Literacy and numeracy support for homeless adults
An exploration of third sector employment and skills provision

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

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Abstract

This research is focused on the literacy and numeracy support offered by third sector organisations as part of their efforts to help homeless adults move into employment. Whilst homeless people are increasingly expected to move into work, many face a number of barriers to labour market participation. A small but growing evidence base suggests that one key barrier is poor literacy and numeracy, or 'basic' skills. However, research has found that homeless people, alongside other disadvantaged adults, are often excluded from formal opportunities to improve these skills. Third sector homelessness organisations are settings in which this exclusion might be redressed. However, whilst many offer employment and skills support, the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy education within it is largely unknown. Additionally, scant attention has been paid to the various factors shaping this support. To address this knowledge gap, this thesis presents new data from semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with 27 homelessness practitioners. The research uncovers the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision offered in these organisations. A range of factors shaping it are also identified. These include: the needs and demands of service users; the roles and capacity of staff working in homelessness organisations; organisational purpose and structures; national policies relating to adult education, austerity and welfare reform; support from other adult education providers; non-governmental finance; and the time and expertise of volunteers. With some modification, this is argued to be consistent with Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model. The thesis concludes that although organisations have demonstrated a propensity to develop literacy and numeracy support, while

government policy and related funding does not recognise and support such provision, it seems likely to remain piecemeal and highly contingent on the contribution of volunteers and short term funding opportunities.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This research is focused on the literacy and numeracy support offered by third sector organisations as part of their efforts to help homeless adults move into work. In this introductory chapter I set out the policy and research context and the rationale behind this focus. I explain how despite many homeless adults having what are considered 'poor' basic skills alongside a range of other barriers to successful labour market participation, they are increasingly expected to move into work as the result of an ever more conditional welfare system in the UK. However, at the same time homeless people are often excluded from both mainstream adult education and employment services. It is because of this that third sector homelessness organisations are potentially important in the provision of literacy and numeracy support for this group – it is argued that through them, exclusion from the mainstream employment support and education systems can (at least in part) be redressed. Following this introduction, the key aims, research questions and methodology are introduced before the contribution this thesis makes is outlined. The chapter ends with an overview of the remaining chapters in this thesis.

1.1 Work as a route out of homelessness

As with a range of other social issues, moving into paid work has been presented by successive governments as an important part of the route out of homelessness and towards social inclusion (Warnes and Crane, 2000; McNeill, 2011). For homeless and formerly homeless people, it has been suggested that paid employment offers the *"ultimate' route to integration'* (McNaughton, 2008, 162). Moreover, people experiencing homelessness can be expected to look

for and move into work, as part of an increasingly 'conditional' welfare system (Dwyer, 2004; Johnsen et al., 2014; Watts et al., 2014), whereby those claiming out-of-work benefits must demonstrate intensive work search and engage in various 'work preparation' activities in order to receive their social security entitlements.

However, homeless people can struggle to both enter and sustain work in the paid labour market. The available evidence indicates very high levels and long histories of unemployment and inactivity amongst this group (FEANTSA, 2007; McNaughton, 2008; Hough et al., 2013; Homeless Link, 2013). Where homeless people do enter employment, many struggle to sustain it (McNaughton, 2008; Hough et al., 2013). A combination of factors can make finding and keeping a job a significant challenge, reinforcing the position of homeless people outside or on the edge of mainstream employment (FEANTSA, 2007; Buckingham, 2010). These can include housing instability and a lack of access to affordable accommodation, a lack of recent work experience and employer references, low or no qualifications, mental and physical health problems, drug and alcohol misuse, and criminal records (Dwyer and Somerville, 2011; Hough et al., 2013).

A focus on moving homeless people into work can be critiqued for failing to take into account the considerable barriers to work faced by many homeless people, in combination with the poor quality and increasingly 'precarious' nature of opportunities at the bottom end of the UK labour market. Expecting homeless people to succeed at the sharp end of the labour market alongside coping with a lack of secure accommodation and other complex needs has been branded unfair and inappropriate (Crisis et al., 2012). In addition, research exploring

homeless people's experiences of the mainstream publicly funded employment services (i.e. those offered through Job Centre Plus and Work Programme providers) has found that many do not feel supported by, and have become alienated from, this system (Batty et al., 2015, Johnsen et al., 2016). Thus, whilst on one hand homeless people are expected to move into work, on the other they receive limited support to access and sustain it. However, failure to demonstrate a willingness to move into employment leaves some homeless people vulnerable to having their entitlements to out-of-work benefits withdrawn, which can have disastrous consequences (Batty et al., 2015). More positively though, many of those experiencing homelessness do aspire to move into work themselves, either in the immediate or longer term (Hough et al., 2013).

1.2 Work, homelessness and the role of 'basic skills'

Adult literacy and numeracy (or 'basic skills') education has been a key part of broader policy agendas aimed at moving people into work; work is often presented as the key to social inclusion, and basic skills are considered integral to individual labour market success (Barton et al., 2007; Tusting and Barton, 2007; Weedon and Riddell, 2011). For those with weak basic skills, evidence suggests that finding, entering and sustaining work can be more difficult (Bynner, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Parsons and Bynner, 2005; Dugdale and Clark, 2008; Vignoles et al., 2008; BIS, 2011; Wolf and Evans 2011; Duckworth, 2013). Low level basic skills in the UK working-age population are widely believed by policymakers to be both a drag on national productivity and seriously hamper individual labour market prospects (Leitch, 2006). As a result,

particularly since the Skills for Life strategy (DfEE, 2001), and through to more recent policy developments (HM Government, 2017), the UK government and devolved administrations have recognised and financed adult learning in this area. In some instances, as part of the increased levels of conditionality described above, those who are considered not to have an 'acceptable' level of 'basic skills' can be mandated to attend skills training (Dorsett et al., 2011; DWP, 2011).

In addition to the range of barriers to work highlighted above, a small but growing evidence base suggests that many homeless people have poor literacy and numeracy skills (Luby and Welch, 2006; Olisa et al., 2010; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). In a recent attempt to assess homeless people's basic skill levels, Dumoulin and Jones (2014) found that in a sample of 139 single homeless adults, 51 per cent and 55 per cent had poor literacy and numeracy skills respectively (i.e. below level 1). This, according to dominant policy discourse, will put many homeless people at a serious disadvantage in the labour market. Indeed, the Skills for Life Strategy identified homeless people as a group in need of improving their basic skills. More recently the government has funded 'STRIVE' (Skills, Training, Innovation and Employment) - a pilot project in two London-based homelessness organisations which was designed to support homeless people to develop their literacy and numeracy skills (House of Commons, 2014; BIS, 2014).

However, in addition to their exclusion from the statutory employment service highlighted above, the available evidence suggests that homeless people are also often excluded from opportunities and support offered by adult colleges and other private training providers (Barton et al., 2006; Luby and Welch, 2006;

Reisenberger et al., 2010; Olisa et al., 2010; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Studies involving adult literacy and numeracy learners and adult learners more generally have also highlighted significant challenges in engaging those facing social and economic disadvantage in adult education provision (Crowther et al., 2010). If moving into work continues to be presented as a 'solution' to homelessness and basic skills are so important to labour market success, homeless people's exclusion from mainstream support to improve these skills should be of great concern to both policymakers and practitioners.

1.3 The role of the third sector in employment-related support for homeless adults

Third sector, community based organisations have been identified as important spaces in which marginalised groups, such as homeless people can access education (McGivney, 1999; Barton et al., 2006, 2007; Green and Howard, 2007; Reisenberger et al., 2010; Tett, 2010; Golding, 2012). Perhaps in recognition of homeless people's exclusion from opportunities and support offered through both formal adult education provision and mainstream employment services, many such organisations have developed their own education, training and employment (ETE) support alongside other interventions to address the diverse range of complex needs many homeless adults have (Dwyer and Somerville, 2011). According to surveys of the homelessness sector, a high proportion offer literacy and numeracy support as part of this (Homeless Link, 2014). Homelessness organisations have also historically been sites of Skills for Life provision (see Barton et al., 2007). Exclusion from formal adult education and a preference to engage with non-governmental, charitable organisations can mean that the support homeless

people are able to access depends on what these local services are able to offer.

However, homeless people's participation in (and exclusion from) learning is a topic neglected in both homelessness and educational research literatures. Despite it being increasingly recognised as being more than just a housing issue, research exploring homelessness has been dominated by housing and social policy traditions (Pleace, 1998). Only a handful of studies in educational research have focused on homeless adults (Castleton, 2001; Barton et al., 2006, 2007; Juchniewicz, 2011), and homelessness researchers have tended not to focus on education and training (the available evidence base is reviewed in detail in chapter five). In 2000, a review of research on homelessness in Britain (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000, 34) concluded that:

> '*most research addressing homelessness and education is limited to children*'.

The authors took this to suggest that:

> '*there is little expectation that underachievement at school can be compensated for afterwards*'.

Since then, whilst an interest in improving the education of homeless adults has grown in policy and practice, both in relation to employment and training, and broader access to educational opportunities, research has not kept apace. A very limited amount of research has taken place in these alternative educational settings. Not much is known about what this provision looks like in practice, nor the various factors that shape it. The only available evidence tends to come from context-free figures about the services that are available and evaluations

of larger services. This is an important evidence gap for those concerned about whether or not homeless adults are accessing the support they need to move into (or closer to) work and/or develop their skills. It also means that the work being undertaken by these organisations in this area potentially goes unrecognised. Furthermore, without knowing about the factors shaping provision, it is also difficult to identify ways in which support in these settings can be enhanced.

1.4 Key aims and research questions

In recognition of the above evidence gaps, the main aims of the research presented in this thesis were:

- to identify the current nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision offered by the homelessness sector

- to deepen understandings of the various factors impacting on the work of third sector organisations, in particular as they shape its educational provision

- to identify opportunities for literacy and numeracy support to be enhanced in these contexts

- to explore the need for (and potential role of) third sector homelessness services in the provision of literacy and numeracy support

- to bring together distinct but overlapping literatures on homelessness, adult education and the third sector in order to enhance understanding of this neglected area of research

In order to achieve the above aims, several research questions have guided this research:

1.   What is the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy education within the employment-related support offered by organisations supporting homeless adults?

2.   What factors shape the literacy and numeracy education offered?

3.   How can literacy and numeracy learning be better supported in homelessness organisations?

To answer these questions a qualitative methodology was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with 27 practitioners drawn from across the Greater Manchester homelessness sector. Through thematic analysis of new data generated through these interviews, I uncover both the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision available in these settings, alongside a range of factors shaping it. Furthermore, I argue that Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model (outlined in chapter four) is a helpful framework through which to understand the various factors shaping educational provision in these settings, albeit with additional elements added given the complexity of such organisations and the issues they are dealing with.

1.5 Scope of the research

This study is concerned with a number of overlapping areas including homelessness, adult education and the third sector, research on each of which is vast and wide-ranging. Within each area there are a number of different facets and contentions, and the policies relating to them vary across devolved

nations. Thus, it is necessary to restrict the focus of the study. First, this study is focused on 'single' homeless people, rather than homeless families or children (the meaning of this is outlined in the following chapter). Second, it is concerned primarily with the English homelessness sector and adult education context. More specifically, the focus of this thesis is on organisations operating within Greater Manchester context, a large post-industrial conurbation in the North West of England.

Policies relating to both adult education and homelessness are devolved matters, each with significant divergence in legislation across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Most notably, on homelessness, Wales and Scotland have recently introduced new rights and duties for homeless people. For example, abolishing the 'priority' need category, which means that all those who are 'unintentionally' homeless have a right to settled accommodation (Dobie, et al., 2014). Concerning adult education, Scottish policymakers have demonstrated a greater appetite to adopt 'social practice' principles (which are explained in the following chapter) compared with their English counterparts, and literacy and numeracy education has been integrated to a greater extent in wider local development and regeneration agendas (Tett and Maclachlan, 2008; Tett, 2010). Whilst this research is located in the English context, evidence from across the UK and further afield is drawn upon, where appropriate, in the wider literature review. In addition, the findings will be of relevance to all with an interest in this area beyond the context in which the study took place. Further consideration relating to the generalisability of this study can be found in chapter six.

1.6 Study contribution

Through this thesis I make a number of important empirical and theoretical contributions. First, I have generated new data which shines a light on a neglected topic: namely, the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision available to homeless adults in third sector homelessness settings. As potentially important sites for the provision of literacy and numeracy support and adult education more widely, investigating what provision is available in these settings is important in understanding whether or not homeless adults are able to access literacy and numeracy support where they want or need to. This research demonstrates that whilst literacy and numeracy learning is supported across the sector, current provision is often on a small scale, ad hoc and in a precarious position. Thus, homeless adults who struggle with literacy and numeracy are not being adequately supported to improve these skills. Through exploring practitioner perspectives, the research has also added to a growing evidence base which identifies literacy and numeracy 'needs' amongst a significant proportion of homeless people.

Second, I have identified a number of factors impacting on the work of third sector organisations, in particular as they shape the educational provision offered. To do this I have generated new data and practically applied Boeren's (2016) model of adult learning participation. In focusing on one particular aspect of Boeren's Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model (i.e. educational institutions) through this research I have uncovered the range of factors impacting on support offered by this particular type of 'learning institution'. I have demonstrated that her model has wider applicability beyond explaining adults' participation in formal educational provision, and that it in fact

helps to identify the range of factors impacting on provision in informal community contexts. Whilst additional factors which are harder to place within her three tiered model also impact on provision in homelessness settings, the model still remains a helpful way of conceptualising the way in which support is shaped by factors operating at individual, institutional and national policy levels. In addition, it argues that the model can be enhanced by being placed within an overarching critical realist framework which emphasises not only the interaction of different factors but also acknowledges the dominance of structural factors in explaining social phenomena such as that concerned with in this thesis. To my knowledge, this is the first time an attempt has been made to apply such a theoretical framework developed from the educational research tradition to phenomena occurring in the homelessness sector.

By bringing together a number of distinct literatures (homelessness, educational research and the third sector) I also contribute to knowledge about the barriers to learning participation encountered by homeless adults, and the institutions which have the potential to address them. Lancione (2016) has argued that an interdisciplinary approach is needed to more fully understand the exclusion and disadvantage experienced by homeless men and women, and to identify potential solutions. As such, through exploring the issue of homelessness through an educational research lens, this thesis makes a unique contribution.

Finally, and perhaps the most important contribution, is that this research identifies ways in which educational provision for homeless adults might be improved or enhanced in future. Following the completion of the thesis, I intend to disseminate the findings widely to both policymakers and practitioners in

order that they are made aware of the extent of provision currently available to homeless adults, and the various ways through which literacy and numeracy support might be enhanced in these settings. As new funding becomes available (for example, through STRIVE or local funding sources) it is important to take stock of the current state of provision – to consider whether the support currently provided is fit for purpose and, if not, what could be done to improve the literacy and numeracy support available to homeless adults. Given continued moves towards greater local decision-making, and associated calls for evidence to better inform policy-making at the local level, by focusing on a particular area's homelessness sector, it is hoped that the research presented here can help to directly inform policy and practice in Greater Manchester. That said, the emerging findings are likely to be relevant to anyone interested in or working within this field. Since the research was conducted, the homelessness sector in Manchester has begun to organise at a local level to campaign and influence policy. For example, the Manchester Homelessness Charter asserts that '*everyone who is homeless should have a right to… equality of opportunity to employment, training, volunteering, leisure and creative activities*'.[1]   It is hoped that this research will be of use to these and other groups seeking to improve employment and skills opportunities for homeless adults in Manchester and further afield.

1.7 Why did I choose to do this research?

My interest in the relationship between homelessness, work and education began whilst volunteering as an administrative and research assistant for Crisis,

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[1] See https://charter.streetsupport.net/read-the-charter/ accessed 10/11/2017

the largest and perhaps most well-known UK charity focused on supporting and campaigning for single homeless people. Based in the employment and skills team of their London headquarters, I was introduced to a world in which homeless adults were being supported to improve their skills and access the labour market in a range of different ways, including through advice and guidance, a variety of skills workshops and access to grants to fund individuals' access to courses, buy work-related equipment, and set up enterprises. Here I was struck by the positivity and commitment of the staff and service users as homeless men and women embraced opportunities to improve their chances of accessing work, despite facing a range of other difficult issues in their lives. Shortly after leaving this volunteer position in order to seek paid work, I began working at The Work Foundation, a policy-focused 'think tank' based in Westminster. Still focused on 'welfare' and 'work', the research I was involved in here concerned general populations i.e. 'the UK population' or 'young people in the UK', predominantly drawing on quantitative data such as that derived from the Labour Force Survey to try to understand people's labour market experiences and formulate recommendations for policymakers. Here the focus was also typically on mainstream welfare and education providers (including schools, adult training providers, Job Centre Plus and Work Programme providers), rather than more specialised provision, or smaller sub-sets of the population with more complex needs and barriers to labour market participation.

Whilst related, debates and policy pronouncements about skills and welfare provision in which I was then involved seemed remote from the employment and skills team in which I had previously volunteered. Reflecting back on my experience volunteering in this setting, I wondered whether what they were

doing was informed by an evidence base and policy pronouncements which presented improving individual skills as (at least part of) the solution to labour market exclusion. Whilst there was a clear consensus in my day-to-day work that skills (including literacy and numeracy skills) were important, whether or not this was a view shared by the homelessness sector was an unknown, as was the extent to which homeless men and women were receiving support to improve these skills across the homelessness sector. A preliminary review of the literature which informed my doctoral research proposal confirmed an evidence gap in this area.

Over the duration of my doctoral study, my own professional practice has shifted. Moving from The Work Foundation to take up a Research Fellow position at the University of Salford, in the past three years I have been involved in a large-scale piece of research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The '*Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions Support and Behaviour Change*' project has involved exploring people's experiences of the mainstream social security system and examining the impact of an increasingly and conditional and punitive welfare system on a diverse group of 'welfare service users'. This has further enhanced my conviction that the employment support offered outside of the mainstream welfare system warrants more attention as those with the most complex needs and barriers to the labour market (including homeless people) are denied the support they need to move into (or closer to) work.

1.8 Thesis structure

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 considers key debates relating to two of the main concepts with which this thesis is concerned, namely, homelessness and literacy and numeracy. My understanding of each is outlined as it informs the proceeding research, whilst also drawing attention to key theoretical debates around these contested concepts. Here the relationship between homelessness and poor literacy and numeracy is also considered. The chapter concludes that a significant proportion of homeless adults have poor literacy and numeracy skills. Thus, support to improve these skills might logically form part of the services offered by third sector homelessness organisations.

Chapter 3 presents evidence relating to the role of literacy and numeracy in the labour market. It does so in order to establish whether literacy and numeracy might sensibly form part of the support available to homeless people seeking to move into work. It argues that a strong case can be made for the inclusion of literacy and numeracy support for homeless people hoping to move into (or closer to) work. However, it draws attention to the limitations of available evidence, and cautions against treating skills as a panacea for tackling labour market exclusion. In doing so, it underlines the need for varied support which takes into consideration the range of factors which may work to exclude homeless people from the paid labour market.

Chapter 4 begins by considering the different types of learning adults engage in. Through bringing together evidence from across both educational and homelessness research, the chapter then goes on to consider the evidence relating to homeless people's exclusion from

mainstream adult education provision and underlines the (potential) importance of third sector homelessness organisations in facilitating service users' access to learning opportunities. Following from this, the chapter identifies and suggests aspects of good practice which organisations seeking to support homeless learners might wish to adopt. The chapter also introduces Boeren's (2016) participation model and identifies some of the potential factors which might impact on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy in homelessness organisations.

Chapter 5 presents the available evidence on adult learning in the third sector, where possible focusing on that available across the homelessness sector. It first reviews what previous research reveals about both the nature and extent of education provision in these settings. It then identifies evidence relating to the factors shaping such support, considering whether Boeren's (2016) integrative model outlined in the previous chapter might offer an appropriate framework for explaining the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support within homelessness services. In this chapter, I argue that whilst often referred to in positive terms (especially when juxtaposed with inappropriate support from the mainstream welfare system), very little is known about what employment-related support in the homelessness sector actually consists of. In addition, scant consideration has been given to the different factors shaping the support and services available in these settings.

Chapter 6 describes the methodology and research design used in this study. The chapter begins by briefly re-capping the key findings of the

preceding chapters, and the key research questions guiding the research. It then introduces some key tenets of critical realism, the philosophical position underpinning this research before outlining the methodology and data generation methods through which the questions will be answered. Early pilot work, the approach to sampling, analysis and issues relating to validity, reliability, generalisability and research ethics are also discussed.

Chapter 7 is a short chapter introducing the context within which this research took place. The chapter begins with an overview of the socioeconomic profile of the Greater Manchester area, alongside the policy context in which it operates. Here the focus is on skills profiles and homelessness data. Findings from a desk-based review of third sector support for homeless adults across the metropolis is then presented in order to contextualise the research that follows.

Chapter 8 is the first of three chapters in which I present and analyse the key findings emerging from the research. Drawing on the accounts of 27 homelessness practitioners, the chapter uncovers a range of support offered by organisations seeking to support homeless people to move into (or closer to work) and shows how literacy and numeracy support forms part of this to greater or lesser extents. Whilst largely 'informal', the learning described also has elements of non-formal and formal provision, demonstrating the potential of these organisations to facilitate homeless people's engagement in a range of learning activities. Interviewee accounts also suggest that many of the various aspects of good practice identified in previous chapters are present in the literacy

and numeracy and wider employment and skills offered by organisations supporting homeless adults. The chapter concludes that there is clearly a role for homelessness organisations in enabling homeless adults to participate in learning, however the potential for this is not currently being realised as provision is often on a small scale, ad hoc, and in a precarious position.

Chapter 9 is the second findings chapter. In this chapter I present analysis relating to the key factors impacting on both the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy (and broader employment-related) support provided in these 'educational institutions'. Through a thematic analysis of the accounts of interviewees, several key factors are identified: the needs and demands of service users, the roles and capacity of staff, organisational structures, support from adult education providers, and national policies relating to austerity and welfare reform. This, it is argued, is consistent with Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model, however reflecting the complexity of third sector homelessness organisations, and the fact that the provision of learning opportunities is not typically a key aim of such institutions, additional factors were identified which are harder to place within the three-tiered model – namely, non-governmental finance and the time and expertise of volunteers.

Chapter 10 is the third and final findings chapter. Here practitioners' views on how literacy and numeracy provision can be enhanced in their settings, and for homeless learners more widely, are presented. These views are considered in light of the existing evidence base and

theoretical framework provided by Boeren's (2016) integrative model and a broader critical realist perspective.

Chapter 11 presents the main conclusions and recommendations emerging from the research. The thesis has demonstrated the varied educational activities currently underway in third sector homelessness organisations. It argues that this is an important source of support for homeless adults, however the sector's role in addressing the educational and wider social inequalities experienced by many homeless adults is potentially much greater. Recognising the various factors at play in whether or not adults are able to participate in learning, I conclude that a number of actions can be taken within existing structures to enhance the literacy and numeracy support provided in third sector organisations seeking to support homeless people to move into (or closer to) work. However, I also argue that without recognition by policymakers and significant financial investment, the extent to which such organisations are able to offer high quality literacy and numeracy support and redress educational and economic inequalities is currently, and will remain, limited. The continued lack of investment in opportunities for homeless adults to develop their literacy and numeracy and other skills risks a missed opportunity for homeless learners.

Chapter 2 Basic skills and homelessness

This study is concerned with several contested concepts: namely; literacy and numeracy; homelessness; and the third sector. In this chapter I consider key debates relating to the first two of these topics, and evidence on the relationship between them (the 'third sector' is considered later, in chapter five). I lay out my position on each as it informs this research, which has been influenced by an emerging critical realist tradition. In doing so, I emphasise the need for 'epistemologically inclusive' approaches to understanding social phenomena such as literacy and numeracy and homelessness, alongside the importance of paying attention to the interplay between structure and agency in exploring these important issues. The chapter concludes that, whilst limited, there is evidence that a significant proportion of homeless adults have poor literacy and numeracy skills. As such, support to improve these skills might logically form part of the services offered by third sector homelessness organisations.

2.1   Literacy and numeracy: skills vs social practice

Literacy and numeracy are fundamental to our functioning in almost every aspect of life – at home, at work, and in our relationships with other people. Without '*the ability to read and write*' and '*the ability to understand and work with numbers*' (Oxford Dictionary), adults will encounter numerous obstacles in various arenas of day-to-day life. Whilst most are in broad agreement about their importance, the nature and value of literacy and numeracy, and the way in which these skills should be understood, monitored and taught are all areas

of contention. This has implications for the way in which policies are developed, which in turn impacts on the way adult education is funded and facilitated. Broadly speaking there are two main ways in which literacy and numeracy have been conceptualised: as 'skills' or as 'social practices'. In the following sections I provide a brief overview of each of these before outlining my own position.

2.1.1 A skills-based approach

For some, understanding literacy and numeracy is fairly straightforward: these are discrete skill sets which people either possess or lack and which are possible to measure quantitatively through standardised testing (Wolf and Evans, 2011). The conception of literacy and numeracy 'skills' is closely associated with the notion of 'human capital', a concept advanced by the economist Gary Becker (1993), who asserted that:

> '*expenditures on education, training… are investments in capital*' (Becker, 1993, 16).

Here the market value of an individual's education and qualification levels is emphasised. According to this conception, this value can be codified by recognised standards and qualifications that are considered to command a quantifiable value in the paid labour market (Stanley and Mann, 2014). Research treating literacy and numeracy as 'skills' and as part of human capital tends to be informed by positivist principles, generating theories based on 'event regularities' and correlations in quantitative data (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 3). As such, great emphasis is placed on the results of studies of how higher skill and education levels are associated with positive labour market outcomes including higher incomes and chances of being in

employment (see for example: Bynner and Parsons, 1997; Machin et al., 2001; McIntosh and Vignoles, 2000; Bynner, 2004; Parsons and Bynner, 2005; Vignoles et al., 2008; Wolf and Evans, 2011; Kuczera et al., 2016; Lane and Conlon, 2016).

In England, a skills-based approach has driven policymaking relating to adult literacy and numeracy (and adult education more generally). Influential reports by Moser (1999) and Leitch (2006) both emphasised the need for a focus on 'economically valuable' skills in order to address national skills shortages and low productivity. Whilst broader aims of 'social inclusion' are often cited in policy documents, policies like Skills for Life and more recent shifts towards 'Functional Skills' have been increasingly focused on these objectives (Barton et al., 2007; Green and Howard, 2007; Burgess and Hamilton, 2011). Policymakers consider the main role of education and training to be to produce a skilled workforce for which global economic competitiveness is the ultimate aim (Quinn et al., 2005; Duckworth, 2013). Improving the population's literacy and numeracy skills is believed to be important for increasing both individual prosperity and national competitiveness. Education is therefore seen as an investment for both the individual and the state (Stanley and Mann, 2014).

Contributing to this, influential organisations including the OECD and European Commission have emphasised a need to develop standardised measures of literacy and numeracy 'skill' in order for cross country comparisons to be made and progress measured. For example, the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) administers regular surveys which aim to measure adults' proficiency in literacy, numeracy and 'problem solving in technology-rich environments'. The international league tables resulting from

these surveys (in which the UK performs relatively poorly) have resulted in ever greater emphasis on standardised testing, with a focus on target driven, top down, quantifiable outcomes (Hamilton and Tett, 2012).

