value is provided by routes into employment and accredited training is pervasive and often entrenched in the definition of terms. Dewson et al. (2000a, p.2), for example, define soft outcomes in part as, ‘... intermediate (usually measuring progress towards hard outcomes such as employment and qualifications)’.

The same authors see the term ‘distance travelled’ as referring to ‘the progress that a beneficiary makes towards greater employability’ (Dewson et al. 2000a, p.3).

This assumption is widely shared. The Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO, 2003, p. 5), for example, sees soft outcomes as including ‘practical work-focussed skills, such as better appreciation of the importance of timekeeping in the workplace’. A hard outcome is described as ‘a clearly definable and measurable outcome, e.g. getting a job or getting a place on a training course’ (WEFO, 2003, p.11).

5.3 SOCIAL INCLUSION AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOCUS

Such views are not consistent with other areas of official policy, which provide a confusing paradox. Central government promotion of lifelong learning, for example, makes it plain that the benefits are much wider than such a narrow focus:

“Learning does not just mean studying for qualifications or to improve job opportunities. It can cover a whole range of mind expanding and physical opportunities” (DfES, 2004a).

This is particularly directed at older people who are told that learning can improve their confidence and self esteem, which are core soft outcomes. The lack of funding for such activity, however, seems to undermine this.
The paradox was further illustrated when the researchers attended a regional learning conference in Newmarket on 1st December 2004. A senior NIACE officer, in speaking about the role of learning, said, ‘It’s about life; it’s about living’, thus supporting the relevance of social inclusion as an objective. The report presented to delegates at the conference, however, said:

“Although non-accredited learning plays a key role in engaging new learners, the emphasis at present is on achievement of qualifications – funding for non-accredited provision is not a priority for the Learning and Skills Council.” (NIACE, 2004b, p.43).

In other words, voluntary and community sector organisations seeking funding from this source are being constrained to take an accredited route, whatever the value of the outcomes they are achieving informally and despite what the needs of the learners might be.

To narrowly define the relevance of soft outcomes gained through informal learning in terms of a demonstrable link to accredited training or employment is to risk devaluing the activities of many organisations. The connection of their work with such hard outcomes is often tenuous or irrelevant because of the needs of the client group. The elderly, such as the 91 year old learner participating in The SOUL Project research (Section 6.3.5) is one example. There are equally those with mental health issues. Even for the young mothers involved in one of the focus groups, a return to employment might be some years in the future. In these cases, measuring only hard outcomes is neither useful nor demonstrable of an individual’s progress.

The literature does recognise, in part, that the wider issue of social inclusion is relevant to the debate. Whilst there is some agreement that the term implies more than poverty there is a variation over the importance of education and learning in feeding into social inclusion. The government view (ODPM, 2004) is nevertheless ample illustration that unemployment is only one of a number of linked problems leading to social exclusion. Poor skills, low incomes, unfair discrimination, poor housing, high crime, poor health and family breakdown are also important.

Learning is implied in reference to skills, but the definition stops short of accepting that poor education is in itself an indicator of social exclusion, or at least a contributor to others. Ravenhill (2000), however, defines social inclusion as including the ability to participate in society and to access housing, finances, services, education and employment.

The European Community view makes the connection clear. Social exclusion has many facets, which include:

“...long term dependence on low/inadequate income, long-term unemployment, low paid and/or low quality employment or absence of employment record, low level of education and training and illiteracy, growing up in a vulnerable family, disability and poor health, living in an area of multiple disadvantage, rough sleeping and homelessness, immigration, ethnicity, racism and discrimination.” (European Commission, 2004).

The complexity of factors feeding into social exclusion is certainly also recognised in the East of England where there exists a number of measures to overcome this:
"The major driver of social exclusion is low income but ill health, poor skills, unemployment, poor housing, discrimination and other factors can all contribute ... There are a number of strategic objectives, policies and actions that have been agreed regionally, which are central to supporting local action and providing a framework for tackling social exclusion" (EEDA, 2004, pp. 56 & 58).

One of the priorities EEDA has is to support ‘those who are disadvantaged to achieve their potential’ and an action to achieve this involves promoting ‘learning opportunities that support individuals to improve their skills for life and employability’ (EEDA, 2004, p. 58).

However, the concentration of funding on formal learning and routes into employment, which is often the outcome, may not be what all learners want and excludes many potentially disadvantaged groups in the community. Research has recognised this for a number of years. A 1995 study demonstrated empirically the educative potential of VCS organisations. Given greater importance than organisational objectives was:

"...quite simply growth in confidence, and its ramifications and secondary effects of self discovery, freedom in forging relationships and undertaking tasks, belief in oneself and in one's potential as a human being and an agent." (Elsden et. al., 1995, p.47).

Many organisations feel that such positive outcomes result from the responsiveness and innovation which can be a feature of informal learning geared to the needs of clients. The fear is that accreditation for the sole purpose of attracting funding risks the loss of such valuable benefits. When funding does not match a stated focus on social inclusion, then VCS organisations are likely to conclude that their work is undervalued.

There is no lack of positive statements throughout Europe which clearly point to the value of promoting social inclusion and recognise the contribution which can be made by VCS organisations (European Commission, 2004). In England, for example, the Home Office commented of the compact between the government and the voluntary and community sector that:

"Voluntary and community organisations make a major and literally incalculable contribution to the development of society and to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the nation. They act as pathfinders for the involvement of users in the design and delivery of services and often act as advocates for those who otherwise have no voice. In doing so they promote both equality and diversity. They help to alleviate poverty, improve the quality of life and involve the socially excluded." (Home Office, 1998)

Within European policy social inclusion is an integral feature of the debate on validating informal learning. Such services are to be valued equally and independently from routes into employment and formal education:

"[They] support social integration, employability and the development and use of human resources in civic, social and economic contexts. They also meet the specific needs of those individuals who seek integration or re-integration into education and training, the labour market and society." (Council of the European Union, 2004, p.5)
Indeed, from a European perspective, a central challenge in addressing social exclusion is to:

“expand lifelong learning opportunities especially for groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion and develop integrated efforts to address educational disadvantage and reduce early school leaving.” (European Community, 2004).

In the UK, the importance of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) as a funder of learning opportunities ensured their draft strategy (LSC, 2004b) for working with the voluntary and community sector was to be welcomed, at least in its intent. The document pointed out that there have been contractual arrangements with the sector to deliver learning provision. They add that ‘some learning leads to qualifications; some does not’ (LSC, 2004b, p.7).

No proportion of funding between accredited and informal learning was given, but the document did refer to a perception in the sector that the funding relationship is ‘disproportionately focused on the LSC’s short-term and more peripheral budgets’ (LSC, 2004b, p.7). A key aim of the draft strategy was therefore:

“…to open up access to LSC mainstream funding blocks for more and different VCS organisations, including those which have not historically been supported by the LSC or its predecessors” (LSC, 2004b, p.7).

Despite this, the later consultation paper on funding and planning (LSC, 2004a) shows a marked lack of certainty over the future funding of informal learning.

The value of soft outcomes is being recognised by the Learning and Skills Council, Norfolk. It recently published the fifth round of the European Social Fund (ESF) co-financing prospectus, calling for projects to bid for finances to support certain key priorities (LSC, 2005b). One relevant measure (3.1e) is to fund ‘first-rung learning’ and providers who are awarded funding must employ methods to measure and record the achievement of soft outcomes. This is the first time that the LSC have awarded such recognition to the need to actively demonstrate soft outcomes and is a welcome development as regards informal learning. It should be noted, however, that this measure is aimed at encouraging people onto accredited learning programmes and therefore is valuing soft outcomes purely as a route into accredited learning, an issue which is raised in Section 5.1. Nevertheless, measure ‘3.1e’ does represent a step in the right direction and it is encouraging that the Learning and Skills Council Norfolk at the ESF launch event in October 2005 publicly endorsed the use of The SOUL Record as a way of evidencing progression regarding this measure.

The promotion of social inclusion is certainly a useful summary of the activities of many community and voluntary sector organisations. Community and voluntary sector organisations participating in the research overwhelmingly reject the hard outcomes of qualifications, places on accredited courses or jobs as the relevant benchmark by which to judge their achievements. In marked contrast, the sector clearly supports the degree to which social inclusion is promoted as the relevant yardstick. At the two SOUL dissemination events in September 2004, for example, 99% of respondents agreed at some level with this contention.

Even if informal learning is appropriately valued however, there remains the difficulty of providing evidence of impact. Organisations can readily provide compelling anecdotal evidence of soft outcomes which promote social inclusion. The difficulty is
in the increasing requirement from the LSC and other funding bodies to evidence their achievements. For many organisations this is easier said than done. Traditional quantitative evidence is simple enough to provide, demonstrating the numbers of service users, the numbers who successfully complete accredited courses, or those who go on to jobs or further courses, but as noted above, these measures are not indicative of all progress achieved by learners.

5.4 SOFT OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

5.4.1 INTRODUCTION

There is a growing literature on the issue of measuring soft outcomes, although research has concentrated on schemes offering routes into formal learning or employment. In December 2003, for example, the LSC published a consultation paper (LSC, 2003), which recognised the contribution of non-accredited learning. The paper stated that there was a need to:

"define targets and performance measures in a way that recognises learning which does not lead to an accredited qualification, yet demonstrates learners' achievements" (LSC, 2003, p.20).

The aim was to encourage the introduction of a method of recognising these achievements without deterring people from accessing learning programmes. It is accepted that any method should not be burdensome to implement but enable learners to clarify their learning goals, have feedback on their progress and how they can improve that performance, and enable them to receive recognition for their learning.

The LSC intention was to introduce a five-staged process linked to the Common Inspection Framework (ALI & Ofsted, 2001), which would be trialled around the country (LSC, 2002). The five elements of what is now the accepted RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement in non-accredited learning) process are:

- Clearly stated learning aims for all programmes
- Initial assessment to establish learners’ starting points
- Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives
- Recording of learners’ progress and achievements during the programme

5.4.2 SOFT OUTCOMES AND EMPLOYMENT

One of the early reports to concentrate on the importance of soft outcomes measurement was produced by ECOTEC (1998). The report explored current practice and issues around qualitative outcomes achieved on innovative training and employment projects.

Over two hundred employment projects were examined during 1995-97 and the report details the evidence of soft outcomes that each of the projects sought to obtain. The recording of such information was intended to demonstrate to employers, and the individual, evidence of transferable skills and abilities. Once this information was evidenced this would enable staff to be more effective in progressing beneficiaries on to higher levels of training.

The information would prove valuable to funding bodies because it would demonstrate the value of interventions and the progress made by the project.
Recording soft indicators and developing soft skills was considered necessary to meet the needs of employers who were more concerned about skill development to create effective employees rather than individuals being trained to pass interviews. It was argued that employers were concerned with levels of motivation, flexibility, reliability, and reassurance of a stable background. Measuring soft outcomes would provide them with reassurance that they were employing the right people.

The ECOTEC report groups soft outcomes under three headings: attitudinal, life skills, and transferable skills. Attitudinal skills includes self-esteem, positive regard for others, taking responsibility for own lives, confidence, motivation, attitude, self-awareness, reduced depression/anxiety and aspirations. Life skills outcomes comprise social skills, attendance, time-keeping, personal presentation, personal hygiene and relevant conversation. Transferable skills include such factors as working in groups/teams, problem-solving, questioning, evaluating, initiative, language skills and communication. The report provides six case studies from a variety of ‘into-work’ initiatives which essentially provides a thumb nail sketch of those analytical tools deployed by the various projects.

A variety of measures for tracking soft outcomes are cited including action planning, regular beneficiary assessments or reviews, psychological testing, identification and recording of key skills, feedback from agencies and individuals, discussions and questionnaires. In developing soft indicators the projects emphasised the importance of relating outcomes to key and transferable skills. Such indicators should be diagnostic and transferable amongst all relevant agencies. These projects should also consider incorporating these indicators within accredited training-education-employment courses. Whilst the report mentions the dangers of over-emphasising accreditation to the detriment of core objectives, the overall thrust is to encourage service providers towards accreditation.

The employment initiative was funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and set the standard for successive analysis about the measurement of soft outcomes and distance travelled. The report emphasises the need for individualised measurement and an effective evaluation of distance travelled, starting from a baseline. There needs to be flexibility to accommodate the various agencies involved with individuals over time and training for assessors, including sensitivity when dealing with issues of personal hygiene and appearance. Beneficiaries should be involved in developing indicators, which should be relevant to the aims and objectives of the activities. Once developed the measurement systems should be incorporated within activities and monitoring at all stages and an account taken of individuals leaving and rejoining training. In considering measurement systems special attention should be paid to the requirements of employers (ECOTEC, 1998).

Two years after the publication of the ECOTEC study, the two-part seminal report by Dewson et. al. (2000a, 2000b) was produced for the DfEE and the Institute for Employment Studies. The research surveyed 300 ESF projects to establish what was happening on the ground and to develop a generic model for measuring increases in employability or ‘distance travelled’ for ESF Objective 3 projects (i.e. those which are based on issues such as tackling long-term unemployment, improvements in lifelong learning and promoting equal opportunities).

The report identifies weaknesses in existing practice of monitoring soft outcomes. The researchers discovered that there was poor integration with other sources of information, there were related problems with the attribution of information, subjectivity, language and the use of different baselines to record progress (Dewson et. al., 2000a). The three categories of soft outcome outlined by the ECOTEC report
are expanded and redefined to include key work skills, attitudinal skills, personal and practical skills, each offering a number of indicator examples (Dewson et. al., 2000a).

Analysis by the researchers suggests that a generic model for soft outcomes is not achievable:

“… it would seem that there are too many different client groups to devise one particular soft indicator or model to fit all projects…Just as it is impossible to develop one model to measure soft outcomes, so too is the development of national indicators unattainable” (Dewson et al., 2000b, p.5).

If this conclusion is valid, it does mean that Vorhaus’ (2001) requirement for comparative benchmarks is unable to be satisfied (Section 5.1). The SOUL research deliberately sought a wide variety of client groups to examine this aspect of the debate (Section 4.1).

There are methods of collecting, measuring and recording soft outcomes, however, that can be applied to individual projects. Dewson et al. (2000a) lists various collection methods including the use of self-completion questionnaires, tests, portfolios, reviews and recorded observations. Soft outcomes could be measured by scales of feeling or agreement with statements (e.g. scale between agree strongly – disagree strongly), comparisons with previous benchmark data, reports or questionnaires, qualifications attained and assessor’s views (Dewson et. al., 2000a).

In the rush to record and monitor outcomes the researchers advise caution noting that for service users:

“The nature of the help they receive is usually holistic, integrated and geared to the individual needs of clients. A “one-model-fits-all” system to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled runs counter to this type of intervention” (Dewson et. al., 2000a, p.24).

The second part of the Dewson et. al. report, (2000b), emphasises the necessity for monitoring soft outcomes and distance travelled for all project evaluations. Rather than offering a generic model the authors offer general guidelines on the measurement and presentation of soft outcomes. The authors’ emphasis concentrates on the development and recognition of soft skills as part of the beneficiaries’ long term integration into the labour market (Dewson et. al., 2000b).

The starting point of any measurement of soft outcomes is seen as establishing a baseline from which individual progress can be measured. A variety of methods of collecting and recording information are suggested including individual action planning and goal setting, trainer/client reviews, personal journals, reflection, questionnaires, recorded observations, portfolio evidence and testing (Dewson et. al., 2000b).

The assessment process should serve the interests of the client and be geared towards their level of ability and comprehension. Whatever assessment method is devised the measurement should be systematic and numerical through scoring systems and scales. Within this system inferences may be drawn in order to better understand the client’s external situation to determine which factors/changes are attributable to the project and which are not (Dewson et. al., 2000b).
Measurements should be taken at least at the beginning and end of the project, but at regular intervals throughout the project would be best practice. The assessments can be undertaken by the client, employer, project staff, or by peer assessment and used to present evidence that aims and objectives of projects are being achieved.

The information should be able to influence future project evaluation and dissemination strategies, and provide useful feedback to clients and project workers (Dewson, et. al., 2000b). The report goes on to provide useful guidelines in developing tools such as questionnaires and in particular advice on the sort of tests that they need to meet to be effective. Both reports provide an ideal starting point for any serious consideration of soft outcomes as stepping stones leading to employment.

Lloyd and O’Sullivan (2003) build upon the foundation laid by Dewson et al. (2000a, 2000b). In preparing a guidance document for ESF projects the authors conducted a large postal survey of existing ESF supported projects receiving almost 600 responses and undertook case study visits and interviews with ten further projects. The aim was to examine current practice, three years after Dewson et al.’s reports and devise a generic model/s for measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled that might be appropriate for all ESF supported projects.

The survey and observations revealed common elements in measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled including target indicators, scoring systems, baseline and subsequent interviews, a system for reporting results and staff training to use the system. The different approaches to monitoring emphasised its value as an ‘initial diagnostic tool and on-going motivational support’ (Lloyd and O’Sullivan, 2003, p.19). Such systems evolved over time and were subject to constant refinement. Where soft outcomes were not being measured the authors found a great deal of interest in doing so by projects provided a suitable approach was available.

The report is particularly valuable in producing a list of exemplar indicators of soft outcomes demonstrating reliability, motivation/attitude, communication, presentation, work and achievements. They also tackle issues surrounding the operational context of any system of measurement, the value of judgemental and evidence based approaches and staff resources to run a successful monitoring system.

Lloyd and O’Sullivan’s work resulted in the publication of the seminal guide by the Welsh Assembly Office (WEFO, 2003). This was written specifically for ESF projects on employability but is applicable to a wider audience. Soft outcomes are defined as ‘those outcomes that represent intermediary stages on the way to achieving a hard outcome’ (WEFO, 2003, p.5).

The guide develops the themes raised by the earlier report and makes some important provisos. The tools are to be viewed as an accompaniment, rather than a replacement for, the project worker’s professional judgement. Measuring soft outcomes is not an exact science and any scoring system can only reflect indications of movement towards achieving soft outcomes rather than producing an exact measurement. The authors concede that there may be times when it is not appropriate to measure soft outcomes, although it appears increasingly unlikely that funders will adopt a similar stance.

The guide identifies five stages in developing monitoring systems:

- Understanding what the process of developing a soft outcomes monitoring system consists of, how much effort it will require and planning accordingly
- Deciding what to monitor and which indicators to use
Deciding how to measure
Establishing baselines
Reviewing progress to assess distance travelled (WEFO, 2003, p.11).

The guide continues to demonstrate in general terms how soft outcomes should be reported to funders. Perhaps the most useful contribution to knowledge about measuring soft outcomes is included in a fifty page section on projects with many helpful examples of existing practice to measure soft outcomes and distance travelled (WEFO, 2003, p.31). All the projects are devoted to issues of employability, which raises the question as to whether such indicators are transferable to learning situations where the outcome is related to educational achievement and progression, or learning situations that result neither in progression to accredited courses nor an employment outcome.

5.4.3 SOFT OUTCOMES AND NON-ACCREDITED LEARNING

The impetus for measuring soft outcomes in non-accredited learning has come from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) and the Learning Skills Development Agency (LSDA), in cooperation with the LSC. The LSC position paper (LSC, 2002) draws on a seminal text by Greenwood et al. (2001).

The position paper sets out to develop a national approach to recognising achievement in non-accredited learning. The LSC’s stated intentions are to drive up standards to improve the learning experience and outcomes, to make any national system of recording outcomes sufficiently flexible to have relevance to informal learning undertaken in a community based or voluntary activity. In addition the LSC state that they wish to:

“… Ensure that formula funding does not distort the relationship between learners’ needs and the learning programmes they access and that the transition to formula funding does not destabilise institutions” (LSC, 2002, p.10).

The position paper became the basis of the RARPA Project trialled around the country (LSC, 2004b). One element of five in the staged process is the recording of learners’ progress and achievements during the programme. The evidence which it is suggested can be used includes:

- Records of learner self-, group- and peer- assessment
- Tutor records of assessment activities and individual/group progress and achievement
- Learners’ files, journals, diaries, portfolios, artwork, videos, audiotapes, performances, exhibitions and displays
- Individual or group learner testimonies: artefacts, photographs and other forms of evidence are also acceptable (LSDA/NIACE, 2003).

A LSC consultation paper at the end of the trial period (LSC, 2004c) saw the issue of acceptable evidence as extending beyond these methods:

“Good examples of recording progress were observed in the test projects, many of them non-paper based, using new technologies to good effect. For example, the use of digital images to demonstrate to learners their improvements in posture and technique in yoga and, the use of digital video to record and then discuss with learners their technique when ‘throwing a pot’.” (LSC, 2004c, p.14).
The diverse range of recording systems noted during the trial period meant that:

“No single approach is to be recommended, as individual tutor preference and the needs and wishes of learners and the learning context all play a part in determining what is appropriate.” (LSC, 2004c, p.14).

The paper expresses the intention of establishing a resource base for organisations to develop their own recording mechanism and ‘to act as a source of ideas to stimulate imagination and effective ways of recognising and recording learner progress’. (LSC, 2004c, p.15).

A fresh idea has been advanced by NIACE (2004c) in the form of ‘The Catching Confidence Grid’ (discussed in detail in Section 5.5). One difficulty is that the grid is concerned only with confidence and self esteem. These are clearly core soft outcomes, but as The SOUL research illustrates, for example in Section 6.2, there are many more being addressed through informal learning. Working on the grid may well be attractive and interesting for learners, but the absence of a numerical basis for the scale raises questions over how any information gained might be communicated to funding organisations.

Clearly this and all the other methods advanced of providing evidence are valuable. They are, however, means of verifying progress, which is different from the issue of measurement. They thus do not satisfy the first requirement set by Vorhaus (2001) (Section 5.1). Interestingly, the LSC position is that ensuring the quality of evidence is a matter for organisations themselves:

“The LSC will not seek to externally validate or audit such self-assessments, but extends trust in the provider to act in the best interests of learners.” (LSC, 2004c, p.16).

What this apparently welcome flexibility and trust seems to obscure, is the need for many funders to receive information in an easily understandable form. Photographs, for example, need interpretation if they are to indicate progress and achievement. To give a specific instance encountered during SOUL research, the researchers were shown a box of art work completed by children. This had been submitted by a project to a funding organisation as evidence of soft outcomes achieved. The work had no context or explanation and the funding organisation is not qualified to make judgements on artistic merit nor emotional expression, nor does it have the time to interpret the material.