Education and skills policy is typically based on assumptions that improving adult literacy and numeracy skills will result in higher salaries and better jobs (Wolf and Evans, 2011). This simple conception has led to an emphasis on formal education characterised by standardised testing and a focus on targets and performance measurement (Moser, 1999; Leitch, 2006). This is convenient for the makers and implementers of government policy as it provides a clear set of objectives against which policy interventions can be evaluated. However, such a narrow approach to adult education has been found to present barriers to adult learning participation where standardised and inflexible courses do not correspond to motivations, interests or capabilities of potential learners. This issue is highly significant for those interested in exploring the range of provision available to different groups of learners, including homeless people, and as such will be re-visited in chapter four.

In addition, as those viewing literacy and numeracy as human capital tend to focus on the value of these skills in so far as they have an economic value in the paid labour market, this approach typically does not recognise the value of knowledge which is considered to have no or little economic value, such as that used in the private domain of the home, or that acquired through various leisure pursuits (Stanley and Mann, 2014). For this reason, learning activities which do not result in a recognised qualification with a quantifiable value in the labour market typically go unfunded, thus limiting the variety of opportunities available

to those who want (or need) to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and excluding those who are unlikely to achieve such qualifications.

2.1.2 A social practices approach

Those taking a 'social practice' view criticise the conceptualisation of literacy and numeracy skills as an individual economic good. They argue that treating 'skill' as a neutral 'thing', neglects to consider how literacy and numeracy skills are developed and used in people's everyday lives, and fails to recognise and address the underpinning social inequalities which result in some individuals possessing weaker skills than others (as determined by lower test scores) (Street, 1995; 2001; Juchniewicz, 2011). Proponents of this view of literacy believe that the 's*election and distribution of literacy to different social groups is not something that happens neutrally*' and that '*definitions of what it means to be literate … cannot be seen outside of the interests and powerful forces that seek to fix it in particular ways*' (Crowther et al., 2001, 1).

Advocates of this approach argue that a functional 'skills-based' approach results in literacy and numeracy provision which is 'remedial', predicated on a 'deficit-model' which emphasises what people lack, rather than recognising the existing capacities which adults bring to their learning experiences or the reasons why they themselves want to improve their skills (Barton et al., 2007; Green and Howard, 2007). This, it is argued, '*actively reinforce[s] the notion of failure*' in adult learners (O'Grady and Atkin, 2006) and can alienate (potential) adult learners from participating in adult education. For example, where a person's vernacular (everyday) literacies are side-lined by and corrected in line with dominant 'institutional literacies' found in formal education, learners can

become demoralised and alienated from opportunities to participate in learning (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Crowther et al., 2001; Duckworth, 2013).

Instead, proponents of the social practice approach emphasise the need for a more nuanced and contextualised understanding, rooting literacy and numeracy in the social practices of individuals and local definitions of 'need' (Street, 1995; Barton and Hamilton, 1998). In other words, the emphasis should be on what people *do* with literacy and numeracy rather than crude distinctions between those who are and who are not functionally 'literate', and whether or not they meet the literacy 'requirements' determined by powerful groups. This may not fit neatly with the 'literacy' and 'numeracy' assessed by the quantitative measures described above, or with the standardised basic skills courses on offer through the formal adult education system, but are arguably more important if adults are supported to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in a way which serves their own purposes (Barton et al., 2007; Green and Howard, 2007).

2.1.3 Reconciling skills-based and social-practice based approaches

Whilst often depicted as 'diametrically opposed', I reject the notion that literacy and numeracy must be understood in either skills-based or social practice terms. Instead, I share the belief that both approaches to understanding literacy and numeracy should be viewed as complementary, each illuminating different facets of literacy and numeracy 'issues' in the adult population and the ways in which '*adults' access to learning is organised in different social contexts*' (Evans, 2009, 112; see also Green and Howard, 2007; Wolf and Evans, 2011). Both approaches have value in understanding adults' literacy and numeracy,

and the extent to which skills weakness and inequalities are possible to address. Moreover, for those concerned with supporting adults to participate in the labour market (as per the focus of this thesis), it is important to recognise that whilst skill inequalities result from broader structural inequalities, these are nevertheless the competencies required in today's labour market.

Delpit (1995), for example, argues that it is a disservice to learners not to equip them with the tools they need to understand and participate in the 'codes of power' utilised by those in command of more dominant institutional literacies. Whilst her work focused on the education of black children in the United States, her argument exposes inadequacies in the sharp distinctions between social practice and skills based approaches along these lines:

> '[A] *'skilled' minority person who is not so capable of critical analysis becomes the trainable, low-level functionary of the dominant society, simply the grease that keeps the institutions which orchestrate his or her oppression running smoothly. On the other hand, a critical thinker who lacks the 'skills' demanded by employers and institutions of higher learning can aspire to financial and social status only within the disenfranchised underworld'* (Delpit, 1995, 19)

Thus, whilst it is important that diverse literacy practices are respected and promoted, it is also important that students are aware of and able to draw on those 'institutional' literacies which are valued in the market.

2.2 What is homelessness and who are single homeless people?

Having established my position on 'literacy' and 'numeracy' I will now turn to consider that group of (potential) literacy and numeracy learners – homeless

people – which are the focus of this thesis. There is no single agreed definition of, cause of, or solution to homelessness (Neale, 1997; Wagner, 2012). People living in a range of conditions can be described as homeless – including those who are 'roofless', 'houseless', and those living in insecure or inadequate housing (Amore et al., 2011). This thesis is concerned with the services designed to support those often referred to as 'single homeless people'. The current homelessness legislation in England enshrined in the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act denies most single homeless people a right to housing, as those in this group are not generally considered to be 'unintentionally homeless' or in 'priority need'. As such, they are often owed no legal duty of support from the state. Single homeless people (hereafter, 'homeless people') live in a range of housing situations. Some live in temporary accommodation, including hostels and supported housing projects, some sleep rough, reside in squats, or 'sofa surf' (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). In addition, many in this group have significant support needs (for example, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues), which exist alongside their housing insecurity. Whilst policymakers recognise single homeless people as a group with particular support needs (DCLG, 2014), local authorities in England currently have no legal responsibility to assist them. As such, support for this group is often limited to that provided by third sector organisations, an issue considered in more detail in chapter five.

Robust data on the extent and nature of the single homelessness population are severely lacking. This arguably demonstrates a lack of interest on the part of policymakers and other key stakeholders. As Rose et al. (2016, 28) bluntly put it:

> '*The fact that as a nation we do not know the number, situation or names of single homeless households…exemplifies how little priority and attention these groups have been given by mainstream public services.*'

Estimates can be derived from looking at 'non-priority homeless' decisions logged by local authorities, which in England currently stand at around 20,000 per year. However, this is likely to provide only a small fraction of the true scale of single homelessness. For example, a recent study found that, because of local authority gate-keeping, many single homeless people are not supported or are even deterred from making a homelessness application (Dobie et al., 2014). Rough sleeping statistics, based on snapshot street counts (or estimates) conducted by local authorities can also be used to build an estimate. According to recent figures, more than 4,000 people are estimated to be sleeping rough on any one night in England (DCLG, 2017). Again, these figures are likely to underestimate the issue due to difficulties in finding and counting those who are sleeping rough (Zufferey, 2008). Service caseload statistics can also be used to estimate single homelessness numbers. For example, in 2014, there were around 38,500 bed spaces in supported accommodation for homeless people. More recently, a significant overlap between homelessness and other forms of social exclusion has been observed, leading to attempts to quantify those experiencing multiple excluded homelessness (Fitzpatrick et al., 2012). In recent years, homelessness of all forms has been increasing due to continuing deficiencies in housing supply, and cuts to benefits and public services (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017).

2.3 Relationship between homelessness and poor literacy and numeracy

On numerous occasions, homeless adults have been identified as a group where a need to improve literacy and numeracy levels is particularly high. The Skills for Life strategy identified homeless people as a target group in need of improving their literacy and numeracy skills. More recently, Allat (2016) has identified a continued focus on homeless and other disadvantaged learners in basic skills support. However, it is not always clear what evidence has driven this focus (this policy context is considered in more detail in chapters four and five).

Statistics derived from nationally representative surveys are used to produce statements, such as: '*in 2011, 49 per cent of adults had numeracy levels at or below those expected of an 11-year old, and 15 per cent were at or below this level for literacy*' (HM Government, 2017). These are used by policymakers and researchers to establish that a significant proportion of the adult population are in 'need' of improving their literacy and numeracy skills. However, as Hamilton (2012a) notes, there are limitations in the extent to which homeless people and other 'marginalised groups' are represented in such surveys. It is therefore unclear how 'homeless people' have been identified as a group 'in need', 'at risk' or 'to be targeted' with literacy and numeracy training through successive government policy.

To a limited extent, it is possible to identify at least some level of literacy and numeracy need through data produced by the homelessness sector. However, the absence of robust data collection activities and the transient and often 'hidden' nature of the homeless population means that there are significant limitations here too. Data collection processes relating to homeless people's literacy and numeracy needs by the homelessness sector are not well

understood - it is unclear the extent to which literacy and numeracy 'need' is recorded and how this is identified. Indeed, as will be shown by the results of this study, the way in which literacy and numeracy needs are identified varies significantly across different homelessness organisations.

Several attempts to improve the evidence relating to homeless people's skill and qualification levels have been made. These have all been documented in the grey as opposed to academic literature. Where surveys of homeless people have been conducted regarding their skill and qualification levels, these have tended to draw samples from single organisations, thus the extent to which data can be considered 'representative' of homeless people is limited. In addition, whilst sampling criteria are not explicit, it is unlikely that a random sampling frame has been used which may have resulted in potential bias from selection effects; and survey data do not tend to distinguish between ESL (English as a Second Language) and native English speakers. This considered, the data available suggest that homeless people generally have very low formally defined skill and education levels (Fitzpatrick et al., 2000; Barton et al., 2006). According to a survey conducted by Luby and Welch (2006), for example, homeless people are twice as likely as the general population to have no qualifications. In addition, a survey of Thames Reach service users found that only 13 per cent have one or more qualifications, ranging from Entry 1 to Level 2 (Olisa et al., 2010), and only 18 per cent of St Mungo's Broadway service users surveyed reported having any qualifications above Level 2 (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014).

A recent attempt to assess literacy and numeracy skills needs can be found in Dumoulin and Jones' (2014) study wherein skills check assessments[2] were conducted with 139 service users of the homelessness charity St Mungo's Broadway. The results suggested that just over half (51 per cent) had below level 1 literacy skills, and 55 per cent had below level 1 numeracy skills, compared to a respective 15 per cent and 48 per cent of the adult population in England (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). In addition, in a self-reported survey of Thames Reach service users, almost half of those living in its projects said they had problems with writing, whilst 38 per cent struggled with reading written materials (Olisa et al., 2010). Despite limitations, these are the best data currently available and suggest that skills and qualification levels are particularly low amongst this group. In addition, whilst from a social practice perspective such measures of literacy and numeracy can be critiqued as a limited, instrumentalist view of what literacy, and to a lesser extent, numeracy is, the disparities they highlight suggest important inequalities in the distribution of skill when comparing homeless adults to the general population.

A small number of studies have investigated literacy and numeracy issues faced by homeless adults with a qualitative approach. For example, in Castleton's (2001) study, staff working at a homeless shelter in Australia reported that poor literacy was an important issue for homeless people, alongside the range of other factors impacting on their lives. Furthermore, in Dumoulin and Jones' (2014) study involving qualitative interviews with homeless basic skills learners, participants described experiencing difficulties

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[2] 'Skills for life smart move skills check'

in managing various aspects of their lives due to poor literacy or numeracy skills.

Recognising significant skills issues within the single homeless population is not to say that all homeless people struggle with their literacy and numeracy. Indeed, reflecting the diverse pathways leading to homelessness, those who might be formally considered to be 'high skilled' and highly proficient in literacy and numeracy may find themselves without a home (Barton et al., 2007). That being said, the majority of homeless people have faced poverty and social exclusion throughout their lives (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2017) and as such those homeless people with high formally defined skill levels can be considered an exception rather than the rule. Following O'Sullivan et al.'s (2010, 12) suggestion that homelessness might be best understood '*as a problem that affects a set of distinct sub-groups and consequently, for tailoring solutions according to each group's respective needs*', the focus of this study is largely on those who are likely to have low skill levels, and who throughout their lives have faced significant social and economic disadvantage during their learning experiences and access to learning opportunities (Crowther et al., 2010). However, it must also be noted that '*everyone in society has some literacy difficulties in some contexts*' (Street, 1995, 24) and new skill demands can occur for all adults across the life-course. This is especially the case within the context of a rapidly changing labour market.

2.3.1 Homelessness and basic skills: the role of structure and agency

Theories concerned with the interaction of structure and agency can help to explain both why some adults are homeless, and why some have poor basic

skills and are excluded from opportunities to improve them. Like many social phenomena, homelessness and poor educational outcomes have traditionally been understood as the result of either individual 'failings' (such as 'laziness', alcohol dependence, substance misuse, unemployment or relationship breakdown) or as an inevitable result of structural forces (such as a lack of affordable housing, educational exclusion, and inequalities in the labour market), disregarding the agency of individuals (Neale, 1997; Belcher and Deforge, 2012; Johnson et al., 2015).

There have been numerous attempts to overcome these dualisms as they apply to the study of homelessness and adult educational inequalities. For example, scholars from both homelessness (Neale, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 2005) and educational research (Boeren, 2016) have been influenced by the work of Anthony Giddens (1984, 171), whose 'structuration' theory argues for the need to recognise the 'duality' of structure, in that:

> '*Human societies, or social systems, would plainly not exist without human agency. But it is not the case that actors create social systems: they reproduce or transform them*'.

Furthermore, structure is considered to be '*always both constraining and enabling*' (ibid, 25). Here, whilst the wider housing, economic and educational structures which create the conditions for homelessness and poor educational outcomes are acknowledged, the role of individual agency is not dismissed.

In this thesis I adopt a critical realist perspective. Characterised by similar principles as structuration theory, critical realism is underpinned by a commitment to the belief that neither structure nor agency can be '*wholly*

explained in terms of the other' as both are interdependent (Shipway, 2011, 84). However, whilst acknowledging this interdependence, it is important to recognise that *'structure precedes action which … provides the preconditions for action'* (Stones, 2001, 180)*.* As Bhaskar (2011, 60; 2014, 36) explains:

> '*People do not create society. For it always pre-exists them. Rather it is an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions that individuals reproduce or transform. But which would not exist unless they did so'.*

For critical realists therefore, individual actions are both constrained and enabled by pre-existing social structures (Fitzpatrick, 2005). As Barton et al. (2007, 9) explain: '*people act and make choices in relation to the possibilities which are available to them*'. Thus, whilst there is space for individual action, homelessness and poor basic skills are the product of structural inequalities reproduced through housing, economic and educational systems.

McNaughton's (2008) notion of 'edgework' is consistent with this perspective, recognising the pre-existence of enduring social structures and how they work to reproduce inequalities in several aspects of day-to-day life. In her longitudinal study, she shows how those trying to escape homelessness tended not to move too far from the margins of society, thus not overcoming their exclusion in any sustained way, and remaining at risk of re-entering homelessness. Importantly therefore, interventions aiming to tackle homelessness and move people into work should seek to move people beyond the margins. As Juchniewicz (2011, 133) acknowledges:

> '[The] *persistent practice of reacting to immediate conditions with stop-gap solutions preserves those conditions in the long run… short-term gratification rather than long-term, meaningful change*'.

This highlights both a need for sustained interventions which seek to tackle a person's homelessness in a long-term sustainable way, providing support to help individuals to tackle barriers to sustaining and independent life. However, a critical realist perspective also highlights the limits to approaches targeted on individuals in attempts to overcome issues like education and housing exclusion more generally. Recognising the influence of structural forces, a large part of the solution to 'homelessness' and meeting homeless people's needs (including improving basic skills) will be significant reform of the social system (including housing, education and labour markets). The principles of critical realism as they have underpinned this research project are explained further in subsequent chapters.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has considered key debates relating to the concepts of homelessness and literacy and numeracy. It has also considered the existing evidence base relating to the relationship between the two issues. Whilst existing theory and research literature contain sharp divisions between social-practice and skills-based approaches to understanding literacy and numeracy, it is argued that a more conciliatory approach is helpful in understanding the issues at hand. The chapter argues that, whilst the evidence base is somewhat lacking, and whether literacy and numeracy are understood in skills- or social-practice based terms, there is evidence to suggest that many homeless adults

have poor literacy and numeracy skills, relative to the wider adult population. Thus, literacy and numeracy support might logically form at least part of the services offered by organisations which seek to support homeless adults. The following chapters consider further evidence to support this claim as it reviews the significance of literacy and numeracy skills in today's labour market, and the factors explaining barriers to learning participation experienced by many homeless adults.

Chapter 3 The importance of literacy and numeracy in the labour market: implications for homeless job seekers with poor basic skills

In this chapter I present evidence on the role of literacy and numeracy in the labour market. Drawing on the findings from both qualitative and quantitative research, I consider the literacy and numeracy demands of today's labour market, and how these might prevent homeless people who struggle with literacy and numeracy from finding, entering, sustaining and progressing in work. I do so in order to establish whether literacy and numeracy might sensibly form part of the employment and skills support offered by organisations trying to support homeless people to move into work. After considering the evidence base, I argue that a strong case can be made for the inclusion of literacy and numeracy support here. However, I also draw attention to the limitations of available evidence, and caution against treating skills as a panacea for tackling the labour market exclusion. As such, a need for varied support which takes into consideration the range of factors which may work to exclude homeless people from the paid labour market is underlined.

3.1 The role of literacy and numeracy in the labour market: quantitative evidence

A large number of studies have used quantitative data to estimate the impact of an individual's literacy and numeracy skills on their labour market prospects (see for example, Machin et al., 2001; Bynner, 2004; Vignoles et al., 2008). Large longitudinal datasets, such as the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the Birth Cohort Study (BCS70) have allowed researchers to observe the impact of varying skill levels across the life course (Wadsworth et

al., 2003), and international datasets such as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) have allowed comparisons across countries. Such studies have demonstrated the positive impact of higher literacy and numeracy skills on both employment chances and wage returns across the life course (Kuczera et al., 2016).

In terms of employment chances, labour market analysts have repeatedly found a positive relationship between higher levels of literacy and numeracy and individual employment outcomes. For example, McIntosh and Vignoles (2000), using the NCDS, found that having level one literacy skills was associated with a five percentage point higher probability of employment than having skills below this level (without controlling for other factors). Their analysis using the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) supports the finding of a positive relationship, however using these data the effect appears greater - with a 13 percentage point higher probability of employment. Evidence relating to numeracy is more consistent – having level one numeracy skills increases the chances of employment by around five percentage points compared to those with a proficiency below this level (without controlling for other factors).

Controlling for other factors reduces the effect of both literacy and numeracy on the likelihood of employment. Using data from the NCDS, the effect of higher literacy levels on employment is reduced to zero, and the effect of higher numeracy levels falls to two to three percentage points. Again however, particularly with regard to literacy, there are some inconsistencies regarding the magnitude of the effect of higher levels of literacy on employment outcomes when controls are added to the model – in the IALS model, much of the effect

of literacy on employment outcomes is retained at 10 percentage point higher probability of employment (McIntosh and Vignoles, 2000). More recently, Lane and Conlon (2016), using 2012 PIAAC data, identified significantly higher chances of employment for those with greater proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Other studies have examined the employment tenure that those with poor basic skills have gone on to access. Bynner and Parsons (1997), for example, found that those with poor numeracy skills tended to experience intermittent spells of employment, with work histories often characterised by casual employment.

Quantitative data also demonstrate a positive relationship between higher literacy and numeracy proficiencies and earnings potential. Again, using data from the NCDS, McIntosh and Vignoles (2000) find that the earnings of individuals with Level 1 literacy are 15 per cent higher compared to those with literacy skills below this level (without controlling for other factors). Those with Level 1 numeracy skills (without controlling for other factors) earn between 15-19 per cent more than those with numeracy skills below this level. For literacy, adding other variables to the model reduces the earnings effect to one to three per cent using the NCDS, however as with employment chances, the effect is largely retained at 11 per cent when using IALS data. With numeracy, a positive relationship between higher skills and earnings remains at around six to seven per cent after factors including qualification level and family background are included in the model. Reflecting lower wages, most of those with poor numeracy work in jobs which are low skilled and poorly paid with limited opportunities for progression (Bynner, 1997; Kuczera et al., 2016).

Part of the positive relationship between literacy and numeracy skills and labour market outcomes can be explained by the higher qualification levels possessed by those achieving a certain level of proficiency in these skills. Literacy and numeracy provide the educational foundations for gaining higher qualification levels which are important to access, sustain and progress in employment. In contrast, low basic skill levels make it difficult to progress towards and gain the formal qualifications valued and often expected by many employers (Bynner, 2004). Those with poor basic skills tend to leave education with no or very low level qualifications and also tend to leave school at the earliest opportunity (thus limiting opportunities for gaining qualifications) (Bynner and Parsons, 1997). In adulthood, those with low basic skills are less likely than others to engage in further learning opportunities, thus further limiting future labour market opportunities (Wolf and Evans, 2011). For example, Bynner (2004) found that on leaving school 44 per cent of young men (1970 cohort) and 33 per cent of young women with very low literacy levels had not obtained any qualifications compared with 10 per cent of men and 9 per cent of women in the general population.

Given the increased significance of qualifications in today's labour market, literacy and numeracy have become even more important over recent decades. Where individuals were once able to leave compulsory education with few qualifications and still be able to access employment, those with no or low level qualifications today struggle both to gain an initial foothold in the labour market upon exiting education and fare less well in subsequent labour market experiences in terms of employment chances, pay and progression (Woods et al., 2003; Bynner, 2004; Sissons and Jones, 2012). A higher premium for

qualifications can be seen through comparing the employment outcomes of individuals in 1958 and 1970 birth cohort studies. Where analysis is restricted to those who left school aged 16, those achieving 'good' qualification levels (top 25 per cent) had similar outcomes in both cohorts. However, those in the 1970 cohort without qualifications were much less likely to be in employment than those in the 1958 cohort – by the time they were 21 years old, more than 90 per cent of young men with no qualifications in the earlier cohort were employed, but this decreased to 75 per cent for those in the later cohort (Bynner, 2004). Importantly though, analysis by Bynner (2004) using both the NCDS 1958 cohort study and the 1970 Birth Cohort Study finds that low literacy levels impact on labour market experiences both over and above the qualifications obtained. Thus, even where individuals with low literacy skills succeed in attaining other qualifications, low literacy levels may continue to adversely affect employment chances.

Overall, quantitative data suggest that having better basic skills (in particular better numeracy skills) improves someone's chances of being in work and can mean that individuals earn more over their working lives (Vignoles et al., 2008). Conversely, those with poor basic skills fare particularly badly in today's labour market. Moreover, the value of basic skills in the labour market has risen over time, with a premium maintained despite policy interventions to boost the supply of basic skills in the workforce throughout the 2000s (Vignoles et al., 2008). Numeracy difficulties are more widespread in the adult working population, and, whilst it is '*often assumed that numeracy… is less important than literacy*', numeracy has been found to 'matter more' for labour market outcomes (Parsons and Bynner, 2005, 4). Reflecting this, and in contrast to previous

campaigns aimed at tackling poor basic skills, recent ministerial speeches have emphasised the need for UK adults to improve their numeracy skills, pointing to cultural differences between nations and lamenting the assumed widespread perspective that it is acceptable to be bad at maths. As the then Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise, in 2014 Matthew Hancock MP asserted:

> '*We've this odd attitude that it's OK to be bad at maths... But it's damaging and unacceptable*' (Wooding, 2014).

3.1.2   Limitations of the quantitative evidence base

Much of the policy focus on improving adults' literacy and numeracy has been driven by evidence of the nature reviewed above. Convinced by the straightforward economic returns associated with literacy and numeracy skills, and concerns that the nation's relatively poor performance in the international league tables result in a drag on national productivity, large scale investment in adult education has supported courses designed to bring adults up to the agreed 'employability' standard (commonly defined as level two, which is equivalent to GCSE grades A*-C, or grades 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, and 4). One of the main benefits of quantitative research is the large sample sizes it is often able to make use of which can allow, for example, patterns of causation to be inferred, tested and generalised (Bryman, 2008). However, whilst large scale longitudinal cohort studies have clear benefits for the study of populations and their outcomes over the life course and benefit from large and representative sample sizes, it is important to recognise the limitations of these data.

A particular limitation of quantitative analysis of adult literacy and numeracy skills are the different levels of association found between basic skills scores

and labour market outcomes according to the data used (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). The returns to literacy in particular have been found to vary significantly according to the data which is drawn upon. That said, the overall picture from studies, using a range of measures, presents a clear case for the importance of literacy and numeracy skills for labour market outcomes. However, there are also issues around the extent to which generalisations made from a 'representative' sample of the working age population can be applied to minority groups within that population. Whilst the sample sizes of large national datasets such as the NCDS may be sufficiently representative of the general population, this may not be the case for underrepresented groups, including homeless people. Nevertheless, these groups are often targeted for intervention based on the findings from the analysis of these data.

More problematic is the way in which the findings of these studies have been used by policymakers to enforce a culture of standardisation and testing, designed to move adults up to the same 'level' of competency. Quantitative measures of literacy and numeracy inevitably classify what are complex social phenomena into pre-determined and often very narrow categories. Standardised measures of reading, writing and maths for scoring and assessment are based on '*tests which pre-define what counts as a difficulty*' and are largely determined by what is valued by employers and mainstream educators rather than individual learners. In addition, the '*difficulties of capturing literacy through measurement*' have been well documented (Hamilton, 2012a, 26) and have meant that literacy tends to be reduced to reading alone (as it has been found easier to assess and measure). This has

particular implications for the study of adult literacy and numeracy and relates to important theoretical debates concerning the way in which literacy in particular is constructed, understood, taught, and used. Moreover, the common exclusion of writing from adult education curricula and assessment can work to further silence what are already too often marginalised voices (Hamilton, 2012a).

Furthermore, whilst associations between low literacy and numeracy scores may draw us to potential problems faced by people without a good grasp of these skills (as they are narrowly defined), they tell us little about how literacy and numeracy skills are formed, used, and developed in the context of people's lives. Whilst associations between low level basic skills scores and poor employment outcomes suggest that people without a good grasp of these skills may be disadvantaged in the labour market, they tell us little about how literacy and numeracy are used, and developed in the context of people's working lives. Indeed, large scale quantitative studies can only produce 'positivistic generalisations' which pay little attention to contextual factors (Snow and Anderson, 1991). The next part of this chapter therefore focuses in more depth on the need for and uses of literacy and numeracy skills at several stages of working life.