Clearly, if such information can be transformed into numerical data, with a baseline and subsequent score, the degree of progress and achievement will be more clearly understood by all stakeholders. This approach would be compatible with RARPA requirements for non accredited learning. Additionally, the use of some of the evidence methods advanced here in conjunction with numerical data would illustrate the nature of the achievements.

5.4.4 SOFT OUTCOMES: EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION
An approach which seeks to utilise soft outcome indicators for both employability and educational development has been produced by the Community Development Foundation (Steer and Humm, 2001). The report details the findings of a workshop to investigate measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled over Neighbourhood Support Fund (NSF) projects, a community based initiative in England for 13-19 year olds who are out of work or education, or at risk of dropping out.
The report details experimental and on-going research into measuring outcomes. The authors expand the narrower definition of soft outcomes to include prerequisites to success in education, training or employment and to maintaining positive social relationships. The report divides soft outcomes into four subsections including: key work skills, attitudinal skills, personal skills and practical skills.

The outcomes measured will vary depending on the individual client but measurements include the use of baseline and subsequent questionnaires with young people on the projects. The questionnaires are designed to cover soft outcomes such as core skills, self-esteem, aspirations and community involvement. The report is particularly useful in honestly tackling practical difficulties of establishing such measurement systems. Various problems are highlighted including recording the information from young people with learning difficulties, intrusiveness into clients' personal lives, whether the outcomes achieved are directly attributable to the project, how comprehensive a picture is provided of the young person and how to overcome the bias of subjectivity.

5.4.5 SOFT OUTCOMES: COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS
Steer and Humm’s report (2001) was followed by a qualitative research project conducted by Gaffney and Humm (2002) based on almost 2,000 structured interviews with young people on NSF projects. This work provides a detailed appraisal of the way projects seek to develop soft skills among their client group. Although this is interesting in its own right the benefit to community and voluntary organisations can be found in the section on measuring soft skills.

The sort of difficulties experienced by some projects with insufficient time and resources to develop adequate measurement systems and the problems of establishing baselines will resonate with other projects embarking on measuring their own soft outcomes. Project workers expressed concern that reduced flexibility and ‘professionalisation’ of the projects may alienate their client group and turn community based people and volunteers into ‘professionals’ (Gaffney and Humm, 2002).

The report strikes a very different tone from those produced from governmental departments and probably has greater applicability to those organisations, in the voluntary and community sector, which are increasingly forced down accredited routes and yet know the value of the non-accredited courses and services they provide for their client group. This reaffirms the need to measure soft outcomes and the distance travelled by service beneficiaries to provide evidence to satisfy funders.

The literature to date has been clearly shown to emphasise the need to measure soft outcomes as evidence of a stepping stone linking non-accredited/soft learning with progression to a hard outcome, such as a job or taking an accredited educational course. Such an approach has also been indicated to narrow the interpretation of social inclusion to employability and educational achievement and ignore the significant number of community and voluntary sector organisations working with clients who may never access jobs or educational qualifications.

There is a value to society when informal learning leads to an individual experiencing increases in motivation, feelings of responsibility, confidence, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, improved individual appearance, time management and teamwork. As a Government Green Paper points out:
“Society as a whole benefits through reduced spending on problems that can be avoided and through maximising the contribution to society of all citizens. For instance, a child with conduct disorder at age 10 will cost the public purse around £70,000 by age 28 – up to ten times more than a child with no behavioural problems.” (DfES, 2004b, p.14).

Children are not the sole category of client where the support of informal learning can be argued to make sound business sense. For example, one young mother involved in The SOUL project research, spoke to the researchers of her concern about being able to control the anger she sometimes felt towards her child. The informal parenting course she had attended had given her the necessary confidence to manage her anger (Section 6.3.1).

Such individuals might not go out to work for a few years, or take an accredited course, but society as a whole will benefit now and in the future from the improved mother/child relationship. The inescapable conclusion is that there is a value in achieving soft outcomes for their social impact and the literature needs to be expanded to take this into account.

The literature points the way to measuring soft outcomes to satisfy funders but can also be utilised to provide real impetus for the voluntary and community sector to benefit clients and project workers. Measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled shows clients the progress they are making and have made. The evidence reveals to workers how the project is going and indicates directions for further developments.

Whilst there is a willingness and desire to measure soft outcomes, devising an effective method has proved elusive. Case studies, psychometric tests, portfolios, action plans, forms of assessment, audio/photographic recordings, client notes, observations, focus groups, diaries, interviews and questionnaires are all advanced as the basis of a system. Which will be appropriate will depend on the client group, the expertise of staff, the resources available to the organisation and the requirements of the funding organisation. These issues were a significant consideration when formulating the soft outcomes measurement system proposed by this research (Sections 6 - 8).

This issue of utility is particularly important in the voluntary and community sector. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) recently strongly criticised the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) for a lax approach to quality assurance (Beckett, 2004). A total of 59 inspectors drove an average of 1,500 miles over three weeks to conduct the inspection. Visits were made to 574 centres, 4,862 interviews with learners and discussions with classes took place and there were 555 interviews with staff.

The general secretary of WEA does not dispute the findings, but understandably wonders whether the ALI expects him to devote a similar degree of resources to evaluation. He commented such a model of quality control was ‘unsustainable’ (Becket, 2004).

The point is that any system of measuring soft outcomes must be manageable within the resources available to a voluntary and community sector organisation. Having said that, it is equally necessary to encourage an evidence based culture within the sector. Some resistance to this was uncovered during the research.

There is in any event an inevitable tension between the different audiences for any measurement. If a culture change is required, then a measurement system which is
client centred, user friendly and assists service delivery is more likely to be effective. In such circumstances, those who must produce the information will more readily accept the relevance and value of the model.

The use of questionnaires does seem to offer the best route for reconciling competing requirements with being manageable within the resources of organisations delivering informal learning. These can produce data individual to the client and therefore of value on a personal level and yet be aggregated to provide information of interest to funders. Certainly, the proprietary systems outlined above which have been developed are based on this approach.

5.5 MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS

There are innumerable skills, ability and aptitude tests available in the education sector. Even in relation to measuring soft outcomes, one report identified over 60 assessment tools (Balgobin et al., 2004). As the report points out, however, many do not allow for the measurement of ‘… ‘distance travelled’ … for which we needed an assessment capable of repetition and illustrating changes achieved’ (Balgobin et al., 2004, p.28). The following presents all those measurement systems available on the market in 2004 identified by the researchers.

One influential tool is the Quality of Life Indicator, developed by the University of Toronto, which asks individuals to assess how satisfied they are with aspects of their life. This model consists of a total of 54 items separated between nine sub-domains, with ratings on a five point scale allied to a scoring system (Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto, 2003).

Apart from an issue of complexity, there is the lack of any direct link between an increase in the quality of life of an individual and the part played by a voluntary and community sector organisation. An informal learner, for example, may experience an increase from such diverse causes as a lottery win or an operation which dramatically improves their health. This has little to do with the informal learning in which they may be participating at the relevant time. Further difficulties arise from the possibility of having a negative score which still equates to an acceptable quality of life.

The Fairbridge and the Foyer Federation charities have experimented with a system based on the Toronto model. ‘SpiritLevel’ is now being offered commercially and is claimed to be ‘a reliable tool to measure and assess quality of life and distance travelled’ (Philantech, 2004). The instrument is shorter than the Toronto model and has the attractive feature that it can be loaded on a computer. An optional voice-over to ask the questions and guide users addresses the needs of those with limited literacy.

SpiritLevel has four sequences of questions in the three domains of ‘being’, ‘belonging’ and ‘becoming’. Two sequences have 27 questions and two sequences nine questions. An example of a question would be ‘How important to me is solving my problems?’; to which the responses are ‘not at all important’, ‘not very important’, ‘quite important’, ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’. Other questions relate to degrees of satisfaction. ‘Don’t know’ and ‘not applicable’ responses are possible. The scoring and presentation of a profile is completed by the software which can visually display up to nine sets of results as a bar chart.

Whilst SpiritLevel has much to commend it, the research was directed at young people and there is therefore a need to consider whether the method is transferable to other groups of informal learners. Additionally, in keeping with SpiritLevel being a
It may be that a general process or framework more directly targeted at the work of voluntary and community sector will be of greater relevance and utility. A system which assists and is embedded in their normal pattern of service delivery will maximise the possibility of consistent and effective use. Models such as SpiritLevel can be seen by those asked to apply them as a burden rather than a tool.

Finally with SpiritLevel there is the issue of cost, which applies not only to the mandatory training, but also to a licence cost per user and the disc itself. Whilst this might not be a problem for larger voluntary sector organisations, it would be for smaller groups, who have an equal need to be able to evidence the outcomes their clients achieve. Where the research which resulted in the SpiritLevel system does have a fundamental link with the SOUL Project is in the need to devise and refine a paper based model before the valuable development of a computer based version can be accomplished.

The Rickter Scale (Stead, 2001) is a measurement model for which significant claims are made:

“The Rickter Scale offers the opportunity to celebrate diversity, overcome limiting beliefs, provide motivation and achieve potential. It offers new perspectives and a means of exploring possibilities that enable clients to make informed choices. And like a device of similar name, it measures movement – one might say ‘assessment on a seismic scale!’” (Rickter Company, 2003).

The system has been developed since 1994 and consists of a plastic ‘Life Board’ with a set of sliders which act on a scale reading from 0 to 10. Scales can be given a frame of reference related to a particular organisation. A board is given to a client, who is then asked to respond to a set of questions. This might be completed independently, to be followed by an interviewer going over the same questions. The client moves a slider to indicate the level of response. In this manner, a baseline profile can be derived. By using the same process at a later date, any distance travelled can be determined.

Examples of questions from the ‘Life Board’ are, ‘How happy are you with your money situation?’; and ‘How much is alcohol a part of your life?’. The first issue that we would point out here is that whilst a ten point scale for the response to such questions is excellent for showing movement, there are still difficulties with this. For example, the relevance of any individual point on the scale is entirely a matter for the subjective judgement of individual clients. Secondly, whilst the system can clearly be used as a diagnostic tool to determine a baseline, there is again no inherent link between the activities of the organisation and any change detected by a subsequent use of the process. Action planning is a separate activity.

Recent developments by the Rickter Company seek to address this issue through the development of ‘The Rickter Guidance Model’, which is based on the framework of the Rickter Scale.

There are no details of the model and what seems to be on offer is a consultancy arrangement. However welcome this development might be, it is separate and additional to the measurement system. The same point can equally be made about
the Rickter ‘Information Management System’, which is software to record and aggregate the data from Rickter Scale interviews (Rickter Company, 2003).

There are many benefits to the Rickter Scale, not least that it is non paper based and thus overcomes difficulties with literacy which will be faced by some clients. On the other hand, it may not be suitable for all client groups engaged in informal learning. It is clearly time consuming and requires the expertise on the part of the interviewer to be facilitator, broker or co-ordinator as appropriate. Additionally, as with ‘SpiritLevel’ and similar systems, the model has to be purchased. This combined with the resource requirements may make the system impractical for many voluntary and community sector organisations.

The ‘Formula One’ process has a number of innovative features (Tulip and Burlinson, 2004). A client’s progress is tracked using a Formula One race format. Clients discuss their aspirations with a development worker, which equates with a taster session, or ‘practice’ lap. A personal action plan is combined with evidential reviews, or ‘pit stops’. Once the ‘race’ is over and the ‘finishing flag’ has been passed, there is a ‘debriefing’ or exit strategy. The reward might be a certificate of achievement.

The process can clearly demonstrate a potential for monitoring, but aggregating the data other than the commitment of time could prove difficult. The system is also particularly suited to intensive personal development situations and therefore not representative of all informal learning. Additionally, just as with the Rickter scale, a degree of expertise on the part of the interviewer is required.

‘The Personal Power Pack’ (GCC, 2002) has been developed by Gloucestershire County Council Adult and Continuing Education and Training Service (ACET). It consists of a set of documents designed to allow tutors, teachers and other support workers to measure progression in soft skills. The skills are grouped into the four areas of attitudinal skills, personal skills, interpersonal skills and organisational skills. It is aimed at students over 16 and runs parallel with key skills and basic skills areas. There is a scoring system based on contacts made by the student. The model can be used with groups to initiate discussion or resolve problems with dynamics.

There is much to commend the model in that it is learner centred, flexible and has bright, attractive and easily understood material which is therefore accessible. On the other hand, in common with most models, it is a one level system designed for a specific area of learning. It requires a significant commitment of resources from trained staff having contact with clients. Not all voluntary and community sector organisations deliver services in this way and they would find it extremely difficult to commit the level of resources necessary to use the Gloucestershire system. As the model is offered on a commercial basis, even the relatively small cost may be an inhibiting factor for some groups. Despite this, some practitioners of the soft outcomes measurement system developed here (The SOUL Record) suggested that for future sustainability there should be a charge for using this system (Section 8.6). Indeed, many of the systems outlined here do charge for their usage, on the basis of providing training and/or toolkits. Training is on average priced at around £50-100 per head per day for those in the voluntary sector and products (i.e. work packs or software) vary between £15 to £100 each.

A more recent development is the NIACE produced soft outcomes measure ‘Catching Confidence’. The system has been developed by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in response to organisations working with adult learners reporting increased confidence as a result of involvement in adult education. Catching Confidence has been designed to complement the RARPA process,
adopted by the LSC (Sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.3) and captures individual and group achievements ‘in order to demonstrate to learners, tutors and funders what has been gained’ (NIACE, 2005, p.2). The system can be used as a group activity, in pairs or on a one-to-one basis between the learner and tutor.

In the original version, learners are given ten positive statements about confidence. They are then asked to consider these in relation to four situations: ‘at a learning centre’, ‘at home’, ‘socially/with friends’ and/or ‘at work/out and about’. Responses are recorded on a four point scale ranging from ‘highly confident’ to ‘very low confidence’ each of which is represented by a different symbol. A sticker of one of these symbols, representing a level of agreement following reflection and open conversation between learner and tutor, is placed on a grid for each statement, which has space for a further symbol when the exercise is repeated to determine ‘distance travelled’ (NIACE, 2004c).

Catching Confidence has much to commend it including the use of positive statements, an emphasis on the value of conversations between tutor and learner, and feelings of confidence in different situations. It is interactive which will appeal to learners. However, there are considerable limitations to the system. Catching Confidence has been designed for learners in adult education and therefore is not an inclusive tool that is appropriate when working with children and more informal settings. In focussing exclusively on confidence and to a lesser degree self-esteem the model excludes a vast array of soft outcomes that voluntary and community sector organisations develop within their client groups. The Likert scale used is a four point scale, which restricts the ability to demonstrate distance travelled. The use of a grid that enables the learner to see their previous response calls into question the validity of the process in that the knowledge of previous answers may bias the learner’s response to statements on the second occasion. Some learners may also feel patronised through using a grid system that encourages them to use cards or sticky labels to indicate progress. Although the tool is one of the more recently developed systems available, it still fails to provide a measure of soft outcomes that reflects the diversity of organisations within the voluntary and community sector.

What would seem to be needed by the voluntary and community sector is an inexpensive general model aimed at all those involved in informal learning. The model would need to take into account the wide disparity between the resources available to organisations and the methods by which they deliver learning services. A model with more than one level, for example, might be required.

Whether from a lack of knowledge of the proprietary systems available or concern over the issues surrounding their use, many organisations and projects have attempted to devise their own questionnaires. The examples are particularly varied. Clearly, designing and using questionnaires is in itself an issue meriting detailed attention (Oppenheim, 1986, 1993; Peterson, 2000). What can be said is that if the intention is to measure distance travelled, then there must be a baseline assessment followed by a means of tracking and comparing progress over time.

The predominant method is the use of a scale and it is usual for an adaptation of a Likert Scale to be used (University of Connecticut, no date). This consists of a statement, to which a respondent is asked to indicate a degree of agreement, frequency, quality or likelihood. A scale might thus range from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’; ‘very frequently’ to ‘never’; ‘very important’ to unimportant’; ‘extremely poor’ to ‘excellent’; and ‘almost always true’ to ‘almost never true’. There are alternative expressions for the same polar extremes. The scale would usually be presented in a horizontal fashion, but might run from left to right, or right to left.
An initial difficulty is to decide how many points to have on the scale. It is thought that ten is the theoretical maximum. On a scale of this length, such as the Rickter Scale, the respondent makes a judgement about what criteria should be applied to all points between the polar extremes. In contrast, rigour is given to some scales by having a description for each point between the polar extremes. That inevitably dictates fewer points on the scale than ten and could be as low as three. If, however, there is an intention to evidence distance travelled, then any scale needs to be long enough to allow for movement.

Numerous examples exist of odd and even numbered scales. A possible difficulty with an odd numbered scale is that it usually allows a ‘neutral’ middle point. Respondents may be tempted to take this route as an alternative to taking a definite position on the issue concerned. An even numbered scale avoids this possibility but will not be appropriate where a respondent genuinely does not know.

The statements themselves can be expressed both positively and negatively. The Clinical Outcomes Routine Evaluation (CORE) outcome measure (CORE IMS, 2004) consists of statements about how respondents may have felt over the last week. A five point frequency scale is used, from ‘not at all’ to ‘most of the time’. One statement is, ‘I have thought it would be better if I were dead’. Another is, ‘I have felt O.K about myself’. Combining positive and negative statements is one way of checking for consistency in answers from respondents but many in the voluntary and community sector will have considerable unease about such questions. Clearly, such a model would appear to be for qualified professional use.

The ‘Rosenberg self-esteem scale’ (Rosenberg, 1965) similarly uses positive and negative statements, but they are expressed in a softer fashion than the CORE model. There are ten questions with a four point Likert scale, ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. This scale was developed from working with young people in full time education and therefore does not allow for the range of informal learning services in the voluntary and community sector. Self esteem, for example, may be only one of a number of soft options achieved by clients.

The negativity of the CORE and Rosenberg systems attracts considerable criticism from voluntary sector practitioners. In order to make any model for measuring soft outcomes relevant to the sector, it would need to be positive and re-affirming to the progress being made by clients. A useful approach is provided by ‘solution focussed brief therapy’ (Brief Therapy Centre, 2004). This therapy takes a particular interest in what is working in people’s lives, as opposed to what is not. Solutions rather than problems are emphasised and the approach recognises that clients can often create their own strategies for change. Of particular relevance to the activities of many voluntary sector organisations is the assumption that small steps can change ‘a vicious cycle of problem maintenance to a virtuous cycle of solution building’ (Brief Therapy North East, 2004)

Using a scale as in the CORE and Rosenberg systems has the benefit of allowing a numerical value to be given to each point. Scores can thus be aggregated and compared more easily with previous occasions to determine distance travelled. One complexity of using positive and negative statements in the same instrument is the need to reverse the scoring when the statement is expressed differently.

Scales with a numerical value have the potential of providing data of interest to funders. Whilst a Likert scale is normally presented in a horizontal fashion, there is a range of methods by which responses can be recorded. In the written form ticking
boxes or circling an answer is usual. As has been outlined above, there are tactile methods such as those employed by the Rickter Scale, choosing an appropriate card or computer based systems. This does point to the need to make any system relevant to the particular client group, taking into account age and any visual or other impairment.

There is equally no overall agreement on whether a scale should run from left to right or right to left. One advantage of having the positive pole with the highest numerical value on the right is that the task of evidencing distance travelled is eased. A higher score means a learning gain has been achieved.

As previously noted, the needs of the voluntary and community sector point to a system for measuring soft outcomes that is simple to use, easily understood and interpreted. It should put the client at the centre of the process which is desirable regardless of any funding considerations.

Placing the client at the centre of the process was precisely the approach to outcomes adopted by the government in the Green Paper ‘Every Child Matters’ (DfES, 2004b). The five outcomes ‘which mattered most to children and young people were’:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Economic well being (DfES, 2004b, p.7)

These same outcomes have been carried forward into the ‘Children Act 2004’, although the language becomes more formal (United Kingdom Parliament, 2004).

The majority of the outcomes sought for young people are soft, which makes it particularly important for consideration and decisions on funding to reflect the reality of emerging government policy. The need for evidence to demonstrate achievement in terms of such outcomes will clearly quickly become acute. Any monitoring and measurement system for young people would certainly have an advantage if it could be linked to the categories of outcomes identified by the government.

Whilst the literature provides helpful guidance on preparing such a regime, it does not give a definitive answer or generic model. The principles for a model have, however, been identified. These are set out under the headings of ‘individual entitlement’, ‘obligations of stakeholders’, ‘confidence and trust’, and ‘credibility and legitimacy’. The principles initially make clear that the ‘identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual’. This is further powerful support for the argument that a model should be learner or client centred. Any model has also to be ‘fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms’. ‘Balance’ is seen as necessary between the needs of stakeholders (Council of the European Union, 2004, p.5).

These European principles give parameters for the development of a system to monitor and measure soft outcomes. In a UK context, given the importance of LSCs as funders, it is clearly necessary that any informal learning model fits with the RARPA process. As a consultation paper points out, the approach and staged process ‘is now established and recognised as good practice’ (LSC, 2004c, p.5). It has been a requirement for learning providers from September 2005.

A succinct summary of what is required is provided by NIACE:
“In simple terms, measuring progress for non-accredited learning involves a process of:

- Assessment (to establish a starting point, plan learning and demonstrate achievement) and
- Review (one to one or group sessions with learners to look back and reflect on the journey taken and progress made in order to plan the next stage)” (NIACE, 2004b, p.40).

It is certainly therefore worth voluntary sector service providers investing time and energy in adapting some of the ideas and suggestions contained in the literature. The likelihood is that they will improve the quality of their services and directly benefit clients. Therefore, evidence gathered of the significant soft outcome achievements illustrated by The SOUL research is reported in Sections 6 and 8.

Such information should be highly useful to funders. A considerable additional benefit is that recognition of the value of informal learning for a social purpose will be encouraged and financial support may extend beyond 'lip service' to this issue.

This would be a major development in itself, because the paradox over the purpose of education continues. In a recent five year strategy (DfES, 2004c, p.19) the document notes that ‘The link between poor health, disadvantage and low educational outcomes are stark’. The details of the strategy and what is on offer are then outlined, which is almost exclusively about employers’ needs and the skills required in this respect by individuals. The strategy then returns to the earlier theme in saying that a varied range of learning opportunities will be maintained ‘for personal fulfilment, community development and active citizenship’ (DfES, 2004c, p.89). In a clear, but belated recognition of the social impact of learning, the document continues:

“Research shows that such learning has a positive impact in many different ways; on the individual and their sense of purpose, motivation, health and well being.” (DfES, 2004c, p.89).