3.2 The role of literacy and numeracy in the labour market: qualitative evidence

Managing and sustaining transitions into work carries a range of literacy and numeracy demands. Supporting notions of literacy and numeracy as social practices, these demands '*are not constant, but may arise at different intervals, and in different intensities and forms in work and in community or family life*'

(McNaught et al., 1996 in Castleton 2001, 58). This section draws on the findings from in-depth, qualitative research to build a fuller picture of the role these skills play in the modern labour market – to demonstrate the varying literacy and numeracy demands encountered at several stages of working life; to manage periods without work; to move into work, and to sustain and progress within employment. Literacy and numeracy demands outside of work, good management of which is argued to have an impact on the extent to which an individual is able to sustain employment, are also identified. The evidence included draws largely on studies focused on adult workers and learners in general, however where possible research focused on homeless adults is also drawn upon.

3.2.1 Literacy and numeracy demands of unemployment

While out of work, jobseekers encounter a range of literacy and numeracy demands (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Individuals seeking social security benefits must first access and understand information regarding out-of-work benefit entitlements and subsequently provide the required documentation and correctly fill in forms to access them. An increasingly 'conditional' welfare system also requires welfare claimants to sign written contractual agreements (or 'claimant commitments') outlining their 'responsibilities' to look for work and document job search activities (Dwyer, 2004; Wright et al., 2016). Increasingly, individuals must access government services including benefit payments through a digital medium, presenting particular obstacles to those without computers, smart phones or internet access, or who have weak digital skills. Failure to adequately document agreed job search activities can result in a person's benefits being withdrawn if a 'sanction' is applied. Numerous studies

have highlighted homeless service users' difficulties in filling in forms, with many needing assistance. And, whilst a disproportionate level of sanctioning of homeless benefit claimants has been found to occur for various reasons (Homeless Link, 2013), it has been suggested that difficulties with reading or writing can make sanctioning more likely (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014; Batty et al., 2015).

Beyond the demands of the Job Centre, successfully managing on the low income afforded by out-of-work benefit payments entails significant budgeting skills. This is increasingly the case as policymakers seek to engender a greater degree of 'responsibility' amongst welfare claimants. For example, whereas previously in the UK a person's benefits were paid fortnightly and elements such as housing benefit were paid directly to landlords, the introduction of Universal Credit, a new benefit rolling six working age benefits into one monthly payment requires individuals to manage a lump sum once a month. Since the introduction of Universal Credit, many claimants have struggled to cope with these new arrangements, with increasing numbers falling into rent arrears, needing to supplement their low incomes with in-kind support – for example by drawing on food banks (Garthwaite, 2016; Wright et al., 2016). Whilst budgeting involves a significant degree of numeracy, some authors argue that this is better understood as 'financial literacy' defined as '*the ability to make informed judgements and to take effective decisions regarding the use and management of money*', encompassing both literacy and numeracy skills (Schagen, 1997, in Hartley and Horne, 2006, 14).

3.2.2 Accessing work: literacy, numeracy and employer demand

Accessing work brings with it a further set of literacy and numeracy demands. These feature at each stage of the recruitment process. The first contact made with potential employers often involves an application form, CV, or cover letters. These literacy demands must be met even where the job roles applied for do not appear to demand much in the way of literacy and numeracy.

It is rare that employers will explicitly require basic skills qualifications and in some cases stating the achievement of what can be perceived of as low level qualifications (for example, Functional Skills) can even deter some employers, along with involvement in government employment programmes which some employers may take as indicative of an unsuitable worker. On the other hand, where employers do impose literacy or numeracy requirements this can be a discriminatory practice, designed to discriminate on the grounds that low levels of literacy and numeracy provide a proxy for other 'undesirable' social characteristics. More commonly, that employers often filter applicants on the basis of qualification level is well established, particularly during periods of slack labour demand when application volumes are high (Sissons and Jones, 2012). This is argued to have led to a rise in 'credentialism' over the past few decades as the workforce has become increasingly qualified. Many employers have been able to capitalise on an over-supply of highly qualified applicants particularly in depressed local labour markets. Adult education therefore '*functions as an instrument of selection for more able workers, broadening their occupational mobility and emphasising economic incentives*', leaving those with lower qualification and skill levels behind (Torres, 2006, 2).

3.2.3 Literacy and numeracy in work

A vast literature details a variety of literacy and numeracy demands experienced in the workplace (Hull, 1998; Belfiore, 2004; Hunter, 2004; Jackson; 2004; Marr and Hagston, 2007; Illeris, 2011; Wolf and Evans, 2011). Whilst the range and complexity of these demands will vary according to a range of factors (for example different sorts of occupation and workplace types), every job requires some use of literacy and numeracy (Hull, 1998; Defoe et al., 2004; Hunter, 2004). Although studies have found that in some workplaces neither workers nor management consider their work as involving significant literacy and numeracy practices, ethnographic research has uncovered a range of them – but these are often hidden by the 'embedded' nature of literacy and numeracy within wider work activities (Black et al., 2013).

Workplace literacies and numeracies include reading and responding to written instruction, dealing with internal and external correspondence, form-filling (for example, for recording and monitoring procedures), reading bulletin boards and health and safety notices, using charts, tables, graphs, and symbols, calculating bills (Belfiore, 2004), and using 'computerised manuals and records' (Jackson, 2004). Taking a wider view, some authors argue that people's uses of literacy cannot be divorced from wider workplace dynamics (see for example, Hull, 1998; Jackson, 2004). Jackson's (2004) ethnographic research on workplace literacies, for example, uncovers the role of literacy in '*negotiated power relationships*' in the introduction of new literacy demands and take-up (or not) of new processes. According to Hull (1995, 19, in Jackson, 2004):

'To be literate in a workplace means being a master of a complex set of rules and strategies which govern who uses texts, and how, and for what purposes. [To be literate is to know]… when to speak, when to be quiet, when to write, when to reveal what was written, and when and whether and how to respond to texts already written.'

Those who struggle with literacy and numeracy can find managing such tasks difficult. In addition, due to the stigma associated with poor literacy skills in particular, and related issues such as having dyslexia, adults can try to conceal such difficulties (Duckworth, 2013). The literature highlights various tactics workers with weak basic skills have employed in order to cope with literacy and numeracy difficulties, such as memorising key information, and receiving help from family members and colleagues (Jackson, 2004). This can be the case even for those in managerial level positions. Wolf and Evans (2011), for example, describe the case of a deputy care home manager who sought assistance with writing from her administrative staff.

The extent to which difficulties with literacy and numeracy make it difficult for homeless people to sustain employment is hard to ascertain. Studies of homeless people in work are rare and have tended not to focus on this area. In Hough et al.'s (2013) study of homeless people entering work, participants had diverse work histories and skills profiles. Entering jobs ranging from cleaning to accountancy, the range of jobs and work histories held by homeless or formerly homeless adults reflects the diversity of this group. However, whilst there are indeed homeless people with higher level skills, the previous chapter has demonstrated that skills tend to be relatively lower amongst the homeless

population. In Olisa et al.'s (2010) study one homeless man described relying on other people to help him to read written instructions in his workplace. He relied on fellow employees for help with literacy tasks such as reading and paperwork, exchanging his physical labour in return. These examples support Barton and Hamilton's (1998) notion of literacy as a '*communal resource*' which is possible to exchange. However, there is an inherent danger in relying on these networks if employment is to be sustained over the longer term, particularly for those whose social networks are often weaker, as is the case for many homeless people (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Buckingham 2010). This underlines Juchniewicz's (2011) call for sustainable interventions mentioned earlier.

3.2.4 Labour market change and increasing demand for basic skills

The increasing value of literacy and numeracy skills in the labour market identified earlier in this chapter has been attributed to large scale economic and technological change. Over the past few decades the numbers working in unskilled manufacturing jobs have declined considerably, and shifts towards a service economy has meant that more people now work in occupations including retail and customer services which tend to demand much more in terms of literacy and numeracy (Woods et al., 2003; Parsons and Bynner, 2005). Several further trends linked to labour market change and relating to literacy and numeracy in the workplace have also been identified. One is the evolution of the structures through which modern workplaces operate – Street (2001, 14) suggests there is now a greater emphasis on '*team working on projects rather than hierarchical forms of organisation that simply pass down a*

chain of command', and as such workers are therefore in greater need of negotiation and communication skills and often have a need to 'prove themselves' through data (Belfiore, 2004).

Related to this, several authors have documented the rise of a so-called 'audit culture' and a 'textualisation of the workplace' whereby employees at all levels of an organisation are expected to engage in reporting and monitoring (Scheeres, 2004; Wolf and Evans, 2011), alongside tighter health and safety regulations and technological change, including the digitalisation of products and services. This has resulted in increased demand for literacy (and increasingly digital literacy) and numeracy skills in the world of work (Parsons and Bynner, 2005). This is even the case for those jobs which have not historically required significant literacy or numeracy skills to perform (Hamilton and Davies, 1996; Belfiore, 2004; Defoe, 2004). Furthermore, Hartley and Horne (2006, 7) describe how '*individuals are increasingly being expected to self-manage areas of their lives which require relatively high levels of literacy and numeracy*' for example, understanding and negotiating individual employment contracts. Hence, for people who struggle with these skills, sustaining a job at any level can be difficult. That even 'low skilled jobs' have increasing literacy and numeracy requirements was recognised by government and formed part of the 'formal rationale' for investment in Skills for Life provision (Wolf and Evans, 2011).

These changing demands support the notion of literacy as a social practice – literacy is not just about a discrete skill set which people either possess or lack, but instead evolves over time across time and space. Workplace literacy and

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numeracy demands are not static and evolve with changing economic demand. Throughout working life even those with a good grasp of literacy and numeracy will be exposed to unfamiliar practices, and have to adapt and perhaps improve their skills in response to new demands and challenges. Those progressing in their roles and taking on managerial responsibilities for example, may be expected to write reports and disseminate information to colleagues which may prove challenging for those who continue to struggle with literacy and numeracy, despite reaching more senior levels in their chosen occupation (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Duckworth, 2013).

As new technologies continue to be developed, and labour markets continue to adapt and change, policymakers and other stakeholders have emphasised the necessity of 'lifelong learning' for all adults. As Cross (1981, 2) asserts: '*change is now so great and far reaching that no amount of education during youth can prepare adults to meet the demands that will be made on them*'. A need for individuals to be able to develop existing and new skills in order to adapt to rapid economic change driven by technological advances has generated new expectations that working age adults should be highly skilled, flexible, and '*recognise the importance of lifelong learning*' (Makepeace et al., 2003). Those who struggle with 'basic skills' and who are averse to participating in learning throughout their adult life will risk exclusion from not just work but wider arenas of modern life (Cross, 1981).

3.2.5   Literacy and numeracy demands outside of work

As the dominant justification for adult education provision is its positive impact on labour market outcomes, provision is often designed around the practicalities of accessing work. This typically ignores literacy and numeracy practices taking place outside of the paid labour market. However, whilst such private practices and responsibilities are often ignored by policymakers in their attempts to move people off benefits and into work, managing life outside work is essential if people are to have a good chance of both accessing and holding down a job. Indeed, Hough et al.'s (2013) study of the experiences of homeless people in employment highlighted the role factors outside of work – for example their ability to manage on a low income, sustain tenancies, budget and manage utilities payments, gaining access to in-work wage supplements and avoid rent arrears - can play in the extent to which they are able to sustain it. Here the literacy and numeracy demands associated with 'organising life' (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, 135) are arguably just as important as those more closely associated with accessing work in the first place. Again, the relationships and 'communal resources' individuals are able to draw on outside of work are important here – research with both homeless and unemployed people has shown the important role that friends, family members, and practitioners can often play in helping individuals to cope with and manage the literacy and numeracy demands of everyday life (Hamilton and Davies, 1996; Castleton, 2001). Thus even where work may guide the focus of adult education provision, it seems logical to address literacy and numeracy needs more holistically, indirectly supporting adults to access and stay in work.

3.3 The benefits of improving literacy and numeracy amongst adults

Drawing on a range of evidence, the above has demonstrated the role that literacy and numeracy skills play in today's labour market. Given that literacy and numeracy demands are more or less prominent depending on different occupations and employer requirements, it must be noted that the benefits and costs associated with improving literacy and numeracy skills may vary for different people (Hartley and Horne, 2006). There is evidence to suggest that engaging in learning can have a positive impact on a number of different aspects in an adult learner's life – including helping to increase their self-esteem and aspirations, improve their relationships with family and friends, equipping them with the confidence and tools they need to 'speak out for oneself' and engage in their community (Luby and Welch, 2006; Barton et al., 2007). In research commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013a) investigating the benefits of maths and English provision for adult learners, improving literacy and numeracy skills enabled some learners to both manage work tasks more efficiently and effectively and engage in new workplace practices. Whereas workers had previously avoided certain work tasks demanding literacy and numeracy, for example by receiving help from colleagues, learners in this study reported becoming more able and confident in filling in workplace forms and other paperwork, and more confident with number skills, for example being able to 'perform calculations for customers' (BIS, 2013a). In Dumoulin and Jones (2014), homeless learners said that being able to access further learning opportunities was a key benefit of improving their basic skills: '*interviewees told us that engaging in English and maths training boosts their confidence and stimulated their interest in further learning*' (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014, 7). Improved numeracy skills have also been found

to result in greater self-confidence and 'control', through 'reducing or removing guesswork'. For example, after attending adult education classes, learners in the BIS (2013a) study were able to calculate restaurant and household bills independently without having to rely on others, to help family members with their claims for social security benefits, and to advocate for support and services. As the authors explain:

> '*these new (or more exactly, expanded) opportunities to practice were not just a result of improved skills. Respondents noted that their improved confidence, whether subject-specific or in general, gave them the strength to try new things in old places, without being overwhelmed by fear or embarrassment or failure*' (BIS, 2013a, 22).

3.4 The limits of improving literacy and numeracy skills in overcoming labour market disadvantage

The above has presented evidence on the value of literacy and numeracy skills in today's labour market. Evidence from both quantitative cohort studies and qualitative work show that better literacy and numeracy skills can help individuals to access, retain and progress in work. Indeed,

> '*during the UK labour government's 13 years in power, raising* [education and] *skill levels was seen as the principal mechanism to improve the position of workers stuck in low wage jobs'* (Lloyd and Mayhew, 2010, 429).

However, whilst the evidence suggests that literacy and numeracy skills have an important impact on an individual's employment outcomes and experiences, it is important to recognise that there are limits on the extent to which literacy

and numeracy skills alone can help them to succeed in the labour market (Graff 1979; Street, 1995; Bird and Ackerman, 2005). Simply improving literacy and numeracy skills is unlikely to offer a complete solution to a homeless person's labour market disadvantage and wider exclusion. As many commentators argue, '*social exclusion* [is] *the result of many factors, and not all of them* [can] *be addressed by education policies*' (Bird and Akerman, 2005). Indeed, scholars have contested the so-called ''*literacy myth*' '*whereby it is contended that literacy of itself will lead to social improvement, civilisation and social mobility*' (Street, 1984, 10). Street (1995, 17), for example is highly critical and accuses government agencies and their mass literacy campaigns of raising '*false hopes about what the acquisition of literacy means for job prospects, social mobility and personal achievement'*.

The limits of skills acquisition in overcoming the labour market disadvantage of homeless adults can broadly be divided into two categories; first is the often multifaceted nature of the labour market disadvantage they face (FEANTSA, 2007; Hough et al., 2013). Low skill levels are just one facet of the labour market exclusion experienced by many homeless adults. A range of factors including unstable housing, poor mental and/or physical health conditions, drug and alcohol problems, low self-esteem, employer discrimination, no or limited work experience, criminal records, weak social networks, high hostel rents, and a lack of financial and material resources also work to reinforce a homeless person's position outside or on the margins of the labour market (FEANTSA, 2007; Hough et al., 2013). As such, for those seeking to support homeless people to move into or closer to work, there is no single solution or 'silver bullet'. Tackling weak basic skills may therefore not be an obvious focus for

organisations which seek to support homeless men and women to move into or closer to work. Instead, a range of interventions may be required.

Second is the wider context of the labour market and the nature of work it provides (Payne and Keep, 2006; Keep and James, 2012; Hough et al., 2013). According to the dominant thrust of adult skills policy, where individuals fail to attain the necessary level of skills and qualifications (typically defined as level two), they will struggle to succeed in the labour market. Conversely, if adults achieve this 'minimum employability platform', their future in the labour market will be much brighter as this is the key to unlocking access to good quality jobs, with higher pay and opportunities for further skill development and progression (Lloyd and Mayhew, 2010). However, this overwhelming focus on 'supply side' factors in adult skills policy is highly problematic. In placing the responsibility on individuals to improve their skills in order to escape poverty and worklessness, policymakers have failed to pay adequate attention to the broader problems of weak demand for labour and skills, and other key drivers of low pay. Lloyd and Mayhew (2010) point to multiple causes of low paid work including reduction in trade union membership and collective bargaining, privatisation, labour market deregulation and common practices of subcontracting and outsourcing to companies which drive down the cost of labour (also see Payne, 2007). Neglecting to consider these factors not only shifts the blame for unemployment and low pay onto individuals who are struggling to access and thrive in the labour market (Street, 1995), it is also in itself not enough to tackle the issue of low paying jobs in the labour market. Whilst an individual's skills have an important impact on a person's labour market outcomes, the returns to

improving these skills will be limited so long as the labour market fails to provide jobs which utilise and reward these skills.

The UK economy suffers from both a high incidence of low wage work and relatively low rates of progression from low wage employment (Dickens and McKnight, 2008, Savage, 2011). Workers in low wage jobs are the most likely to become unemployed, struggling to move away from a 'low pay-no pay' cycle (Stewart, 2007, Shildrick et al., 2010). For most homeless people entering the labour market, wages tend to be at or around the minimum, making it difficult to afford basic necessities or participate in mainstream society (Hough et al., 2013). For many, the nature of work does not enable individuals to move far beyond the margins of the labour market. Indeed, many homeless people face the bottom, low-paid and often more precarious end of the jobs market, where jobs offer few opportunities to progress to higher pay, sustain employment and avoid recurrent spells of unemployment and/or homelessness (FEANTSA, 2007; Hough et al., 2013). Many homeless people struggle to move away from '*a situation of precariousness and often low paid jobs in the mainstream labour market that further contribute to their vulnerability*' (FEANTSA, 2007, 5).

If homeless people are to avoid recurrent spells of poverty and unemployment and move beyond the margins of the labour market, they need the support and skills both to manage the risks of working in what is often low paid and insecure employment, and move into higher paid, more secure work. Support needs to be in place not just to help them to enter any job and sustain them in it, but to enable them to continue to develop and move towards higher paid and more secure work. Employers could do more to develop opportunities to allow employees to learn and progress; yet opportunities to do this are often

particularly limited at the bottom of the labour market. It is therefore important that individuals are able to identify and access further opportunities outside of work to develop skills and gain qualifications which will help them progress in the labour market. For organisations helping homeless people into work, helping to address skills needs and promoting the value of seeking out and taking up opportunities to continue to participate in learning (and information about how to do this) should arguably feature in any service that aims to support homeless people into work.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has presented both quantitative and qualitative evidence on the important role of literacy and numeracy in shaping people's labour market experiences. The available evidence suggests that helping adults to improve these skills can help them to fare better in the labour market, both directly and indirectly through opening up access to further qualifications which are increasingly demanded by employers, through increasing confidence and self-esteem, and through making the literacy and numeracy demands outside of work, for example, tenancy sustainment, easier to deal with. Whilst improving homeless people's basic skill levels is not a panacea to addressing their labour market disadvantage and exclusion more generally, the available evidence suggests that it could help towards this. Thus, there is a strong case for literacy and numeracy support to be part of the package of assistance offered by homelessness organisations which aim to support their service users to move into (or closer to) work.

Chapter 4 Homeless adults and (non-)participation in learning

The aims of this chapter are threefold. First, it identifies the different types of learning activities which might exist in organisations supporting homeless adults, along with some of the potential factors which might impact on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support in these settings. Second, it explains more fully homeless people's exclusion from mainstream adult education provision and underlines the (potential) importance of third sector homelessness organisations in facilitating service users' access to learning opportunities. Finally, it identifies and suggests aspects of good practice which organisations seeking to support homeless learners might wish to adopt. These three areas are then used as a framework for analysis in subsequent chapters.

The chapter begins by considering the different types of literacy and numeracy learning activities in which homeless adults might engage. Bringing together findings from both educational and homelessness research, it then goes on to consider evidence relating to factors which can either constrain or enable homeless people's participation in such learning activities. Drawing on Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model, it acknowledges that whether or not adults engage in learning is the outcome of the interaction of multiple factors (including those existing at individual, institutional and country levels).

4.1 Types of learning

Literacy and numeracy learning (and learning more broadly) can take multiple forms. Paying attention to the various types of learning activity is important for those interested in exploring the variety of educational provision available to

homeless adults, along with the barriers preventing their participation. Distinctions are often drawn between formal, non-formal and informal learning (Boeren, 2016). Formal learning is that which takes place in formalised settings such as adult colleges or training centres, as part of a structured programme of learning. In many ways reflecting the format of the initial schooling system, formal adult education opportunities often lead to the completion of a course of study or the acquisition of qualifications (Boeren, 2016). Non-formal learning is similar to this but takes place without the award of recognised qualifications. Official statistics describing adult learning participation only tend to consider 'formal' and 'non-formal' learning activities (Boeren, 2016, 11). However, learning is not restricted to that which follows a traditional structure or takes place within a traditional setting - a great deal of learning also takes place which can be considered 'informal'.

Informal learning is defined by the European Commission as '*learning that takes place outside formalised settings, whether it has been the intention of the adult to learn something new or otherwise*' (Boeren, 2016, 10). However, it is a very broad term and its use varies for different actors and in different contexts. For some, all learning which takes place outside of formal educational institutions is informal (McGivney, 1999; Tusting, 2003). Given the focus of this study on the literacy and numeracy support offered in homelessness settings (i.e. non-traditional learning institutions), a little more consideration will therefore now be given to what is typically understood as 'informal learning'.

In addition to the 'setting' in which learning takes place, Tusting (2003) identifies three further ways in which the term 'informal learning' has been used ('unplannedness', 'accreditation and assessment', and 'styles, roles and

relationships'). Some authors emphasise the way in which 'informal learning' does not typically follow a pre-determined curriculum or '*prescribed learning framework*' (Eraut, 2000, 12; Tusting, 2003), taking place outside of classroom-based activities (Marsick and Watkins, 1990, in Tusting 2003)*.* Here 'implicit' learning may occur where an individual has no particular intention to learn and may not even be aware of learning taking place (Eraut, 2000; Barton et al., 2007).

Learning may also be 'incidental' (Marsick and Watkins, 1990, in Tusting, 2003), occurring as a 'by-product' of participating in some other activity, or 'reactive' (Eraut, 2000, 12) where '*learning is explicit but takes place almost spontaneously in response to recent, current or imminent situations'.* For example, if literacy and numeracy demands arise in the workplace, where an individual learns how to respond effectively to these, learning can be seen to have taken place. In this way it is possible for adults to learn '*literacy practices through participating in them*' (Barton et al., 2007, 75). According to Eraut (2000, 28), improving one's skills in this way often hinges on feedback from others. Learning opportunities can also be '*deliberative*', where time is made specifically for learning (Eraut, 2000, 12). Taking part in a group discussion, for example, involves thinking deliberatively about a particular topic, listening to and understanding what others in the group are saying and deciding what contribution they themselves should make to the discussion (Eraut, 2000).

A lack of formal accreditation and assessment is another common characteristic of informal learning (Eraut, 2000, 12). In addition, teaching styles are often informal or colloquial, and teacher-learner relationships tend to be less hierarchical (Tusting, 2003). Whilst it is possible to observe common

characteristics of 'informal learning', the reality is often not so straightforward. As Tusting (2003) notes:

> '[it is] *not necessarily the case that learning which takes place outside a formal institutional setting is unplanned, unaccredited, or non-hierarchical and informal in style*'.

Informal learning activities are mostly excluded from both adult learning participation data and the attention of policymakers (Boeren, 2016, 11). This is an important omission for those concerned with the provision which exists in homelessness organisations and other alternative community contexts. As will be shown by the results of this study, informal learning is the predominant form of learning which takes place within the context of homelessness organisations, and a failure to capture its prevalence and nature can mean that this provision is overlooked. A narrow interest in more formal forms of learning is highly limiting for those wanting to understand more fully the range of provision taking place in various contexts. Furthermore, learning in alternative, '*informal community settings*', outside of the formal education system, plays an important role in offering opportunities to those who are unlikely to engage with 'formal' provision (Tusting, 2003; Quinn et al., 2005), in some cases helping individuals to grow in confidence as learners and move closer towards feeling able and motivated to access formalised opportunities in the mainstream adult education sector. However, Coffield (2000, 8) has criticised the way in which informal learning is often '*regarded as an inferior form of learning whose main purpose is to act as the precursor of formal learning*', arguing that informal learning should be valued as an end in itself (see also McGivney, 1999; Barton et al., 2006). This study considers all forms of learning activities which take place in

homelessness organisations – whether they are formal, non-formal or informal in order to capture the diversity of practice which might exist in these settings.

4.2 Understanding adult learning participation

Having outlined the various types of learning in which adults might engage, I will now consider why adults do (or do not) participate in learning of these various forms. A long history of research on adult education has investigated the reasons behind adults' (non-) participation in education. The issue has been approached from a number of disciplinary perspectives including educational research, psychology, sociology and economics, each contributing in different ways to our understanding of why adults participate in learning (or why they do not). Boeren et al. (2010) helpfully draw on the range of disciplinary perspectives, arriving at an integrated model of participation in adult education. According to this model, whether or not adults participate in learning is the result of a number of factors operating at three key levels; namely, that of individuals, institutions and countries. Influenced by the work of Bourdieu (1979) and Giddens (1984), Boeren (2016) develops the model further, arguing for the need to recognise the ways in which factors at each level interact (shown below in Figure 1). At each level the interplay of structure and agency can be observed, reproducing and reinforcing skills and other socioeconomic inequalities in the adult population. Whilst Boeren (2016) focuses on formal and non-formal learning, it is argued here that her model has wider applicability, helping to demonstrate the various factors impacting on adult learning participation in multiple fields.

Drawing on Boeren's (2016) model, the following sections present evidence drawn from both educational and homelessness research literatures, demonstrating the multiple and complex factors behind homeless people's (non-) participation in support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, including their exclusion from many mainstream formal learning opportunities. In doing so, I also underline a potentially important role for third sector organisations in providing support in this area. Recognising the interaction of factors existing at individual, institutional and national policy level the remainder of this chapter also highlights some of the potential factors which might impact on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness organisations. The evidence presented below also suggests aspects of good practice which organisations seeking to support homeless learners might wish to adopt.

Figure 1: Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model

4.2.1 Individual-level explanations for non-participation

The first part of Boeren's (2016) model concerns 'individual-level' explanations for (non-) participation. Identifying the barriers to learning experienced by individual adults can help us to understand why many homeless people do not participate in the formal educational opportunities offered through mainstream adult colleges and training providers. As Barton et al. (2007, 1) explain,

> '*decisions about participation and engagement are based upon people's histories, their current situations and the possibilities they see for themselves*'.

Whether or not an adult chooses to participate in available learning opportunities depends on whether or not they are motivated, confident and able to do so. With literacy and numeracy, wanting to attend learning activities and work towards improving these skills requires an individual to identify that they have a literacy and/or numeracy skills need, to see the value in addressing it and believe that they are capable of doing so, and to recognise appropriate opportunities. Here a number of social and behavioural characteristics come into play, alongside both situational and dispositional factors which can prevent homeless people from engaging in adult education. These factors, which are experienced at an individual level, make engaging in learning challenging for many adult learners in general, however several authors (Luby and Welch, 2006; Barton et al., 2007; Crowther et al., 2010) suggest that these constraints are even greater for homeless people, given the severity and complexity of disadvantage they often face. Generally speaking, many adults do not participate in learning opportunities because they do not *want* to do so. On the

other hand, some adults *do* want to participate, but for a range of reasons are not *able* to do so. Each of these positions are considered below.

Motivation to participate in literacy and numeracy education

Many adults do not participate in learning because they are not motivated to do so (Golding, 2012). As Illeris (2006, 17) explains:

> '*adults are not very inclined to learn something they are not interested in, or in which they cannot see the meaning or importance*'.

Conversely, there are a range of reasons why adults might *want* to participate in learning. In Houle's (1961, in Boeren, 2016) typology of learners, for example, he distinguishes between 'goal-oriented', 'activity-oriented' and 'learning-oriented' learners. The first group engage in learning as they believe that it will help them to achieve specific objectives, for example to move into or sustain a job. Accessing or progressing in employment is often identified as a key motivator for engagement in learning activities amongst the general adult population (Cross, 1981; Aldridge and Hughes, 2012), as most consider education is the best way to achieve upward mobility in the labour market (Cross, 1981). However, for some adults, motivation to engage in learning derives from something other than an aim to achieve such specific objectives. Some ('activity-oriented learners') are motivated to take part in learning simply as part of a desire to participate in activities – they value aspects of learning such as meeting new people and keeping busy rather than as a vehicle for learning particular skills or subject matters. Other, 'learning-oriented' learners partake in learning following their recognition of the value of engaging in education for its own sake (Cross, 1981, 82-83). Whilst these categories of

learners are presented discretely, it is important to note that many adults have multiple reasons for participating in learning (Cross, 1981, 83). In addition, a person's motivations are not fixed, but rather can evolve over time as circumstances change and new opportunities or constraints are realised or encountered. In Duckworth's (2013) study of basic skills learners, for example, aspirations of learners evolved as skills were developed and more opportunities in the labour market became possible.

Due to a lack of research examining the motivations of homeless (non-) learners, it is difficult to ascertain how those experiencing homelessness relate to these distinctions. In one study of homeless service users, employment-related benefits such as gaining qualifications, increasing their employability, and getting a job were seen as important motivators for engaging in learning and skills provision (Luby and Welch, 2006). Conversely, in Castleton's (2001) study based in an Australian homeless hostel, most of the residents interviewed did not want to improve their literacy as part of goals to move into work. Instead, goals relating to managing health and well-being were identified as important motivators to engage in support to improve literacy skills. Given that many homeless people live in a state of flux and transition, their motivations and aspirations may be likely to change more quickly and frequently compared to other adult learners with more settled lives. Indeed, when a person does not have somewhere to live, learning is likely to be considered less of a priority (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Barton et al.'s (2006) study highlights how homeless people's '*shifting priorities and circumstances*' can cause them to move '*in and out of learning*' as '*often immediate concerns had to take priority*'. Goals, plans and motivations were altered both as circumstances (often

unpredictably) changed and evolved and as '*new possibilities'* emerged (Barton et al., 2006; 2007).

For some, a reluctance to engage with literacy and numeracy education will follow from a belief that they do not need to improve these skills. Despite evidence to suggest a relatively high level of literacy and numeracy 'need' amongst many homeless people (as identified earlier in chapter two), if they do not recognise a need themselves, they may be unlikely to engage in literacy and numeracy provision. Self-perception of learning needs has been found to vary for different groups of homeless people. For example, one study involving homeless service users suggested that those in younger age groups were more likely to recognise and address their skills needs, whereas those '*over forty appeared less interested … in improving their literacy, while continuing to need help with tasks such as form-filling*' (Olisa et al., 2010, 59). As Street (1995, 2001) and others have argued, many adults with literacy levels below that deemed acceptable by standard assessment measures function perfectly well in their everyday lives. This finding echoes that of Hamilton and Davies' (1996) study of jobseekers. Here they found that a large proportion of study participants did not consider themselves to have a problem with their literacy. Those who did reveal that they had a literacy 'problem' did not feel that this was the most significant barrier to labour market entry. Similarly, widespread reluctance to engage in numeracy support amongst homeless adults and the adult population more generally may be in part due to the widely held belief that having poor maths skills is not particularly problematic in people's everyday lives (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). If they do not perceive their literacy and numeracy skills to be in need of improvement, 'goal oriented' adults may require

something else to convince them that engaging in provision to improve these skills is worth their time. More broadly, whilst homeless (and other) learners may want to engage in learning for a range of reasons, where learning opportunities do not cater to these, they are unlikely to participate. Where they are not motivated by objectives such as moving into work for example, provision focused narrowly on this purpose is unlikely to prove sufficiently engaging.

Individual barriers to learning are not only related to adults' motivation to take part in, but also to their self-perceptions about themselves as learners (or potential learners) (Cross, 1981, 98). As Giddens (1984, 6) explains, '*motivation refers to potential for action rather than to the mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent*'. Thus, even where individuals may have a desire to learn, there are other factors which impact on whether or not they decide to participate in activities designed to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This may be due to practical and situational barriers, or may be because of barriers relating to low confidence and self-esteem. These are considered in the following section.

Confidence to participate in literacy and numeracy education

An individual's confidence in their own abilities is an important factor in whether or not they participate in education (Boeren et al., 2010). Even where there is a desire to improve skill levels, those who struggle with literacy and numeracy are often reluctant to disclose these difficulties and can lack the confidence to engage in learning opportunities (Olisa et al., 2010). For some, this may be the result of previous negative learning experiences - poor performance at school

and fears about assessment and testing, reinforced by 'repeated exposure to failure,' deter many from engaging with learning in adulthood (Randall and Brown, 1999; Crowther et al., 2010; Olisa et al., 2010). Adults who participate most in education are more confident and tend not to have had negative learning experiences, whereas '*those who have been involved in negative learning experiences in the past have little faith in their own abilities*' (Boeren et al., 2010, 9).

Several studies have found homeless adults' engagement in early schooling to have been poor – with many missing school, often through truancy or exclusion, or leaving school at the first opportunity (Randal and Brown, 1999). In Dumoulin and Jones (2014), interviewees revealed mixed early educational experiences. Whilst some did not feel that they had had any difficulties whilst at school, several truanted and left school as soon as they could. Some felt that they had been taught poorly, with teachers showing a lack of effort or interest, or focusing on a select group of pupils at the expense of others. In common with the wider population of adults with weak basic skills, research contains examples of homeless adults receiving little support to overcome difficulties in school (Luby and Welch, 2006; Olisa et al., 2010).

Relatedly, there is evidence to suggest that homeless people are significantly more likely to have dyslexia and other learning difficulties compared to the general population (Oakes and Davies, 2008; Olisa et al., 2010; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). In Dumoulin and Jones (2014), several interviewees reported having dyslexia, however such specialist learning needs had not been addressed at school or subsequently, either because they were unaware of any problem or because they were unwilling to tell people about it. One interviewee

in their study explained that because their dyslexia was not identified by their teachers, they were 'branded as really stupid', and this severely impacted on their willingness to engage in further learning as an adult. Findings from interviews with people who are homeless and skills professionals suggest these conditions have often gone undetected and therefore unaddressed at school (Oakes and Davies, 2008; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Duckworth's (2013, 44) accounts of adult basic skills learners echoes this finding. Her interviewees described being '*sat on the outskirts*', and how those '*struggling to read and write… [were] labelled as thick*' (see also Crowther et al., 2010). In Juchniewicz's (2011, 95) study, one participant described taking a long time to enrol on an adult education course because she felt 'too stupid' and was worried about being unable to cope with the demands of the course. Here it is also important to acknowledge the role of 'stigma' in deterring potential adult learners. Being homeless, unemployed, and having difficulties with literacy and numeracy can all be highly stigmatising (Belcher and Deforge, 2012). The resulting low confidence and feelings of being an 'outsider', can make people reluctant to attend college or participate in other group learning activities (Barton et al., 2006; Luby and Welch, 2006; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014).

Levine (1980, in Street, 1984, 15) has been critical of assumptions that those considered to be 'illiterate' lack 'self-esteem', arguing that those with weak literacy skills '*often manage perfectly well and have positive self-images until some crisis occurs*'. However, low self-esteem and self-confidence has been found to be common amongst homeless people and can be a major barrier to engaging in learning (Olisa et al., 2010). Indeed, Street (1995, 19) asserts that the '*stigma of 'illiteracy' [is] a greater burden than the actual literacy problems*'.

Homeless people who believe they have weak literacy and/or numeracy skills may therefore be reluctant to reveal this (Luby and Welch, 2006). This in part explains why homeless people have been found to favour literacy lessons provided by homelessness organisations on a one-to-one basis, with '*people they know and trust*' (Luby and Welch, 2006; Olisa et al., 2010).

The impact of relationships and wider social networks on participation in learning

Although motivation and confidence can ultimately be considered individual-level factors, the social environment within which adults live also has an impact on whether or not they engage in literacy and numeracy learning (and adult education more generally) (Boeren et al., 2010). Barton et al. (2007, 75) for example, provided examples of how '*family members and others close to* [adult literacy learners] *were actively helping people to improve their literacy capabilties*'. Similarly, Crowther et al. (2010) show that learning experiences are shaped by a person's social networks. Although ultimately the influence of others is '*received in the light of the individual's own experience and perspectives*', if they are to be convinced by these outside influencers to engage in learning, potential learners must understand and accept the rationales presented to them and recognise that value that participating in learning can bring to their lives (Illeris, 2006, 17).

Many homeless people have weak social networks, however, and are often unable to draw on family and friends for support (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Buckingham, 2010). The absence of supportive social structures has

repeatedly been shown to negatively impact upon a person's confidence and motivation to learn (Hamilton and Barton, 1998). Where a homeless person's social networks predominantly comprise other homeless people, breaking out of destructive habits (for example, drinking and taking drugs) can be more difficult (Castleton, 2001; Luby and Welch, 2006). In Juchniewicz's (2011, 60) study of homeless learners in the United States, one participant explained how other hostel residents would complain that their engagement in learning '*makes us look bad*'. As a result, engaging in support to address their homelessness or wider support needs (including learning activities) may be more difficult. Whilst on one hand learners can appreciate learning alongside '*others who shared their experiences*' (Barton et al., 2006), limited peer support has been identified as a barrier to engaging in learning (Luby and Welch, 2006). Supporting this, Barton et al.'s (2006, 20) study highlights how the '*presence or absence of particular groups of people shaped others' willingness to engage*' and can reinforce other constraints, for example, a lack of motivation or self-esteem where these relationships are not supportive and encouraging (Barton et al., 2006). A number of studies have also explored how domestic violence and bullying had negatively impacted on adults' access to learning, both in childhood and as an adult (Duckworth, 2013, 89, also see Horsmann, 1999). Conversely, positive, encouraging relationships with family, friends, key workers and adult educators have been found to have a positive impact on adult engagement in learning (Juchniewicz, 2011). As Juchniewicz (2011, 114) reports: '*common to all participants was having experienced an important difference that one person had made in their lives*'. Duckworth (2013) describes how friends of learners can support them in ways that adult educators may not

be able to. The role of adult educators in facilitating or inhibiting homeless adults' participation in learning is discussed further below.

Situational barriers: the impact of housing insecurity and poor health on learning participation

Homeless people can also face a number of 'situational' barriers to learning participation (Cross, 1981, 98). First, whilst the backgrounds and characteristics of homeless people vary significantly, by definition they all face unstable housing situations. For adults experiencing homelessness, accessing support to improve their skills can be made even more difficult by the nature of their accommodation (or lack thereof). From rough sleeping, to living in hostels and supported housing, unstable and often disruptive housing situations have, and continue to, present barriers to learning for homeless people in several respects. For many homeless people, this instability did not begin in adulthood. Housing instability in childhood disrupts and negatively impacts on early learning experiences and educational attainment levels, leading to a higher risk of social exclusion in adulthood (Wadsworth et al., 2003; Barton et al., 2007). For many, an immediate and urgent need to access more secure accommodation will override any desire to engage in learning activities (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Where homeless adults want to access adult education, unstable and often unpredictable housing situations can make it difficult to manage the demands of a course (for example, regular attendance, meeting deadlines) (Barton et al., 2006). Housing instability also militates against course registration (i.e. if potential learners are unable to register on courses without a fixed address) and sustainment (i.e. as people move homes).

In addition, a lack of suitable 'spaces to learn' can inhibit the self-study that successful learning often requires (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Many hostels and day centres are noisy and overcrowded (Warnes and Crane, 2000; Hough, 2013) - this has been found to present both instructional barriers (Norris and Kennington, 1992) and make quiet self-study difficult (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014).

Further 'situational barriers' to learning can also arise from health problems or issues with alcohol or substance abuse experienced by a large proportion of homeless people (Barton et al., 2007). Untreated problems with eyesight due to limited engagement with health services, for example, can make reading difficult (Olisa et al., 2010). More commonly, both mental health and substance misuse issues can impair working memory, which can make engaging in learning more challenging. Unpredictable and fluctuating conditions and the need to attend appointments designed to assist with health and wider support needs can also make it difficult to stick to rigid course structures and can hinder concentration (Luby and Welch, 2006; Olisa et al., 2010). Several of the participants in Dumoulin and Jones' (2014) study of basic skills support for homeless people identified drinking or drugs misuse as a key reason explaining low basic skill levels and preventing many homeless people from engaging in learning to improve them. Another study (Olisa et al., 2010) provides an example of a homeless person with a history of alcoholism who would actively avoid reading due to the solitary nature of the activity, and his desire to keep active to keep his mind off alcohol. However, whilst on one hand these factors may act as barriers to engaging in learning, education programmes can also offer a means to overcome them. In Juchniewicz's (2011, 61) study, for

example, a hostel resident described reading and writing as a 'protective mechanism', occupying their mind and keeping 'unwanted thoughts out'. For those trying to recover from drug or alcohol dependency, the structure and regular routine that learning may offer *can* be a strong source of support. For example, through keeping busy and replacing addictive habits with educational ones, and through avoiding spending time with other substance misusers (Barton et al., 2006, 2007; Luby and Welch, 2006).

4.2.2 Institutional-level factors

The second element of Boeren's integrative lifelong learning participation model concerns factors operating at an institutional level. These include '*practices and procedures that exclude or discourage… adults from participating in educational activities',* such as inconvenient schedules or locations, exclusionary course fees or the provision of learning opportunities which do not coincide with learners' needs and interests (Cross, 1981, 98). Institutions of various sorts play an important role in facilitating adult learning. Boeren (2016) identifies formal educational institutions and workplaces as important institutions in this regard. The remainder of this section considers these factors within the context of such institutions. However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, third sector community organisations also play a potentially important role in providing access to learning opportunities for homeless adults.

Educational institutions

Most adult literacy and numeracy education is delivered through further education colleges and private training providers. These organisations are

currently funded to provide literacy and numeracy support to those adults who fall below Level 2. However, numerous institutional-level factors associated with such organisations have been found to present barriers to participation for homeless people and other 'disadvantaged' groups (Quinn et al., 2005). Common features such as rigid procedures, attendance requirements, and a lack of engaging content, result in provision which does not match the needs of many homeless learners. For adults with chaotic lives and multiple and complex needs, keeping to structured courses can be challenging and can prevent both participation in, and completion of, adult education courses. Homeless learners have been found to struggle to attend courses regularly due to other needs and commitments, and may need time to follow the course over a longer period of time or drop out of the course entirely (Olisa et al., 2010). In addition, homeless people are often receiving support for a range of issues and from multiple sources. Appointments with other agencies, for example the Job Centre or counselling can clash with structured or time limited courses and other often unpredictable demands (Barton et al., 2006). Whilst for some, a course over a set period may give a welcome source of structure and routine, many others require more flexible support that allows them to drop in and out, and that is not focused solely on hard outcomes such as the achievement of qualifications.

Adults are unlikely to engage in learning opportunities that do not provide adequate routes to achieve their goals, involve activities which are enjoyable, allow them to develop relationships with others, or learn new things in which they are interested. Whatever (potential) adult learners are motivated by, the nature of learning opportunities available therefore impacts on their desire to participate – as highlighted by the BIS select committee:

'*The motivation of adults is crucial and that motivation might not fit well with participating in formal GCSE English and Maths Classes*' (House of Commons, 2014)

As noted earlier in this chapter, where a homeless adult's previous experiences of the education system have been negative, they can be 'reluctant to try again' (Luby and Welch, 2006). Consequently, many homeless people are '*unwilling and unlikely to access mainstream college provision, or community provision which appears similar*' (Barton et al., 2006). This suggests there are significant limits on the extent to which encouraging homeless people to engage with mainstream courses is possible.

The role of practitioners

As mentioned earlier, the role of the adult educator can be of particular importance in considering the reasons behind adult participation in learning. Positive, sustained, and encouraging relationships with tutors can help to motivate adults to engage in learning (Crowther et al., 2010). However, homelessness is a complex issue which can be difficult for practitioners working outside homelessness services to fully understand. Juchniewicz (2011, 8), writing about adult education in the United States, observed a dearth of understanding on the part of adult educators about the homelessness experienced by some learners. As an adult educator herself, she noted that '*the majority of my colleagues were not aware of the prevalence of homelessness, nor of the unique needs of the homeless student*'. Similarly, in the English context, Barton et al. (2007, 35) found that '*finding tutors who were qualified*

literacy and numeracy tutors as well as being experienced in working with homeless people' was a key challenge.

Those advocating a social practice approach to literacy and numeracy provision emphasise the importance of equal, supportive relationships between tutors and learners. However, as Hamilton and Tett (2012) note, practitioners are often excluded from the process of policymaking and provision development due to the low status of the profession and a weak professional voice. Whilst often committed to a broad conception of the value of learning and its importance in achieving social justice, practitioners have needed to teach within the constraints of provision organised along the lines of more limited skills-based conceptions of what literacy and numeracy provision should look like (Barton et al., 2007). As Tett and Maclachlan (2008, 663) explain,

> '*the power relationships that are part of all adult education are especially pervasive in ALN contexts because the dominant discourses surrounding ALN are constructed on a deficit model of ALN learners. This places them in a particularly subordinate position in the tutor/learner relationship*'.

Furthermore, several authors (Tett and Maclachlan, 2008; Bowl, 2012) have noted that the work of the adult educator has long been characterised by low pay and casualization, which is not conducive to the provision of meaningful teacher-learner relationships and related learning opportunities.

Workplaces as learning environments

As Cross (1981, 2) notes, '*many agencies whose primary function is not education have entered directly into the educational process*'. Boeren (2016) identifies workplaces as important educational institutions in this regard. Workplace learning includes (but is not limited to) literacy and numeracy, and can take place both formally and informally (Jackson, 2004; Wolf and Evans, 2011). In a recent survey of employers, for example, 44 per cent reported that they had organised training to tackle employees' numeracy, literacy and IT weaknesses (CBI/Pearson, 2014). Jackson (2004) and others have illustrated the range of literacy learning which takes place informally in the workplace. Learning at work may or may not be recognised or named as such, as '*learning is embedded in practices beyond those traditionally understood as training or workplace learning*' (Chappell et al., 2009, 176)

As Green (2013, 5) notes, 'a *good learning environment enables workers to become more skilled, potentially increasing their access to future jobs that are better in quality*'. However, workplace learning occupies a precarious position, and has declined significantly over the past decade (Mayhew and Keep, 2014). Employers are under no legal obligation to support their workers to develop their skills, and a focus on the day-to-day business of a firm can make workplace learning programmes difficult to establish and maintain (Wolf and Evans, 2011; Hamilton, 2012b). In addition, where managers are prepared to invest in the training of their workforces, they may choose to invest in job-specific training instead of literacy and numeracy support (Belfiore, 2004; Hamilton, 2012b).

A review of both educational and homelessness research literature has uncovered limited research on homeless people's experiences in work, and

nothing on their experiences of in-work training and skill development. However, with long histories of unemployment and economic inactivity, it is likely that many homeless adults have again been excluded from opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills both formally and informally at work. Both unemployment and working in low skilled jobs have also been shown to result in skills atrophy - whereby a person's skills deteriorate when not in use (Reder, 2009; Kuczera et al., 2016). Relatedly, Crowther et al. (2010) provide multiple examples whereby difficult life experiences including drug and alcohol addiction and depression had led to adults losing some of the basic literacy and numeracy skills they had previously mastered. Thus, even when adults have left school with relatively strong literacy and numeracy skills, these can deteriorate through limited use. Several of the interviewees in Dumoulin and Jones' (2014) study of homeless basic skills learners explained that despite having been employed for a large proportion of their adult lives, their skills had weakened over time as they had not had the opportunity to use them in their line of work. Where homeless people have been in work, for many this has largely been in low skilled, low paid, often manual roles (Hough et al., 2013). Such jobs often provide limited opportunity to build and develop skills due to fewer training opportunities in low paid work.

4.2.3   Country level factors

Individual learners (and potential learners) and educational institutions operate within the context of broader national policy frameworks. Recognising differences in patterns of adult learning participation across countries, Boeren (2016, 148) therefore emphasises the importance of the national policy context as the third and final factor in her integrative model. She states that the

'*participation of adults in lifelong learning activities can be stimulated and constrained by a range of policy measures*', for example through the ways in which initial education systems are organised and financed, and the level of social protection, and labour market regulation. Government policy impacts both on the extent to which individuals are able to *access* support and opportunities to develop their skills, and on the *nature* of support and the extent to which the support available meets their needs (Wolf and Evans, 2011; Hamilton, 2012b).

A number of studies have documented the impact of national policy in adult education settings (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Bowl, 2012; Hamilton, 2012b), especially as adult education providers are required to make adjustments to the courses they offer in response to funding criteria (Barton et al., 2007, 13). Particularly since the early 1970s, with the 'Right to Read' campaign, UK government has introduced numerous initiatives designed to improve adult literacy and numeracy. Perhaps most important was the Skills for Life strategy (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006) which saw significant levels of state investment alongside the introduction of a core curriculum, national standards and qualifications. This was accompanied by a high profile media campaign. More recently however, Allatt (2016) has highlighted difficulties in pinning down current government policy as it relates to adult literacy and numeracy education. However, recent policy changes include the replacement of 'Skills for Life' with 'Functional Skills' qualifications, defined by Ofqual (2012) as '*the fundamental, applied skills in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology (ICT) which help people to gain the most from life, learning and work*', and an emphasis on GCSE English and Maths (Allatt,

2016). Most of this support is delivered through further education colleges and private training providers who use the Adult Skills Budget (ASB) to offer maths and English courses to adults. Current policy *should* therefore result in provision being available for all adults who want to improve their basic skills and access employment, albeit in a narrowly defined and largely functionalist form. However, whilst funding commitments have been made, investments have received much less fanfare. There is no national campaign to promote learning opportunities to adults, which may limit awareness and take-up of available opportunities.

Analysis of the impact of government policy on adult literacy and numeracy education (and adult education more generally) has uncovered several key trends relevant to those seeking to understand many homeless people's exclusion from mainstream provision. Given the focus of English policymakers and others subscribing to predominantly 'skills-based' conceptualisations of literacy and numeracy, it is this type of learning upon which their attention is typically focused. An emphasis on qualification-led skills funding and quantifiable targets has resulted in reluctance on the part of mainstream adult education providers to target or tailor their provision to those who have (or are perceived to have) lower chances of completing a course or achieving qualifications. Funding which is closely tied to learning outcomes shifts provision away from supporting learners with more complex needs (Hamilton and Tett, 2012). In addition, a focus on standardised curricula and testing frameworks has led to 'one-size-fits-all' provision which often does not reflect the needs or interests of adult learners (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). Support for younger learners has also often been prioritised over that for adults with

complex and multiple learning needs (Hamilton and Pitt, 2011). This has implications for the extent to which homeless adults are able to participate in state sponsored learning opportunities – they often fall outside the target population for skills interventions, and where they are able to access provision, the individual barriers to participation described earlier in this chapter can make attending and achieving the outcomes required by government funding formulas difficult. Thus homeless learners are an unattractive 'client group' for mainstream adult education institutions (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014).

However, perhaps in a move which can be considered contradictory to the dominant thrust of adult education policy, Allatt (2016) has noted some focus on specific groups of learners, including homeless people. Homeless people were identified as a specific group in need of targeting through the Skills for Life strategy. More recently, additional government funding was provided, through STRIVE (Skills, Training, Innovation and Employment) pre-employment pilots, which took place in London in two national homelessness charities, jointly funded by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG / BIS, 2014). STRIVE was a small scale 'pre-employment' programme, providing an opportunity for homeless people to build their confidence and develop their basic IT, maths and English skills. Commenting at the pilot's inception, the then Skills and enterprise Minister, Matthew Hancock, said:

> '*It is wrong that until now excellent education projects led by St Mungo's*
> *Broadway and others have been denied government funding – today we*
> *are putting that right. There is no doubt that charities like St Mungo's*

Broadway and Crisis are the best placed to reach those in need of help, but we are backing them in this vital task.' (Vavarides, 2014)

However, despite policy rhetoric around the value of engaging homeless adults in education, the amount of statutory funding for learning and skills flowing into homelessness agencies has been minimal. According to a recent survey of homelessness organisations in England, only three percent of accommodation projects had received any 'employment and education' funding, for day centres this was seven per cent (Homeless Link, 2016). Beyond the STRIVE pilots, it is unclear what the current government's commitment to this agenda involves. Three years after the pilot's inception, no further statements have been forthcoming. In addition, following broader policy shifts towards 'localism', policy decisions relating to adult education are increasingly taken at a local level. Whether local decision makers will share the then Minister's sentiments on adult education in homelessness services is yet to be seen.

Learning for work: Adult education as part of active labour market policy

As this thesis investigates literacy and numeracy provision specifically as part of the support provided to assist homeless people to access and sustain paid work, some attention is now given to the place of literacy and numeracy or 'basic skills' in the statutory employment support system. Helping adults to develop their literacy and numeracy skills has been a key part of government strategies designed to move people into employment, featuring more or less prominently in programmes for unemployed adults since the 1970s, and gaining more salience following Skills for Life in the early 2000s (Tusting and Barton, 2007). However, '*evidence on take up of… skills interventions for unemployed*

people in England' showed '*high levels of drop-out between referral from the Jobcentre and attending an initial provider interview or starting on the course*' (DWP/BIS, 2011, 7). This has led the government to pursue a policy of 'mandated adult education' (Cross, 1981, 32) also known as 'skills conditionality' (DWP/BIS, 2010), a 'hotly controversial issue' (Cross, 1981) whereby unemployed adults who are identified as having basic skills needs can be mandated by the benefit system to enrol on and participate in courses to improve their skills, or risk losing their unemployment benefit (Dwyer, 2004, DWP/BIS, 2010, 2011). Proponents of such policies point to the benefits of participation in learning and a high level of drop out in previous voluntary provision. Opponents argue that such an approach is unlikely to help adults to improve their skills, and may even have a negative impact on their desire to engage in subsequent learning opportunities. They argue that such policies '*pose a threat to individual choice and substitute a negative image of education as punishment or threat for a positive image of education as an opportunity for personal growth and fulfilment*' (Cross, 1981, 32). Moreover, considering that individual motivation is considered a pre-requisite to successful learning engagement raises important questions about the appropriateness of mandated skills training for homeless people and others in receipt of unemployment benefits. In addition, research has repeatedly found that mainstream statutory welfare-to-work programmes underpinned by increasing levels of conditionality, typically fail to support homeless people (Batty et al., 2015). Particularly for those providers rewarded on a 'payment-by-results' basis, those with more significant barriers to work are 'parked' as efforts are

shifted to those perceived to have a better chance of moving into work with fewer resources deployed (Crisis et al., 2012; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014).