The same apparently positive note has been recently sounded by the LSC:

“Non-accredited learning is a vital part of lifelong learning, including first steps learning, learning for personal and community development and opportunities for older learners. These courses are crucial to encourage those who would not otherwise participate to get involved, enjoy and progress further.” (LSC, 2004c, p.6).

However, a continuing lack of certainty over the funding of informal learning is not in harmony with the nature of such statements.

Clarity and consistency over the value of informal learning would therefore be welcome. That, however, does not remove the need for voluntary sector organisations to be able to show what they are achieving in promoting social inclusion. There are many difficulties to overcome in devising, refining and implementing a measurement system. Willingness on the part of organisations exists to try to do this, but the unequivocal message from the literature is that measuring soft outcomes is not a soft option.
6. RESEARCH PHASE ONE: OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

6.1 RESEARCH FIGURES
Table 4 presents the totals for the different methods of data collection in phase one of the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>No. of hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Data collection methods, by number/hours, phase one.

Table 5 indicates the types and number of data collection methods conducted at each organisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Questionnaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Foundation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8 x clients</td>
<td>1 x clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1x client, 7 x staff)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td>3 x staff</td>
<td>4 x clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Arts East</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12 x clients</td>
<td>1 x clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4 x staff, 8 x clients)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College in the Community</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12 x clients</td>
<td>2 x clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2 x staff, 1 x client)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwich Community Workshop</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11 x clients</td>
<td>1 x clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8 x staff, 1 x client)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lynn Discovery Project</td>
<td>3 x staff</td>
<td>10 x clients</td>
<td>1 x clients</td>
<td>1 x clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>21 x staff</td>
<td>3 x clients</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7 x staff, 1 x clients)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Data collection methods, by organisation, phase one.
* ‘Other’ refers to additional organisations which were visited during phase one for subsequent inclusion in the project.

6.2 SOFT OUTCOMES MAPPED
A large number of soft outcomes were identified for each of the six organisations, totalling over 80 overall (Appendix 2). The research suggested that these can be grouped under three general headings of ‘attitudinal skills’, ‘personal skills’ and ‘practical skills’ as indicated in Table 6. This has some similarity with the types of soft skills identified by ‘The Personal Power Pack’ (Section 5.5).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Attitudinal skills</th>
<th>Personal skills</th>
<th>Practical skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Foundation</td>
<td>Motivation, initiative, self-esteem, ability to receive constructive criticism, recognition of prior skills, aspirations, confidence, Behaviour, regard for others.</td>
<td>Health and fitness, communication, advice, social skills, decision making, teamwork, hygiene, problem solving, appearance, relevant conversation, reliability, belonging, responsibility,</td>
<td>Literacy, numeracy, form filling, C.V., money management, health and safety, cooking, planning, ICT, completing tasks, prioritising, awareness of rights and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREAK</td>
<td>Behaviour, regard for others, self-esteem, confidence</td>
<td>Self-awareness, communication skills, teamwork, hygiene, belonging, appearance, responsibility, appropriate conversation and behaviour, concentration, listening, engagement, social skills, health and fitness.</td>
<td>Health and safety, cooking, ability to carry out tasks, coordination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Arts East</td>
<td>Initiative, self-esteem, ability to receive constructive criticism, aspirations, confidence, adaptability, regard for others.</td>
<td>Communication, teamwork, decision making, responsibility, belonging, advice, social skills</td>
<td>Health and safety, money management, rights and responsibilities, planning, prioritising, ability to carry out tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College in the Community</td>
<td>Motivation, initiative, self-esteem, recognition of prior skills, confidence, adaptability, regard for others</td>
<td>Attendance, listening, engagement, time keeping, ability to receive advice, social skills, communication, reliability, belonging, concentration</td>
<td>Literacy, numeracy, form filling, health and safety, rights and responsibilities, C.V., planning, ability to carry out tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwich Community Workshop</td>
<td>Motivation, self-esteem, aspirations, confidence, regard for others, recognition of prior skills</td>
<td>Attendance, social skills, self-awareness, time keeping, hygiene, communication, belonging, appearance, appropriate conversation, listening, engagement</td>
<td>Literacy, numeracy, form filling, health and safety, money management, rights and responsibilities, cooking, ICT, ability to carry out tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lynn Discovery Project</td>
<td>Motivation, aspirations, self-esteem, behaviour, confidence, regard for others,</td>
<td>Attendance, health and fitness, time keeping, communication, teamwork, reliability, hygiene, responsibility, belonging, listening, concentration, engagement, appearance, social skills.</td>
<td>Complete forms, health and safety, manage money, cooking, rights and responsibilities, planning, ICT, literacy, numeracy, prioritising, ability to carry out tasks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Soft outcomes identified in phase one, grouped according to three types.

6.3 DISCUSSION OF CASE STUDIES

Only two of the six organisations had any involvement with accredited training and this was very much a peripheral activity for them. The outcomes were achieved as the result of informal learning or development initiatives with individuals. All the organisations undertook evaluation by various methods, but none were currently monitoring and measuring soft outcomes in a systematic fashion. All were able to provide impressive anecdotal examples of success with clients. These had the potential to be persuasive case studies and a number were followed up by the researchers in semi-structured interviews. Behind the mapping undertaken of soft outcomes was a detailed and rich insight into the ethos of the voluntary sector organisations and their impact with regards to informal learning. This is documented and analysed below and highlights that the way in which organisations work with their
clients is varied but finds common ground through the types and range of soft outcomes being achieved and the contribution made to promoting social inclusion.

It was evident that all staff and volunteers encountered had a real commitment to their organisations and were almost unfailingly positive about their work. Even when a sense of frustration was expressed at what were perceived as ‘failures’, individuals nevertheless concluded they felt that they had made a difference to the lives of their clients.

6.3.1 THE BENJAMIN FOUNDATION
At the Benjamin Foundation the staff had a shared vision of what they sought to achieve for young people. One individual expressed this by saying:

“The best part of the job is seeing the young people change. They come in quite traumatised and a lot of the time with a brick wall in front of them which they are determined nobody will get through and reach them. What the job is all about is building a relationship and bringing the wall down. We can then see them walk out of that door into their own accommodation a totally different person.”

Another said:

“The biggest goal is to move them on to independent living. If that means cooking, life skills, that’s what we do. If it’s a matter of looking after themselves, keeping themselves clean, keeping their rooms clean, their environments healthy. All the things that a lot of us take for granted. Things we were taught from an early age often our residents aren’t taught.”

The clients at the project certainly valued the help on offer. One young woman said that being at Winston Court was the first time in her life she had felt supported. When asked in a focus group to identify all the benefits residents received from the project, they responded with the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gaining skills</th>
<th>less nagging from a parent</th>
<th>social skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>working as a team</td>
<td>a roof over your head</td>
<td>independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more support</td>
<td>self confidence</td>
<td>cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>budgeting</td>
<td>being able to have own things in your room</td>
<td>boy friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation</td>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Benefits received from The Benjamin Foundation by residents.

The relevance and significance of soft outcomes for this group was therefore clear. When the residents were encouraged to discuss the benefits with a view to identifying which was most important, an interesting debate took place about the relative importance of having a roof over your head. As one individual put it: 'it's no good being confident if you are on the streets'. They therefore thought that the accommodation factor was particularly important; the project giving them the support they needed, together with a sense of freedom.

In order to gauge from the residents their perception of development, they were asked to score themselves out of ten for outcomes such as confidence, both at the
time they joined the project and at the current time. This indicated that they all considered there had been an improvement. Notably, a similar technique with groups from other organisations unfailingly produced similar results. A woman who had suffered from post natal depression, for example, had joined an informal personal development course. At that time she would have scored her confidence as -1. As a result of participating in the programme, she would now score herself at 6/10. The individuals in another focus group were asked to independently identify the main benefit to them from their participation in informal learning. At least 64% described a gain in confidence with the total rising to 82% when other soft outcomes were included. Another example would be the young woman who had attended a parenting course which had given her the necessary confidence to manage her anger (Section 5.4.5).

A powerful example of the impact of informal learning took place at one focus group at The Benjamin Foundation where a group of nine young women were discussing issues with the researchers. All were casually dressed. It was known that at some time the group might be visited by a party from the regional government office and the Learning and Skills Council. However, it was still a surprise when the door opened and six men dressed formally in suits and carrying briefcases entered. A refreshment break was called and the women talked openly and confidently to their visitors. The women said that they would not have been able to do this had they not taken part in a personal development course run by the project. One participant had already told the researchers that prior to the course, she had found it extremely difficult to even leave the house because of a lack of confidence.

6.3.2 BREAK

As with previous case studies the staff members interviewed at BREAK’s Daybreak Centre were confident that important outcomes were being achieved through their project. For example, one project worker commented:

“I’ve seen progress. You know with certain individuals and you create a safe environment. Fun. To give people a certain outlet as well, you know if they want to discuss anything, to talk, you know. Just a chance to be normal actually and you know it sounds a bit … but just to ‘be’”.

Once again there was a shared ethos from staff over vision and an equal sense of satisfaction over the achievements of clients:

“Like XXXX again today I said to him he was fantastic, you know all year he’s getting really smiley, you know you have to remember to be praising where it’s due, not patronising, but certainly encourage them. And you can see the achievements as well.”

Staff were initially wary about their involvement in action research and the imposition of any new system that might not be fully appropriate to their client group. However the researchers were able to reassure them that action research involved working “on the shop floor” and fitting in with clients and staff to gain a comprehensive picture of the operation rather than rushing to early judgement.

Observation was selected as the most appropriate method with this client group. The interest and engagement of the majority of participants was regularly illustrated. On one occasion, for example, a group was observed after they had made cards for Mothers’ Day, which had been sent to mothers, foster mothers or carers. One client, who could be difficult to engage, was especially animated about the fact that his
mother had received his card and was really pleased with it. He mentioned this at the outset and at intermittent intervals without any prompting.

On another occasion a group of clients was observed taking part in ten pin bowling. On one lane the participants were particularly animated, engaged and mutually supportive. They praised each others’ efforts and took great delight in achieving a strike. After the bowling the clients returned to the minibus and one served squash and crisps to the others. One client told the researchers that she really enjoyed it at Daybreak and that it was better than anywhere else she had been. All the participants had clearly enjoyed the bowling with two asking for a print out of their scores.

The observations did reveal the difficulties inherent in devising a system for measuring soft outcomes that would work effectively with clients with severe learning difficulties. For example, the lack of communication skills among clients meant that only a very few of the clients would be able to record their feelings, desires, attitudes or experiences. Working with the Daybreak client group therefore provided very valuable input into the development of The SOUL Record.

The overall impression was of clients that enjoyed being at Daybreak, who felt comfortable with the staff and each other, and who were prepared to carry out tasks to help everyone and the individual tasks the were called on to complete as part of their educational development. Staff members were supportive and encouraging and created a warm and inviting atmosphere for the clients.

6.3.3 CREATIVE ARTS EAST
There is plainly a difference between the client group at BREAK and that of Creative Arts East, but nevertheless there are many similarities in terms of soft outcomes. Welborne Village Hall trustees are all volunteers but their views on what they are achieving echo those of many paid staff in other organisations. One individual saw the main benefit of their activities as ‘people coming together’. Another said:

“Well, I like to think there’s greater cohesion and the reason I say that is that in the winter, it forces you to go out to meetings and you do get to know the odd people on the committee, which in the long term must be good for the local community if people know one another. It also leads to us being more of a team in the village….”

This sense of improved relationships in the village was shared by many. One resident said:

“There’s one or two of the people that I do definitely get on with and respect a lot more because of the work they’ve done and everything … and I never would have thought that I would have done before.”

Another told the researchers that ‘everybody works together’. There was ‘no in-fighting or anything like that’.

A trustee asked to summarise the impact of their activities spoke for many in saying, ‘I think it’s this sense of community’. He added:

“We certainly put on events in the village which simply wouldn’t happen, which means a lot of people are going to the things that they wouldn’t either be able to or think of. Like the Arts Festival. A lot of people, I suspect, would not go and see any sort of artistic endeavours, however
“wonderful, in Norwich or U.E.A or something. But because it’s on their doorstep they do come in and hopefully get inspired.”

Given the potential for rural isolation faced by this community, the project contributed significantly to encouraging social inclusion. This is reinforced by findings from a questionnaire survey conducted as part of the research amongst those attending the 2004 Arts Festival (Appendix 3). Apart from being regarded as well organised and hugely enjoyable, the event attracted people from rural areas who did not regularly attend arts events. At least 64% of the sample lived either in Welborne or another rural area of Norfolk and of the 36 polled, 75% said that they only occasionally attended such events.

The survey showed that 91% of respondents felt that the arts festival assisted with building community spirit with 40% strongly agreeing and 34% very strongly agreeing. Respondents were also inspired by the event: 79% said they were more likely to attend arts events in the future as a result of having attended the festival, whilst 68% said they were more likely to participate in the arts as a result of having attended the festival.

There was a continuing relationship between Welborne Village Hall and Creative Arts East. The trustees had developed a comprehensive programme of arts activities and social events which depended largely on their own initiative but recognised the debt they owed to Creative Arts East for helping them to start a process which could lead to events such as the festival.

6.3.4 COLLEGE IN THE COMMUNITY
At College in the Community, there was an equal sense of purpose and enthusiasm. One member of staff, who had herself been a former client, had a clear view of what was being achieved for clients:

“The confidence is just amazing, to see the people blossom. Even from when I was on it as a learner. You have to ask questions and you get the people who wouldn’t have said a word are now actually taking part and almost leading things and you can see them just blossom.”

One focus group conducted with learners from College in the Community involved individuals who had participated in informal learning after visiting local voluntary sector information centres. They had all just begun an accredited course, but interestingly continued with informal learning activities. None had originally approached the local information centre with a clearly defined objective of engaging in learning.

Members of the group identified the main benefits for them of having taken part in informal learning and were then separated into two sub-groups to prioritise the list produced. Both sub-groups independently identified ‘confidence’ as the primary benefit. By the use of a ten point scale, the degree of their development was explored and one individual said that she would have been 0 at the start of learning, but now considered herself 9. There was unanimity on the part of the whole group that they would not have been able or willing to access accredited courses at the time they returned to learning. The confidence to do so had come from attending the non accredited workshops.

Participants were then asked to list specific things they were doing now, which had resulted from their participation in informal learning. Impressive detail was provided on positions of active responsibility with a variety of community and voluntary
organisations. One individual had formed a martial arts club for young people and another chaired a parents’ panel. There was an absolute clarity from the participants that such activity would not have taken place but for their increased confidence gained through informal learning. One woman talked of ‘just being a mum’; informal learning had, ‘made me feel like a real person with something to offer’.

One individual from the focus group was subsequently involved in a personal interview to explore at greater length the importance of informal learning to personal development. She was asked by the researchers why she had gone in the first instance to a local information centre:

“I had no motivation. I lacked self confidence. I lacked self confidence because I had been knocked back so many times, my confidence I would say was nil. I just made the tea and coffee at first and then Sue got me to welcome visitors. It started to build the confidence. Confidence building came up at a ‘Making a Difference’ [an informal workshop] and I went along. I must admit that at first I sat back and just watched. But they make you feel so welcome there, they don’t push you; if you didn’t want to do it you don’t have to do it. You could just sit there and be involved if you wanted to. But that really did build my confidence that day. They did exercises which made you think I can get involved in this. I ended up getting involved and by the end of the day I was involved in the discussion. It went on from there.”

Getting involved in an accredited course was simply not an option for this individual at that stage: ‘I would have started panicking’.

The same individual then recounted an example at a public meeting where she had felt the concerns of rural areas were being overlooked. She decided to speak. Before her involvement in informal learning, ‘I couldn’t have done that. I would have just sat there and let it go by’. But she had taken the microphone and asked a question. Not being satisfied with the response she had pressed the point. A debate ensued which had lead to additional information being promised: ‘So something positive has come out of it. I wouldn’t have been able to do that. I would have just sat there’.

The same individual was subsequently seen taking part in a presentation on her own development through involvement in informal learning before an audience of 130 people. From those first tentative steps without any real focus she was now on a partnership steering committee, a member of the youth café committee, and represented the rural partnership on both the social forum and local strategic partnership. Additionally she was still involved with the local information centre, continued to attend informal learning workshops and had joined the accredited course.

This is clearly an outstanding example of soft outcome development. There is nevertheless particularly strong evidence of the benefits to other informal learners both with College in the Community and elsewhere. Building confidence was highly rated by participants in one focus group at Great Yarmouth Community Trust, whilst there was an even more dramatic illustration at another focus group at Sure Start. This involved learners from a different organisation who were asked independently to write down what was the main benefit for them from involvement in informal learning. They were asked to do this before any discussion in order to get their views without any influence from their peers. The results showed that 64% used the word ‘confidence’. This was sometimes qualified as in ‘confidence in myself’, ‘more
confident in being a good mum’ and ‘confidence in carrying on in life’. In total, 82% selected a soft outcome as the most important benefit for them.

The primacy of social and personal benefits from learning continued to be emphasised by this group. One individual had previously had what she regarded as menial and uninteresting jobs in cleaning and bar work. Her learning was seen as enabling her to widen her horizons concerning future employment but it was also very much about her worth as an individual and coming to terms with the end of an abusive relationship. Terms such as ‘self esteem’ and ‘keeping my brain active’ characterised the discussion.

Where this group of learners were in total agreement with the Benjamin Foundation clients and the learners at College in the Community was in the fundamental importance of key figures who provided support and encouragement. At a focus group held with clients of this organisation, all spoke very highly of their facilitator. One woman spoke of having quietly dropped out of an accredited course because of a lack of confidence in her success. The facilitator had seen her in the street and encouraged her back to undertake a less demanding course.

6.3.5 NORWICH COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

There was equally agreement amongst clients of Norwich Community Workshop on the effectiveness of staff. Clients with a degree of learning difficulty involved in a focus group rated staff ‘very good’ and ‘very helpful’. The staff suggested things for the clients to do. One individual said that staff ‘help me with my project which I couldn’t do without’. As this group was dispersing, one client made the telling comment about the workshop that: ‘It’s a reason to get up in the morning’. Such a personal and social outcome from involvement in informal learning was echoed by other clients and staff. One volunteer tutor said:

“It is rewarding seeing what people get out of it. It’s creative. Seeing people who have real problems achieve something in the way of pottery. It’s lovely. People get things out of it on their own level. It’s really nice seeing people go away happy.”

Another volunteer tutor had himself been a client. He responded when asked about what was being achieved for clients:

“Well I think I’m, or I hope I am, helping them to help themselves. Because the problems they have I have had and I understand what they are going through. And I find that that is easier to figure out. I wouldn’t like to work in a place like XXXX, because it’s about 95% disabled people and I don’t count myself as disabled at all. And I feel a bit put out if I find myself put with disabled people. It probably goes back to my childhood or something like that because I was always bunged in with special people and I don’t class myself as special. “

For this individual his route to current involvement began with overcoming personal difficulties through participation in informal learning at a time when an accredited course would have been impossible for him. He had progressed to an accredited course as a result of the personal development he had achieved and was now determined not to stop until he had ‘a cap and gown’. In addition to showing the researchers the draft of a book he had written, he was proud of now being a tutor at the project which had been such a help to him:
“And I think we teach them a better sense of being, if you know what I mean. People who come here have sometimes – they, how shall I put it – are a little bit down in the dumps and we cheer them up a bit, and that’s basically what we do and we try and teach them the best way to do it, to look after themselves, without having any stress or as less stress as possible. So that’s what we do.”

Other tutors expressed similar views. One said:

“The one thing the clients get most of all is a social thing, a real big social thing. Clients can be very isolated and come here and be part of one big family.”

Another put it as follows:

“With some people it is the social thing of being able to achieve something which they have tried other methods to do and they can’t do it. So it includes their self belief and confidence.”

The importance of the social aspect of the work of such organisations was further illustrated when a researcher was taking part in water colouring with a woman who had some learning difficulties. The client talked openly about her background. She said that people near where she lived had shunned her. Children had been told not to talk to her. This concerned her and she felt hurt. She said they did not understand ‘my problem’. The presence of supportive people and purposeful activity was therefore an important part of her life.

An equally positive message was received through a 91 year old receiving personal tuition in basic computer skills. He was writing his life history and showed chapters to the researchers with pride. His wife had died seven years before and he had health problems. The training was the focus of his life and he still drove himself to sessions and wanted more. He said:

“Well, to be honest, I had prostate cancer. When my wife died I thought I would have to do something to pull myself together. I thought I would try dancing again and then I had a blood test and had to go to hospital. I then had a heart attack. I thought this is good and I had to do something to get stuck into … You live alone, don’t you. Housework is a bit monotonous. You can get depressed. I want to get out doing something. I don’t like talking about anything.”

For this individual the help and support he had received at the workshop was crucial:

“The people are nice here. They try and help you. When I first came here, they could have thought they’d have a big job with me; I’d be hard work. They’re very good; I will say that. Whatever I want, they have done their best. I appreciate what they have done.”

Another client was a talented young man who was able to produce impressive art work. He had some learning difficulties and spoke of being on medication and having been referred to the workshop by his care worker. He told the researchers that he lived alone and, were it not for the workshop, would have probably been in bed watching television.
6.3.6 NORTH LYNN DISCOVERY PROJECT
The client group for the North Lynn Discovery Project was younger than for all the other projects and yet there were marked similarities in the views of staff and clients. One member of staff, when asked what was being achieved for young people, responded:

“If I can use cases [examples], there are three brothers who come up here. When I first started working here, two of them were troublesome. When you look into their background, their father … has only recently been convicted again of … fraud. These children were on the verge of being taken out of school because of their home life. Drugs are involved. The … fraud is there to feed the habit. Since the boys have been coming here, most of the time they will be here by half past three. The youngest is 8 years old. They will be here until 9 o’clock. What I feel we have achieved with these children is for one, they now have an understanding there is rules. You can’t just go around doing what you want to do. The young one was constantly being asked to go home because of his behaviour. You don’t hardly talk to the lad no more. He got into one of the football teams which he very much enjoys. That keeps him on track with his behaviour. If there was anything like a school of excellence for pool, he would be in it. His confidence has grown. The trouble he was having was he thought he couldn’t compete. Now I will put him in charge; give him responsibilities even at that young age. His self esteem has soared. A nice little lad and everyone up here thinks the world of him. His school work has picked up. He is learning all the time.”

Another member of staff said the project was about helping young people to ‘realise their potential’.

North Lynn has multiple indicators of relative deprivation which makes the degree of social impact of the project particularly important. For example, statistics from the 2001 national census (National statistics, 2004) show that the percentage of households having a lone parent with dependent children is, 13.6% in the area. This compares with the average for King’s Lynn and West Norfolk of 4.9% and the national average of 6.4%.

A similar picture emerges in terms of learning. In North Lynn 50% of residents aged between 16 and 74 have no educational qualifications, compared with 36% for King’s Lynn and West Norfolk and 29% for England and Wales, while only 5% were qualified to degree level or higher, compared with 13% for King’s Lynn and West Norfolk and 20% for England and Wales.

Given that North Lynn has 25% of residents aged under 16 compared with 20% for England and Wales, the impact of the project has a clear potential for breaking the cycle of deprivation.

A sample questionnaire survey undertaken for The SOUL research, completed by 76 young people attending the project, revealed positive indications of development. Respondents were asked to identify the manner in which the project helped them. A menu of possible soft outcomes was provided and young people were asked to identify all those which applied to them. There was also space to identify outcomes which did not appear on the menu. The response is presented in Table 8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>No. of Occasions Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'It stops me from getting bored'</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'It helps me make new friends'</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'It gives me new experiences'</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'It teaches me new skills'</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'It helps me feel more confident'</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'It helps me cope with my parents arguing'</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'It helps me cope with being picked on at school'</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Soft outcomes responses from sample questionnaire, North Lynn Discovery Project.

Other factors identified were ‘It helps me do better at school’; ‘It gets me out of the house’; and ‘It stops me from getting in trouble’. Those selecting increased confidence, new skills and new experiences as the most important of the benefits were 10%, 19% and 15% respectively (Appendix 3).

Young people in the survey felt particularly positive about the project: 91% felt ‘good’ in this respect and 66% identified ‘learning stuff’ as something they liked about attending. Given a free text opportunity to suggest ways in which the project could be improved, 13% used words indicating this was not possible. Other suggestions were only for minor improvements.

The results were supported in focus groups. Individuals spoke of being more confident and of being able to work as part of a team as a result of attending the project. New opportunities had been made available to them. They had visited places they might not otherwise have reached and benefited from the experience. Asked whether they were different people from attending the project, there were responses which indicated an increase in personal attributes such as motivation and confidence.

Two particular initiatives tracked by the researchers gave strong evidence of soft outcomes. In the first, a group of eight young people started dance training which culminated with a performance at a public dance workshop in Norwich after just two months. Many had not previously been involved in dance and none had taken part in a public performance.

Participants were asked if they had learnt anything from their experience. Their responses were:

- “I can do dance combinations I didn’t know I could”
- “I can dance. I like dancing”
- “How to be a bit more creative”
- “That I can actually do it and I tried!”
- “That I can actually dance”
- “That I can dance and enjoy it”
- “Well yes because last time I gave up half way through. This time I didn’t which proves I can do the dance workshop”.

One of the participants had written an account of the experience for her school. This detailed the preparation, hard work and increase in confidence that the performers experienced. The individual described how she had been inspired and now wanted to go to college in order to learn how to do different dance styles. She ended her article by writing:
“I would like to do this again but if it weren’t for the North Lynn Discovery Centre being there I wouldn’t have learnt anything.”

A dance tutor added:

“...when I see them, for example, at The Playhouse absolutely rising to the challenge of walking through a piece in front of a full house of two hundred people ... then doing the performance to their utmost ability, that’s when I know it’s worked, that it’s the right thing to be doing and that’s the right way to be working.”

Similarly positive outcomes were derived from the other tracked initiative. A group of young people working with professional musicians had recorded a pop song working in the recording studio at the centre. A suggestion was made that with a change of lyrics, this could be turned into a video with an anti drugs message. This was taken up enthusiastically by the whole centre. A member of staff and one of the teenage singers stayed up until one o’clock writing new lyrics.

The main singers were five young men. They were extremely excited about the whole initiative and one told a researcher that he did not believe it possible that he could be involved in making a video. All were keen to spread an anti drugs message based on their own experiences of living in North Lynn. A dance tutor quickly worked out a dance routine for the video. Other much younger members were recruited to be backing singers and clap in time to the music.

The video was shot in the centre and in the streets of North Lynn. It involved the five youths stopping bad things happening to young people on the estate. A researcher was surprised when the young people decided to ask a local drug dealer if they could video outside his house, and was further surprised when he gave them permission to do so. His expensive BMW and boat testified to a degree of opulence, but a front door that still revealed the burn marks where someone had petrol bombed his house vividly illustrated life for young people on the estate and the difficult choices in life they would need to make.

The output of the initiative was the one video produced. The valuable outcomes, however, were precisely those which had been achieved through the dance group. All those involved with the video thought it was one of the most exciting things to happen at the centre. They had learnt valuable lessons about teamwork, persistence, patience in rehearsing the scenes over and over again, developing acting, singing and dancing skills. Above all they learnt that they have an important part to play in what the Centre seeks to achieve and that big ideas can be accomplished if they are prepared to see things through.

6.3.7 SUMMARY
A deliberate research aim of The SOUL Project first phase had been to select organisations with a wide spread of client groups (Section 3.2). As Table 6 and the subsequent discussion has indicated however, a marked similarity was mapped in terms of soft outcomes between different client groups. These coalesce around personal and social skills.

A further similarity was found in relation to the issue of measuring and monitoring such soft outcomes. There was general agreement that it was important to be able to provide persuasive evidence of achievement, but few ideas on the nature of a suitable system. Staff often tended to see evaluation systems as separate from service delivery and these were therefore given low priority. At one focus group a
participant from the executive level of an organisation talked in general terms of the evaluation methods they used, only to be corrected by a colleague involved in project management who said this just was not happening because of pressure of work. Evaluations which were seen as merely serving the interests of funders were a burden:

“I suppose I do feel vaguely resentful underneath. On the one level I can see yeah we should be evidencing this it’s a good thing, on another level I think well there’s a lot of other things I could be doing. Because it is very time consuming. It can be. And I find it hard to do.”

For staff directly involved with service delivery there were real and understandable concerns about the demands which might be placed on them by any system for measuring soft outcomes. One tutor was involved with accredited training on a paid basis and informal learning as a volunteer in the same organisation. She accepted the need for completing paperwork in terms of the accredited training, but not necessarily for her voluntary role:

“For me there is one big difference. One is paid work. One is unpaid work. The accreditation does take time and effort and as a volunteer I am not sure I would be prepared to do that. There are limits.”

Clients could also share concern about completing paperwork. A focus group where participants had largely progressed from informal learning to an accredited course revealed weariness over form filling. Reference was made to the chore of filling in the same forms over and over for each accredited course they attended. An individual interviewed was equally concerned by such paperwork:

“I find it really difficult. If I get any form I sit there and think Oh! I’ve got to fill this form in. I don’t understand big words. I like it straight and in everyday language. When you start putting jargon in, then I switch off.”

On the other hand, learners did like to know they were making progress in informal learning. At the same focus group, one individual spoke of having put her learning aims in a sealed envelope at the start of a course. At the end of the course, she had opened the envelope and reflected on what had been achieved. This had given her personal satisfaction.

A Benjamin Foundation staff member was equally certain that clients needed to know they were developing:

“Yes, it is vital to their progress here and whether their placement is a success or not. If they don’t feel they are achieving nothing, it is quite easy for these young people to just chuck it away and walk away from it. We do get it quite often when our residents are feeling depressed or bad and they have been here six months and Winston Court is a bad place to be and they aren’t achieving and what’s the point in our being here; that’s a good chance for us to step in and say you are achieving. Since you have been here you have done this, a training course, you have addressed this issue.”

Clients did appreciate, for example, even simply receiving a certificate from an organisation signifying that they had completed an informal course. It was also the case that staff concerned about resource implications of any measurement system
became markedly more positive and enthusiastic when it was suggested that a system could benefit clients as well as funders.

### 6.4 THE SOUL RECORD: ORIGINAL VERSION

The system developed for implementation in the second phase of research was provisionally called ‘The SOUL Record’. Given the association of the ‘SOUL’ project title with music, this imagery was followed through into the original version of the framework produced. Terms, such as ‘play list’ and ‘tracks’, were used to indicate sections of the system.

The system used was paper based. Whilst the researchers clearly realised the advantages which could be derived from a computer software model, it was essential that a robust paper based system be developed in the first instance. The framework was constantly emphasised as ‘work in progress’, to all those participating in the second phase of research.

During the first phase of research, the focus had been on the clients who were in receipt of the services offered by voluntary and community sector organisations. It became clear that staff who worked for such organisations, whether on a paid or voluntary basis, also derived considerable benefits in terms of soft outcomes such as increased self esteem. Nevertheless, in devising the original version of The SOUL Record, the assumption was that it would be used to measure the ‘distance travelled’ of clients rather than staff. It was equally assumed that clients would be in a continuing relationship with an organisation. The measurement of soft outcomes for discrete events, such as a one day workshop, was not therefore considered at this stage.

Even before this version was launched at two dissemination events, amendments had been made to earlier drafts as a result of comments by individuals and focus groups. It was fully expected that this would continue during the second phase of research in a dynamic process with experienced practitioners in the voluntary and community sector participating as researchers.

The SOUL Record in this original version took the lessons and conclusions of the first phase of research fully into account. It was learner or client centred and based on positive affirmation. Whilst it would therefore potentially provide, through a numerical score, a means of clearly demonstrating the degree of individual achievement in terms of soft outcomes, there were limitations. It would not be possible, for example, to directly compare one client with another, nor one voluntary sector organisation with another.

The system was as generic as possible, but the wide disparity in client needs meant allowance had been made for considerable flexibility. Only those parts of the system relevant to an individual client were intended to be used, although consistency would be a key requirement.

The client would own and fully participate in the system, which was solution focussed (Section 5.5). Concentration was therefore on what an individual could do, rather than things they had been unable to achieve. The system was intentionally intended as a positive experience for learners, where their development was encouraged, recognised and valued.

Whilst there were significant differences, The SOUL Record drew on the theoretical orientation of ‘The Personal Power Pack’ (Section 5.5). One difference was that The SOUL Record provided for learners of all ages.
In relation to adults, there were two forms of the system. The first, or ‘A side’ was based on a questionnaire of 21 positive statements to which a degree of agreement was sought. Examples of statements were:

- I feel good about myself
- I am a confident person
- I get on well with people

A Likert scale of six points was used, ranging horizontally from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to ‘strongly agree’ (6) to incorporate a scoring system. Respondents were asked to ring the relevant number to indicate their degree of agreement with the positive statement.

An even number of points was chosen to avoid the possibility of learners simply choosing to circle the middle number and instead encouraged respondents to engage with and consider each statement. Indeed, research by the authors demonstrated that all participants have a view about their own life. Six points were considered the optimum number to show progress and also relate the numbers to a specific measure of agreement.

This form was intended to be used shortly after a client joined an organisation in order to determine a ‘baseline’ measurement. For many clients, it would be appropriate to allow a short settling in period before the form was completed. Ideally, the form would be completed by the client and worker together. This would not only assist with the interpretation of any words which might be unfamiliar, but allow the worker to engage with the client. Additionally, it would provide a degree of triangulation where unusually low or high responses could be checked with the client.

It was expected that there would be occasions where the form was given to clients to complete unaided. In order to illustrate the effect this would have, an exercise was incorporated into the first set of workshops attended by those participating in the second phase of research. Initially, individuals completed a questionnaire on their own. They were then paired, so that one participant worked through the questionnaire with a colleague. The version of the questionnaire completed in this fashion was then compared with that completed individually. In every case there were subtle differences between the two versions, which might appear surprising, given that there was a time interval of only minutes between them. The questionnaire completed with a colleague did take longer, but was arguably more relevant in terms of establishing a ‘baseline’. The process of reflection and triangulation undertaken in the joint completion of the questionnaire made the results more valid and reliable. This demonstrates the important point that part of the value of The SOUL Record lies in the competence of the facilitator with whom or through whom questionnaires, worksheets or observation sheets are completed and justifies the need to train users of the system.

Having established a ‘baseline’, a form with exactly the same statements would then need to be used on at least one further occasion in order to identify the ‘distance travelled’. Development would be indicated by a higher numerical score. Organisations were encouraged to use the form on more than one subsequent occasion to map progression and identify possible areas for specific help.

It was thought that the questionnaire would be particularly helpful as a diagnostic device. The need for simplicity and concern over resource implications of any
measurement system had constantly been impressed on the researchers. It was therefore felt that the questionnaire would respond to the needs of those voluntary and community sector organisations without the infrastructure to implement a more detailed model.

The initial form was headed ‘Getting to know you’ and that used on subsequent occasions as ‘Getting to know you better’. With these forms, and all the other work sheets in the system, colour was used to make them attractive and interesting to clients. The use of colour had already received strong support from focus groups.

The statements in the forms linked to three general areas into which the research indicated soft outcomes could be divided of ‘attitude’, ‘personal’ and ‘practical’. On the ‘A side’, which used questionnaires, this division would not be apparent to the learner, although the scoring method could still be used to allocate responses appropriately to each of the general areas.

In the second, more detailed, adult form of the system, the measurement was linked with progress monitoring and goal setting. In this fashion, any detectable improvement could be linked to the activities of the organisation engaging with the learner. Headings of ‘attitude’, ‘personal’ and ‘practical’ were used, called the ‘B side’ and these explored various themes through the use of worksheets. This was complementary to the ‘A side’ and allowed for situations where there was an individual relationship between the client and member of staff, such as in key work.

There were a total of nine individual work sheets provided, with three in each section of the soft outcomes areas noted above. Only those sheets relevant to the individual client would be used, although consistency would require the use of the same sheets at all review sessions. It was never envisaged that an individual would be given the sheets to complete on their own. Indeed, statements included on the sheets were primarily intended to generate conversations and engagement by the learner in the process.

Each worksheet consisted of ten positive statements, which were ticked if an individual felt it referred to them, having discussed the point with the facilitator. Specific examples of the manner in which skills had improved in the relevant area would be recorded, with prompts given for consideration by the client. Goals were set for the next review and recorded. A points system valued all these areas, but was deliberately weighted in favour of goals achieved since the last review. The scoring system enabled progress to be monitored and measured.

The learner would sign each sheet to indicate ownership and copies could be provided if a portfolio system was being used. Pictorial representations of progress, such as in graphs or bar charts, would be encouraged as providing further support and motivation to clients. Clearly, the ‘B side’ (featuring worksheets) was intended for regular use, rather than on a minimum of two occasions.

The two sides (questionnaires and worksheets) of the adult version were mirrored in a format for children. In this case, however, the system was directly linked to the areas of outcomes for children identified in The Children Act 2004. The ‘A’ and ‘B’ sides therefore linked to four areas of ‘being healthy’, ‘staying safe’, ‘enjoying and achieving’ and ‘making a positive contribution’.

The ‘A side’ (questionnaires) had 20 instead of the 21 statements in the adult version (in order to easily divide the statements into the four general areas noted above) and
the already simple and straightforward language used was modified for young people. Examples of statements were:

- I try my best at school
- I have lots of friends
- I am a confident person

The 'B side' (worksheets) of the version for young people had a total of eight sheets, with two in each section for the four general areas. Alternative methods of gaining the views of young people were suggested for both sides of the system. Pictorial cards were one possibility. These would equate to points on the scale and allow a young person to point to an appropriate card as a means of indicating their degree of agreement. Smiley faces were included in the worksheets on the 'B side', allowing a young person either to tick them or colour them to indicate agreement.

The researchers were encouraged by the positive response from practitioners shown early versions of the system since members of the organisations involved in the second phase of research would have a crucial role in further developing the system. It also seemed clear that considerable data would be obtained on the measurement of soft outcomes which would enhance the conclusions of the final report.

7. DISSEMINATION EVENTS

7.1 INTRODUCTION
At the end of the first year of research, two dissemination events were held, one in Norwich and the other in King’s Lynn. The purpose of these events was to inform participants about the progress of the research, seek feedback on the emerging findings and invite participation in the second year of research.

Each event had been planned for a maximum of 35 people. The level of interest in the issue of measuring soft outcomes meant the events were heavily oversubscribed; more than 150 people actually attended.

Both events included presentations from the researchers on the first year of research and The SOUL Record, the system developed to measure soft outcomes. Facilitated workshop groups discussed the conclusions of the first year and gave an initial reaction to the system. Views were recorded and contributed directly to the research. The events concluded with an invitation to local voluntary and community sector organisations to become one of the forty being sought to trial and develop the system over the next year.

Emphasis was given to the fact that the system was in a developmental stage and that the second year of research would provide a unique opportunity for people associated with local organisations to play a major role in research of national significance.

7.2 EVALUATION
The evaluation of both events was by way of a questionnaire with a number of positive statements: 41 questionnaires were completed at the King’s Lynn event and 69 at the Norwich event. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a six point scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The results are detailed in Table 9.
Table 9: Responses to evaluation of dissemination events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Soft outcomes should be valued in terms of promoting social inclusion</th>
<th>Norwich (%)</th>
<th>King’s Lynn (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<td>Slightly disagree</td>
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<td>Disagree</td>
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<td>Strongly disagree</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. 'The SOUL Record' has the potential for measuring soft outcomes</th>
<th>Norwich (%)</th>
<th>King’s Lynn (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly agree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. 'The SOUL Record' would benefit my organisation</th>
<th>Norwich (%)</th>
<th>King’s Lynn (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly agree</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those attending were almost unanimous in expressing agreement to some degree with the following statements: 'The event kept me interested; 'The event was well structured'; I was able to get my views across; and 'The venue was suitable'. For example:

"Very well facilitated event with lively informal discussions."

"I enjoyed it today and I think everything went well and everyone got their say."

"Overall a very positive event."

"Worthwhile event"

"Good opportunity to network. The inclusion of young people in event was inspirational. The best bit was the video!"

Many specific comments were made which were considered in detail by the researchers. A selection is presented below.

On the adaptability of The SOUL Record:

"The SOUL Record can be used as a tool for development/adaptation pertinent to individual organisations’ clients needs”.

"I feel the questions need to be revised in some cases but that the scheme has the potential to be very beneficial to many. It would certainly work with the people I work with”.

"I think there would be need for adaptation in any organisation".
“I think the SOUL Record would need to be customised for each individual organisation due to the diverse nature of clientele and the work done.”

“It would be useful to influence how to tailor the system to individual client groups (e.g. v. different factors apply to those working with children to those with a learning difficulty).”

“Organisations should be able to adapt the SOUL Record so as to produce a version that is appropriate for their particular activity. It is difficult to see how it can be used with short-term or one-off learning activities. Participants should not find it insulting”.

“I think it will be great so long as the different organisations using it can tweak it according to their needs”.

“Equally applicable to statutory bodies.”

On the future of The SOUL Record:

“This will be a useful tool for the new TUC project, we have to record so to trial this system would be excellent”.

“Great idea and concept – looking forward to seeing how it develops and hope the system proves beneficial! Not too keen on ‘soft’ as seems to belittle achievements against ‘hard’ ones!”

“Hope the second phase goes as well as the first phase has done so far”.

“Not all organisations are at the stage to embrace evaluating their outcomes as they need to complete some form of self-assessment of their service. Once organisations are prepared to undertake a self-assessment of their service and delivery they will then be prepared to look at progression of their service users.”

On the need to measure soft outcomes:

“The theory about SOUL and its ideology needs to be commended. It’s about time. Well done”.

“I am delighted to participate. I believe so many of us have waited so long for such a project”.

Suggestions for developing The SOUL Record:

“Project geared to individual clients rather than voluntary workers or the communities in which the projects exist. The larger community would be a valuable source of information on how a project seems to work – Any ideas on how to measure this?”

“The language and tone of questions would not be useful to Older People. But the principle and format are excellent.”

“SOUL Record rooted in education model from examples given. Need to see/influence? worksheets for adults”.

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“Still finding process a bit confusing, therefore so important that this becomes a practical exercise ASAP.”

“Like the idea but the SOUL Record looks in danger of being too complicated and time-consuming. Don’t let the system become too bureaucratic. Will be interested to work with you.”

General comments:

“An innovative and well researched project. I am inspired by it”

“I’m impressed by the process by which this has been, and will continue to be developed. I’m sure this will become an important part of our evaluation process”.

“SOUL Record – a good idea in theory. Very necessary to develop. GOOD LUCK!”

“Very informative seminar. Within our organisation I feel the SOUL Record would be easier to use on volunteer workers during learning than the client group – crime victims (victim support).”

“Really good to be invited and involved in this project”.

“Well done. Keep up the good work”.

“Enjoyed the day and found it very beneficial. Good to interact with other projects and hear their differing opinions on the subject and both your and their projects and how it could be of a help to both you and them.”

“Useful session on a personal level (currently undertaking a level 4 management course). Not sure how SOUL fits with my organisation’s objectives – supporting elderly at home following discharge from hospital. However, I am very aware that funders are becoming more interested in “how we make a difference” and of course the “Unit Costing”. Forewarned is forearmed and so thank you for a useful session its good to be in the know. Thank you.”

8. RESEARCH PHASE TWO: OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the dissemination events, 71 expressions of definite or possible interest in participating in the second phase of research were received. After a process of review and discussion, 47 organisations were selected for inclusion in the process; although subsequently only 42 organisations fully participated during phase 2 (Section 4.3). The number of projects involved was greater than the number of organisations (Appendix 1). A particularly wide spread was achieved in terms of both geography and client groups (Table 2).

Organisations were asked to commit to three workshops over the course of the year to allow for two complete action research cycles. The degree to which they would trial The SOUL Record was in each case a matter for discussion and agreement with the researchers.
Workshops were organised in sets over a short time span. The first set began on 11th October 2004, in order to build on the enthusiasm expressed at the dissemination events. The second set began on 1st March 2005 and the third on 5th September 2005. Workshop venues were arranged throughout Norfolk in order to minimise travelling for participants.

### 8.2 FIRST WORKSHOP SET

There were six workshops in this set, attended by a total of 68 people. In addition, three separate briefings were organised for individuals for whom none of the workshop dates were suitable.