4.2.4 International-level factors

Whilst understanding adult education in any given context requires an awareness of national policy, international forces have also been shown to have a significant impact on adult education provision (Barton et al., 2007; Hamilton, 2012b; Boeren, 2016). Influential organisations including the OECD and European Commission have devoted considerable resource to researching and understanding adult education participation in a global context. For example, the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) administers regular surveys which aim to measure adults' proficiency in literacy, numeracy and 'problem solving in technology-rich environments'. The international league tables resulting from these surveys (which have shown the UK to have relatively poor literacy and numeracy skills) have resulted in ever greater emphasis on standardised testing, with a focus on target driven, top down, quantifiable outcomes (Hamilton and Tett, 2012). In addition, at least for the time being, funding from the European Union has also supported a range of adult learning initiatives across the United Kingdom and other member states.

4.3   Integrative lifelong learning participation model

Historically research and theoretical understandings of adult learning participation have tended to focus on either individual level factors (for example a lack of motivation to participate) or structural factors (such as education and labour market policy) to explain why adults do or do not participate in learning.

In Castleton's study, for example, '*rarely were explanations given* [for poor literacy skills] *in systemic terms such as the nature of schooling, the state of the labour market, opportunities for retraining*' (Castleton, 2001). However, the above has shown how multiple factors existing at individual, institutional and national levels can prevent engagement in learning, resulting in non-participation in literacy and numeracy (and wider) education amongst many homeless adults. These factors do not operate in isolation. As Barton et al. (2007, 36, 28) observe: '*national policy is mediated through local networks, local organisations and crucially impacts on individual lives*' and '*people's experience of a government initiative is mediated by its enactment in a specific situation*'. Here we can return to consider the interaction between structure and agency. Indeed, core to Boeren's (2016) model is an emphasis on how factors operating at each of the three levels interact. Influenced by the work of theorists Bourdieu (1979) and Giddens (1984), Boeren (2016) recognises the range of factors impacting on adult learning participation and emphasises the complex interaction between the different levels of explanation identified in her model. The relationship between structure and agency is key here. As Giddens (1984, 171) explains, for example, in his influential 'structuration' theory, in understanding social phenomena it is necessary to recognise the 'duality' of structure, in that:

> '*Human societies, or social systems, would plainly not exist without human agency. But it is not the case that actors create social systems: they reproduce or transform them*'.

Whilst, for example, an adult's decision whether or not to engage in education is made by individual agents, such choices are influenced by the social

structures and entrenched inequalities within which they are located (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Barton et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2013). Class-based analyses in particular draw our attention to the structural constraints within which individuals operate - the link between a person's socioeconomic background and low levels of participation in education as an adult is well established, as is the link with socioeconomic status and weak literacy and numeracy skills. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, 164) assert:

> '*the educational system… [performs the] <u>social function</u> of legitimating class differences behind its <u>technical function</u> of producing qualifications*' (authors' emphasis).

Lower socio-economic status has a profoundly negative impact on early educational outcomes (Cassen et al., 2015), and many of those leaving compulsory education with weak skills or those who leave school early are less likely to participate in learning in the future (Kuczera et al., 2016). This has led many to argue that the notion of 'lifelong learning' serves to widen skills inequalities rather than narrow them, as those who are better qualified upon leaving school go on to achieve even higher qualifications in adulthood (Makepeace et al., 2003; Bynner, 2004; Wolf and Evans, 2011; Aldridge and Hughes, 2012; Golding, 2012). Such structural inequalities are both reflected in and reproduced by both government education and skills policies (and the institutions though which these are enacted) (Duckworth, 2013), and the structure of opportunities in the UK labour market. The UK education system typically fails to compensate individuals for unequal life chances, especially when compared to other countries, supporting the notion that educational systems play a pivotal role in the production and reproduction of social

inequalities (Willis, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Archer, 2013; Duckworth, 2013; Stanley and Mann, 2014). This is consistent with the critical realist view of reality adopted in this thesis. Critical realism is underpinned by a commitment to 'analytical dualism', which holds that neither structure nor agency can be '*wholly explained in terms of the other*' as both are interdependent (Shipway, 2011, 84). Whilst recognising this interdependence of structure and agency, it is important to recognise that *'structure precedes action which, in turn, leads to a more or less attenuated structural outcome… which, in turn, provides the preconditions for action'* (Stones, 2001, 180). As Bhaskar explains:

> '*people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so'* (Bhaskar, 2011, 60; 2014, 36).

However, whilst '*social structures are dependent on human actors to reproduce them*', critical realists recognise the ability of individual agents to make changes in the world.

Drawing on Boeren's (2016) integrative model is helpful in prompting consideration of the range of factors impacting on homeless people's (potential) participation in learning opportunities, helping to explain more fully homeless people's exclusion from formal adult education provision. Where policy results in standardised provision which does not meet the needs, speak to the interests, or even lend itself to the inclusion of single homeless people, the

available evidence suggests that this group of (potential) learners will be unlikely to engage in adult learning provision. In addition, where homeless adults are perceived to have limited desire to engage in learning opportunities (perhaps communicated through poor attendance or lateness) educational institutions may be less likely to seek to cater for this group, particularly when their funding is predicated on measures such as attendance levels, course completions and qualifications obtained. However, because '*adult education services a poor, politically underrepresented, and consequently weak clientele*' they are often unable to shape state services in any meaningful way (Torres, 2006, 1). Instead, where adults are reluctant to engage with or complete courses of study designed to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, national policy makers have chosen to pursue 'mandation' over voluntary measures or efforts to create an adult education 'offer' which attracts adult learners, as part of broader policy shifts towards an increasingly 'punitive' conditional welfare system. As a range of factors militate against homeless learners' engagement in mainstream provision, the evidence presented above also underlines the (potential) importance of third sector homelessness organisations in facilitating service users' access to learning opportunities.

The above also suggests potential factors which might impact on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy in alternative educational settings. Whilst needing to appeal to adult learners, learning institutions operate within the context of wider policy agendas and their own organisational constraints. Due to limited research in homelessness organisations, it is unclear the extent to which the educational activities which take place in these settings are shaped by the same individual and national policy level factors relating to adult

education participation more generally. Particularly when funding is tied to outcomes or attendance, developing sustainable provision for homeless learners will be challenging. On the other hand, by sitting outside of the formal adult education system, and being established for the specific purpose of supporting homeless people, it may be expected that different mechanisms are at play in shaping the provision available in these settings. It is conceivable that such organisations will avoid pressures from national policymakers which result in inappropriate standardised provision. In addition, that organisations start from the aim of supporting homeless adults, where education is provided, we might expect this to be tailored to their needs and interests, thus overcoming a key barrier to their engagement in mainstream adult education provision. The findings presented later in this thesis show that this is the case to some extent in the variety of organisations seeking to support homeless adults to move into (or closer to) work.

4.4 Supporting homeless adults to develop literacy and numeracy skills: what does 'good' provision look like?

The evidence presented in this chapter has a number of implications for those seeking to support homeless people to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Most significant is homeless people's apparent exclusion from formal learning opportunities. To address this, as organisations which have regular contact with homeless people, homelessness agencies could perform an important role in promoting and encouraging the take up of learning opportunities where these are available in the local area (for those service users who feel motivated, confident and able to do so). However, recognising the range of barriers to participation in formal learning activities and wider exclusion

from training and skill development (for example, due to long term labour market exclusion), there is arguably a more significant role for such organisations in the direct facilitation of literacy and numeracy learning opportunities within their less formal and more familiar settings. As such there is potential for such organisations to themselves function as educational institutions, alongside the support they provide to address the multiple and complex needs experienced by many homeless people.

For those organisations seeking to develop literacy and numeracy provision for homeless adults, the above has a number of further implications. First, in light of the varied needs, motivations and capabilities of homeless learners, a range of flexible and tailored learning options may be required. For some, small class sizes will work well as this allows support to be better tailored to individual learners, and can be less intimidating to attend. Luby and Welch (2006) also emphasise the benefits of group learning activities for homeless adults including the opportunity to develop communication and social interaction skills. For others, one-to-one support may be required particularly where homeless people lack confidence or are anxious about participating in large groups (Luby and Welch, 2006; Olisa et al., 2010). In any provision, recognising the difficulty of sustaining educational engagement for those with complex needs and chaotic lifestyles, adults should also be supported to '*dip in and out of provision as their ability to participate fluctuates*' (Porter et al., 2005 in O'Grady, and Atkin, 2006). The above also highlights the importance of support to overcome situational barriers (such as transportation costs, a lack of quiet spaces to learn, and the need to attend appointments). Additional support for those with specialist learning needs (such as dyslexia) may also be required.

Successfully engaging homeless adults in learning opportunities is also dependent upon them seeing the relevance and value of it. Good practice therefore requires understanding individual motivations for learning and linking '*learning opportunities to individual interests and goals*' is therefore vital if homeless people are to engage in and benefit from any education and training offered (Barton et al., 2006; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Whilst for some engaging and succeeding in more formal provision will be appealing, particularly as they seek to improve their position in the labour market, others may be less motivated where such formal provision is not perceived to be relevant to their interests or goals. Given the distance of some homeless people from the labour market, '*narrowly focused vocational education policies and programmes…*[are] *insufficient or inappropriate'* (Golding, 2012, 142).

Proponents of a social literacies approach argue that provision should be rooted in the ways in which adults use (or want to use) literacy in their day-to-day life, rather than based on standardised provision which may hold little relevance for individual learners. As Castleton (2001) argues, '*literacy can be developed as a social practice based on a curriculum that is relevant because it is rooted in why people use literacy rather than why some others think they need it*'. Similarly, Golding (2012, 144) concludes that for those with the '*most negative attitudes toward learning, pedagogies based on communities of [people's] informal practice have been found to be effective.'* Embedding learning in other activities can be particularly effective in helping adults to recognise the need for and develop the kinds of skills which will help them in their day-to-day lives.

The literature also highlights a significant role for professionals and peers in motivating homeless people to improve their literacy and numeracy, helping

them to see the relevance of developing these skills in their everyday lives and keeping them motivated to participate in learning activities (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Good relationships between tutors and pupils are often fundamental to successful learning experiences. There is a need for supportive and patient teachers, taking the time to listen to the learners' needs and tailor support around them. Tutors also need a non-judgemental attitude and understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of homeless people. Homelessness practitioners may be uniquely positioned to understand the needs of and build rapport with homeless learners compared to mainstream adult learning providers. As such, staff working in homelessness organisations could also play an important role in encouraging and supporting homeless people to recognise that they might benefit from and are capable of improving their literacy and numeracy skills. Here it might be necessary to sensitively help people to identify literacy and numeracy skills need particularly if this is likely to make moving into and sustaining work more difficult, which may involve challenging those who do not recognise a need to improve these skills. However, it is important that this is done sensitively, avoiding a 'deficit' approach instead emphasising the fact that all adults could benefit from improving these skills in particular contexts – as we are all presented with unfamiliar literacy and numeracy demands in our day-to-day life both inside and outside of the labour market.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter I have shown that literacy and numeracy learning can take various forms – from formal standardised provision offered by adult colleges and training providers to informal learning in the workplace. The evidence

presented above, however, suggests that factors existing at individual, institutional and national policy levels present barriers to homeless people's engagement in opportunities to improve these skills. To compensate for homeless adults' exclusion from opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, third sector organisations supporting homeless adults potentially have an important role to play. However, recognition of the interaction of institutional factors with those operating at individual and national policy levels suggests some of the potential factors which might impact on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy in these settings. Several aspects of good practice emerge from the available evidence which organisations seeking to support homeless learners might wish to consider. In subsequent chapters these are considered in light of new data emerging from interviews with a range of practitioners working in organisations supporting homeless adults.

Chapter 5 Adult literacy and numeracy in the third sector

Together the preceding two chapters have demonstrated both the importance of literacy and numeracy skills in the labour market, and that homeless people are often excluded from the support available to improve these skills. This is highly problematic, particularly considering that many homeless people want to move into work, and indeed are increasingly expected to do so. In this chapter I introduce third sector homelessness organisations as potential sites to address this issue. I begin by outlining what is meant by the term 'third sector' as it is operationalised in this research, before providing an overview of the relevant policy and practice contexts within which third sector homelessness organisations operate. Following this, consideration is given to what previous research reveals about both the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision (and broader employment and skills support) in these settings. I then critically appraise the theoretical and empirical evidence base relating to what shapes such support. Finally, I argue that despite being developed within the context of formal adult learning opportunities, Boeren's (2016) integrative model outlined in the preceding chapter can potentially offer an appropriate framework for explaining the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support within homelessness services.

5.1   Defining the third sector

This research is focused on third sector organisations as potential sources of literacy and numeracy support for homeless adults. Some attention will therefore now be given to outlining what is meant by the term 'third sector' as it is operationalised in this research, before evidence about the role of the sector

in both policy and practice is considered. The 'third sector' is a broad term which comprises organisations variably referred to as voluntary sector organisations, non-profit organisations, charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations. The National Audit Office explains that the term 'third sector' is:

> '…*used to describe the range of organisations that are neither public sector nor private sector. It includes voluntary and community organisations (both registered charities and other organisations such as associations, self-help groups and community groups), social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives.*' (National Audit Office)[3]

Third sector organisations have a number of key characteristics which make them distinct from the state or market. Institutionally separate from the state, they are largely autonomous and have significant control over their activities. Any profit generated through their work is re-invested to serve the organisation's mission. They also involve some sort of voluntary participation – both in that volunteers are involved in operations and management and in terms of being '*non-compulsory*' (Anheier, 2014, 73). In addition, a key defining feature is that they are distinguished by their values, thus creating '*a more complex means-goal relationship between operational and ultimate objectives*' than might be observed in firms operating in the private sector (Anheier, 2014, 271). Thus, we might expect third sector organisations to be shaped by

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[3] http://bit.ly/2tqOG3D (accessed 23/07/2017)

different factors to state sponsored educational institutions or private sector business.

Third sector organisations perform different, often multiple roles, ranging from community-building and empowerment to public service delivery. They also vary significantly in terms of their size, resource requirements and capacity (Buckingham, 2010). This has a number of implications for any study where such organisations are its focus. As will be shown by the data generated in the research presented here, that the organisations in question operated independently from the state, involved a considerable degree of voluntary participation, engaged in activities which were guided by their values and mission (namely, that of supporting homeless people), all had an impact on the extent and nature of educational provision in these settings.

However, the extent to which the third sector can be considered a distinct category within the general 'welfare mix' is contested (Alcock, 2010). Regarding the third sector's position in the provision of welfare services and support, scholars have argued that it should be located somewhere in between welfare provided by the state, market and family (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012). Instead of occupying its own designated space, the sector can be seen to operate within a 'tension field' (Evers and Laville, 2004), with organisations '*moving along different trajectories towards or away from the other sectors as their characteristics and relationships change over time*' (Buckingham, 2010, 7). Some studies, for example, have demonstrated the ways in which some third sector organisations increasingly adopt state or market values and practices as a result of their involvement in public service provision and the need to engage in and meet the conditions of associated competitive tendering processes

(Buckingham, 2010). In addition, the development of 'social enterprises' (Teasdale, 2010), where an organisation's purpose is to use '*the power of business to bring about social and environmental change*' (Social enterprise UK) further blurs the distinction between the third and private sectors, due to a need to ensure business sustainability.

5.2   The role of the third sector in policy and practice

Across the world, the third sector has become increasingly important in social policy, experiencing '*greater policy recognition at local, national and international levels*' (Anheier, 2014, 11). The third sector's involvement can be observed in a range of different welfare and social services including health, housing, social care, employment and education. The level of involvement of third sector agencies in the provision of support and services varies across countries and changes over time in line with social, economic and political developments (Anheier, 2014, 35). In liberal welfare regimes such as the UK and US, for example, the role of such organisations in supporting socially excluded groups is relatively extensive, following from a preference for limited state intervention in tackling social problems (Anheier, 2014, 218). These cross-national differences suggest a great deal of caution is needed in making generalisations about the findings from research concerned with third sector organisations in any particular national context.

In the UK context, the role of the third sector in public service provision proliferated under the New Labour administration (Haugh and Kitson, 2007). During this period, the establishment of the Office of the Third Sector within the Cabinet Office signalled greater policy recognition of the sector's role, and

significant investment was made in supporting its capacity and sustainability. The sector, it was argued, had particular strengths with regards to '*empowering users and promoting community engagement, particularly for those who may be distrustful of the state*' (Cabinet Office, 2006, 9). Recognition of these strengths resulted in greater involvement of the third sector in the provision of a range of public goods and services. However, at the same time, policymakers placed increasing emphasis on monitoring the 'performance' of those organisations in receipt of state funding, which some argued had a damaging impact on some third sector organisations (Buckingham, 2010), as they became focused on the achievement of externally imposed outcomes, rather than being led by the needs of service users.

The Conservative-Liberal Coalition (2010-2015) continued to place an emphasis on third sector organisations in the delivery of public services (Buckingham, 2010), but as part of its broader Localism and 'Austerity' agendas driven by an ideological commitment to deficit reduction and rolling back the state (Crisp, 2015). Within the context of constrained public finances following the financial crisis of the late 2000s, the role of volunteers in particular was promoted as part of the then Prime Minister David Cameron's vision for a 'Big Society' (HM Government, 2010). However, this renewed emphasis took place alongside the reduction of third sector capacity building bodies and swingeing cuts to local government spending (a major funder of homelessness and broader third sector activities) (Buckingham, 2010). The concept of the 'Big Society' has therefore been identified by some as a 'smokescreen for cuts' to government expenditure, diverting '*attention away from government and towards the responsibilities of others during a programme of deep cuts to the*

public sector' (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012, 10). Indeed, there is evidence that spending cuts have had a negative impact on many charities, in some cases leading to their closure (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012). Met with a great deal of cynicism and derision, the language of the 'Big Society' has petered out of the political lexicon, however a commitment to Localism, self-organisation and rolling back the state has remained. Under the current Conservative administration (2015-present), rhetoric around the 'Big Society' appears to have been further muted, although government spending cuts continue apace. As the findings of this research will show, the context of 'austerity' and assumptions that volunteers can fill the void have both had a significant impact on the extent of learning activity taking place in homelessness settings, as it is often unfunded and reliant on the goodwill of volunteers.

5.2.1 The role of the third sector in supporting homeless adults into work

Third sector organisations are of particular importance when considering support and services for single homeless adults, given their exclusion from both the statutory housing system and a range of other mainstream services (Warnes and Crane, 2000). With a long history in the provision of services, the homelessness sector comprises organisations of various sizes with a variety of organisational forms and stages of development (Buckingham, 2010). According to a recent sector survey, the homelessness sector is comprised of 1,399 organisations in England (Homeless Link, 2016). Different types of organisations perform different functions and respond to different needs (Buckingham, 2010). Most typically, organisations engage in the direct provision of services and support for homeless people. For some, this involves providing accommodation (for example hostels and other residential projects).

However, particularly as homelessness is understood as more than simply a 'housing issue', organisations across the sector offer a wide range of support and services relating to wider 'non-housing' needs (Anderson, 2010). Day centres, for example, provide support including counselling, hot meals, educational activities, employability services and other social activities. There are currently around 214 homelessness day centres in England, catering for around 13,000 people per day (Homeless Link, 2016).

At least in principle, the notion that 'work' is part of the 'solution' to homelessness has been largely accepted across the homelessness third sector. Whilst often critical of the expectations and practices of the statutory welfare system and its increasingly punitive 'work first' approach, the sector has been generally supportive of a need to support homeless people to move into (or closer to) work (Crisis et al., 2012). Consequently, although providing education and training opportunities is not typically a primary focus of the work of third sector homelessness agencies, many organisations offer their service users employment-related support, and related education and training alongside a broader range of support and services to deal with various other complex needs following their common exclusion and a lack of appropriate support from the mainstream employment and formal adult education services (Luby and Welch, 2006; Barton et al., 2006; Buckingham, 2010; Crisis et al., 2012). According to a recent survey of the homelessness sector, 50 per cent of day centres reported directly providing 'employment, training and education' activities in-house in 2015. A further 70 per cent provided 'meaningful activities' (Homeless Link, 2015).

Perhaps the most well-known form of employment-related support in the sector is offered by the Crisis 'Skylight' centres which focus on providing education, employment and arts-based activities at a number of centres across the country (Pleace and Bretherton, 2014). However, it is not just the largest, long-established organisations in which employment support and learning opportunities are offered: according to the umbrella body Homeless Link: '*the vast majority of homelessness services are supporting people to enter work, training or to engage in other activities*' (Homeless Link, 2012, 3). As part of this employment-related support, several organisations also operate as 'social enterprises' directly providing work and training opportunities outside of the mainstream paid labour market. Well known examples of these include the Big Issue, where homeless 'vendors' are recruited to sell street magazines and keep a fraction of the profits (the remainder of which are re-invested into the company and other social enterprise activities), and Emmaus, self-sustaining communities originating in Paris and established in the UK in the 1990s, whereby homeless 'companions' are provided with food and board in exchange for working in a range of 'social enterprises' including cafés, shops, gardening projects and removal companies.[4]

The potential of homelessness organisations to support homeless people to participate in learning has not gone unrecognised by policymakers. Their role (alongside that of the third sector more generally) has been recognised as having an important role in helping homeless adults to develop skills and access employment (Buckingham, 2010; Crisp, 2015). Consequently, over the

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[4] https://www.emmaus.org.uk/emmaus_in_the_uk accessed 24/07/2017

past couple of decades, a number of policy initiatives have been introduced which cut across employment, skills and homelessness. For example, the 'Places of Change' agenda sought to encourage homelessness services to do more to '*move service users into appropriate training and sustainable employment*' (DCLG, 2007, 6). Under the Coalition government, the Work Club Programme, established as part of the wider Big Society agenda in 2011 also offered a small amount of funding for third sector organisations (including some homelessness organisations) to provide non-mandatory employment support (Crisp, 2015). Specifically regarding literacy and numeracy, the Skills for Life Strategy identified homeless people as a target group in need of support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills (DfEE, 2001). Most recently, STRIVE (Skills, Training, Innovation and Employment) pre-employment pilots took place in two national homelessness charities, jointly funded by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG/BIS, 2014). However, despite policy rhetoric around the value of engaging homeless adults in education and broader support to move into work, the amount of statutory funding for such activities making its way into homelessness agencies appears minimal. According to a recent survey of homelessness organisations in England, only three percent of accommodation projects had received any 'employment and education' funding, for day centres this was seven per cent (Homeless Link, 2016). This perhaps makes the level of activity suggested by the sector surveys all the more surprising. Furthermore, in 2013, the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills acknowledged a gap in knowledge about the nature and extent of third sector involvement in the learning and skills sector – which appears to be at odds with the decades

of policy pronouncements emphasising its role as a key partner with regards to this agenda (BIS, 2013b).

5.3 Existing research on adult education in homelessness settings

Whilst sector surveys suggest that a majority of such organisations offer their service users some form of Employment, Training or Education (ETE) support, including support with literacy and numeracy, the surveys are context free and provide little detail about what this support looks like in practice, or the factors which shape support at an organisational level. As such, I now consider what the academic and grey literature tells us about both the extent and nature of educational provision and other employment-related support in these settings. A review of the literature has identified a small number of studies which examine the issue of adult education and employment support in third sector homelessness organisations. In addition, a handful of studies have explored different factors shaping the support and services offered by homelessness organisations more generally. In the following sections I provide an overview of this literature and identify key themes which are of relevance to this thesis.

A very small number of studies have focused on educational provision in third sector homelessness organisations. In the academic literature, most have focused on the relationships between homeless people's lives and learning. For example, Castleton (2001) studied the role of literacy in Australian homeless people's lives. She describes how many homeless people would come to homelessness organisation at the centre of her study for help with reading and writing tasks required to access the social security system, alongside broader social contact and support and advice. This highlights the range of purposes

served by such organisations. Juchniewicz (2011) provides an account of the journeys of students who she terms 'invisible homeless' – both individuals and families living in temporary accommodation or the American shelter system. Focusing on their 'literacy identity', she explores the transitions of five homeless adults, focusing on their perception, interpretation and creation of their 'literacy identities', examining this within the context of transformation in their wider lives. Barton et al.'s (2007) Literacy, Lives and Learning study, considers the relationship between people's lives and their participation in learning, examining the experience of learners in community settings (including homelessness organisations). Norris and Kennington (1992) provide a guide to adult educators working with homeless adults and their literacy. All of these studies have been influenced by the New Literacy Studies tradition, with authors emphasising literacy as a social practice. In addition, grey literature provides some important insights into the current state of play of education and training within the UK homelessness sector. Luby and Welch (2006), in a report commissioned by Crisis and Dumoulin and Jones (2014) in a report published by St Mungo's drew on the accounts of homeless learners and practitioners about the importance of 'basic skills' provision in supporting homeless adults.

More generally, third sector community organisations have long been identified as important sites for learning, especially for the most 'excluded' groups in society (McGivney, 1999; Quinn et al., 2005; Barton et al., 2007; Reisenberger et al., 2010; Tett, 2010; Golding, 2012; BIS, 2013b). Indeed, adult education originated within the context of community organisations, driven by a commitment to broader social justice agendas and empowering excluded groups of learners (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Barton et al., 2007). Particularly

where more informal opportunities for learning are concerned, especially those targeted at 'hard to reach' groups, community organisations (including both learning and non-learning focused) play an important role in facilitating adults' access to learning. Golding (2012, 14), for example, points to the absence of appropriate learning opportunities for unemployed men and identifies an important role for community organisations and the opportunities they provide which function as a 'first step' into learning for those who do not tend to engage in formalised provision (Golding, 2012, 143). Where organisations are successfully engaging those who do not traditionally engage in adult education provision, it arguably makes sense to utilise these settings as 'stepping stones' into more formalised provision (Golding, 2012). Exploring learning in a range of community contexts, Barton et al. (2007) highlight the diversity of provision in what are very varied community settings. This ranged from the provision of literacy and numeracy courses, informal educational provision guided by service user needs, support to attend formal courses, and support to participate in the organisation's activities. They describe how learning in these contexts can be 'less obvious' than that found in formal educational institutions, with provision 'often hidden or embedded in other services or support provided' (34). Golding (2012, 142) also provides several examples of how adults can engage in learning in a variety of community contexts, where often learning was 'neither named not foregrounded'. However, few studies explore the extent or nature of these services in any detail. They also tend to be located in single organisations, rather than exploring provision across the homelessness sector as a whole.