The learning outcomes for the workshop were as follows:

- To explain the difference between outputs and outcomes
- To list the requirements of participation in the research
- To identify the knowledge required to measure soft outcomes
- To explain the theory behind The SOUL Record
- To identify best practice to implement The SOUL Project

All those attending were invited to complete an evaluation form at the start of the workshops which was directly aimed at the learning outcomes and illustrating how The SOUL Record works. This produced a baseline measure in order to determine the extent to which the outcomes were met. A repeat of the exercise at the end of the workshop measured the distance travelled. In each case the views of participants were scaled (between 1 to 6) and could be expressed as a numerical score out of 30 (i.e. for a total of five questions). A total of 58 completed sets of forms were returned. Aggregating the scores provided the results in Table 10 and Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcomes, first workshop series, second phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggregated score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can explain the difference between outputs and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can list the requirements for participation in the SOUL Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150 - 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify the knowledge required to measure soft outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250 - 350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can explain the theory behind 'The SOUL Record'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350 - 450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify the best way to implement the SOUL Record</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Aggregated scores for learning outcomes, first series of workshops, second phase, at the start and end of sessions.
Learning outcomes | Start | Finish |
--- | --- | ---
1. I can explain the difference between outputs and outcomes | 185 | 296 |
2. I can list the requirements for participation in The SOUL Record | 127 | 275 |
3. I can identify the knowledge required to measure soft outcomes | 128 | 294 |
4. I can explain the theory behind The SOUL Record | 132 | 286 |
5. I can identify the best way to implement The SOUL Record | 113 | 276 |

Table 10: Aggregated scores for learning outcomes, first series of workshops, second phase, at the start and end of sessions.

Another way of expressing these aggregate scores is that the average score at the start of the workshops was 12 and at the end had increased to 25. Both formats illustrate the distance travelled and therefore are an indication of the success of the workshops judged against the learning outcomes.

The feedback was very positive. For example:

“Effective, supportive, confidence-building.”

“You made us work hard but I found it valuable, interesting and worthwhile!”

“Really useful and enjoyable – many thanks – I know we can use this in our organisation.”

“Grounded and easy to understand. Good learner participation and opportunity to contribute.”

“Well organised, well run. Good trainers, clear, well-paced, variety of activities.”

“Workshop was presented in a method that allowed full participation. Relaxed and informative.”

“A very interesting, thorough and informative workshop. Am looking forward to participate within research.”

“Thank you for today, really enjoyed it, and will be asking you to visit to look at how we will implement.”

“Useful day – feel positive about the system.”

“Useful and accessible. Good level of support for individual projects.”

“Very professional presentations and day as a whole. Good to have such motivated group facilitators.”

“Very clearly explained – good trainers – very informative and has left me with a clear understanding of the project.”

“Very useful – the offer of continued support and modification to suit users needs is very useful and reassuring…I will be in touch!”

“Very worthwhile training – now understand the SOUL concept and how it will be relevant to my work and project.”
“Very interesting day. Brian and Lee very good at presenting and very flexible with our comments. I look forward to putting this into practice.”

8.3 BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND WORKSHOP SETS
The second phase of SOUL research involved local organisations trialling and developing The SOUL Record. The researchers maintained contact and offered support as necessary to these organisations. Requests were received to provide training for members of organisations who were to use the framework, but were unable to attend one of the initial workshops. Some organisations needed the SOUL material to be amended to allow for their particular needs. All those organisations contacted during this phase were encouraging. Staff working directly with clients valued the use of the framework as a diagnostic device.

Although the focus of the SOUL research was to provide evidence of achievements on behalf of clients, at least two organisations realised that the same techniques could be used to show the learning gains achieved by volunteers attending initial training courses. The researchers advised on this development in order to produce data of direct relevance to the research.

The researchers actively engaged in encouraging acceptance of The SOUL Record concept by funding organisations. Meetings took place between the researchers and a variety of smaller funding bodies, including Acorn Grants and Norfolk Children’s Fund and local authorities to discuss their evidential requirements. The researchers also attended a Learning and Skills Council presentation on the RARPA process in London (Section 5.4) to ensure that The SOUL Record met the requirements for this process (Appendix 4). A preliminary and outline discussion was held with Open College Network Eastern Region, who provide accreditation for adult learning, on possible partnership development of The SOUL Record. It is thought that it should be possible to accredit the process of learning and not the learning itself. An informal pottery course could thus be accredited not for the activity itself but for the manner in which learning was encouraged.

8.4 SECOND WORKSHOP SET
The second series of workshops proved a valuable learning experience as practitioners received further training and were able to feed back the results of their use of The SOUL Record so far. Six workshops were held in Norwich, Great Yarmouth, King’s Lynn and Sheringham in March and April 2005. Participants reported back on their experience of using The SOUL Record and were shown how to use it as a diagnostic tool and as part of service delivery. They were also shown how to present information to funders. The workshops were attended by 49 people representing 33 organisations.

Lower numbers of participants when compared to the first set of workshops, can be partly explained by some organisations sending just one representative on this occasion and by appalling weather conditions affecting one of the events, which reduced the number of participants to just three. Those organisations which did take part reported success in using The SOUL Record, were able to point out where The Record did not meet their requirements and worked collectively to help improve the system. An evaluation of five of the workshops was conducted asking participants to indicate a scale of agreement with four positive statements (Table 11).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly agree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was able to provide information on the use of the SOUL Record</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reflected on my experience using the framework</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned from other practitioners</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I worked cooperatively with colleagues on amendments and development of the framework</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Evaluation of second workshops, second phase.

Those participants who were unable to agree with the statements were exclusively from organisations that had not started trialling The SOUL Record as yet. The workshops were well received, for example:

“A very useful day. Things are now a lot more clearer.”

“Very valuable – sharing experiences and how organisations are implementing the SOUL Record.”

“Every part of this workshop has been relevant + very useful. Like new developments + way focused on funder – more relevant statements etc!”

“[The workshop has] put into context of use within project, re-assured use of model, valuable & relevant, valuable sharing of experience and ideas.”

“Look closely at future development in quality and training of the SOUL Project; also issues of sustainability on the national agenda – this excellent project needs branding.”

“Well done! I hope the project will go national.”

“The day was well paced and delivered very well with useful handouts & illuminating examples. It has clarified several points regarding implementation and given me greater confidence in using it as a tool in our organisation.”

“Very positive and everyone was able to bring valuable, valid information and contributions.”

“Can't wait to put it into practice”

“This was a really useful workshop. There were lots of opportunities to reflect on measuring soft outcomes & much lively discussion of the issues involved. Very helpful information on reporting to funders.”

“It is really good to see how the research is developing into a working tool that I am hoping we will use with the YMCA schools work. Great stuff.”
“Clear, concise, informative, supportive, friendly, and excellent.”

“This has renewed my enthusiasm for SOUL and I can clearly see how I will be able to use it.”

8.5 BETWEEN SECOND AND THIRD WORKSHOP SETS

The second set of workshops revealed a lack of activity in trialling The SOUL Record by a number of organisations. Problems highlighted were changes in staffing, or shortage of staffing, which meant that workers were not in post for a sufficient length of time to start using the system. The workshops did, however, inspire a number of those to start work on using the system. This reflects an ongoing problem within the VCS that high levels of staff mobility, caused by short term contracts and the unpredictability of funding, means that staff who have been trained and equipped to train others in the use of a system will not necessarily stay within the organisation for any longer than a few years. When such members of staff leave they take their skills, enthusiasm and knowledge of how to use the system with them.

Nine of the original second phase organisations had made no effort to start using The SOUL Record and these were contacted and urged to commit to trialling The SOUL Record and to attend the last one day workshop. None of these organisations responded. The SOUL remit had been to work with forty organisations trialling the system. In order to achieve this objective the researchers recruited nine replacement organisations, which were willing and eager to participate and use The SOUL Record. Despite this, the original 47 organisations recruited reduced to 42 by the end of the phase, although this number was to still in excess of the target set out in the project aims and objectives (Section 2).

Recruitment of the new organisations was a relatively easy task as knowledge of The SOUL Record had become widely disseminated throughout the Norfolk VCS. Organisations were and are becoming increasingly aware of the need to, and desirability of, measuring soft outcomes and this led to a good response to participate in this phase of the research.

The researchers conducted four in-house training workshops in the use of The SOUL Record for 33 people representing seven organisations funded by the North Earlham Larkman and Marlpit development partnership (NELM), five projects run by OMNIA and Norwich MIND and five projects run by Great Yarmouth and Waveney MIND, and one for practitioners working with Embrace Young Mums. These sessions were intended for those organisations that had been unable to attend the second series of workshops or which were new to The SOUL Project. Great Yarmouth and Waveney MIND had originally decided to use The SOUL Record with just one client group but were so enthusiastic that they decided to extend use of the system to measure soft outcomes across all their projects.

The researchers continued their policy of talking to funders and other interested parties to explain the value in using The SOUL Record for clients, organisations and funders. Meetings were held with representatives of Norwich NHS Primary Care Trust and NELM to inform them about The SOUL Project and SOUL Record and its value for organisations they fund. Both funding bodies expressed a desire for organisations they fund to use The SOUL Record as an effective way of demonstrating soft outcomes and distance travelled.

Fifteen site visits took place to observe, talk to clients, and support organisations in implementing The SOUL Record and merge existing paperwork. These organisations
comprised Families House, Victim Support Norfolk, NR5, Great Yarmouth and Waveney MIND, One to One Project, Family Welfare Association, Age Concern Norwich, the Benjamin Foundation Bizfizz, NEICG, Victim Support Great Yarmouth, West Norfolk MIND, Forward & Futures, and Body, Mind and Spirit.

A constant source of irritation to practitioners is the abundance of paperwork that they are required to complete in the course of their service delivery. The SOUL Record could be seen as yet another burden on their time and resources, albeit a necessary one in order to demonstrate progress. Several organisations have been eager to incorporate The SOUL Record within their existing paperwork and the researchers facilitated this process by amalgamating The SOUL Record with their existing documentation.

The researchers met with Norfolk’s two Outcomes Champions. Outcomes Champions are recruited from voluntary sector organisations, many of whom are responsible for training, development or capacity building. The purpose of this meeting was to update one another on the respective projects, which are both funded by the Big Lottery. The projects are complementary in that Outcomes Champions consider the overall perspective of outcomes awareness within organisations and The SOUL Projects enables organisations to actually measure outcomes with individual learners. The Norfolk Outcomes Champions suggested existing methods for measuring outcomes and mentioned The SOUL Record as an effective way of doing so. At one of their workshops it was noticed that one group were significantly faster at the activities and better informed than the others. When asked how this was the case, they replied that they were using The SOUL Record.

After the second series of workshops The SOUL Record was extensively revised to take into account new legislation and the experience of practitioners and learners using the system so that it featured three types of measurements: questionnaires, worksheets, and observation sheets. Additional sheets were developed to measure soft outcomes in communities, group settings, gaining confidence, parenting, and skills for life. In addition to the questionnaires and worksheets devised for children and young people relating specifically to four of the key areas in the Children’s Act (‘being healthy’, ‘staying safe’, ‘enjoying and achieving’ and ‘making a positive contribution’) material for a fifth area (‘achieving economic well being’) was also devised. The economic well being section fits into the raising aspirations agenda identified by the Norfolk Learning Partnership and the local LSC and was added so that organisations working with children could demonstrate changing attitudes towards training, educational and employment among Norfolk school pupils. Further information about the final version of The SOUL Record is given in Section 8.8.

In order to enable The SOUL Record to be used as a stand-alone-tool the researchers developed a User Guide which was validated by members of the steering committee, other researchers and selected organisations trialling the guide.

A computerised Spreadsheet Results Package (SRP), using Microsoft Excel, was developed to enable practitioners to record results effectively and easily in a database. This package provides an average score for questionnaires, worksheets and/or observation sheets for groups or individuals using The SOUL Record and converts these statistics into bar graphs which can be used to present the progress of these clients to support funding applications and/or for monitoring reports. The package was initially trialled with two organisations with support provided by the researchers. This formed part of the validation process, which was strengthened by testing within The Research Centre, City College Norwich (Appendix 5).
8.6 THIRD WORKSHOP SET
There were six workshops in the third set, held in Sheringham, King’s Lynn, Great Yarmouth and Norwich. The workshops were attended by 52 people representing 42 organisations.

The workshops had the following learning outcomes and aims:

- To gain further understanding of how to use The SOUL Record
- To enable participants to present evidence of soft outcomes to funders
- To raise awareness and gain an understanding of the RARPA process and how The SOUL Record relates to it
- To clarify how participants would like to see The SOUL Record proceed in the future.

A great sense of achievement was felt as practitioners shared their experiences of The SOUL Record to date, and were introduced to the new developments including new questionnaires, worksheets, user guide and the Spreadsheet Results Package (SRP). As with the first and second round of workshops an evaluation exercise took place at the beginning and end of the day to assess and measure which of the outcomes had been met. A total of 52 completed sets of evaluation forms were returned at the end of the workshops. The results are presented in Table 12 and Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcomes, third workshop series, second phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aggregated score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to use the SOUL Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to present evidence of soft outcomes to funders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good understanding of the RARPA process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how I would like the SOUL Project to proceed from here</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Aggregated scores for learning outcomes, third series of workshops, second phase, at the start and end of sessions.
Learning outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning outcome</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>Finish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I know how to use The SOUL Record</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I know how to present evidence of soft outcomes to funders</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have a good understanding of the RARPA process</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I know how I would like The SOUL Project to proceed from here</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Aggregated scores for learning outcomes, third series of workshops, second phase, at the start and end of sessions.

Another way of conveying this is that the average score at the start of the workshops was 11 and at the end had increased to 18. This shows the third phase of workshops to be a success and indicates that the learning outcomes and aims were met. Comments from the forms included:

“[It was] really useful and informative, particularly with regard to presenting evidence to funders.”

“[An] excellent workshop with lots of new ideas. SOUL continues to go from strength to strength.”

“I am incredibly impressed with the SOUL Project. It is vital that funding continues. SOUL needs further development and organisations need individual support to tailor make SOUL to their organisations. Training officers will be vital to help new organisations or workers use the systems. Funders and the statutory services will benefit from the uniform presentation of SOFT OUTCOMES.”

“I wish I had attended the other workshops as today has helped me to understand the SOUL Project a lot more, as up until now I haven’t felt completely comfortable with it.”

“As with the previous workshops, it has been clear, concise and focussed. I hope the project continues and that SOUL can be used in other counties. It would be good to have Train the Trainer sessions and future workshops for new users. Excellent project – great staff.”

“Excellent presentation and materials – particularly SRP. SOUL needs to continue in the future and community/voluntary organisations need to understand the value for internal evaluation as well as providing external evaluation, with information.”

“I feel that the SOUL Project has been an excellent tool that my team have been able to be part of developing, as a way of measuring the impact of the work we do with children. I would like SOUL to continue and I am working with my staff to continue to use this.”

“[It was] very useful and detailed, further introduction of other and further new worksheets adding even more scope for tailor made questions for clients. New worksheets simplified for results much better; simple, clear and concise. Simple and clear is best to work with. Keep system unfuss and user friendly.”
“Working through sheets (role play etc) was quite useful. SOUL Project must continue because of its’ clear benefit to learner’s, to organisations, and to funders assessing value for money.”

“I have set a target for our organisation to rollout SOUL by December 2005 with all support workers understanding it. It has been and will continue to be a very valuable tool in our practice with clients and has saved time for our support workers, helping them achieve results. SOUL should be made available nationally as it is an asset to personal development within all client groups and would be selfish to keep it to ourselves and deny others the opportunity of working with it. It would also be advantageous for our statutory partners to work with SOUL and gain more parity in our practice – the consistency would benefit clients directly and facilitate understanding between workers – especially where there are a number of people involved in someone’s care and development from varying agencies. SOUL has enormous potential to be developed as a Human Resources tool in business and we are considering its use with our staff in appraisal and career development. What is vital is that quality is in some way secured. The tool is useless if the worker doe not understand how to use it. The support we have received to integrate the system into our organisation has been invaluable and can take time. It is worth doing thoroughly. The system could be sold with training and a support package on a sliding scale or free to voluntary organisations and sold to other sectors. Thank you for all your hard work and support.”

“I would like Home-Start UK (the national organisation, which has 333 schemes in UK and British Armed Forces) to work with SOUL to develop a version that can be used in each scheme – specific to Home-Start.”

“Would like to see an easy way of inputting data as our organisation deals with about 6500 clients per year. Computerisation waited with intent.”

“This is the first time I have come into contact with ‘SOUL’. As a monitoring officer for a funding body I believe the model it provides identifies a ‘gap in the market’ and is a really useful tool for organisations and funders. It would be a great pity if the project were to end in February. Perhaps it could be taken forward regionally/nationally and look at the idea of charging.”

Feedback was sought via forms on participants’ use of The SOUL Record. The forms corresponded to The SOUL Record ‘Getting to Know You’ framework with twenty-one positive statements split into the three sections of attitude, personal/inter-personal and practical. Workshop attendees were asked to talk through the questionnaire in pairs with one person discussing the statements whilst the other responded to them, thus forming a conversation. The attendees would then swap roles. The purpose of this was not only to give the participants further practice of using The SOUL Record format, but also to identify to the researchers any problematical statements/topics. Following this exercise, there was discussion amongst the group and feedback revealed a clear pattern emerging of disagreement with specific statements.

The workshop attendees disagreed most with the statement ‘Learners enjoy using The SOUL Record’ in the attitude section, proposing that although their learners were happy to complete the sheets, they did not always enjoy doing so and some were pleased when they had finished. Conversely, some respondents acknowledged the
enjoyment their learners had whilst completing The SOUL Record and suggested
that it acts as a ‘good ice breaker’ and it is ‘good for developing conversation’. Other
workshop attendees recommended that it was best to complete The SOUL Record in
a private and confidential manner. Some participants only found it useful to use The
SOUL Record at the second or third meeting with a client, when trust had been
developed. One organisation has an implemented ‘unwritten’ law that when
somebody joins the organisation they agree to complete The SOUL Record. It was
noted by this organisation that learners prefer to complete The SOUL Record than
the support plan which was in place previously. The organisation’s three monthly
reviews took longer as the learner was more open and wanted to compare their
previous sheets. This was a positive experience for both learner and worker and
created a conversation between them as a result.

Two statements from the personal/inter-personal section were regularly disagreed
with at the workshops. The first statement was ‘The SOUL Record helps to tackle
difficult issues’. The main reasons for this was that individuals felt that although The
SOUL Record highlights important and difficult issues, it cannot solve them. Comments were however made that The SOUL Record enables workers to carry out
their job more effectively by highlighting these issues. Contention regarding a second
statement, ‘I am comfortable using the worksheets and questionnaires’, was on the
basis that some respondents had at that point not used The SOUL Record before
(they were new users), that they formed part of the management team in their
organisations and so did not use The SOUL Record directly or that felt they needed
more training to make the best use of The SOUL Record. Feedback from the
workshops proved that with help and guidance from others, alongside some practice,
more experienced users felt they were very comfortable in using The SOUL Record.

Disagreement with five statements in particular was a feature throughout the
workshops from the practical section of the feedback form. These statements were:

“I have used questionnaires from the SOUL Record’
“I have used worksheets from the SOUL Record”
“I can present the evidence gathered to funders”
“I can present the evidence gathered to clients”
“I have made the best possible use of the SOUL Record.”

Reasons for this are explored here. For example, it was revealed at the workshops
that most people had used either questionnaires or worksheets, but not both as yet.
Some participants were new to their organisation and The SOUL Record, or formed
part of the management team from their organisations so did not directly use The
SOUL Record but delegated it to other staff members. Those who disagreed that
they could present the evidence gathered to funders or clients had either not been
trained to do this, or it did not form part of their role. Training was given later in the
day on the Spreadsheet Results Package to cover this area. Respondents who did
not agree that they had made the best possible use of the SOUL Record commented
that they were yet to properly use it or had only used questionnaires and not any of
the worksheets. This was identified as not utilising SOUL to its maximum potential.
For example, some workshop attendees who work with larger groups identified that
they would be able to make better use of the record by moving away from clients
self-completing forms to joint completion with the practitioner.

Fifty-one of the fifty-two people in attendance at the workshops agreed that
‘Involvement with The SOUL Project has been worthwhile’. Forty-nine also agreed
that ‘My organisation will continue to use the SOUL Record’. Two respondents felt
unable to agree with this statement as they were sent on behalf of their project
managers and it was those people who would decide if the organisation would use
The SOUL Record in the future, not the workshop attendee.

On the subject of scoring it was suggested that as learners become familiar with The
SOUL Record and the way it works, the scoring scale becomes better understood
and the comments become more sensible. The fact that there is no midpoint on the
questionnaires means that learners are engaged in the activity and encouraged to
think about their answers. Participants also commented that all questionnaires were
‘good to use as a diagnostic tool’ and it was identified that The SOUL Record had a
positive impact on a person and helped with confidence building when an individual’s
progress was fed back to them:

“It is good to show a client’s progress and how far they have moved on”.

“SOUL focuses anecdotes and is generally well received.”

“SOUL contains useful dialogue to help people in other ways than what
you would otherwise be able to do.”

“The SOUL Record builds confidence amongst staff with them being able
to see the progress their learner has made.”

Other feedback included:

“[By using a Getting to Know You questionnaire at the commencing of a
course, the SOUL Record] focuses attention on learning outcomes of the
day straightaway.”

Following the workshop activities, attendees were asked what they would like to
happen to The SOUL Record when the current project ends. Responses included:

“SOUL has completely changed our support plan and the way we work.
We would hate to see it die.”

“Roll it out regionally or nationally so it becomes widely recognised by all
funders.”

“Roll out regionally/nationally and use the same language across sectors,
introducing commonality.”

“A computer system is more feasible if SOUL is taken nationally.”

“It is a good idea to allow a person/organisation to pick and mix
statements to create their own sheets on a PC.”

On the subject of training and regular support they said:

“Regular workshops for organisations involved at any stage should
continue to keep it fresh.”

“[A] minimum of two workshops/training sessions required. One to train,
one as a review.”

“Ensure its [The SOUL Record] integrity is kept intact by training and
having a main point of contact.”
“It needs some support to be a success; either telephone or web based.”

Concerning expanding The SOUL Record (e.g. into other sectors) they remarked:

“Within the statutory sector there is an element of us and them so why not use the same system? You could even share training days to make them more viable.”

“I would like others to benefit, then we all benefit.”

“Move into the statutory sector – they are excited about it becoming the standard.”

“SOUL needs to be turned into an organisation to meet the needs of everyone.”

On the topic of sustaining The SOUL Record as a commercial product, comments were:

“SOUL could be paid for. It should be built in as a cost within any funding application by an organisation. It would be paid for by the funding body and would be an acceptable way of measuring soft outcomes.”

“Nominal price considered – you could build the cost into funding applications for individual projects to pay for it.”

“When writing funding applications, people should state they are going to use SOUL. They could get the required funding to pay for SOUL in this way.”

“Set up a social enterprise and market SOUL nationally. You could go to funders and encourage them to set SOUL as a requirement.”

“SOUL could be used as an HR resource to help reduce sickness and improve the well being of staff.”

“Market SOUL in relation to Every Child Matters – it is the simple and best way of measuring the outcomes.”

Concerning the value of The SOUL Record to funders, attendees stated that:

“SOUL is the turning point for the future of funding.”

“[It helped with] funding evaluation in relation to the Every Child Matters government agenda.”

“Now credibility has been gained across Norfolk, the funders have proof that this is what they are looking for.”
8.7 **DISCUSSION OF CASE STUDIES**

Five case studies from the second phase of the research were chosen to demonstrate how The SOUL Record had been trialled and subsequently developed through organisations catering for different client groups. These are presented here.

8.7.1 **FAMILY WELFARE ASSOCIATION**

The Family Welfare Association’s WellFamily Service is a social support service based in primary care. It employs Family Support Co-ordinators who provide a ‘single door’ advice, information and support service in GP practices or health centres (Clarke et al., 2001). The WellFamily Service in Swaffham was established in 1998 and aims to:

“Improve the well-being of individuals and families by providing a generic and holistic early intervention or preventative service, which offered support, advice, information and brief solution-focused counselling” (Clarke et al., 2001, p.55).

The report (Clarke et al., 2001, p.55) concluded that: ‘users and health professionals clearly believed that the service had been successful in bringing about an improvement in users’ well-being’. The problem for voluntary organisations such as the WellFamily Service has been in proving that they have been instrumental in bringing about that improvement in users’ well-being.

The organisation nationally had sought ways in which to evidence soft outcomes with varying degrees of success. The Swaffham Family Service Coordinators, however, sought involvement with The SOUL Project in order to be involved in the process of developing a system from the bottom up that would be of value to themselves, their clients and funders. The organisation began its involvement with the project soon after attending a dissemination conference in October 2004. The WellFamily Service had four case workers and a manager based in Swaffham who agreed to trial The SOUL Record with a number of clients and to work with the researchers in improving the initial SOUL Record to develop a useable tool that could successfully measure soft outcomes among their client group.

The client group was varied and included parents and children, men and women. Some clients were referred individually, others as couples or as families. Given the flexible and varied nature of their work with clients, some of the workers were understandably nervous about applying new methods in their one-to-one work with clients. The researchers emphasised from the outset that they were prepared to work closely with participating organisations to assist in the development of a measurement system that would meet their needs. A meeting was held between the researchers and workers in Swaffham to address their concerns, learn about their progress with using The SOUL Record and to make any necessary changes.

At the meeting it was revealed that one member of staff had used the basic adult questionnaire and had found it to be a most useful diagnostic device. It had helped to take away the panic from the client, in that the questions on the form could be presented as those asked of all clients. The client in question had given detailed thoughts to their answers once the questionnaire had been produced, when it had previously been impossible to engage this person in meaningful conversation. The client had wanted to score both one and six in relation to confidence. This had provoked useful discussion and it became clear that there was a sharp difference between the client’s work and personal life. The use of the questionnaire had enabled this area to be explored. This member of staff made the point that workers needed to feel comfortable with using the forms and on reflection realised that
individual workers themselves needed to be prepared to change what might be ingrained practice. She thought that clients who had a low score on the first use of the form might feel worse as a result and wondered whether it might be better to hide the score entirely. She would have no ethical difficulties in this procedure and as the client gained in confidence, it would then be possible to talk about the scoring.

A second member of staff had used both questionnaire and worksheet with a young woman who was severely depressed. She liked the manner in which the framework was solution focused and had found it to be useful as a diagnostic device. This member of staff echoed the need for workers to feel comfortable in the use of new material. In her case she had not shown the numbering to the client and had not mentioned the score. A positive response to one statement had been turned into a goal when the worksheet was used. The client had agreed to consciously remember this positive response on each occasion when she experienced the feelings which had resulted in her giving a particularly negative response to another statement.

The third member of staff had used the child version basic questionnaire and a related worksheet. The client was described as a ‘difficult’ boy with whom the organisation had been working for some time. The value of The SOUL Record as a diagnostic device was again highlighted, together with the need for workers to feel comfortable with the use of new techniques. An interesting point was that once safety at home and school was discussed, the client had scored as being very safe at home, but not at school. This was not what the worker would have expected. On the other hand, shortly after the interview, the client had been excluded from school. In this case, the worker had shown the scoring to the client, who then wanted to add the figures up for himself. The client had been excited and pleased with achieving a score of over 70, saying ‘I’ve never got that many before’. This did lead the worker to wonder whether on subsequent uses of the questionnaire, the client would simply say what he assumed the worker wanted to hear in order to better his score of the previous occasion. This worker used the term ‘task’ instead of ‘goal’. When this was questioned, she did not have strong views but thought it more appropriate. She felt ‘goal’ was more of an overall aim of their work with a client, whilst ‘task’ indicated the small things on which the client had agreed to work.

All the three members of staff were positive about their involvement in the project and were keen to develop the use of the material. They particularly valued the degree of flexibility. Two main areas of work were agreed for the researchers to assist Family Welfare Association. These included designing a questionnaire for use in conjunction with a forthcoming parenting course and amending The SOUL Record framework material to make it more directly focussed on parenting. As a result of this meeting the researchers developed a new 21 positive statement questionnaire called ‘Getting to Know You as a Parent’ and a worksheet included within the Personal section as ‘About You as a Parent’.

The team set to work using the new forms and the original sheets with the children they worked with. All three workers involved reported success in using the ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire and found that the worksheets were an effective way of goal setting and discovering the client’s strengths. They did experience some problems with the children’s worksheets where some children struggled to complete the improvement section to make the score higher. The most experienced practitioner found sticking to the worksheets too repetitive and that ‘it made me too rigid’. A further meeting was arranged to address these issues.

The meeting took place in May 2005 and discussed amalgamating Family Welfare Association paperwork in order to use The SOUL Record as their definitive
measurement tool. The specially designed parenting questionnaire was used on a parenting course where they put the original questionnaire into a sealed envelope at the beginning, and, after completing the questionnaire again at the end of the course, their earlier sheet is shown to them so that they can reflect for themselves on their progress. The practitioners also wanted a more general questionnaire to reflect the outcomes they are specifically achieving within their client group. In terms of using the questionnaire all the practitioners were enthusiastic and saw that the system could be flexible. It was suggested that it could be used as the closing part of the first session, rather than the beginning, and could be an initial exercise. It could be part of the normal paperwork to get to know more about the client but not necessarily be used for service delivery. The main issues Family Welfare Association felt they attended to were day-to-day coping, budgeting, managing feelings, depression and the sense of being overwhelmed, confusion, relationships and feelings of being out of control. The questionnaire was altered to reflect these outcomes and incorporated within a three page WellFamily Initial Assessment form.

Following this meeting and the incorporation of the questionnaire within the initial assessment form, the practitioners have been more confident in the use of The SOUL Record as a tool to deliver their service. Family Welfare Association is using The SOUL Record with new clients in one-to-one work and with children and parents at the first and last sessions of the Parents Course. They have not found it particularly useful for whole family assessments but children seem to enjoy completing it and talking about themselves. Parents at Parents Course seemed happy to complete it and understood the purpose. The practitioners felt that it helps adults and children to focus on a particular issue and on particular goals. Although children seem to like completing the questionnaires and having the one-to-one time, one practitioner was not sure they are completely ‘honest’. Children tended to score themselves high and she wondered if this is how they would like things to be rather than how things are. Practitioners felt that it was useful for groups and definitely gave them the outcome they were seeking for the Parents Course. When asked how the system could be improved practitioners felt that:

“The issues we deal with vary so greatly that we wonder if we need to have a wider ‘selection’ of ‘Getting to Know you Questionnaires’. Perhaps four or five so that, after an initial assessment visit, we can select one that seems relevant”.

The organisation remains committed to using The SOUL Record as a means of measuring their soft outcomes.

8.7.2 VICTIM SUPPORT NORFOLK

Victim Support Norfolk was also involved from the outset of the second phase of the project. The organisation helps Norfolk residents to cope with the effects of crime by providing confidential support and information to victims of crime and to witnesses attending court. It has three local offices based in Attleborough, Great Yarmouth and Norwich and provides witness support services across eight courts throughout the county. Victim Support’s initial interest in being involved with The SOUL Project arose from a desire to demonstrate to the organisation, clients, volunteers and funders that their organisation made a difference to the quality of people’s lives in terms of developing confidence and well-being after being the victim or witness to a crime. They were also anxious to demonstrate that the training provided to their volunteers developed soft skills to enable them to deliver the service effectively.

The Project’s initial contact was with the Victim Support office in Norwich. Before using The SOUL Record with clients the organisation decided to determine the
usefulness of the system by trialling it with their volunteers. This was carried out through using it on a ten week training course for volunteers. The basic ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire, slightly amended to include two questions relevant to Victim Support, was used during the first, middle and final session, which the researchers attended. The thirteen volunteers on the course were a mixture of professional people and university students. Ten completed the questionnaires on three occasions but the others were unable to do so because of illness or holidays.

On the first day each member was given the 21 questions to complete at the beginning of the session. The course facilitator explained the reasoning behind the questionnaire to the group, who were then happy to answer the questions on an individual basis. It was emphasised if there were any questions that needed clarification they should ask the facilitator. This method was used due to the number of participants on the course, the limited timescales to complete the learning process and the fact that participants wished to complete questionnaire on their own.

It was identified after the completion of the first questionnaire that many of the participants’ marks were based on their own perception of themselves regarding giving support and listening to clients. This also showed in the ‘level of confidence’ rating. It was therefore felt by the facilitator that a second questionnaire be completed half way through the course as participants would have had more information and understanding on the work of Victim Support and their role. Before participants engaged with the second questionnaire, the facilitator asked them to reflect on their own confidence levels, now that they know more about what is expected of them with regard to supporting the service users.

A final review took place on the last day of the programme. All except for two participants had an increase in the final overall score. This was attributed to anticipation of receiving their first client. This would also be the case for one individual who had a lower final figure regarding confidence level. One interesting factor that was identified by the facilitator was that in certain cases, the participant’s own perception of confidence in their everyday life and their own views of the role of the Victim Support volunteer impacted on the results recorded on the day one questionnaire sheet. A person that had a high level of confidence gave a ‘6’ to most of the questions, which did not allow for improvement. However, the first review did actually show that there was a decrease in the score levels as participants became more aware of the skills, knowledge and experience needed to be effective in the role and were perhaps more realistic about scoring themselves.

The researcher’s observation and discussion with participants revealed that none had any difficulty in understanding the scale and accepted the need to complete the form on three occasions. They found the statements easy to understand and said they had not remembered their previous scores when completing the questionnaire on subsequent occasions. Interestingly, they said that more thought had been given to their responses on the second and third occasions they had completed the questionnaire.

One lesson emerged from the use of the questionnaire: if it is to be self completed, there is a need to place it in context for respondents. Clearly, if someone can respond in a valid fashion with a ‘6’ to a statement about their ability to give practical advice and support to the victims of crime, it would be pointless their attending the course. For example, one person had responded with a ‘6’ on the first occasion the questionnaire was used. This was repeated on the second occasion, but the person had written that they had learnt a great deal in the interim. In future, difficulties might be overcome by explaining the scoring more fully when the questionnaire is
introduced to the group. One way would be to state that if you know all there is to
know about giving practical advice and support to the victims of crime, you would
strongly agree with the statement and ring number ‘6’. On the other, if you know
nothing whatsoever about this, you would strongly disagree with the statement and
ring number ‘1’.

The problem seems to arise from participants self completing the forms rather than it
being done in conjunction with a member of staff who could explain and check
understanding. Having recommended joint completion as best practice, there
nevertheless seems a need to recognise that the demands of a large group and a
solitary worker will inevitably require self completion.

A second new volunteer training programme took place five months later. In the
intervening period the researchers worked together with the training manager to
improve the questionnaire. As a consequence the form was reduced in size from 21
to 18 positive statements, still grouped in the core areas of attitude, inter/personal,
and practical, but more relevant to the outcomes the organisation sought to achieve
through their training. Again the questionnaires were distributed at the beginning,
middle and end of the course. This time the trainer emphasised the context of scoring
to enable the participants to make a realistic initial assessment of their soft skills.

The SOUL Record revealed significant progress by the 12 new volunteers taking part
and was not considered time consuming or invasive by the participants. They did
suggest, however, that they would have liked to see the difference between their
original score and the final one. The trainer intends to show them their original
sheets after completion of the final questionnaire on future courses.

Following the success of using The SOUL Record on their training courses the
organisation decided to use the system in measuring progress with their clients in the
victim support and witness service. Much of Victim Support’s work is conducted over
the telephone rather than in person and therefore a questionnaire system was
considered to be the most practical. In order to be effective the questionnaire needed
to be short (certainly not 21 statements) and help to develop a conversation that
would aid with delivery of the service as well as record progress. There were also
different client groups; witnesses and victims.

The witnesses require practical information and the organisation’s role is to impart
information, enable witnesses to talk to someone in confidence, and offer practical
support. In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of this service and highlight areas
where witnesses were concerned, a short questionnaire, using The SOUL Record
format, was designed with the following positive statements:

- I understand what happens in court
- I am confident about giving evidence
- I have the help and information I need
- I have confidence in the legal process
- I feel okay talking about what has happened
- My needs are being met

A similar attempt was made to meet the needs of practitioners in telephone and face-
to-face contact with victims. Here it was felt that more statements could be used to
develop conversation and reflect the more in-depth nature of the work with this client
group. Ten statements were selected:
• I understand the legal process
• I am getting the help I need
• I know where to go for help and advice
• I have confidence in the legal process
• I am a confident person
• I feel okay talking about what has happened
• I am able to express my feelings
• I can cope with what has happened
• I feel supported
• I feel safe

The SOUL Record has provided a framework for the organisation to use, which can then be adapted to meet the specific needs of different aspects of the service. Members of staff were involved in devising the statements for the questionnaires and participated enthusiastically during the trial period.

8.7.3 NORFOLK EDUCATION INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE GROUP
Norfolk Education Industry and Commerce Group (NEICG) has been established for over 25 years and experienced continued growth during last year visiting ‘more than 6000 pupils in 73 schools’ (EDP, 2005).

The aim of NEICG is to promote business awareness and education for students in schools and colleges around Norfolk. This is achieved, in a cost effective way, by organising participative business activities for students, tutored by local business people who share their real life experiences with groups of six to eight students. The activities normally run for a whole day and with a complete year group. The programmes are entitled 'Preparing for Opportunities', 'Table Mats', 'Chocolate Box', 'Newsday' and 'Jotters'.

In the first meeting with the Business Manager of NEICG, the researchers were shown the existing evaluation forms used by NEICG on completion of a business day. These forms did not measure soft outcomes but were instead measuring if the children enjoyed the day and found it helpful, whether the day was too long/short and too intensive or not intensive enough. NEICG rely on this quantitative data and case studies to gain funding. Teachers’ evaluation is also gathered about the success of the day but this is mainly centred on ticking a yes/no box. A new ‘Getting to Know You’ form was adapted from the generic SOUL Record to accommodate the outcomes NEICG were aiming for. These outcomes are:

• Understanding of basic business concepts
• Communication skills
• Design
• Creativity
• Innovation
• Enterprise
• Decision making
• Confidence
• Co-operation
• Management
• Team working
• Organisational skills
• Time management
• Literacy
• Numeracy
• Responsibility

NEICG’s ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire was based on the current style and design of the generic SOUL ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire with some minor layout changes (Figure 3). It was decided that although a student’s name may be kept anonymous from teachers and should not be released, it was necessary to include this for comparative purposes (i.e. between the baseline and subsequent
measures for the same student rather than measures between students). Other changes included space to indicate if the questionnaire was completed in the morning (AM) or afternoon (PM) rather than giving the date (as the business days only run over the course of one day). Smiley faces were included to indicate the mood of a student at the time of completing the questionnaire as this may have had a bearing on answers. Such a measure fitted well with NEICG’s original ‘Student Appraisal’ document where students were asked if they enjoyed the day or not.

The statements developed for the NEICG ‘Getting to Know You’ document correspond to four of the five sections of the Every Child Matters green paper. Thirteen have been devised for use at the start and end of NEICG’s business day activities.

NEICG have used The SOUL Record twice thus far as a trial. It has been used for a Chocolate Box/Making activity at Lakenham Middle School and a Preparing for Opportunities day at Heartsease High School.

![Figure 3: The ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire adapted for use by NEICG.](image)

**LAKENHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL ‘CHOCOLATE BOX/MARKETING’**
A total of 40 students in Year 7 completed the ‘Getting to Know You’ form before the start of the activity and upon completion of the business day.

A brief introduction was given at the start of the day before the activity commenced, describing what the ‘Getting to Know You’ form was and why the students were to complete it. The forms were placed on the desks in brown envelopes which captured the children’s attention and raised interest in what they were. The statements were all understood and the completion of the forms took around five minutes. A second sheet was issued upon the end of the business day and the students completed them straight away without having to be asked.
It was made clear that although the Business Manager of NEICG was keen on The SOUL Project and how well received it was by the students, he was not entirely sure how to interpret the results to make them useful for himself, the volunteers and their funders. He was talked through the generic SOUL Record and how the results were collected and presented to funders. He understood this but was concerned at the volume of results he had and how much time it would take to collate them, even though he was introduced to the spreadsheet package tailored specifically for NEICG.

Upon reflection of the completed questionnaires it became apparent that many students had opted to circle ‘5’ (agree) and ‘6’ (strongly agree) at the start of the day. Following, further discussions it was discovered that further explanation was required for the students as to what the ‘Getting to Know You’ forms meant (i.e. they needed to be set in context more effectively). It was agreed that NEICG would trial The SOUL Record further in another Norfolk school.

HEARTSEASE HIGH SCHOOL ‘PREPARING FOR OPPORTUNITIES’
A total of 59 students in Year 11 took part in the ‘Preparing for Opportunities’ activity at Heartsease High, completing the ‘Getting to Know You’ forms at the start and end of the day. After previous discussions, the students were provided with a fuller explanation to the exercise than previously given at Lakenham Middle school. For example:

- The questionnaire is not a test
- It is not a competition between students
- There are no right or wrong answers to any question
- Answering ‘6’ to a statement would mean that the student knew everything there was to know about the statement and they could probably teach the people from NEICG some things about it.

Reviewing the ‘Getting to Know You’ forms after the initial completion, it showed that although some students had still circled all ‘5s’ and ‘6s’, overall the added explanation had helped the students to be more realistic with their scoring. Again the forms took around five minutes to complete and were warmly received by the students. The volunteers helping on the day were also interested in the results to see how much good work they had done throughout the day.

SPREADSHEET RESULTS PACKAGE
Once scores have been inputted into The Spreadsheet Results Package (SRP), it can automatically calculate any overall mathematical scoring as a result of measurements taken using The SOUL Record and will produce graphs which may be useful to funders. The SRP was updated and individualised reflecting the changes made for NEICG, some of which have been outlined above with respect to the ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire.

Before handing the SRP over to NEICG, the results of two of the groups from Lakenham (12 students in total) were input into the spreadsheet as an example. The bar graph showed that progress had been made during the day but it was minor. The section on ‘Economic Wellbeing’ actually decreased during the day but it was decided that the business activity had made them think seriously what this issue meant, where before the children thought they knew all there was to know about business and what they wanted to do when they left school.
Due to the investment of time required to input data from the ‘Getting to Know You’ forms for a large number of students, one of the researchers completed this task on behalf of Heartsease High School. It was therefore agreed that next time NEICG use The SOUL Record they will hand select, for example, the data for students with the five highest and five lowest overall scores at the start of the day and enter these results into the SRP along with the corresponding final results to determine an overview sample for the day. The time commitment required to input data into the SRP was an issue raised during the series of third workshops (Section 8.6). Nevertheless, if a concerted effort is made to complete this task, there are evident benefits in terms of recording and graphically representing the distance travelled by learners.

CONCLUSION

NEICG are pleased with the progress and development of their organisation in conjunction with The SOUL Record thus far. Following a successful trial period, NEICG now plan to use the ‘Getting to Know You’ forms to supplement their current evaluation sheets. Currently, the plan is to complete two days of ‘Getting to Know You’ forms for each activity and for each age range. For example, two Newsday activities would be measured in middle school and two would be measured in high schools. NEICG feel this would be a fair reflection of their work at the present time and will continue to use their existing evaluation forms for the remaining school days.

8.7.4 ORMISTON TRUST

Ormiston Children and Families Trust are one of the largest providers of voluntary support services to children and families in the Eastern Region. Ormiston currently have twenty five community and prison based projects running across five counties. Their first project was established in 1981.

Ormiston work with children and young people who have been disadvantaged by their life experiences or circumstances. They promote well being by offering direct support and services and by raising awareness of related issues through research, publications, conferences and other events. Ormiston state that many of the young people they work with are:

- Experiencing stigma and isolation caused by prejudice and discrimination
- In danger of becoming isolated and excluded both from school and the wider world
- Affected by the imprisonment of their parent
- At risk of, or experiencing, emotional or physical harm
- Caring for parents or siblings within their family.

The SOUL Project has had direct involvement with the Great Yarmouth Children and Families Project. Ormiston offer outreach services across the Great Yarmouth Borough. The Project offers a variety of support including:

- Individual work with children and adults
- After school groups
- School age children’s groups
- Focused support groups
- Groups for adults
- Parenting support
- Drop-in sessions
- Holiday activities
- Home visits
Ormiston now use both the ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaires and worksheets with children, adults and their volunteers as part of staff development. This evolved after successful trials with these groups of people. Ormiston commented that The SOUL Record works well for one-to-one sessions helping to ‘open up a conversation’ with clients. The organisations also reports that clients respond well to a second session where The SOUL Record is used. Confidence is often improved at this point if it is proven client scores have been raised. Ormiston’s funders were happy that they had adopted The SOUL Record having previously told them that funding would be withdrawn if soft outcomes measurement could not be achieved. The SOUL Record also enabled Ormiston to keep accurate records about their clients.