The focus of the research to date has been predominantly on the learner and their learning experiences and transitions, rather than the extent and nature of provision available in these settings. Centring research on the learner is entirely justified and is an important focus for research on literacy and numeracy and adult learning more generally (Castleton, 2001). However, as Boeren (2016) explains, institutions and the opportunities for learning they provide are a key aspect of whether or not adults are able to engage in educational provision and improve their skills. Thus, exactly what provision is available in these settings is an important issue which is often overlooked. In addition, the majority of the studies reviewed here were conducted at a time when adult skills funding (and resources for third sector organisations more generally) was in more plentiful supply, or in different national contexts. Under the current context of austerity both adult education and homelessness services have been severely cut in England, which has serious implications for third sector organisations supporting homeless adults (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Thus a lack of understanding about the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy support in these settings is an important gap for those concerned with the support available to those homeless people who want (or at least are expected to) move into work.

5.4 Factors shaping support and services in homelessness third sector organisations

In addition to the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision in these settings, it is also important to know about the various factors which shape it. Without understanding these, it will be difficult to identify ways through which to enhance the support on offer, or indeed share aspects of good practice where

they occur. In this section I consider the existing theoretical and empirical evidence base relating to what shapes such support.

5.4.2 Existing research on homelessness services: key issues

A handful of studies have explored various factors which are likely to impact on the support and services offered by homelessness organisations. These studies have raised a number of issues relating to the challenges of developing services for people with multiple and complex needs, namely, identifying and understanding those needs (and responding with appropriate support), the ability of staff and volunteers to support service users effectively, the importance of interagency working in ensuring all needs are met and the importance of resources for the continued operation of the homelessness sector. Each of these will now be briefly considered. As is demonstrated in later chapters, the data generated in this study show that each of these factors can impact on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness settings to varying degrees.

Identifying multiple and complex needs

Many homeless people have multiple and complex needs which can present considerable barriers to labour market participation (Dwyer and Somerville, 2011; Hough et al., 2013). These barriers may relate directly to a person's capabilities and experience of the labour market (for example their skills or qualifications, the extent and nature of their experience in employment, practical barriers to work including the cost and accessibility of transportation). They often also relate to wider factors in people's lives including a lack of social networks and encouragement, or the need to manage health problems. In

developing services to meet them, these needs must be identified, understood and responded to. However, data limitations are a well-known barrier to understanding homelessness. Numerous European scholars have drawn attention to a lack of detailed assessment of homeless people's support needs (see for example, Edgar et al., 1999; Anderson, 2010). In the UK assessment has ranged from detailed forms which are then used to develop a support plan to only 'minimal information', for example, age and benefit receipts (Warnes and Crane, 2000). Some homelessness organisations have specifically identified basic skills as a '*significant barrier to meaningful employment*' and to overcoming wider social exclusion (Olisa et al., 2010, 15). However, whilst toolkits have been developed in order to help those working in homelessness organisations to identify skills needs (see, for example, Olisa et al., 2010), the extent to which such resources are disseminated to, and used within, organisations is unclear. An organisation's understanding of skill needs may therefore be dependent on key workers identifying them which may be difficult given the coping or avoidance techniques adults with literacy difficulties have often been found to employ (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Where support to develop literacy and numeracy skills is in place, an absence of assessment may hinder understanding of the quality or impact of an intervention. In addition, it may also inhibit progression if achievements or continuing difficulties are not identified or addressed (Olisa et al., 2010).

Even with the aid of tools to assess the level and type of needs of homeless people, it can be difficult to fully and accurately assess them, because needs are often hidden – either consciously or unconsciously. Several studies have found that homeless people's '*self-reports are often not an accurate measure*

of need' (Warnes and Crane, 2000; Homeless Link, 2013). With regards to literacy and numeracy, homeless adults may try to cover up any skills needs by employing strategies of avoidance and offering excuses for an inability to read and write (such as forgotten pens, broken glasses). In addition, homeless service users with poor literacy and numeracy skills, in line with general adult population with low skill levels, may not perceive a need to develop these, and hence may not seek support. Findings presented in chapter eight highlight the diverse ways through which literacy and numeracy needs are identified across the homelessness sector.

Inter-agency working

The multiple and complex needs experienced by many homeless people often cannot all be met by a single organisation working alone (Le Dantec et al., 2008; Anderson, 2010). In response to this, and in line with wider policy aspirations for a more 'joined up' approach to service provision and tackling social exclusion (Grace et al., 2012), a need for inter-agency and partnership working in providing support for homeless people has increasingly been recognised across the sector (Edgar et al., 2004). Many homelessness organisations have developed strong partnerships with other support agencies, particularly those offering services relating to housing, health and social work (Warnes and Crane, 2000; Edgar et al., 2004; Anderson, 2010). The need for inter-agency working with the healthcare and housing sectors has perhaps been most recognised given the high and often visible level of health and housing needs amongst the client group. In addition, Anderson (2010) suggests a focus on

health services is because these may be the '*most universal of services*' which homeless people should '*be able to access on the same basis as the housed population*'. There have also been some instances of inter-agency working with homelessness organisations and both employment support services (Grace et al., 2012) and the adult education sector. Adult education policy (i.e. Skills for Life), and advocates of the field have highlighted the importance of working with voluntary sector organisations and delivering literacy and numeracy support in community settings in order to target services on 'at risk' individuals (Bird and Ackerman, 2005).

The capacity of the homelessness sector workforce

Understanding the roles and capacity of staff working in homelessness organisations is a key consideration for those interested in the nature and extent of support provided by these organisations. Knowledge about who works in the sector and their professional backgrounds is sparse (Anderson, 2010). According to the latest survey of needs and provision (Homeless Link, 2012), there are 17,000 paid staff working in English homelessness organisations (reduced from 18,400 in 2010) (Homeless Link, 2012). Perhaps given the complex nature of the needs of many single homeless people, there is no clearly defined professional identity for those working in the homelessness sector. Alongside paid staff, it is estimated that the sector is supported by 13,000 volunteers. The use of volunteers and paid staff varies across different types of provision. For example, accommodation projects tend to employ more full-time paid staff compared to day centres where more use is made of volunteers (Homeless Link, 2012). Across the sector, annual surveys show paid

staff levels decreasing and volunteer numbers increasing in recent years. Whilst an increase in volunteers could be seen as a success of the 'Big Society' project, across the third sector there is a great deal of concern (and indeed anger), about increasing reliance on a volunteer workforce as specialised and experienced staff numbers are reduced (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012). Paid staff reductions can impact both on the level, consistency and quality of service offered to service users and on staff morale. Many third sector professionals argue that '*the assumption that volunteers can simply step in and take over the running of services or programmes devalues and belittles the skills, experience and knowledge of professionals*' (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012, 11). Anheier (2014, 214) raises the issue of 'philanthropic amateurism', whereby volunteers are expected to tackle social problems despite not being qualified or experienced in various aspects of the support they are providing. Volunteers also lack accountability for vulnerable service users. Growing volunteer numbers is on one hand welcomed as a result of the additional resources they bring to services supporting homeless people. On the other hand, that the services and support available to them exist on such a precarious footing, is perhaps symptomatic of the attitude towards this group held by policymakers (Rose et al., 2016).

Funding from government and other sources

The origin, scale and nature of funding is an essential consideration when trying to understand the work of the third sector (Edgar et al., 2004). Whilst by definition driven by the public good rather than private profit, the third sector cannot exist without monetary support. English homelessness organisations derive funding from a range of sources including central and local government,

European funding (e.g. European Social Fund), grants from foundations (for example the Big Lottery Fund), through the profits generated through social enterprise activity, and through various other fundraising activities. The scale and nature of the funding received can impact on the nature of provision in numerous ways. Who and what gets funded is shaped by the interests of the funders, or the consumers in the case of a social enterprise (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012). For example, in a shelter for young homeless people, Barton et al. (2007, 34) found that '*changes in the funding available to the centre were resulting in changes in what activities they could put on'*. Furthermore, exploring educational provision at the Big Issue, they found that whilst the organisation had previously been able to access funding to develop flexible educational provision which responded to the needs of their vendors and allowed for courses to be taken over several years allowing for gaps in between, the introduction of new funding arrangements as part of Skills for Life limited this flexibility as courses needed to be completed within tighter schedules.

The proliferation of social enterprises which aim to tackle homelessness in part reflects an increasing policy emphasis driven by the search for 'new' and 'innovative' approaches, and an emphasis on market-led solutions to long term financial sustainability. A key rationale for establishing social enterprise activities is to reduce an organisation's dependence on funding from grants and unearned charitable income (i.e. donations) (McKay et al., 2011). Here again, tensions between social and economic objectives can be observed and can be expected to impact on the support and services provided to homeless people engaging with them. The extent to which the needs of homeless people take

precedence over ensuring the sustainability of a business, for example, has been a concern for some (Teasdale, 2010).

More broadly, within a context of constrained resources, decisions will need to be made about how best to allocate these, and inevitably this will mean some interventions are prioritised over others. This also depends on the nature and source of the funding obtained (i.e. whether or not conditions regarding its usage are specified and monitored). Under the politics of austerity, homelessness organisations have been under increasing strain, with cuts to government funding presenting considerable challenges for homeless agencies and the range of services they provide (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). Within the current context of fiscal austerity, the range of potential funding streams available to homelessness agencies have experienced drastic funding reductions resulting in significant cuts to the public resources flowing into third sector homelessness agencies (Homeless Link, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2017). Small organisations are at a particular risk, in the absence of more professionalised approaches to grant capture. Furthermore, a reliance on charitable income can leave 'unfashionable' problems such as social welfare in particular danger (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012). Despite this, it is striking that 50 per cent of homelessness day centres reported directly providing 'employment, training and education' activities in-house in 2015. A further 70 per cent provided 'meaningful activities' (Homeless Link, 2015). Thus, whilst typically not in receipt of skills funding, the sector appears committed to supporting learning amongst its service users.

5.5   Theorising third sector development

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the homelessness sector comprises organisations of various sizes, organisational forms and stages of development (Buckingham, 2010). Within the sector, individual organisations perform different functions and respond to different needs. Given the focus of this research on what shapes employment and skills provision (and particularly literacy and numeracy support) in these settings, I will now consider the various theories which have been advanced to help us to understand third sector service development.

The majority of theories concerning the third sector originate from economic theory, typically involving '*some notion of utility maximisation and rational choice behaviour*' (Anheier, 2014, 196). Some theories have focused on the relationship between the third sector and government policy. Interdependence theory (see Salamon 1987), for example, starts with the premise that the third sector and government frequently act in partnership rather than opposition, considering the fact that government is a major source of funding to many third sector organisations. Other theories have focused on the factors driving the scale and functions of the third sector – social origins theory (see Salamon and Anheier, 1998) emphasises the embeddedness of the third sector in the broader political and social context in which it is located, drawing links between the extent of third sector involvement in tackling social issues and the nature of the welfare state in a particular country or region. In the UK for example, with its '*liberal yet class based society*', the '*roles of voluntary action and state changed over time in response to social, economic, and political needs*' (Anheier, 2014, 35). In addition, resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salanick, 1978), emphasises the 'contingent' nature of organisations and social

structures, highlighting organisations' dependence on resources outside of their control (including monetary or physical resources, knowledge and information), in order to function and survive.

Whilst informative, these studies have tended to focus on how just one factor (for example, government funding) impacts on third sector services, instead of exploring the range of different factors shaping provision at any one time. An exception to this within the homelessness literature is Edgar et al.'s (2004) framework in which he identifies factors operating at both an intra-organisational level (organisational capacity, operational practice and organisational structures) alongside external drivers of service development. Whilst this is perhaps more helpful, Edgar et al. (2004) pay limited attention to how mechanisms at different levels interact, nor to describing in any great depth the factors identified at each level. As a critical realist, I consider this a key shortcoming of the theoretical literature to date.

In an attempt to overcome this, a number of authors have considered the value a critical realist approach can bring to research in organisations (Elder-Vass, 2010; Edwards et al., 2014; Kessler and Back, 2014; Vincent and Wapshott, 2014). Vincent and Wapshott (2014), for example, identify the importance of acknowledging how factors operating at multiple levels interact and influence the activities of any given organisation, arguing for the need to look at configurational factors (i.e. the ways in which actors and groups are situated), normative factors (the ways in which actors respond to their situations) and field factors (broader contextual conditions) impact on the phenomena of interest, before arriving at 'institutional level' explanations combining all of these factors. In educational research, Boeren (2016) emphasises the interaction of

'educational institutions' and individual level and national level factors, although here their focus was on 'formal' adult education providers, rather than the community contexts of concern here.

5.5 Discussion

Together with preceding chapters, the above has demonstrated a potentially important role for third sector organisations in the provision of support and services for homeless adults. It also highlights a role for them in educational and broader employment-related provision for this group. However, the above has also demonstrated that adult education in homelessness contexts is a neglected topic. Whilst often referred to in positive terms (especially when juxtaposed with inappropriate support from the mainstream welfare system), very little is known about what educational and wider employment-related provision in the homelessness sector actually consists of. Whilst sector surveys suggest that a majority of such organisations offer their service users some form of employment-related support, including support with literacy and numeracy, the surveys are context free and provide little detail about what this support looks like in practice. Whilst a small number of qualitative studies have been conducted around the topic of homelessness and literacy and numeracy, these are limited in number and took place in different countries or in very different political contexts (i.e. during the 'Skills for Life' era).

Furthermore, scant consideration has been given to the different factors shaping the support and services available in these settings (Snow and Anderson, 1991). Most research has focused on the perspectives of homeless adult learners, rather than attempting to explain the range of factors impacting

on the extent and nature of the provision available to them. This is an important gap for those concerned with the support available to those homeless people who want (or at least are expected to) move into work, but who also struggle with literacy and numeracy. As potentially important sites for the provision of literacy and numeracy support and adult education more widely, investigating the support which is available in these settings, along with the factors shaping it, is important in understanding first whether or not homeless adults are able to access literacy and numeracy support where they want or need to do so, and second, how this support might be improved or enhanced in future. Without understanding the range of factors that can influence this provision, it will be difficult to identify ways through which to enhance the support on offer.

Whilst some previous studies have highlighted various factors impacting on support in these settings, they do not take account of the range of factors which are likely to play a role in shaping homelessness services. Going forward, I argue that Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model provides a useful framework to overcome this limitation. Combined with a broader critical realist perspective which recognises both individual scope for action, but also the constraints imposed by structural factors, her model highlights a need to examine factors operating at individual, institutional and national policy levels. However, given that her model was developed with formal learning institutions in mind, I show in the following chapters that the model requires some degree of modification in order for it to be applicable to community contexts (such as homelessness organisations), recognising the

particular traits of third sector organisations highlighted above (namely the role of non-governmental finance and the time and expertise of volunteers).

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to acknowledge that homeless people's reliance on third sector organisations is problematic for several reasons. Whilst third sector organisations provide an essential source of support, underpinned by good intentions and a desire to help homeless people, service users do not have a right of entitlement to the support provided (as, for example, they may have to services that are provided by the state). As Buckingham (2010) outlines, the centrality of the third sector in the provision of support and services for homeless people can in part be considered the consequence of the 'failure' of the state to meet their needs. The extent to which the failures of formal educational institutions in engaging and responding to the needs of homeless learners should be responded to through the creation of alternative provision which sits apart from mainstream services and support is questionable. Arguably, by accepting that mainstream support and services are 'not fit for purpose' in this way lets them off the hook, whereas they should be doing more to understand and change the aspects of their institutions and practices which deter and prevent the successful participation of (potential) homeless learners. For some, in providing an alternative form of educational support, this means that the homelessness sector functions as '*part of the status quo and an instrument of oppression and injustice*' (Anheier, 2014, 36).

Furthermore, the very notion that organisations should be facilitating the movement of homeless people into work can also be critiqued. The provision

of employment-related support could be seen as a tacit endorsement of a neo-liberal emphasis on work as the 'solution' to a range of social ills, despite the poor quality of opportunities at the bottom end of the labour market and the inappropriateness of a strict 'work first' approach enforced by the state (as was outlined in chapter three). Whilst operating outside of the state-funded welfare-to-work sector, such principles could be seen to be propped up by the efforts of third sector organisations to move people into work. On the other hand, it is important to recognise the positive impact that engaging in paid employment can have (and indeed the fact that many homeless people want to move into work). In addition, a more tailored, supportive approach to supporting people into work would arguably lead to more suitable employment opportunities. Providing the right kind of support to overcome barriers to work and sustain work in the longer term avoids the narrow instrumental focus of the mainstream employment support service which emphasises quick movements off benefits and into work.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter I have considered the potential role of third sector homelessness organisations in the provision of literacy and numeracy support. Whilst policy suggests a key role for third sector educational provision, and surveys of the homelessness sector suggest a large amount of activity of this nature, previous research reveals little about both the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision (and broader employment and skills support) in these settings, and how far this appears to correspond to the aspects of good practice identified in the previous chapter. Moreover, the existing empirical and theoretical evidence

base gives scant consideration to the range of factors shaping support in these settings. The chapter has identified Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model as a potential framework for explaining the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support within homelessness services. The research presented in this thesis addresses these research gaps, and demonstrates the applicability of Boeren's (2016) model to literacy and numeracy provision in these settings.

Chapter 6 Researching literacy and numeracy support in homelessness organisations: a qualitative study

This chapter describes the methodology and research design used in this study. It begins by re-stating the rationale behind the research focus and the questions which this study answers. It then devotes some space to the broader philosophical position underpinning this research: namely, that of critical realism. The chapter moves on to outline the methodology and research design adopted. Research methods, early pilot work, the approach to sampling, analysis and issues relating to validity, reliability, generalisability and research ethics are then discussed.

6.1 Key findings from the literature review: a re-cap

Before outlining the methodology adopted in this study, I invite the reader to take stock of the key issues emerging from the preceding literature review chapters, namely:

- There is evidence to suggest that many homeless people have poor literacy and numeracy skills. This is likely to make entering and sustaining work more difficult.

- Homeless people are often excluded from available opportunities to improve these skills, due to a range of factors existing at individual, institutional and national policy levels. This contributes to the reproduction of social and economic inequalities as this group continues to be excluded from opportunities to improve their position in the paid labour market.

- Third sector organisations offer a potential space where homeless people can be supported to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

According to sector surveys, the majority of organisations in the sector offer both 'Employment, Education and Training' support and 'meaningful activities', and this includes literacy and numeracy support.

- However, the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision is largely an unknown. Moreover, because the provision of educational activities is not typically a primary concern of these organisations, factors shaping support available through these community-based 'education providers' might be expected to differ to those identified in Boeren's (2016) model, which focuses on formal provision.

In light of these issues and gaps in the evidence base, the following research questions have guided this study:

1. What is the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy education within the employment and skills support offered by organisations supporting homeless adults?
2. What factors shape the literacy and numeracy education offered?
3. How can literacy and numeracy learning be better supported in homelessness organisations?

The project sought to provide both a better understanding of the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision currently available, and an explanation of how this came to be. A qualitative approach was considered most appropriate to answer these questions. Whilst qualitative research is perhaps most commonly associated with interpretivism or constructivism, this study adopts a critical realist philosophical position. This has a number of

implications for the design of the study and the interpretation of the results (Mason, 2002). The following section will therefore explain in greater detail some of the key tenets of this emerging tradition which are relevant to this project, before the research design and data collection methods are outlined.

6.2 Critical realism: ontological and epistemological principles

In this section I outline in more detail the philosophical position which underpins this research: namely, that of critical realism. Critical realism is an emerging tradition with different (and contested) facets – too numerous to explore in depth here. Instead I outline several key aspects of this philosophical approach which have influenced my research design, the resulting analysis and claims of contribution to knowledge – namely; the relationship between structure and agency; the commitment to an objective 'truth'; and a need to begin with agent's perspectives as the starting point for knowledge.

Critical realism on the relationship between structure and agency

As noted in previous chapters, I share the critical realist belief that the social world is constituted by the interaction of both structure and agency. Neither structure nor agency can be '*wholly explained in terms of the other*' as both are interdependent (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Shipway, 2011, 84). This is also a key aspect of Giddens' (1984) influential theory of 'structuration':

> '*Human societies, or social systems, would plainly not exist without human agency. But it is not the case that actors create social systems: they reproduce or transform them*' (Giddens, 1984, 171).

Whilst recognising this interdependence, it is important to acknowledge that structure comes before action, creating the conditions in which actions take place (Stones, 2001). As Bhaskar (2011, 60; 2014, 36) explains:

> '*people do not create society. For it always pre-exists them. Rather it is an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions that individuals reproduce or transform. But which would not exist unless they did so'.*

Thus, whilst there is space for individual action, social phenomena like homelessness and low basic skill levels amongst the adult population are the product of enduring structural inequalities reproduced through housing, economic and educational systems. Individual actions are both constrained and enabled by these pre-existing social structures (Giddens, 1984; Fitzpatrick, 2005). However, at the same time it is important to recognise that it is possible for individual agents to make changes in the world.

Whilst critical realists like Archer (1995) critique the theory of structuration, arguing that '*Giddens' duality of structure is at odds with the 'analytical dualism' which lies at the heart of the realist approach*' (Fitzpatrick, 2005, 10), and has an '*in-built tendency to direct one towards the micro*' and the possibilities associated with individual action (Stones, 2001, 178), I share the belief of other critical realists that structuration theory is compatible with this position (Stones, 2001; Fitzpatrick, 2005). As Stones (2001, 181) explains:

> '*Whilst I think that it is fair to say that Giddens' account of structuration theory tends to direct one to the moment of agency, in the context of structures, and that he does not spend much time on the explication of the sequencing that Archer draws our attention to, I do not think that*

> *such an emphasis is at all at odds with… the spirit of structuration theory'.*

Instead, Giddens' *'account of constraints upon agency makes clear that social structures both pre-exist agency and can have a causal influence on agents'* (Fitzpatrick, 2005, 10).

A number of critical realist scholars have focused their attention on organisations (Elder-Vass, 2010; Edwards et al., 2014; Kessler and Bach, 2014; Vincent and Wapshott, 2014). Organisations of various forms – including third sector organisations, businesses and state agencies - play an important role in the social world. As Elder-Vass (2010, 144) asserts:

> '*No serious attempt to explain events in the social world can ignore their influence*'.

Organisations are important sites of inquiry for those concerned with how structures are reproduced and individuals are able to make changes in the world. They represent sites through which social inequalities are reproduced or transformed. Similarly, Boeren (2016) identifies organisations, or 'institutions' (i.e. 'training providers' and 'workplaces') as a key element of her theory explaining adult participation in learning. Factors operating at an institutional level can impact on whether or not adults decide and are able to participate in learning and improve their skills. Organisations are entities which themselves can produce (and reproduce), resist or challenge social structures. However, an organisation's activities are influenced by larger social structures, the actions of the actors working with them, and by the individuals who draw on their services (Elder-Vass, 2010). Recognising the transformative potential of third

sector homelessness organisations, with the potential to redress in some way the social and economic inequalities reproduced through homeless people's exclusion from the formal adult education system, this research was focused on such organisations.

Commitment to an objective 'truth'

In line with critical realism I also share with positivists the 'ontologically bold' belief that an objective 'reality' or 'truth' exists (Shipway, 2011). As such, this research was concerned with identifying the real nature of the literacy and numeracy support available in homelessness settings along with the real factors shaping this learning provision. In terms of what constitutes 'knowledge' and what is needed to uncover the 'truth', my overall standpoint is an 'epistemologically inclusive' one. In understanding any social phenomena, I believe that our knowledge of it is more complete if we draw on different kinds of knowledge from different sources. This is reflected through previously discussed aversions to sharp dichotomies such as those between structure and agency, skills and social practices, and through the presentation of both qualitative and quantitative evidence in preceding chapters. In selecting a methodological approach for this study, however, I deemed a qualitative approach to be most appropriate to answering the questions at hand. A qualitative research methodology enables exploration of the wide range of factors constituting and impacting upon the social world and has an '*unrivalled capacity*' to develop convincing arguments about '*how things work in particular contexts*' (Mason, 2002, 1).

However, whilst committed to the existence of an objective reality, I accept that the extent to which this 'truth' can be known is limited. Whilst 'epistemological inclusivity' is important, 'epistemological caution' is also required. Unlike positivists, and in line with critical realist positions, I reject the notion that the world can be limited to observable, empirical 'facts' (Bhaskar, 2008; Shipway, 2011; O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). This is because, in contrast to 'closed systems', where a particular stimulus always results in a particular effect (such as in the controlled, scientific laboratories), social phenomena always occur in 'open systems', such as societies or organisations (Shipway, 2011, 76). The complexity inherent in such open systems means that it is not possible to produce '*universal statements or 'laws' about the world*' (as positivists seek to do) (Shipway, 2011, 76). Instead, research can only make tentative claims and identify 'potential' explanations for social phenomena in any given context.

Beginning with agent's perspectives as the starting point for knowledge

Whilst there is a need for 'epistemological inclusivity', the reasons and accounts individuals give for their actions '*form the logically indispensable starting points… of social scientific inquiry*' as it is through these actions that structures are reproduced or transformed (Bhaskar, 2014, 156). Though constrained by pre-existing social structures (Fitzpatrick, 2005), it is possible for individual agents to make changes in the world. Where such actions are intentional, these are triggered by an individual person's 'beliefs and desires'.

> *'Intentional human behaviour is caused, and…is always caused by reasons'* (Bhaskar, 2014, 80)

Particularly given the scant detail currently available about the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision across the homelessness sector and the factors shaping this, a qualitative approach exploring the perspectives of key actors in these settings was deemed not only appropriate, but necessary, to uncover the varied practices and range of complex processes through which such provision is shaped in these organisational contexts (Miller et al., 2004). To better understand this issue, there was therefore a need for an inductive approach based on the explanations of key actors in homelessness contexts.

Homelessness practitioners are key actors embedded in these specific 'learning provider' contexts, and have at least some degree of power over the extent and nature of support provided in these settings. They are uniquely placed to provide an illuminating account of the range of factors impacting on the day-to-day work of their organisations, and specifically the literacy and numeracy support provided within that (including both the needs of individual homeless people they are seeking to support and wider structural factors shaping provision in their settings). As Giddens (1984, 281) makes clear:
'*all social actors know a great deal about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives*'. As such, they are also in a good position to appreciate factors operating at individual, institutional and national policy levels as identified by Boeren's (2016) model. Their accounts can be used to identify the structures and mechanisms which shape their actions (Corson 1998, in Shipway, 2011). A focus on practitioners is also important in identifying potential solutions to enhancing the support on offer. As agents with a pivotal

role in enacting change, they are arguably best placed to offer insights into what could enhance the support available in their organisations.

Again, reflecting the 'epistemologically cautious' approach outlined above, there are indeed limits to what critical realists believe can be gleaned from agents' accounts of any social phenomenon. As such, whilst 'indispensable starting points', it is important not to award 'unconditional supremacy' to the agent's reasons for acting over other data (Shipway, 2011, 165). This has implications for the 'contribution to knowledge' made by this thesis, which is considered in the section on validity later in this chapter and in the concluding chapter following the presentation of the research findings.