Ormiston did not feel that some aspects of The SOUL Record were child friendly so introduced the concept of smiley faces into their general working practice. Rather than using the six point scoring scale, children were asked to tick boxes corresponding to a particular face. Ormiston agreed that the graphics could be changed to allow inclusion in The SOUL Record for other organisations. Female faces are also available but the selection of male faces is shown in Figure 4. The faces created by Ormiston were identified as best practice in 2005 by their funders and were included in the Norfolk Children’s Fund Best Practice Handbook.

### Figure 4: Use of smiley faces on questionnaires by Ormiston instead of the numerical six point scale.

At the third round of SOUL Project workshops, Ormiston reported that six of their seven staff members in Great Yarmouth were using The SOUL Record and that it now formed an essential part of training for all new staff members. Other Ormiston Trust locations were keen to adopt The SOUL Record shortly.

A typical example of the success Ormiston have had whilst using The SOUL Record was identified at the workshop. Ormiston were using the ‘Economic Well-Being: Home and Community’ worksheet with a child from an ethnic minority family who had recently moved into Great Yarmouth. One statement, ‘I have enough to eat’, was identified as a problem area by that child who told Ormiston they never have enough to eat. Further investigations with the child and their parents highlighted that the
family were not claiming their full benefit entitlement so money was particularly tight. Ormiston were able to help the family claim what they were entitled to.

8.7.5 BENJAMIN FOUNDATION
The Benjamin Foundation was one of the original six participants in the SOUL Project. Therefore, background information and earlier involvement with The SOUL Project during phase one is available in Appendix 1 and Section 6.3.1.

After the second round of workshops a meeting was arranged at Winston Court to discuss incorporating The SOUL Record within the Benjamin Foundation’s existing Support Plan. Incorporation was necessary in order to reduce the volume of paperwork and to avoid any duplication.

The combined ‘SOUL Record Support Plan’ was to be used with every new resident who visited Winston Court. Although the hostel had had a settled clientele for the previous nine months, Winston Court was expanding by converting brick stores in the car park into two self contained flats. Residents would be able to graduate from the hostel into the flats as a first step to independent living. This would allow Winston Court to follow the scheme of work of another hostel of the Benjamin Foundation; Steven Newing House based in Fakenham. Residents of the self contained flats are unable to use the hostel’s facilities but have the support of the workers if this is needed.

The Benjamin Foundation had their previous Support Plan criticised by one of their funders because it did not show any evidence of progress for those residents involved in unplanned moves. The funders also suggested that areas within that support plan did not identify in detail how workers from the Benjamin Foundation would work with residents, or give evidence of distance travelled over short periods of time. Winston Court has now changed from a 3-monthly review system with their residents to a monthly review and uses The ‘SOUL Record Support Plan’.

In combining the two pieces of paperwork together it was important to allow enough scope to mention other issues such as paying a service charge and problems where issues need looking into in greater detail. A section about personal safety was also required.

The new ‘SOUL Record Support Plan’ has proved a success at Winston Court with all new residents using it. Staff have incorporated it as part of their standard working practice. At the third round of workshops it was noted that residents prefer to complete the new ‘SOUL Record Support Plan’ than the Support Plan which was in place previously. Staff from Winston Court also noticed that reviews with residents were now taking longer to complete as the residents were more open with their support worker and wanted to compare their previous sheets to see how far they had progressed. This was a positive experience for both resident and support worker.

Staff from Winston Court were introduced to the Spreadsheet Results Package (SRP) at the third round of workshops and wanted to use it to help collate results for management, funders and most importantly, the residents themselves. One comment was that ‘SOUL shows the progress people have made even after eviction. The SRP now allows us to present that information clearly.’

Another point raised at the workshop was that SOUL has completely changed their support plan and the way they work. Using the SOUL Record ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaires, support staff are now able to easily identify issues of concern, thus enabling them to take action more effectively and efficiently.
Upon recommendations and positive examples from Winston Court, Steven Newing House at Fakenham also now use The ‘SOUL Record Support Plan’ to good effect.

### 8.8 THE SOUL RECORD: DEVELOPED VERSION

The SOUL Record developed through a process of consultation with participating organisations and other interested parties including educational specialists and funders. The original SOUL Record was trialled by over forty voluntary and community sector organisations throughout Norfolk. The feedback from practitioners at the workshops, on site visits and through telephone contact proved valuable in transforming the SOUL Record into a usable system for measuring soft outcomes. In seeking to develop a final version of The SOUL Record the necessity to ensure that the system was of value primarily to the client or learner was paramount.

The original emphasis in producing The SOUL Record was to show distance travelled by clients in non-accredited learning. Over the course of trialling the system it became clear that the same principles could be applied to staff development and in accredited learning. Several organisations decided to trial The SOUL Record with both their client group and volunteers to demonstrate progress made over periods of time, including participation in training courses.

The researchers cooperated with organisations in devising specific questionnaires to be used on training courses. These questionnaires used a SOUL framework, which can be defined as a series of positive statements geared to desired learning outcomes, using a six point Likert scale, asking for a degree of agreement from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

The development of individual sheets for organisations reflects the diversity within the sector and the need to demonstrate outcomes specific to the training or work being undertaken with the client or volunteer. Although common soft outcomes will apply to all, or most, organisations working in the VCS, different organisations will emphasise certain soft outcomes over others. This may change within different projects or with different individuals. This does mean that a generic, ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to measuring soft outcomes is neither realistic nor appropriate.

The number of questionnaires was increased from the two original generic ‘Getting to Know You’ sheets for Adults and Children to six. The developed system has additional questionnaires on ‘Raising Aspirations, Parenting and Community’. There are also two Getting to Know You questionnaires for children and young people. The former questionnaire is aimed at children up to the age of eleven or twelve and the latter for teenagers. It was considered by practitioners that the original children’s questionnaire was not appropriate for teenagers who might have felt patronised by the wording of the questions and existence of smiley faces instead of tick boxes.

The new questionnaires were devised at the request of organisations working with families, children, and communities and outside bodies such as the local LSC and Learning Partnership, which seek to promote a raising aspirations agenda within Norfolk.

The wordings of some of the statements in the generic ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire have changed as a result of practitioners using them with clients.

The changes include:
- ‘I am able to cope with constructive criticism’ became ‘I am able to receive advice’
• ‘I am always willing to take on responsibility’ became ‘I am willing to take on responsibility’
• ‘My computer skills are improving’ became ‘I am able to find/share information’
• ‘I carry out any tasks that I am set’ became ‘I carry out any tasks that I am set or set myself’

The changes were designed to be more inclusive and reflect a consensus among practitioners that the term ‘constructive criticism’ was not readily understood among many clients. It was also felt that no one is ‘always’ willing to take on responsibility. Many organisations were not involved in teaching computer skills and therefore the more encompassing phrase ‘find/share information’ was considered more appropriate. The addition of ‘or set myself’ was intended to reflect the diversity of clients, many of whom of course set themselves tasks.

The original questionnaires contained a score box asking participants to score themselves on a scale of one to ten concerning how they would rate their level of confidence at the time of completing the questionnaire. In the developed version this has been replaced with space for a name and date and three smiley faces asking how the client feels today: 😊😊😊. The changes were made because feedback revealed that most organisations did not use the ‘Getting to Know You’ front sheet on which the client’s name would be recorded. The smiley faces were preferred because incorporating a 1-10 score on the perceived level of confidence distorted the overall scoring, weighting confidence more highly than other soft outcomes. This measure also duplicated the statement ‘I am a confident person’. It was considered important to have an indication of how the client felt on the day they completed the questionnaire because feelings can influence the approach to responding to the statements. It is also helpful if the score decreases on the second occasion the sheet is used, to consider whether the client’s mood was affecting his/her scores.

The potential for the questionnaire to have diagnostic value has been realised by a number of organisations. The adult questionnaires are divided into three sections of seven statements corresponding to the three soft outcome areas of (i) attitude, (ii) personal and interpersonal and (iii) practical. At one of the workshops an organisation demonstrated how they used the questionnaire as a diagnostic device to identify which soft outcomes require particular attention. By drawing a vertical line between the ‘3’ and ‘4’ (slightly disagree – slightly agree) it became immediately apparent, in the left hand column where there was disagreement with the positive statement, which areas the client was struggling in (Figure 5). By drawing horizontal lines under the ‘7’ and ‘14’ a six box grid is formed, highlighting the main soft outcomes areas where help may be needed (Figure 5). The organisation then used worksheets appropriate to the client’s areas of need (whether relating to attitude, personal/interpersonal and/or practical skills). This diagnostic device has been disseminated across the participating organisations and is being applied.
Figure 5. Illustration to demonstrate how questionnaires can be used as a diagnostic tool.

A similar diagnostic assessment can be used with the children’s and young people’s questionnaires, except that horizontal lines are drawn beneath statement ‘4’, ‘8’, ‘12’, and ‘16’, reflecting the five areas of ‘being healthy’, ‘staying safe’, ‘enjoying and achieving’, ‘making a positive contribution’ and ‘economic wellbeing’.

In the developed version all forms (i.e. questionnaires, worksheets, observation sheets) can be modified to display issues raised on an action plan on the reverse side of the sheet. This enables workers to put all relevant information about a client’s progress on one sheet, thereby reducing unnecessary paperwork by duplication.

The wording of statements on the worksheets was improved by practitioners as they trialled them with clients. The changes were made on the basis that they were more easily understood by clients or would lead to a more meaningful conversation.

The following examples reflect changes made on this basis:

‘I am an honest person’ became ‘I think being honest is important’
‘I would go to someone if I needed help’ became ‘I would go to someone I trust if I needed help’
‘I look out for younger brothers and sisters’ became ‘I look out for brothers or sisters’
‘If I saw a crime being committed I would report it’ became ‘I think laws should be obeyed’.

The change in the final example came about as a result of a workshop discussion in which it was pointed out that many of the children a particular organisation worked with came from homes where crime was a way of life. It was felt inappropriate to discuss reporting parents or siblings for committing crime without undermining the relationship between the worker and learner.
The scoring on the worksheets was changed to reflect an emphasis on evidence rather than just a self-assessment by the client. Originally clients received two points for each goal achieved, in the final version this has been increased to five points.

In order to reflect the different requirements and areas of work by organisations, additional worksheets have been developed. These include attitudinal soft outcome worksheets on ‘Gaining Confidence’, ‘Increasing Self-Esteem’, ‘Raising Aspirations’ and ‘Developing Potential’. The personal section has been renamed the ‘inter/personal’ section and has an extra sheet, ‘About You As a Parent.’ The practical section was supplemented by three new sheets based on the ‘Skills for Life’ agenda. These include ‘Literacy’, ‘Numeracy’ and ‘English Spoken as an Other Language’, all at entry level.

There are two new additions to the children’s worksheets with sheets developed for children and young people in the area of ‘Economic Wellbeing: Work, Education and Training’ and ‘Home and Community’.

Three new sheets were also developed on Observing Soft Outcomes. The sheets cover ‘Outdoor Activities’, ‘Cared for Learners’, and ‘Learners in Group Situations’. These were designed for organisations who work with people who have severe learning disabilities and are unable to communicate effectively to complete a worksheet or questionnaire. The observation sheets are also useful for those organisations which have neither the time nor resources to work with clients on a one-to-one basis. It is however recommended that questionnaires and worksheets should be attempted first where possible as this is a more ethical and effective way of measuring a person’s soft outcomes. Using questionnaires and worksheets removes the need to make a valued judgement on a person and their abilities as is necessary to complete an observation sheet.

9. CONCLUSIONS

9.1 PROJECT EVALUATION

As part of the action research process, The SOUL Project has been subject to continual evaluation in a number of ways. These have included management of the project by The Research Centre Manager and Director of Research, monthly meetings to discuss the progress of the project amongst the research team and bimonthly meetings of the steering group committee with representatives from the research team.

Sustained contact with the various voluntary and community organisations involved with the project has enabled constructive feedback to be provided to the research team and therefore facilitated and informed the research process (e.g. in mapping soft skills and developing specific aspects of The SOUL Record). This evaluative process was achieved via meetings, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, telephone and e-mail contact and through comments made by participants at the dissemination events (Section 7) and during workshops (Section 8).

As a result, this final report has given a detailed insight into issues surrounding informal learning, including progression in terms of soft outcomes. Indeed, all aims and objectives of the research project (Section 2) have been met. This is demonstrated in Table 13 and by the following summary which discusses informal
learning and soft outcomes, developing a method to measure soft outcomes and mapping progression, and the viability and future development of The SOUL Record.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims and objectives</th>
<th>Research outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To examine, analyse and document the informal learning process and the resultant soft outcomes in six identified voluntary organisations.</td>
<td>During phase one of the research, over 80 soft outcomes were mapped (Section 6.2) in six voluntary organisations (The Benjamin Foundation, BREAK, Creative Arts East, College in the Community, Norwich Community Workshop and The North Lynn Discovery Project). This gave an insight into the informal learning process documented through six case studies (Section 6.3). Soft outcomes were grouped according to attitude, personal/interpersonal and practical skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To use this data to investigate the development of a model or a process for mapping progression and soft outcomes through the use of soft indicators.</td>
<td>The case studies and soft outcomes mapped in phase one allowed the researchers to develop an initial model to measure soft outcome progression and pilot this in over 40 voluntary organisations in phase two (Section 8). Three series of workshops were held, allowing for two complete action research cycles whereby participant organisations fed back results on its usability so that the model could be further developed. This model was also formulated through an evaluation of other similar models available commercially (Section 4.4). The researchers offered continued support to all participant organisations, tailoring the model to suit their needs where necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pilot this model/process through 40 voluntary organisations supported by workshops.</td>
<td>The research has shown that although a generic measurement model is not effective, a generic framework that is learner centered, simple to use, and supported by practitioner training provides a successful means to evidence soft outcome achievement. Recommendations for its further development are given in Section 10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make recommendations as to the viability of a soft outcomes process or model using soft indicators and its possible further development and dissemination.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Research outcomes of the project mapped to its aims and objectives.

**9.2 INFORMAL LEARNING AND SOFT OUTCOMES**

This final report has provided an insight into informal learning, its processes and resultant soft outcomes. One of the key points it has demonstrated is that informal learning should be valued for the way in which it promotes social inclusion, a complex, multi-faceted issue. The promotion of social inclusion is a valid description of the activities of practitioners in the voluntary and community sector participating in
this research. Practitioners overwhelmingly support the degree to which social inclusion is promoted as the benchmark by which to judge the value of their activities.

Valuing informal learning solely as a stepping stone to accredited learning fails to take account of the significant contribution it makes to promoting social inclusion. Indeed, many learners feel that accessing an accredited course is not a relevant choice until their confidence and self-esteem have been developed and have a negative view of aspects of accredited courses, such as perceived formality and pressure on the individual. In these instances, evidencing such developments in soft outcomes is vital, as individuals predominantly regard ‘soft’ outcomes, such as personal and social skills, as the primary benefit of their informal learning.

The concern which led to this research was that the value of voluntary and community organisations in delivering informal learning was being considerably undervalued because of the focus on hard outcomes such as accredited qualifications and employment. This was supported by our examination of the literature which suggested the targeting of official funding on accredited learning, or informal learning with a clear pathway into formal learning or employment. This appeared to result in a failure to observe the potential that informal learning has in promoting participation in the local community and in enabling learners to develop soft skills, such as increases in confidence, motivation and self-esteem. A clear concern existed in the VCS over being forced down an accredited route to attract funding and possibly losing the dynamic quality of their services which flexibly met the needs of clients and an obvious difficulty was the absence of a method of providing information on their achievements in an easily understandable manner. The SOUL Record has attempted to address these issues and has achieved a practical method to measure soft outcomes.

9.3 THE INFORMAL LEARNING PROCESS: MAPPING PROGRESSION AND DEVELOPING A METHOD TO MEASURE SOFT OUTCOMES

The research also showed that there were generic soft outcomes achieved within the voluntary sector which could effectively be measured within a generic framework. Six voluntary organisations (i.e. The Benjamin Foundation, BREAK, Creative Arts East, College in the Community, Norwich Community Workshop and The North Lynn Discovery Project) took part in phase one of the research, enabling the researchers to map the soft outcomes they were achieving with their clients (Table 6). Important, the researchers found that although the informal learning process varied between organisations in terms of client group, the soft skills that resulted were generic and over 80 were identified. Further development of a system to measure soft outcomes was achieved in phase two of the project with over 40 organisations participating and feeding back results on its usability.

Although the research indicated some minor resistance in voluntary and community sector organisations to embrace an evidence-based culture, there was recognition by others that it was more appropriate to welcome such practice. A willingness to measure soft outcomes varied between wearied acceptance to considerable enthusiasm. Enthusiasm was the dominant response, which was of real benefit to the project. The dissemination events were substantially oversubscribed with the result that the target for organisations to participate in the second phase of research was easily met. Participating in the project has been a positive experience for organisations. It has enabled them to reflect on the delivery of their service and increased an emphasis on what they actually achieve with their clients.
Whilst the principle of measuring soft outcomes was agreed to be important by all stakeholders, there were understandable concerns over resource implications. The voluntary sector is diverse in terms of the infrastructure of individual organisations and this was reflected in the research. The innovation and speed of development from relatively small organisations was amply illustrated, and should not be risked by the attempted imposition of a complex and onerous measurement system.

Any measurement system developed needed to respond to these issues and be as simple and straightforward as possible for practitioners. Evaluation is often currently seen as a burden. It can be viewed as separate from service delivery and undertaken for either the organisation or funders. Some regard it as having little relevance to clients.

The system that was to be developed therefore had to be client centred. Such a system, which is an integral part of service delivery, will have the maximum chance of successful implementation, simply because it will be valued by those who will need to use it. On the other hand, it was necessary to recognise the legitimate demands for information on the part of funding organisations. This goes against the views of a small minority who saw any evaluation as being unique to the individual and therefore incapable of providing any data in an easily understood form.

These were the principles incorporated in The SOUL Record, the framework developed by the project to measure soft outcomes. The SOUL Record affords a range of methods of measuring soft outcomes and evidencing progress. These include various questionnaires designed to measure progress in different contexts and with different client groups. A series of worksheets have been formulated to provide one-to-one interaction between worker and learner. These can be used in addition to questionnaires (e.g. where questionnaires diagnose areas of soft outcomes that may require further attention) or instead of questionnaires. Facilitators, working together with the learner will select an appropriate worksheet from a large menu. Discussion is then continued with this worksheet until the learner has progressed and any support and development in another area can then be addressed. The SOUL Record also has a series of three observation sheets designed for use where workers are unable to give one-to-one attention to individual learners and yet still wish to evidence progress. The worker observes the learner and then awards a score from ‘1-6’ based on the degree of participation by the learner in the learning activity. A spreadsheets results package has been developed to record and display the progression of individuals and/or groups of learners for their own benefit as well as for that of the organisation and funding bodies.

To some extent the integrity of The SOUL Record is inherent in the capability of its practitioners. Used incorrectly it will not achieve its potential. For this reason it should be stressed that sufficient training and ongoing support for practitioners is paramount. Use of The SOUL Record without the necessary training cannot be validated by the researchers.

9.4 THE VIABILITY OF THE SOUL RECORD AND ITS FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

One aim was to make recommendations as to the viability of a soft outcomes process or model using soft indicators and its possible further development and dissemination. To some extent the viability and robustness of The SOUL Record has already been demonstrated by the overwhelmingly positive response from the majority of participant organisations in the research. There are also other concluding remarks that can be made regarding this issue. For example, it is clear that a generic
measurement model is not possible, given the wide variance in client groups and their needs. However, a generic framework as illustrated by The SOUL Record can provide an effective means by which to evidence achievements in terms of soft outcomes and is a valid and reliable framework for monitoring and measuring soft outcomes. The flexibility of The SOUL Record in other sectors where there is a need to record progression is also of interest; individuals in education have already begun to enquire about using the model and others have suggested its usefulness as a tool for staff appraisal.

Specific recommendations on how The SOUL Record might be further developed in the future are covered in Section 10.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Informal learning should be valued as an important means of increasing social inclusion, rather than being valued simply as a stepping stone to a hard outcome such as getting a job or qualification. This needs to be clearly endorsed in national and regional policy making.

- More funding should be directed at supporting informal learning in the voluntary and community sector, because of the important role it plays in promoting social inclusion and in facilitating wider participation in accredited learning.

- A focus on outcomes and distance travelled is beneficial to service users, volunteers, practitioners, managers and funders. An outcomes focus helps service providers to identify need, target resources, inform action planning and demonstrate effectiveness. All community and voluntary sector organisations should therefore be encouraged to produce evidence of their outcomes.

- The SOUL Record has been shown to be a highly effective and acceptable means of measuring soft outcomes with the voluntary and community sector in Norfolk. Funding should be sought for it to be further disseminated within the sector, whether regionally and/or nationally.

- The research suggests that The SOUL Record could be of use within other sectors, such as education, health, local government and the private sector (e.g. for staff appraisal reviews). However further research is required to evaluate its transferability and adapt the framework for other sectors.

- The SOUL Record has demonstrated that a generic framework for measuring soft outcomes works successfully, providing that there is the flexibility to make small modifications to the statements to suit individual organisations and client groups. Such modifications need to be made or approved by the research team involved with its development to ensure that the integrity of the system is retained. Any future dissemination of The SOUL Record should take account of these issues.

- The study has also shown that practitioners require training and a small amount of ongoing support to make best use of The SOUL Record. Again, this should be incorporated in future dissemination plans.
• Voluntary and community organisations are generally willing to pay some amount for use of The SOUL Record, because of its clear value to them. However, it is important that charges remain affordable for small organisations. Given that minor modifications may need to be made to The SOUL Record to ensure it is always relevant to the user and reflects contemporary policy, charging would provide the means to sustain such support.

• The SOUL Record has been successfully trialled as a paper based system which includes a software spreadsheet results package and should now be developed to become fully computerised. It is envisaged that a computer system would hold individual client records and allow organisations to select statements to use with a client from a pre-defined, drop down menu. This would allow tracking of individual client progress. The computer system would also enable organisations to collate groups of users to identify total distance travelled. Such a system could be produced as software, or on CD or as an interactive, password protected website.