6.3   Research methods

This study centres on the accounts of homelessness practitioners generated through 27 in depth semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews are an effective method through which to understand the experiences, motivations and beliefs of participants (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000) and as such were considered the most appropriate method to answer the research questions. Alternative qualitative approaches – namely, focus groups and participant observation – were considered. However, these were rejected for several reasons. First, as a part-time doctoral student I needed to ensure that the research design was practical within the time constraints associated with working a four-day week alongside my studies. Second, I needed to ensure that the design was flexible enough to fit around the busy workloads of homelessness practitioners. Individual interviews scheduled around their day at a time and place to suit them was key to ensuring sufficient levels of engagement with the research (luckily,

this was also accommodated for by my own employer, who was happy for me to move my working hours around at short notice). Arranging focus groups whereby a number of staff members would have had to stop working at the same time would have been impractical, particularly in smaller organisations where staff numbers were fewer. In addition, whilst observing the learning activities taking place in these contexts would have helped to corroborate the findings gleaned from interview data, time restraints prevented the long term meaningful engagement with these organisations that such an approach would require. The available evidence suggested that these were already fragile learning environments and relationships, which I was concerned might be impacted by the presence of an observer. Without being able to spend time and develop trust in these settings, I considered this inappropriate for ethical reasons (more consideration of which can be found below).

Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow meaningful comparison across participants whilst at the same time allowing for flexibility in the discussion. The interview topic guide was informed by both the research questions and the literature review (a copy of the topic guide can be found in Appendix One). Interviews began with a discussion of the role and professional background of the interviewee and the organisation in which they worked. Discussion then moved on to focus on the employment support provided in general – participants were asked to describe the ways in which the organisation in which they worked helped people to move into or closer to work, and were asked to consider who and what influenced this support. Participants were then asked more specifically about the literacy and numeracy support offered in their organisation. Again, they were asked to think about what factors

shaped the support available. Interviewees were asked about their views on the support that their organisation currently provided (i.e. in terms of its effectiveness and appropriateness). They were also asked for their perspective about the value of literacy and numeracy in today's labour market. The broad nature of the questions allowed for exploration of those issues which were most relevant to the interviewee's specific job role or experience working in the sector. Whilst a review of the literature provided some '*potential mechanisms active in the empirical domain*', this did not determine the focus of the empirical fieldwork (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 15).

6.4 Piloting the approach

Prior to the main data collection phase of this study, a pilot study was conducted in a large homelessness organisation based in London but with multiple sites across the UK in order to test the method and interview questions. This organisation was selected for matters of geographical convenience and through gaining access via existing contacts in the field. Over the period December 2014 to February 2015, three pilot interviews were conducted. Each interviewee was involved in the employment and skills services offered by the organisation, yet were working at different levels; an operational level worker (a basic skills tutor); a managerial level worker (an employment and skills service manager); and a strategic level worker (director of employment and skills services). These descriptors do not correspond directly to participants' job titles: rather, they have been chosen in order to convey their job role, but at the same time so as to preserve the anonymity of participants and the organisations in which they work. The interviews were transcribed and analysed, using the research questions as an initial framework for thematic analysis.

The organisation in which the pilot study was conducted was a large organisation offering a range of support and services to predominantly single homeless adults. Employment and skills services formed a key part of the support they offer. Within this, a dedicated basic skills team sat alongside vocational training team (supporting service users to achieve vocational qualifications) and an employment team (helping service users to find work). At any one time there were around four basic skills tutors working within an employment and skills service which worked with roughly 2,000 people per year. The literacy and numeracy support offered by the organisation was reported to take multiple forms. Broadly, the basic skills team offered one-to-one support, facilitated group work and peer learning, and provided support with structured courses as part of vocational training programmes. The support was typically informal and unstructured, and programmes were open and rolling, allowing for individuals to drop out and re-join. No basic skills qualifications were offered. Instead, service user progress and service impact were assessed and recorded using RARPA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement – a framework through which to measure progress and achievement in non-accredited courses).[5] Most of the support was offered in hostels across London rather than being spread evenly across services outside of the capital.

Accounts of the interviewees revealed multiple factors which shaped both the extent and nature of basic skills education in their organisation. These were the needs of service users; organisational history, aims and ethos; the professional

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[5] www.niace.org.uk/current-work/rarpa accessed 20/03/2015

backgrounds of staff; funding from government; funding from other sources and relationships with the wider homelessness and adult education sectors. As I will show in the chapters which follow, these factors were similar to those identified through interviews with staff working across the Greater Manchester homelessness sector. Although significantly, volunteers did not appear to shape services in the London-based pilot organisation as they were found to in Greater Manchester – perhaps reflecting the smaller scale of organisations operating outside of the capital. The analysis presented in the following chapters focuses on the data generated through interviews with representatives from the Greater Manchester homelessness sector, however where such differences arise, pilot data are drawn upon to highlight these.

The pilot study provided a useful opportunity to test the research instruments and broader methodology adopted for the research presented in this thesis. Pilot study participants were also invited to give feedback on the questions asked in the interview along with the key focus of the study (although participants did not suggest any revisions to the topic guide or wider focus of the study). The data generated through the pilot study were also deemed useful to addressing the research questions. As such, research instruments remained unaltered. However, participants in the pilot study were recruited in order to uncover how support and services were shaped in one particular organisation. At this stage, it was envisaged that the main study would involve a series of in-depth case studies, wherein two to three organisations would be selected and as far as possible all staff would be interviewed to get a fuller picture of the various different factors shaping support in a particular organisation. With this in mind, issues of guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality were a concern,

particularly where only one or a few individuals performed a particular job role (i.e. in the above organisation, there were only a handful of skills tutors which may have been easily identifiable in resulting research outputs). To try to overcome this issue, limits to the extent of confidentiality which could be guaranteed by the researcher were outlined. In addition, all participants were invited to 'member check' their interview transcripts and highlight any areas where they felt uncomfortable that their anonymity could be at risk. All participants responded to this with no changes to make to their transcripts. In the main study this approach was not adopted given the decision to draw more widely across a range of different organisations operating within the Greater Manchester area (as explained below).

6.5 Sampling strategy

In order to inform the sampling strategy and provide context for further in-depth qualitative investigation, I first conducted a desk-based review of publicly available information relating to the employment and skills support offered by third sector homelessness organisations operating in Greater Manchester. Prior to conducting this review, I had intended to select only a small number of these organisations in which to conduct interviews. Through a comparative case study approach, I was then going to compare and contrast different 'types' of organisation along the lines they were selected (for example larger versus smaller organisations; those in receipt of varying levels of state funding). However, the desk-based review highlighted considerable diversity amongst the organisations and their activities, with no obvious basis on which to select one for investigation over any others. Given that the topic under consideration was unexplored, I did not want to unnecessarily restrict the research at the

outset in this way. Thus, the decision was taken to sample widely *across* the organisations operating within the Greater Manchester homelessness sector. As is common with qualitative research, the research design was flexible and evolved as these new findings came to light (Mason, 2002, 3).

A purposive, non-random sampling strategy was employed (Mason, 2002), inviting all staff and volunteers working in organisations identified in the desk-based review to participate in the study. In recognition of the likelihood of the presence of differing perspectives *within* each organisation and warnings that '*we should not assume that senior managers are the most knowledgeable… different locations within the wider practitioner/managerial division of labour are likely to be characterised by distinctive perspectives and priorities*' (Smith and Elger, 2014, 120), an attempt was made to conduct multiple interviews within each organisation involved in the research, in order to capture the perspectives and experiences of multiple actors working in different roles and at different levels who had an influence on the development and/or delivery of employment and skills support in each setting. This allowed for triangulation both across and within organisations. It was not possible to sample multiple interviewees in all organisations. However, where multiple interviews were conducted this did not produce any contradictory results – respondents were merely able to elaborate in more depth about the different activities of the organisation they were involved in day-to-day.

Arranging access to interviewees was fairly straightforward. An initial email was sent out to all homelessness organisations offering some sort of employment-related support and operating in the Greater Manchester area (as identified through the desk-based review) detailing the nature of the study and asking for

participants. Follow up phone calls were made where emails were not answered. Once fieldwork was in progress, additional recruitment efforts were made in an attempt to include skills tutors and volunteers in the sample. Further targeted emails were sent, and attempts to recruit were made via social media and through an advertisement on the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO)'s website (however, these attempts proved unsuccessful). Where potential participants expressed a willingness to take part, interviews were then arranged at a time and location to suit them.

Whilst staff from some organisations declined the invitation to participate due to work pressures, a sufficient sample size was obtained, drawn from a large proportion of organisations operating within the Greater Manchester area. In total, 27 semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners working in 12 third sector organisations which in some way aimed to support homeless people to move into (or closer to) work (see Table 1 below for an overview). The sample includes 12 'strategic-level' workers (i.e. those working at the highest levels of an organisation with responsibility over the strategic direction of the organisation's activities, such as chief executives and directors), six 'managerial-level' workers (i.e. those in charge of managing other staff in the organisation) and nine 'operational-level' workers (i.e. those with front-line roles and responsibilities such as 'support workers' or 'project workers').

The sample includes organisations working in seven of the ten local authorities in Greater Manchester. Interviews were conducted between August and November 2015. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. All except two were conducted in a private room within the organisation in which participants worked (interviews were scheduled at the workplace for the

interviewee's convenience) – one in a busy café, another in an open plan area of the organisation from which they were sampled. With respondents' permission, all interviews were digitally recorded. The interview duration ranged from 25 minutes to 68 minutes, with an average running time of 49 minutes.

In order to ensure that participants fully understood the purpose of the study and what it would involve for them, all participants were provided with an information sheet which was discussed prior to conducting the interviews. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they had about the research, although it can be noted that they all felt that they understood and were happy to take part. They were all asked to sign two copies of a consent form, one of which was kept by them, the other was kept in a locked filing cabinet at my place of work (see Appendix One for a copy of the consent form). To ensure interviewees were comfortable, it was emphasised from the outset that there were no right or wrong answers, and that they were under no pressure to take part in an interview or to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with.

Organisation	Staff members interviewed
1	1
2	1
3	4
4	1
5	1
6	4
7	3
8	1
9	3
10	1

11	2
12	5
Total	**27**

Table 1: Sample details

6.6 Data analysis

An inductive thematic approach was taken during the data analysis. Once interviews were conducted and audio data transcribed in verbatim, an initial framework for analysis was created based on emerging themes resulting from detailed and repeated reading of the interview transcripts. Systematic thematic analysis of the qualitative interview data was then conducted using QSR NVivo10, allowing for the creation of new themes or 'codes' as they arose during the analysis (see Appendix Two for the coding framework developed as part of this process).

My approach to analysis was influenced by the critical realist tradition. Critical realist analysis involves two key processes. The first is to describe empirical phenomena (i.e. what is the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness organisations, and what factors shape this) through a process called '*abduction*'. These descriptions are '*grounded in the everyday activities of, as well as in the language and meanings used by, social actors*' (Lewis-Beck, 2004; Edwards et al., 2014). Second, critical realist research requires further theorising in order to move '*from the empirical to the real*'. Through '*retroduction*' the researcher then theorises the mechanisms through which these phenomena are generated (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 11). To date, limited theory has been developed about what shapes support in this context, as such analysis was further underpinned by the critical realist commitment '*to work out a... reliable explanation for these patterns of events*

via the development of more adequate accounts of the powers, entities and mechanisms which created them' (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 9). At least at the beginning of any research project, retroduction requires a '*commitment to theoretical pluralism'* until an initial investigation has helped to identify the key factors at play in any given setting (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014), 18). Indeed, it was not until my initial analysis was complete that I became aware of Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model which I draw upon to explain my key findings. Whilst I began with analysis grounded in the interview data, I will show in the following chapters that the findings in many respects verify this model.

The researcher theorises '*what the* [broader context] *must be like in order for the* [observed] *mechanisms…to be as they are and not otherwise*' (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 17). Put simply, the mechanisms identified as shaping the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support in one organisation may or may not be observed at different points in time or in different organisations. Despite this, critical realism enables '*a coherent causal analysis to be maintained in the face of the diverse circumstances*' (Fitzpatrick 2005). The tendency of government to shape the services of third sector organisations through funding arrangements may not, for example, be observed in all homelessness organisations, but it can be considered a key factor influencing provision if it can be seen to have a real impact on some. At another level, it may be observed that in some organisations, front-line workers consider basic skills support to be central to supporting service users into work leading to a greater emphasis on support in this area, whereas in another organisation other

factors may prevent the development of such support, even though the need for it is recognised.

6.7 Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines produced by both the British Sociological Association and the Social Research Association. Prior to the conduct of the fieldwork, ethical approval was also obtained from Lancaster University's Ethics Committee. Given the focus on practitioners, the study did not involve any vulnerable participants. As such the ethical risks were low. The issues for discussion were not of a sensitive nature. However, whilst questions were not anticipated to evoke sensitive issues, it was recognised that questions may elicit an emotional response from participants. For example, they may have felt that they had poor literacy or numeracy skills themselves which they may not have felt comfortable discussing. Due to uncertainty over the precise content of what is revealed in any semi-structured interview, the researcher is unable to completely explain what participation will involve (Fisher and Anushko, 2008, 99). However, it was made clear to all participants that they could refuse to answer any questions or terminate interviews at any point (Bryman, 2008). As previously mentioned, the decision was taken not to include observation of classes in the data collection, due to the often fragile nature of relationships in these settings and concerns that the presence of a researcher may impact negatively on these.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the conduct of all interviews. All participants were provided with a participant information sheet and were asked to sign a consent form, confirming that the purpose and nature

of the research project had been explained to them, that they understood the implications of participation, and their rights as an interviewee. Two copies of the consent form were made, one of which was kept by the participant. Consent forms were stored securely in a locked filing cabinet at the researchers' workplace. It was made clear to all participants that neither their name nor that of the organisation in which they worked would be included in any outputs from the research process. Confidential data were handled sensitively, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Interviewees were given a unique 'code number' and audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password protected laptop.

6.8 Reliability, validity and generalisability

This section considers the 'reliability', 'validity' and 'generalisability' of the study. These related measures are used to assess the quality, rigour and wider application of any research project. Reliability refers to the accuracy of the research methods and techniques utilised in the study; validity is concerned with whether or not the research involves the observation, identification or measurement of the particular phenomena that it claims to; and generalisability concerns the extent to which it is possible to make wider claims on the basis of findings from a particular study. Assessing qualitative research by these measures is problematic as criteria have conventionally been drawn from positivist traditions. However, below each concept is considered as it related to this research project (Mason, 2002).

6.8.1 Reliability

For positivist researchers, the reliability of a research study is typically assessed according to the extent to which '*the same methods of data 'collection' produce the same results*'. According to convention, where phenomena are measured repeatedly with the same, standardised instrument, and obtains the same results, research can be considered reliable. Here the emphasis is on the precision of research instruments and the consistency of the results they generate. This also carries with it the assumption that data collection tools and techniques 'can be standardised, neutral and non-biased'. This is problematic for qualitative researchers as the methods they employ are typically non-standardised, producing complex and varied data which do not fit into neatly defined 'measurements' (Mason, 2002; Miller and Glassner, 2004). Yet as Mason (2002, 187) explains,

> '*an obsession with reliability…overshadows more important questions of validity, resulting in a nonsensical situation where a researcher may be not at all clear about what they are measuring (validity), but can nevertheless claim to be measuring it with a great deal of precision (reliability)*'.

Moreover, critical realists attest that '*an 'open' social system does not allow the precision afforded by the laboratories of natural science*' (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 4). Instead, '*unlike 'closed' laboratories, open systems, such as societies or organisations, contain complex and unpredictable feedback loops that prevent history being determined or predictable*' (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 4). That being said, considerations of reliability in terms of overall accuracy in methods and conduct of research remain important standards against which any qualitative research should be assessed. The data

generation and analysis presented in this thesis can be considered reliable in the first instance as the methodology was considered appropriate to answering the research questions. This is further strengthened through the systematic and transparent process through which data were collected and analysed (Mason, 2002). Furthermore, the research questions and focus of the study were discussed and verified with participants in the pilot study.

6.8.2 Validity

This research investigates the nature of literacy and numeracy support and the factors shaping this from the perspective of practitioners working in the homelessness sector. Given that the reasons and accounts agents give for their actions provide the starting point for social inquiry, data obtained from interviews with practitioners who had direct involvement in these settings are therefore highly likely to result in valid data collection and inferences (Morse, 2017). All participants were asked the same questions regarding both the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision in their settings, along with any factors shaping it. However, there is a possibility that validity may be compromised due to misrepresentations or omissions in the accounts of participants, for example where the interviewer's knowledge on a topic is taken for granted interviewees may omit important details, or participants may be unable to translate meanings into words. Interviewees may also have been unaware of the true extent of learning activities taking place in their organisations, or of factors which may nevertheless impact considerably on the day-to-day work of their organisation. In addition, bias introduced through 'social desirability' effects, whereby participants describe their actions in the best possible light, may result in invalid inferences (Grace et al., 2012). To

mitigate this risk, participants were asked to explain and expand on their answers for clarification. Where multiple interviews were conducted within the same organisation, their accounts could also to some extent be verified by the triangulation of these different perspectives. Context bias may also have been a factor – all except one of the interviews was conducted on the premises of the organisation in which the individuals worked. Whilst, with one exception, all were conducted in a private room, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured, this may have impacted on the degree of openness of participants, if for example, they were concerned about being overheard or their accounts linked in any way. That said, the content of the interviews was not of a controversial nature (i.e. homelessness organisations are not expected, nor are they under any obligation to provide literacy and numeracy support). It was also made clear that there was no assumption that they or their organisation should necessarily be supporting people with their literacy and numeracy.

6.8.3 Generalisability

This study does not claim to be representative of all homelessness practitioners and all homelessness organisations. Taking place in homelessness settings in the North West of England, it is likely that findings will differ at least to some extent in other contexts (both within and outside of England). Thus, it is not possible to claim 'empirical generalisability' whereby statistically representative samples enable inferences to be drawn about general populations (Mason, 2002, 195). However, theoretical generalisability is considered more important for both qualitative and critical realist researchers (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 18). Theoretical generalisation 'encompasses a range of strategies

based on different logics' (Mason, 2002, 195). First, whilst not statistically representative, there is '*no reason to suspect atypicality*' in the sample (Mason, 2002, 195). Further, as the sample was drawn from a large proportion of homelessness organisations operating across a large geographical area, it has been possible to identify common themes. As Mason (2002, 197) explains:

'*by making comparisons between… contexts you can then produce cross-contextual generalities that are derived from an understanding of processes or phenomena in specific contexts, that are strategically compared*'.

The findings generated by this study can therefore be considered relevant to homelessness organisations in other geographical locations. In line with a critical realist approach, the research must balance an attention to context, acknowledging '*the influence of specific situational factors, with a broader perspective, acknowledging and seeking to locate wider patterns and generative mechanisms*'. Drawing on the accounts of practitioners working across a range of different organisations and demonstrating the applicability of Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model to these contexts enables movement '*beyond locally contingent processes and outcomes*' so that '*wider patterns and their generative forces*' can be identified and examined (Kessler and Bach, 2014, 169).

6.9 Summary

This chapter has described the methodology and research design used in this study, along with related issues concerned with validity, reliability,

generalisability and research ethics. Whilst, as with any research design, the approach adopted had its limitations, it was considered the best way in which to answer the research questions within time and resource constraints. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, semi-structured interviews with 27 practitioners working across the homelessness sector in a range of roles provide rich data which has illuminated the nature of literacy and numeracy provision as it currently stands in organisations seeking to help homeless people to move into or closer to work. Whilst it is not claimed that the findings are generalisable to all organisations which seek to support homeless adults, thematic analysis has uncovered a range of factors commonly experienced which impact on whether or not such organisations are able to offer literacy and numeracy support, and the nature of the support available.

Chapter 7   The study context

As noted in the preceding chapter, the complexity of the social world means it is necessary to pay attention to the particular contexts in which social phenomena occur. In this short chapter I will therefore provide some context for the findings which follow in chapters eight and nine. The chapter begins with an overview of the socioeconomic profile of the Greater Manchester area, alongside the policy context in which it operates. Here the focus is on skills profiles and homelessness data. Findings from a desk-based review of third sector support for homeless adults across the metropolis is then presented in order to contextualise the research that follows.

7.1 Socioeconomic context: Work, skills and homelessness in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester is a metropolitan county in the North West of England, consisting of ten metropolitan boroughs (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan). In 2016 the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) announced their vision that:

> *By 2040 Greater Manchester will be one of the world's leading city regions, reaping the benefits of sustainable and inclusive growth across a thriving Northern economy… No one will be held back, and no one will be left behind: all will be able to contribute to and benefit fully from the continued success of Greater Manchester. (GMCA, 2016)*

However, at present, the conurbation faces a number of significant socio-economic challenges. Unemployment in Greater Manchester is higher than

both North West and national levels, and jobs growth since the recession has been predominantly in more casualised forms of labour rather than full-time employment. Skills underutilisation has been identified as a key issue, and productivity across all sectors is below the national average (New Economy, 2016).

Higher numbers of people in Greater Manchester have no qualifications than nationally, with significant geographical variations underpinned by large and persistent socio-economic inequalities (Lupton, 2017). Skills inequalities can be observed in accordance with historic patterns reflecting Greater Manchester's industrial heritage. For example, around 30 per cent of older workers (aged 50 to 64) in Manchester, Oldham and Tameside had no qualifications, compared with around 20 per cent in Stockport and Trafford. As is the case nationally, take-up of adult skills training in Greater Manchester has been declining, in large part attributed to substantial funding cuts (Lupton, 2017). There are more than 400 further and adult education providers (New Economy, 2016; Lupton, 2017), however Lupton (2017) describes a complex adult education system which has proved difficult for learners to navigate.

Regarding homelessness, research has consistently demonstrated a large proportion of adults experiencing homelessness and 'severe and multiple disadvantage' in Manchester and other Greater Manchester authorities. For example, Rochdale and Manchester are amongst the English local authorities with the highest prevalence of 'severe and multiple deprivation' (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2015). And recent increases in rough sleeping have been well documented (Fitzgerald and Ottewell, 2015). This has led the newly elected

Mayor of Greater Manchester (Andy Burnham) to pledge to eradicate rough sleeping in his jurisdiction by 2020.

An increasing prominence given to devolution and 'local' decision-making means it is increasingly important to understand phenomena at a sub-national level (Lee et al., 2015). Optimism about the potential for Greater Manchester's devolution settlement (commonly known as 'Devo-Manc') in particular, to shape public policy around areas including adult skills, social care, and housing makes the metropolitan county a timely focus of research concerned with the provision of both adult skills and homelessness services.

7.2 Employment and skills support for single homeless people across Greater Manchester: Findings from a desk-based review

The first phase of this research study involved a desk-based 'mapping exercise', with the aim of providing an overview of the employment and skills support offered by organisations supporting single homeless adults in Greater Manchester. The objective was both to provide context and a basis for subsequent sampling strategy for further in-depth study. Whilst it is recognised that multiple agencies provide support and services for homeless adults (including councils, colleges, wider community organisations), the focus of this research was on specialist third sector organisations. As such the criteria for inclusion in this mapping exercise was as follows – organisations needed to:

1. be third sector organisations – i.e. neither public sector nor private sector. This may include voluntary and community organisations (both registered charities and other organisations such as associations, self-

help groups and community groups), social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives.[6]

2. have single homeless adults as a main target group – this excludes organisations specifically targeting services at those aged 25 and under

3. offer service users support to move into (or close to) employment – this might include, for example, support with CV writing and interview skills, literacy and numeracy (or 'basic skills) support, job brokerage, confidence building, and volunteer placements.

Having established these criteria, the information was then gathered systematically through a three phase strategy:

1. An initial search of Homeless UK, a database which provides information on homelessness services across the UK.[7] Search results for 'employment and training' services and 'day centres' for homeless people in the North West of England were refined by local authority area.

2. A targeted internet search for each local authority area including the terms 'employment', 'skills', 'literacy', 'numeracy', 'homeless'

3. Sense-checking with key contacts in the field (local authority housing and homelessness officers, the Homeless Link North West regional manager, and the third sector organisations identified).

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[6] National Audit Office guidance http://bit.ly/2jq5U0E accessed 14/11/2017

[7] www.homelessuk.org (published by Homeless Link with funding from Communities and Local Government)

After excluding those organisations outside of Greater Manchester and those exclusively targeted at young homeless people (i.e. those aged 25 and under), the mapping exercise identified 16 third sector organisations which support homeless people to move into (or close) to employment. In addition, 'Inspiring Change' is an eight-year partnership project led by Shelter, funded through Big Lottery Fund's £112m Fulfilling Lives project providing support for people with a variety of complex needs (including homelessness) through a range of services (including employment and skills support). The organisations identified varied significantly, in terms of:

a) their size – where staff numbers are stated (n=8) the number of paid staff ranges from 1 to 49 (median = 22). For volunteers (n=6), numbers range from 1 to 200 (median = 50)

b) the mix of services that organisations offer – whilst some were focused solely on advice and activities, others also provide accommodation. Only one organisation specialised in educational support for homeless adults (alongside other vulnerable groups)

c) their main funding sources - organisations reported drawing on a range of funding sources including the Department for Communities and Local Government, the European Social Fund, and charitable donations. A number of social enterprises were also operating where service users were supported through the sale of goods and services.

According to the publicly available information obtained through websites and other promotional literature, a range of employment-related support such as assistance with job searching, IT classes, work and volunteer placements,

advice and guidance, mentoring, ESOL support and other courses. Only two explicitly stated on their websites that they offered 'Maths and English' support.

The above mapping exercise has also highlighted that the larger national third sector homelessness organisations such as Crisis and St Mungo's are not operating in the Greater Manchester area. Instead, existing services in this area tend to be smaller than those located in the capital. This underlines a need to examine support and services outside of London. It also arguably means that locating pilot work such as STRIVE in smaller, more localised services might be more appropriate where national resources are found to invest in learning and skills support for this group.

7.3 Summary

This chapter has introduced the location in which the research presented in this thesis took place, in order to contextualise the findings presented in the following chapters. It has also highlighted the diverse range of homelessness organisations operating within the ten local authorities constituting the Greater Manchester conurbation. Importantly, an increasing prominence given to devolution and 'local' decision-making means it is increasingly important to understand phenomena at a sub-national level. Recognising this wider context has important implications for the generalisability of the findings and the recommendations presented in the final chapter.

Chapter 8   The extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support offered by third sector homelessness organisations

This is the first of three chapters in which I present and analyse the main findings of this research. The findings presented here address the first of the three research questions underpinning this thesis, namely: '*what is the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy education within the employment-related support offered by organisations supporting homeless adults?*'. The chapter begins with an overview of the literacy and numeracy provision available in these settings, before describing the wider employment and skills support in which this was located. Having earlier established the various forms learning can take in chapter four, throughout the chapter all forms of learning opportunities described by participants are considered, in order to capture the diversity of practices taking place in these community settings. I will show that whilst largely 'informal', learning opportunities also had elements of non-formal and formal provision, demonstrating the potential of these organisations to facilitate homeless people's engagement in a range of learning activities. However, interview data also show how literacy and numeracy support features as part of the employment-related assistance offered to varying extents. In most cases the support was available on an ad hoc basis and centred on helping service users to compensate for poor literacy and/or numeracy skills, for example through engaging in literacy practices on their behalf where they encountered difficulties. Significantly though, whilst limited, the activity underway which was developed to help homeless people to develop their literacy and numeracy skills was reported to encompass many of the various aspects of good practice identified in previous chapters. I conclude that there is

clearly a role for homelessness organisations in enabling homeless adults to participate in literacy and numeracy learning, however the potential for this is not currently being realised as provision is often on a small scale, ad hoc, and in a precarious position. The reasons for this are considered in the following chapter.