11. REFERENCES


NIACE (2004b). *At the heart of learning: promoting literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy skills development*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.


Philantech (2004). *SpiritLevel*. Available at: [http://www.philantech.co.uk](http://www.philantech.co.uk) [accessed 15/07/2004].


University of Connecticut (No Date). *Likert Scale*. Available at: [http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/research/Instrument%20Reliability%20and%20V](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/research/Instrument%20Reliability%20and%20V) [accessed 01/06/2004].


APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT ORGANISATIONS, PHASES ONE AND TWO

PHASE ONE
THE BENJAMIN FOUNDATION
The Benjamin Foundation is a registered charity covering North Norfolk and based in North Walsham. It has ‘cradle to grave’ client groups, but the residential facility for young people in the town was the focus of research. Winston Court is a direct access hostel with nine places for homeless young people who in general spend about nine months at the facility. Their homelessness may be the result of a variety of factors, including drugs, mental health issues and family breakdown. Young people are allocated a key worker with a remit to address the issues which had lead to their homelessness. Young people can be referred by a number of agencies or may self refer. The aim is to enable them to live independently and ongoing support is offered when the young people move on.

BREAK
BREAK is a registered charity with a wide geographic coverage based in the town of Sheringham. It has an extensive range of care activities and the research concentrated on the day care service for adults with learning disabilities. This service is based in premises owned by the charity in the town and is linked to cluster groups. These are smaller groups which take place at various locations throughout North Norfolk to cater for those unable to reach Sheringham. Clients are aged from the mid 20s to 60s and have varying degrees of need. Some participants, for example, are unable to communicate verbally. Clients are primarily referred by statutory caring agencies.

COLLEGE IN THE COMMUNITY
College in the Community is an initiative in the Great Yarmouth area by a group of voluntary and community organisations. The main point of reference was through Community Connections, which is a registered charity based locally in Gt. Yarmouth. College in the Community provides specialist learning opportunities for the local voluntary sector. These are primarily through informal learning. ‘Making a Difference’ workshops are run by a facilitator from Community Connections as part of the initiative and were a primary focus of research. These workshops are for those interested in community activities and participants are aged 13 upwards. Workshops are characterised by informality and are often practically based.

CREATIVE ARTS EAST
Creative Arts East is a registered charity based at Wymondham. It has a number of initiatives as suggested by the title but research focussed on the rural touring scheme. This takes arts performances out to villages and currently involves about 30 community groups and 200 volunteers. Local groups are responsible for promoting and managing the actual performance. The group at Welborne in Norfolk was approached to participate in the research, particularly to address the issue of rural isolation and access to such services.

Welborne Village Hall, the local group, is a registered charity in its own right, but has a close relationship with Creative Arts East. In a village of only 150 people, performances of classical music and jazz are promoted, together with puppet shows for children. Each year an arts festival is held which in 2004 included commissioned work. The festival sponsors activities in local schools as part of the festival.
NORTH LYNN DISCOVERY PROJECT
The North Lynn Discovery Project is based in King’s Lynn and caters for local young people. The North Lynn area is subject to multiple indicators of relative deprivation (National Statistics, 2004). Social and informal learning activities are provided as a means of addressing the issues faced by young people in the area. The project has a large membership which has a particularly positive attitude towards what is being achieved. There has been rapid development of the project from humble beginnings when local people formed a football team for the youth of the area. The project now occupies a large building at North Lynn and is constituted as a limited company and a charitable society.

NORWICH COMMUNITY WORKSHOP
The Norwich Community Workshop is based near the city centre. Activities such as arts and crafts, woodworking, basic cookery, computer use and basic skills are on offer to a client group predominantly aged 16 upwards, with the oldest individual aged over 90. Clients are largely, but not exclusively, at risk of social exclusion from a variety of factors. These would include learning difficulties, disability, isolation, unemployment, poor literacy skills, accident recovery, mental health issues, substance misuse rehabilitation and homelessness. Clients can self refer or be referred by a caring agency. The Norwich Community Workshop Trust is a registered charity, whilst Norwich Community Workshop Ltd is also a registered friendly society.
**PHASE TWO**
The 42 organisations that participated in the second phase of the research are listed alphabetically below with reference to any sources of further information about the organisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation Name</th>
<th>Source/Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Concern Norwich</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ageconcern.org.uk">http://www.ageconcern.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Foundation, The</td>
<td>See Phase One, Appendix 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bizfizz</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bizfizz.org.uk">http://www.bizfizz.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body, Mind and Spirit</td>
<td>Provide Godly play for the children of the North Earlham, Larkman, and Marlpitt area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILD</td>
<td><a href="http://www.buildnorwich.org.uk">http://www.buildnorwich.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Connections/MEGA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.communityconnections.org.uk">http://www.communityconnections.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Music East</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cme.org.uk">http://www.cme.org.uk</a></td>
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<td>Creative Arts East</td>
<td><a href="http://www.creativeartseast.co.uk">http://www.creativeartseast.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSV Vocal Project</td>
<td><a href="http://www.csv.org.uk">http://www.csv.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earlham Youth</td>
<td>Engage young people, actively involving them in anti bullying and drugs awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace Young Mums</td>
<td><a href="http://www.embraceyoungmums.org.uk">http://www.embraceyoungmums.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIGO Dyslexia Services</td>
<td><a href="http://www.4dyslexics.com">http://www.4dyslexics.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Matters</td>
<td>Offer support and advocacy to parents and carers of children of all ages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward and Futures</td>
<td>Day centre for adults with learning difficulties in West Norfolk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FWA Well Family Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fwa.org.uk">http://www.fwa.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Garden Science Trust, The</td>
<td><a href="http://gardensciencetrust.co.uk">http://gardensciencetrust.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Yarmouth Community Trust</td>
<td>Learning within the Great Yarmouth community, between the ages of 19 and 60.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Yarmouth and Waveney MIND</td>
<td><a href="http://www.home-start.org.uk">http://www.home-start.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Start</td>
<td>Supports spiritual, physical &amp; educational well-being of people working in prostitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdalene Group, The</td>
<td><a href="http://www.communityconnections.org.uk">http://www.communityconnections.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Ethnic Group Apprenticeship</td>
<td>Advice &amp; support on accommodation, training &amp; employment/offer learning activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk ACRO</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nacro.org.uk">http://www.nacro.org.uk</a></td>
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<td>NACRO/Families at Bowthorpe</td>
<td><a href="http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk">http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk</a></td>
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<td>Norfolk Museums &amp; Archaeology Service</td>
<td><a href="http://www.norfolkeda.org.uk">http://www.norfolkeda.org.uk</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Norfolk Eating Disorders Association</td>
<td><a href="http://www.neicg.freeserve.co.uk">http://www.neicg.freeserve.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEICG</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ymca-norfolk.co.uk">http://www.ymca-norfolk.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norfolk YMCA Schools Team</td>
<td><a href="http://www.norfolkcarers.org.uk">http://www.norfolkcarers.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lynn Discovery Project</td>
<td>See Phase One, Appendix 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwich and District Carers’ Forum</td>
<td>See Phase One, Appendix 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwich Community Workshop</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nr5project.co.uk">http://www.nr5project.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR5 Project, The</td>
<td>Support for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive Tree Project</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">http://www.mind.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMNIA</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">http://www.mind.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to One Project</td>
<td>Counselling where mental health and/or emotional issues are causing disruption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ormiston Children &amp; Families Trust</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ormiston.org">http://www.ormiston.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabulum</td>
<td>Working to improve the lives of people with dementia through reminiscence activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure Start Learning Centre</td>
<td><a href="http://www.surestart.gov.uk">http://www.surestart.gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalia Theatre Company</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thaliatheatre.co.uk">http://www.thaliatheatre.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Support Norfolk</td>
<td><a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.uk">http://www.victimsupport.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Norfolk MIND</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mind.org.uk">http://www.mind.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Norwich Partnership</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wnplive.org.uk">http://www.wnplive.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Carers’ School Project</td>
<td><a href="http://www.norfolkcarers.org.uk">http://www.norfolkcarers.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 2: LIST OF SOFT OUTCOMES MAPPED BY THE RESEARCH

Ability to carry out instructions  Engagement  Relevant conversation
Ability to complete forms  Evaluating  Reliability
Ability to cope with constructive criticism  Feeling of responsibility  Seek and/or respond to help and advice
Ability to cook  Health and fitness  Self-awareness
Ability to follow written instructions  Initiative  Self-esteem
Ability to meet deadlines  Inter-personal skills  Self image
Ability to use tools and equipment  Job search  Social belonging
Ability to write a CV  Knowledge  Spiritual beliefs
Achievements  Listening skills  Supporting others
Acquisition of language skills  Motivation  Taking part in meetings
Adaptability  Non verbal communication  Taking responsibility for own life
Appearance  Oral communication  Team working
Aspirations  Organisational skills  Time keeping
Attendance  Personal circumstances  Time management
Attitude  Personal hygiene  Telephone skills
Awareness of rights and responsibilities  Personal standards of conduct  Understanding of emergency procedures
Behaviour  Physical belonging  Understanding of equal opportunities issues
Belonging  Planning  Understanding of others’ roles in the workplace/project
Budgeting  Positive regard for others  Use of appropriate language for task or situation
Communication  Presentation  Use of computer software
Community belonging  Prioritisation  Work output
Completion of work placements  Problem solving  Work quality
Concentration  Questioning  Written communication
Conduct  Rate of sickness-related absence
Confidence  Recognition of prior skills
Cooperation  Reduced depression/anxiety
Decision making  Relationships
Encouraging others  Relationship with those in authority
APPENDIX 3: ANALYSIS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES ONE AND TWO

CREATIVE ARTS EAST (WELBORNE ARTS FESTIVAL): QUESTIONNAIRE ONE

Q1. ‘Where do you live?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Welborne</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Another rural area of Norfolk</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Town in Norfolk or Norwich</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Outside Norfolk</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2. ‘My age is:’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Up to 17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) 18 to 30</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) 31 to 64</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) 65 and over</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3. ‘Do you have a disability or any form of special need?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) No</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4: ‘How often do you attend events of the type included in the Arts Festival?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Never before</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Occasionally</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Often (on average once a month or more)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q5: ‘Where did you hear about the festival?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Poster</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Programme</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Newspaper</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Radio</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Word of mouth</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Some respondents indicated more than one source of information)

Q6: ‘Which parts of the festival have you attended?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Creative Arts East ‘Reflections’ exhibition</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Breckland Artists’ exhibition</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Exhibition of work by children</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Exhibition of visual art by villagers</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) ‘Something for all the senses’ in the church</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Jay Singers concert</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Apartment House concert</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) Refreshments</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Respondents attended more than one event. Percentages given of the total respondents having attended that event)

Q7: ‘Which part did you enjoy most?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Creative Arts East ‘Reflections’ exhibition</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Breckland Artists’ exhibition</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Exhibition of work by children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(d) Exhibition of visual art by villagers | 3 | 12
(e) 'Something for all the senses' in the church | 2 | 8
(f) Jay Singers concert | 1 | 4
(g) Apartment House concert | 1 | 4
(h) Refreshments | 0 | 0
(There were 11 no responses to this question)

Note: In questions six and seven, the Bristol Art Library was not included in the list but two respondents indicated that this was the event they had particularly enjoyed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q8: 'I enjoyed the festival'</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Very strongly agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strongly agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q9: 'The arts festival was well organised'</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Very strongly agree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strongly agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q10: 'The arts festival puts Welborne on the map'</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Very strongly agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strongly agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q11: 'Events such as the arts festival help build community spirit in a rural area'</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Very strongly agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strongly agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q12: 'Having attended the arts festival, I am more likely to attend arts events in the future'</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Very strongly agree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strongly agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q13: 'Having attended the arts festival, I am more likely to get involved in arts activities'</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Very strongly agree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q14: ‘Having attended the arts festival, I will support future events at Welborne’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Very strongly agree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Strongly agree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Very strongly disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q15: ‘Do you have any further comments or suggestions on how the arts festival can be improved in future?'

Comments made in free text were as follows:

- Flowers were very nice, excellent
- No comments. Very well organised as it was.
- Bigger?
- Catering could be better! More range and a bit more exciting.
- Having a motorised wheelchair available.
- Larger signs for traffic.
- Maybe involve other villages nearby – Barford/Wramplingham. There are crafts people there too!
- Input from local musicians e.g. Norfolk Young Musicians.
- Everything is (well) done.
- Signs on main road for passing traffic.
- Well done – most enjoyable.
- Doesn’t need improving because variety is so good.
- Could be bigger, more art and craft.
- Difficult to improve on such a memorable event. Perhaps consider having more populist concert alongside a classical music event.
- Brass or jazz band in the field? Organ recital in the church? Seeing an artisan at work. Extend activities in to the field to expand area you can use.
- How about some drama!
- A little more variation in exhibits perhaps.
- Both adults and children very much enjoyed the festival – thank you for all the time and effort.
- Very good. Could include conceptual art or live artist. Could include audience participation art. Particularly liked created rose – art that develops.
- Artists workshops were a bonus last year. Timetable of events in the programme would be an advantage. Programmes sold in advance would allow people to plan their visit.
**NORTH LYNN DISCOVERY PROJECT: QUESTIONNAIRE TWO**

**Q1: ‘Are you male or female?’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q2: ‘How old are you?’**

Respondents ages ranged from 6 to 18 years

**Q3: ‘Please tick which of these people live with you for most of the week’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mum and dad</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mum</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepmum/Dad’s partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepdad/Mum’s partner</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another person who cares for me</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: one question unanswered. Percentage given of 75 respondents.

**Q4: ‘Tell us how you feel about the North Lynn Discovery Project’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not so good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: two questions unanswered. Percentage given of 74 respondents.

**Q5: ‘How do you feel about other children who come to the project?’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not so good</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: one question unanswered. Percentage given of 75 respondents.

**Q6: ‘If you answered ‘Not so good’ at 5 above, please tell us why’**

This was a free text response. Whilst no respondent had answered the previous question ‘Not so good’, there were two comments as follows:

‘Not a lot of people get along with [named individual]’ and ‘Most people that go to the centre are ok, but some are not’.

**Q7: ‘What do you like about coming to the project?’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning stuff</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to do</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in activities</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Individuals were asked to select all the reasons which applied to them. The numbers of responses thus total in excess of the 76 respondents indicating that individuals selected a number of reasons. The percentages are therefore of respondents mentioning the factor as at least one of the things they liked and will in consequence total above 100. A free text category was added to cater for factors not covered in the menu of choices. Comments added were ‘Having loads of opportunities’ and ‘Raising my self esteem’.
Q8: ‘Why do you come to the project?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is something I need help with</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just for fun</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because my friends go</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because my parents send me</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses were again possible to this question and therefore the caveat to the totals and percentages in question seven apply. In the free text category the following comments were made:
‘To get help with homework(x3)’; ‘To see (name) Boy’; ‘To have a laugh with my friends and because I enjoy it’; ‘So (name) can help me DJ, so I am able to get better’; ‘Because it is good/fun(x3)’; ‘Meet new people/mates(x3)’; ‘To learn’.

Q9: ‘How did you find out about the project?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From my friends</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From my parent(s)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From my social worker</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another adult</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses were again possible to this question and therefore the caveat to the totals and percentages in question seven apply. Whilst no free text category was provided, ‘newspaper’, ‘staff’ and ‘programme through the door’ were added as sources of information.

Q10: ‘How does the project help you?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It helps me cope with being picked on at school</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me make new friends</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me cope with my parents arguing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me feel more confident</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It teaches me new skills</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It gives me new experiences</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It stops me from getting bored</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses were again possible to this question and therefore the caveat to the totals and percentages in question seven apply. In the free text category the following comments were made:
‘It helps me do better at school’; ‘It gets me out of the house’; ‘It stops me from getting in trouble’.

Q11: ‘Which of the above is most important for you?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It helps me cope with being picked on at school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me make new friends</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me cope with my parents arguing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me feel more confident</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It teaches me new skills</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It gives me new experiences</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It stops me from getting bored</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The individuals who had responded at question ten ‘It stops me from getting in trouble’ and ‘It gets me out of the house’ as at least one of the ways the project helped them, selected those choices as most important for them. The percentages are therefore of the 74 respondents who selected one of the main menu choices.

Q12: ‘How could the project be made better?’

This was a free text exercise and attracted a number of remarks which indicated that respondents were perfectly satisfied with the project in its current form. Comments
were made such as ‘Nothing’ (three times); ‘No comment, it’s ok how it is’; ‘It couldn’t be’ (twice); It's ok how it is”; ‘There is nothing to be better’; and ‘It can’t’.

Amongst the suggestions for improvement, a number wished for longer opening hours or an extension of activities such as discos. Three responses indicated a realisation of what would be needed to make this happen. One response was ‘More staff so that the opening hours can be made longer”; another wrote ‘Get more money to do better things with the children”; whilst the third said ‘More money so we can do more things’. Two responses included ‘computers that actually work’ in their views. The idea of more trips out was frequently mentioned as was a wish for more competitions with football, tennis, netball and pool being mentioned. One individual wanted ‘up to date music’ whilst some thought the wide age range catered for at the centre could be divided. ‘More activities for girls’ received one mention, whilst a further response was ‘More youth council meetings so we can plan more stuff’.
APPENDIX 4: RARPA AND THE SOUL RECORD

The Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) in non-accredited learning project has now reached a crucial stage. LSDA and NIACE, after three years of research, including pilot schemes, have developed a model, called the ‘Approach’ and the ‘Staged Process’. They claim that this model is generic and can be applied in any setting. The RARPA process has been endorsed by the LSC and all learning providers, who wish to receive funding from them for non-accredited provision, will be required to use this model by September 2005. The LSC Progress Paper on ‘The Approach’ states that:

“All providers will be expected to make a commitment to the RARPA principles for September 2005 and will have until September 2006 to develop and embed the principles and requirements fully across their organisation” (LSC, 2002, p.22).

The Approach consists of two elements: a Staged Process for measuring achievement in non-accredited learning, and a quality assurance process to make sure that the first element is fit for purpose and entails no additional bureaucracy. Learning providers will be required to demonstrate how RARPA is being applied in their organisations and demonstrate a clear commitment to applying the RARPA principles to non-accredited learning, in their three-year development plans. Clearly this will have implications for all VCS organisations which look to the LSC for funding. The authors consider that The SOUL Record fully meets the requirements of The Approach and Staged Process as shown in Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RARPA Stage</th>
<th>SOUL Record Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims appropriate to an individual learner or groups of learners (clearly stated learning aims).</td>
<td>The aim would be clearly stated at the outset of using The SOUL Record with an individual or group. The aim in general terms would be to develop the soft skills of the learner in whatever area the organisation specialises in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial assessment to establish the learner’s starting point.</td>
<td>This is the baseline assessment provided by either the ‘Getting to Know You’ questionnaire or the worksheets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of appropriately challenging learning objectives: initial, renegotiated and revised.</td>
<td>These come from using the initial questionnaire or worksheet as a diagnostic tool. The challenging learning objective becomes the goals (learning outcomes) that the learner identifies in consultation with the worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition and recording of progress and achievement during programme (formative assessment): tutor feedback to learners, learner reflection, progress reviews.</td>
<td>This will be achieved by revisiting the questionnaire and worksheets, which reveal progression through its scoring system, recognition of achievement through the examples given of progress and goals achieved. Tutor feedback, learner reflection, and progress reviews are also contained within this process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-of-programme learner self-assessment; tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement</td>
<td>This is provided by the completion of the questionnaire or worksheet, used by individual learners, when they exit the programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: How The SOUL Record fulfils the requirements of RARPA.

The SOUL Record is more defined than the loose evidential requirements of RARPA, offering a clear system, which demonstrates both the development of soft outcomes and the recognition and recognising of non-accredited learning. The research team
consider that funders, including the LSC, will prefer applications for funding from learning providers which produce clear, unambiguous evidence of the progress made by their learners. Funders, in practice, are unlikely to spend time reading diaries, case studies, watching videos, or listening to audio tapes, in order to make decisions on funding non-accredited learning when it is so much easier to justify funding for accredited provision. The SOUL Record provides a definite framework which seeks to improve the quality of service provision by engaging workers and learners together in developing their soft outcomes. The SOUL Record is both a measure of learner progression and a diagnostic tool to improve service delivery. It is a motivational method that encourages learners, workers, and is easily understood by funders. Therefore, The SOUL Record appears to be fully compatible with the RARPA process and leads to the development of best practice, whilst providing funders with a better indication of the contribution organisations make to the progress achieved by their learners.
APPENDIX 5: THE SPREADSHEET RESULTS PACKAGE

Figures 6 – 10 show example screen prints from The Spreadsheet Results Package.

Figure 6 (above): Main Menu, Spreadsheet Results Package. Clicking on the ‘Getting to Know You’ button will take the user to the screen shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 (above): Getting to Know You Main Menu (i.e. questionnaires). Clicking on the ‘Adult’ button will take the user to the screen shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8 (above): Adult Getting to Know You Menu. There are options to input Baseline, Midpoint and Final data. Clicking on the ‘Baseline’ button will take the user to the screen shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9 (above): Adult Baseline Results Screen into which data from the Adult Getting to Know You questionnaire would be input. Data for Midpoint and/or Final Results would be input in the same way.

Figure 10 (left): Once all necessary data had been entered (Baseline, Midpoint and/or Final) the next step would be to click on the ‘Progression Summary’ button (see Figure 8). The ‘distance travelled’ by learners would be automatically summarised in the diagram seen.
APPENDIX 6: TRAINING REQUEST FORM

If you would like to receive training on how to use The SOUL Record, please complete this training request form (an electronic copy is also available in the following link; Training Request Form. The training package includes:

- One day of SOUL Record user training
- SOUL Record folder
- User Guide
- CD containing the Spreadsheet Results Package and electronic copies of The SOUL Record and User Guide

Total cost of the above package is £150.

Contact Name: 
Organisation/Project: 
Address: 
Postcode: 
Telephone No: 
E-mail: 
Sector (E.g: Voluntary, Private, Public): 
Type of Service Provided by Organisation 
Client Group (E.g: Children, adults, disabled etc): 

Please return the form to: SOUL, Room F216 Research Centre City College Norwich Ipswich Road Norwich NR2 2LJ

Telephone: 01603 773364 - E-mail: theresearchcentre@ccn.ac.uk