8.1 Literacy and numeracy education in organisations supporting homeless adults

This section describes the nature of literacy and numeracy support taking place across the organisations represented by the sample. Table 2 provides an overview of both the activities taking place at the time of the interview and the literacy and numeracy support which interviewees described had been offered in the past. According to all interviewees, many of the homeless people receiving help from the organisations they represented were supported with literacy in some way. A smaller but still significant number reported supporting their service users with numeracy. Interviewees most commonly described assisting people to meet day-to-day literacy and numeracy demands, however all also described in some way supporting service users to develop these skills. After describing the support provided to service users to temporarily *compensate* for weak literacy and numeracy skills, this section provides an overview of the variety of activities which have been developed to support service users to *develop* and *improve* them.

Organisation	Support to meet every day literacy and/or numeracy demands	Learning on the job through volunteering/social enterprise activities	Working towards accredited qualifications (adult education outreach activities)	Learning through non-accredited courses/drop-in sessions/group activities	Reading groups	Creative writing activities	Learning brokerage activities (i.e. helping service users to identify mainstream learning)
1	**X**	**X**					**X**
	X	X					X
2	**X**						**X**
	X						X
3	**X**	**X**				**X**	
	X	X	X		X		
4	**X**	**X**					
	X	X					
5	**X**	**X**		**X**	**X**		
	X	X		X	X		
6	**X**			**X**			**X**
	X			X			X
7	**X**	**X**					
	X	X	X				
8	**X**	**X**					**X**
	X	X	X				X
9	**X**	**X**					
	X	X					
10	**X**			**X**			
	X		X	X			
11	**X**			**X**		**X**	**X**
	X			X		X	X
12	**X**	**X**					
	X	X	X			X	

Table 2: Literacy and numeracy support in homelessness organisations: past and present

NB: Shaded rows indicate activities taking place in the past.

8.1.1   Support to compensate for weak literacy and numeracy skills

When asked to describe the basic skills support offered within their organisation, interviewees most commonly described how they help those struggling to *meet* the literacy or numeracy demands of everyday life (including,

but not restricted to, looking for work). Providing assistance to read and understand official forms relating to welfare benefits and services was a common activity:

> *'We aren't doing a huge amount about that, having basic skills courses… a lot of the support work that will be done will be by people who will work with people to actually do forms'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Whilst in many instances, interviewees explained that this support was provided due to literacy skills weaknesses amongst their service users, it was also recognised that those who did not generally struggle with literacy could also find understanding and filling out official forms difficult. This supports the belief held by advocates of a social practice view of literacy and numeracy – which holds that these skills are not discrete skill sets which people either possess or lack, but rather that anyone can struggle when presented with unfamiliar literacy or numeracy demands throughout their lives.

From the accounts offered, support appeared typically to involve doing things 'for' service users rather than helping people to cope with such everyday tasks independently:

> *'Our role is supporting them in any aspect where they need support. So it could be benefits, form filling, scribing for them… we would do that on their behalf because some people can't read and write'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

One interviewee also described attempts to make services more accessible to those with weak literacy skills, by presenting service information in a simplified,

pictorial form. Thus, most of the support available for homeless service users with basic skills needs appears to be designed to temporarily *compensate* for rather than *address* in any sustained way any skills weaknesses experienced by service users. Support of this kind is no doubt important for homeless jobseekers – failure to fill out social security forms or to understand instructions laid out in official letters for example, can have disastrous consequences which can result in movements further away from the labour market (Batty et al., 2015; Johnsen et al., 2016). However, such reactive provision arguably only provides 'stop-gap solutions' rather than the 'long term, meaningful change' (Juchniewicz, 2011, 133) required to address in any sustained way the disadvantage those with poor literacy and numeracy skills face as they try to enter and sustain work.

8.1.2 Support facilitating the development of literacy and numeracy

Whilst less common, interviewees also described a range of support provided within their organisations to help homeless people to *develop* and *improve* their literacy and numeracy skills. They described a range of activities through which literacy and, less commonly, numeracy learning was facilitated by the organisations in which they worked. These included learning 'on-the-job' through tasks involved in volunteering and working in social enterprises; working towards accredited qualifications; the facilitation of reading groups and creative writing activities; and the provision of more formalised, structured literacy and numeracy courses. In a small number of instances this support formed a regular part of the service offer, however in most instances learning opportunities were short-term and ad hoc.

That these learning opportunities took place in community settings (outside formal institutional settings such as schools and colleges) is enough for some to simply define them as 'informal'. However, this masks considerable diversity in the extent and nature of the provision available. In the analysis presented below I therefore draw on different uses of the term 'informal learning' in order to capture the diversity of practices taking place in these community settings. Following Tusting (2003), I describe the settings in which these learning activities take place, the extent to which activities are planned, the level of accreditation and assessment involved and the approach to teaching adopted. The data highlight the diversity of practices taking place which might otherwise simply be described under the mantle of 'informal learning', supporting the notion that sharp distinctions between formal and informal learning and education should be avoided (Coffield, 2000; Tusting 2003).

The learning context

The learning opportunities described by the interviewees took place in training rooms, on shop floors, in computer suites, in dining rooms and common areas, all within the context of third sector homelessness organisations. Importantly, these were settings in which it was thought service users felt comfortable to engage in support to improve their skills (this is explored in more detail in the following chapter):

> *'I think if I took some of the* [service users]*, and sent them to college once a week, they wouldn't go. But by coming here, it's the same environment – it's safe, secure'* (Managerial level worker, social enterprise)

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However, the level of 'informality' in each setting varied. Whilst most organisations represented by the sample could not be considered '*dedicated learning environments*', and were more akin to '*informal community settings*' (McGivney, 1999; Tusting, 2003), the core focus of one *was* on providing education to homeless people alongside other 'disadvantaged' groups, albeit in a specialised, more relaxed setting. In addition, several interviewees described literacy and numeracy support from local adult colleges being offered within their contexts.

For some interviewees, the support offered in their organisations was believed to provide a 'stepping stone', with the aim of enabling service users to participate in more formal learning opportunities, should they wish to, further down the line. Coffield (2000, 8) has criticised the way in which informal learning is often '*regarded as an inferior form of learning whose main purpose is to act as the precursor of formal learning*'. However, whilst it is important not to restrict the role of informal, community learning to the facilitation of access to more formal provision, this was felt to be a key benefit of the service the organisations were providing:

> '*The goal would be ultimately to encourage people to attend classes in their own communities… So the idea there is – yes they're learning basic skills and hopefully improving those skills, but they're also hopefully building up their confidence about the very act of learning and the very fact of being in a classroom, and the perception of themselves as somebody who can attend those sort of classes and can participate*' (Managerial level worker, day centre)

'It was supposed to be a flavour, a taster if you like: this is how learning

is when you're an adult and maybe going off to a course isn't so bad'

(Operational level worker, day centre)

Several interviewees explained that, where service users were able and aspiring to access more formal learning opportunities, they would help them to identify provision in their local area. To this end, some had established relationships with local colleges and education providers, and helped their service users to identify further opportunities outside their organisation. One respondent, for example, described taking their service users on field trips to local adult education centres to highlight the range of learning opportunities available. Conversely, some interviewees felt they had little awareness about the adult education opportunities available in their local authority or across Greater Manchester more generally. Thus, it appears that the importance of 'interagency working' identified earlier in chapter five as being important for ensuring that the multiple and complex needs of homeless adults are met, is not being realised between the homelessness and adult education sectors.

Varying levels of planning

The learning opportunities facilitated in the organisations represented by the interviewees appeared to involve varying levels of planning. In most cases, learning was not formally structured and did not follow a pre-determined curriculum or '*prescribed learning framework*' (Eraut, 2000, 12; Tusting, 2003). Some described how opportunities to identify and support basic skills needs emerged through other activities, and, in most cases, how volunteers and agency staff would respond to these as and when issues arose or opportunities

for learning presented themselves. Computer classes were identified by several respondents as good opportunities to identify literacy difficulties. Interviewees described using ICT as a 'hook' to identify, support and engage service users who struggled with literacy.

> *'Our [IT] skills trainer is well aware of* [literacy issues] *and has volunteers in the group that would help support people with different literacy needs and different abilities'* (Strategic level worker, day centre and social enterprise)

From the accounts of the interviewees it is not possible to tell how far the identification of and assistance with literacy and numeracy needs through wider ICT support played out in practice. However, the quotes above perhaps expose an assumption that 'ICT tutors' are capable of adequately responding to literacy and numeracy issues where they arise. This may be the case, however the tutors' voice is missing here. This issue was also raised in the pilot interviews, with a literacy tutor working in a London-based homelessness organisation explaining how they were often expected to be a 'jack of all trades', teaching numeracy despite only being qualified to teach literacy:

> '*My maths is good, but teaching it… I know only one or two methods but then I get stuck*' (Literacy tutor, London-based homelessness organisation)

In addition, respondents described a range of opportunities for service users to practice and develop their literacy and or numeracy skills through the day-to-day activities of running social enterprises – such as through working on tills,

and doing stock takes. In both cases staff and volunteers were brought in to support service users if needs emerged.

> *'I've got a young man who's on our desk at the moment at the front. His numeracy and his literacy is very poor: [but] he's working on the till, he's filling in dockets, he's talking on the phone, he's taking down information. He doesn't get it all right, his spelling is atrocious…*[but] *he's doing it because we've said 'you can do it, you've got to do it''* (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

Whilst not involving any sort of formal curriculum, it is likely that such activities result in a considerable level of '*incidental*' or '*reactive*' learning (Eraut, 2000; Tusting, 2003). As discussed earlier in chapter four, even where there is '*no intention to learn*' and individuals are not explicitly aware of learning taking place, '*implicit*' learning may occur, as individuals learn how to overcome challenges encountered in day-to-day life. According to Eraut (2000, 28), improving one's skills in this way is '*particularly dependent on feedback*', through increasing a person's '*confidence and fluency*' through the positive affirmation of a 'job well done' or through highlighting areas for improvement. Again, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which such feedback is offered in the absence of systematic observation. On the other hand, whereas such informal opportunities were identified by several respondents, it is likely that interviews have not revealed the true extent of informal learning of this kind – as Tusting (2003) notes, such learning often goes unrecognised.

It is also clear from the interview data that not all learning which does not follow a planned curriculum is necessarily 'unplanned'. Indeed, interviewees

described developing a range of 'deliberative' (Eraut, 2000, 28) activities which might be described as an '*organised learning event or package*' (Eraut, 2000, 12). This included 'embedded' learning opportunities, reading groups, and creative writing activities, and, whilst these were not structured around a set curriculum, they had various aims and appeared to have been 'planned' to some extent. For example, one interviewee described developing 'fantasy football' activities and utilising the numeracy demands involved to embed numeracy learning amongst activity participants. This was in recognition of reluctance on the part of service users to engage in activities which are explicitly designed to tackle numeracy:

> '[With fantasy football] *they'll all get a budget of players that they need to spend, bonuses when they win, minuses for when they don't. And they will do their budgeting through fantasy football… so it's just making sure that when they're doing groups, functional skills are embedded in it anyway'* (Managerial level worker, residential project)

Several respondents felt that introducing numeracy through activities like cooking would be an effective approach. One organisation was in the process of developing 'embedded' numeracy support as part of working in the charity's café:

> *'It's loaded with maths, absolutely loaded. But it's the sort of maths that people will be able to apply in other areas of their life that's really useful to them'* (Strategic level worker, day centre)

Interviewees from two organisations described setting up reading groups, whereby service users were invited to read out loud to volunteers and staff

members. Here, inviting readers to choose their own books rather than those prescribed through a set curriculum was felt to ensure that the activity was interesting and enjoyable. In one case this was offered on an ad hoc basis. In another, a regular reading mentoring scheme involved volunteers from a local housing association visiting the organisation and offering one-to-one reading support over a set period. It was felt that this had been well received by service users, and provided an opportunity for people to 'try out' literacy support in a relaxed setting.

In several organisations, creative writing activities had been (or were being) developed, encouraging and supporting service users to 'tell their stories', and giving them 'a voice'.

> *'We have just started to recruit* [a volunteer] *for creative writing...[to] just sort of give them another tool, another way to express themselves when they're facing difficult times'* (Managerial level worker, residential project)

Ideas for creative writing activities in the future included what might be considered more 'radical' approaches, whereby literacy could be used to help service users to voice their frustrations resulting from their interactions with the labour market:

> *'If you turn round to people as they do at the Job Centre and say 'you've got to come in and do job applications today' – well, how many people get a job out of doing that? I don't think many. And how many people get sanctioned because they say 'stuff this!' and walk out? So it doesn't work. But if you were to say let's write a play about getting a job… and let's write a play about being treated like shit when I went for an interview,*

you might get people to start writing!' (Operational level worker, day centre)

Creative writing activities were developed from matters that were believed to be important and relevant to the service users. Importantly, this did not narrowly restrict content to issues concerning 'homelessness' or 'unemployment'. Instead, attempts were made to identify more positive themes, experiences and interests that everyone could relate to. One interviewee, for example, gave an example of where they had worked with an external agency and with service users to create a book based on their memories about food:

> *'We got people talking about* [food memories] *in a group… and it was about writing their stories or at least telling their stories and, for some people, having some support in writing them'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Whilst in one sense this was about trying to make activities relevant and interesting to the service users, it was also about overcoming issues of stigma and low self-esteem:

> *'We had a whole group of people together who were too embarrassed to talk about their literacy skills so we said it's not literacy, it's about food…it was about trying to address literacy problems but also low self-esteem, that their stories didn't matter. And we wanted their stories to matter'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

The extent to which literacy and numeracy learning involved in such activities was planned or unplanned is difficult to ascertain. It is unclear, for example,

whether through producing a book about their experiences the aim was to develop literacy skills, or whether the aim was more about the production of a publication to highlight the issues faced by homeless people, or to simply provide a 'meaningful activity' through which to alleviate boredom. That such an activity took place within this setting nevertheless highlights important potential avenues through which opportunities can emerge to both develop literacy and numeracy skills and empower homeless people. In addition, participation in group discussion *'involves deliberative thinking about the topic, rapid comprehension of what others are saying, and rapid decision making about when to speak and what type of contribution to make'* (Eraut, 2000, 25). Thus, even if improving literacy skills was not necessarily a key aim, it is likely to have been an important by-product of the activity.

A minority of interviewees did describe more formalised, structured literacy and numeracy support. This was offered directly by two organisations, and several others had, in the past, hosted professional adult educators from local adult colleges or education providers who came into their setting to support service users in working towards accredited qualifications such as NVQs and GCSEs. Whilst provision was more formal in these organisations than elsewhere, interviewees described how support was flexible and responsive to the needs of the individuals and groups of service users who they were supporting. Interviewees emphasised the need for awareness and sensitivity to challenges around punctuality and maintaining attendance, in recognition of the obstacles homeless people faced when trying to engage in learning and skills provision. Flexibility was built into activities both in terms of the rules around sign up,

attendance and punctuality, the mix of one-to-one and group work, and the adaptation of group activities to one-to-one support where necessary:

> *'If someone has got mental health issues by all means we'll have regular breaks, we'll make sure that you're in a good frame of mind. Take into consideration what people's barriers are and work round it individually. If somebody doesn't like and doesn't feel confident in group work, then we're quite happy to do one-to-one sessions'* (Managerial level worker, residential project)

This was not always straightforward, with one interviewee describing the challenges involved in accommodating lateness whilst at the same time trying to make expectations clear:

> *'It may be very difficult for that person to commit to being punctual or committing to come every week, and we need to kind of understand that when we sign people up…it's a balancing act because we also need to really motivate people to make that effort to come on time. But we have to play it really on a case-by-case basis because the last thing we want is somebody's got a really valid reason why they weren't able to come and to have the feeling of being told off or that they've failed…[but] at the same time we need to get the message across that it's not ideal to come late'* (Managerial level worker, day centre)

Due to this, one interviewee described providing courses which were rolling in nature so that people could join at any time, in order to capture moments of motivation to engage in learning. Service users were also welcome to re-sit courses:

'[I]f somebody comes in and interviews on the fifth week out of six, they can usually start straight away because we're aware that that might be the very moment that they've decided to go for it. And if they're told to wait another month, it could be the difference between them starting a course or not' (Managerial level worker, day centre)

In addition, structured support had been offered in short durations, in recognition of poor concentration levels amongst many service users:

'It worked when it was only a few hours a week. Because again if it was a full day…the concentration levels…they would never have done it' (Strategic level worker, residential project)

The above quotations illustrate a recognition of the importance of motivation on adult learning participation and how this can change over time, and a level of sensitivity regarding issues of low confidence which may emerge amongst some learners. Furthermore, across the accounts of the interviewees, there was a concern not to reinforce notions of 'failure' amongst those service users who wished to engage in support to develop their literacy or numeracy skills.

A limited role for accreditation and assessment

According to the interviewees, there was a general lack of formal accreditation and assessment in learning activities facilitated in their organisations. As such, the '*external specification of outcomes*' (Eraut, 2000, 12) which has a considerable impact on the formal adult education sector, was conspicuously absent. Whilst interviewees described some instances where literacy and numeracy learning had been accredited, for example through their engagement

with outreach work from a local college or learning provider, most support was unaccredited and unassessed. This is particularly salient given the close relationship between funding for adult education and accreditation (Davies, 2000 in Tusting 2003), and perhaps explains the absence of adult skills funding in these settings.

However, whilst not typically offering accredited learning opportunities, two organisations had developed their own curricula, based around the needs of homeless people. Explaining why accreditation was not a key aim of the service, one respondent felt that focusing on 'functional' literacy and numeracy skills was more important in terms of meeting the needs and goals of their service users. Another described developing workbooks designed to prepare residents with the practical skills they needed to 'move on' to and sustain independent accommodation. Activities designed to improve budgeting skills, for example, were developed to equip service users with the numeracy skills they would require to manage their day-to-day lives. Moreover, reflecting the value of both skills- and social practice-based conceptions of literacy and numeracy, those offering more structured support explained the need to relate attending more formalised support to individual life and work goals.

> *'It's about functional skills for us here so we want to improve people's functional levels of maths and English so their life is easier, or more enjoyable, or more successful or whatever that is. We don't expect to get them to entry 3 or level 1 or level 2 here - That's not what we're doing'*
> (Strategic level worker, day centre)

> '[If they say] *in the future I want to be a support worker then we'll say*
> *well before you're a support worker you need to work on your basic*
> *skills…you have to really link it in to their individual needs because*
> *otherwise they're gonna be like, 'Well I don't need to know that. I've done*
> *alright for 40 odd years not knowing so I don't need to know now''*
> (Managerial level worker, residential project)

The absence of accreditation and assessment is perhaps problematic where a key aim of support is to improve service users' employment prospects. Coffield (2000, 8), for example, asserts that '*formal learning relevant to employment needs to be accredited*'. However, many service users were perceived to be a long distance away from the labour market, despite aspiring to move into work at some point in the future. This perhaps breaks the direct link between the 'employability' function of improving a person's literacy and numeracy skills in these settings and again underlines their potentially important function as a 'stepping stone' into formalised, accredited provision. Whilst some literacy and numeracy provision was not tied explicitly to 'work' and 'employability', this does not necessarily matter. The important thing is that it engages adults to improve these skills. Even where movement into the paid labour market is not a key aim of provision, improving literacy and numeracy skills through activities which are engaging and relevant will arguably improve a person's labour market prospects as a by-product of this engagement.

Informal styles, roles and relationships

In the absence of an ethnographic approach, it is difficult to ascertain the exact nature of the roles and relationships assumed by teachers and learners in

organisations supporting literacy and numeracy learning amongst homeless adults. In addition, particularly in those instances where homelessness agency staff and volunteers were the ones supporting those with weak literacy and numeracy skills as and when needs emerged, a '*designated teacher or trainer*' was not always present (Eraut, 2000, 12). However, from the accounts offered, ensuring a right 'fit' between teachers and learners was perceived to be a fundamental element of successful provision.

Interviewees also explained how formal provision had to be 'managed'. Rules for group conduct had to be negotiated rather than imposed – instead of instructors setting out rules about behaviour, respondents stressed the need to 'treat them like adults'. Here we see an explicit attempt to rebalance power relationships which are too often weighted towards the teachers in formal educational provision.

> '[They] *create their own rules. So when I first start a new course I say right well it's not my training it's yours – what do you think's acceptable and what do you think's not acceptable? They set their own boundaries*' (Managerial level worker, residential project)

In addition, interviewees explained how the personalities of those attending group sessions had to be carefully managed in order that a safe environment was created for all who wished to participate in the activities:

> '[It's about] *making the people that are loud aware of it, but in a constructive way so you're not having a go at them… I think we made quite a bit of progress on that… Because the louder ones now tend to support the quieter ones*' (Managerial level worker, residential project)

Whilst there were some examples, it was rare that organisations would directly employ professional 'skills tutors'. Instead, whether or not service users were supported with literacy and numeracy was often dependent on the support which non-specialist staff and volunteers were able to provide. A reliance on volunteers here was somewhat problematic. Whilst volunteer time was highly valued, this underlines the precarious nature of basic skills provision for single homeless adults.

> *'We do have a volunteer that comes in. He's an ex-maths and IT tutor and his literacy skills are quite good'* (Managerial level worker, residential project)

Interviewees also gave examples of residents and volunteers supporting each other:

> '[We have] *peer support here for those who can't read and write, mentioning it to another resident who's part of that… Part of a peer support that they know that they're struggling so maybe would help them read letters but that's difficult to put on when we have such a chaotic client group sometimes'* (Managerial level worker, residential project)

Where professional tutors were employed, they tended to be paid on a part-time, or sessional basis, reflecting a long history of casualised labour in adult education (Tett and Maclachlan, 2008; Bowl, 2012).

In some organisations, outreach support from external adult colleges and education providers was provided sporadically where sufficient demand was

identified and funding could be obtained. Interviewees explained a cautious approach to engaging with external adult education providers. One interviewee felt that it was important that the consistency of support was maintained, through ensuring that the same tutor was coming in to teach their service users each week:

> *'They were seeing the same person, it wasn't a different person…She'd come in a bit earlier, sit in the main room, get a brew. So people knew who she was…they knew her face. Again it's that going right back to that trust thing all over again, and them being able to say…For an adult to say to somebody 'I can't read and write' must be very difficult'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

In addition, they felt it was important to ensure that staff from external agencies were suitable to work in their context - that tutors understood, could engage and establish a good relationship with their service users. Although largely positive about instances where external education providers had come in to teach within the context of their organisation, some described mixed experiences:

> *'[T]he tutors that we've had in have got a great understanding of the [service users] and what we do here… I do feel we've been lucky with that, because I have been to* [other homelessness agencies]*, where that is a problem'* (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

'We would always have a good meeting before, find out what their agency is like, [and] *what do they expect from our residents…we have had trainers that aren't suited to the project and we just won't accept them back'* (Managerial level worker, residential project)

However, it is important to note the external providers' perspective is absent here. It is not possible to ascertain how accommodating homelessness organisations are in hosting their provision. Likewise, it must be recognised that outreach workers and the agencies in which they work are in turn subject to their own constraints and pressures (as discussed earlier in chapter four and outlined in Bowl, 2012).

8.2   Other employment-related support

Having outlined the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision, this chapter now turns to consider the broader range of employment-related support offered by organisations seeking to assist homeless people to move into (or closer to) work. It does so in order to provide further context for the support identified above and also to highlight the range of interventions which might logically form part of the support offered to help people to access the labour market, given the multifaceted labour market disadvantage many face (as highlighted in the literature review). Along with literacy and numeracy support, interviewees identified a further five key areas of employment-related support offered by their organisation, namely:

1. Assistance with work search and the application process
2. Assistance with accessing out-of-work benefits
3. Digital skills and access to technology

4. Internal and external work experience and volunteer opportunities

5. Support to build up confidence and self-esteem

These are displayed in Figure 2. Each will now be considered in more detail.

Figure 2 Employment and skills support offered by homelessness organisations (excluding literacy and numeracy support)

Assistance with work search and the application process

According to the interviewees, all the organisations in which they worked offered assistance with searching and applying for jobs. This included giving careers information, advice and guidance, assisting service users with putting together their curriculum vitae (CV), and helping them to search for jobs to apply for, to complete job applications and prepare for interviews. In addition, one interviewee explained how their organisation offered further practical support, by providing service users with suitable clothing for going to interviews.

Assistance with the work search and application process was personalised and tailored to reflect service users' capabilities and experience of work, and was designed in the hope of helping them to overcome specific barriers to the labour market, such as the possession of limited employment histories and criminal records. Several interviewees noted that this sort of activity was undertaken even though this support *should* be provided by the statutory employment support system.

Assistance accessing out-of-work benefits

A particularly striking finding was the level of support provided to service users to access and meet the demands of the statutory employment support system. Whilst some residential organisations required their residents to sign off out-of-work benefits, many day centres devoted a significant portion of time to helping their service users to meet the demands of an increasingly 'conditional' welfare system. This included support to meet 'job search' requirements but also helping service users to understand benefit rules and correspondence from the Job Centre, particularly considering recent changes resulting from a major programme of welfare reform. Interviewees described how they also acted as advocates, liaising with the Department of Work and Pensions, and challenging sanction decisions on their service users' behalf. One organisation was supporting a service user to support others to understand the benefit system. The interviewee explained how facilitating peer support to understand benefits was a more effective approach in terms of both understanding the needs and concerns of other service users, giving purpose to the 'peer adviser' and recognising their potential to help other people:

'Rather than getting a professional in to come in and to say this is what Universal Credit's all about, we have people who are claiming Universal Credit telling somebody else how it works and what to do…it just works so much better. It gives a purpose to somebody, and the relationship's completely different…We should do more with that person…this person's got loads of potential' (Operational level worker, day centre)

Digital skills and access to technology

Digital exclusion was considered a major barrier to accessing support and moving into work for many service users – due to either (or a combination of) limited technological access or poor digital skills. In response to this, several interviewees explained that they were both providing access to computers and the internet and supporting service users to develop digital skills to enable them to both make benefit claims and search for work:

> *'If anybody wants to come in and they need to use a computer to do the universal job-searching then they can do that'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Several interviewees described how this provision had been developed in response to the new 'digital by default' approach introduced through recent welfare reforms, and the requirement for those service users claiming benefits including Job Seekers Allowance, Universal Credit or Employment Support Allowance to evidence job search through the online 'Universal job match' system.

Internal and external work experience and volunteer opportunities

Several of the interviewees described in-house volunteer and training opportunities offered to all, or some, of their service users. In some cases, volunteering and work experience had developed as part of the day-to-day running of the organisation's core operations – for example, cooking for residents, volunteers and staff members, cleaning, repairing and maintaining the buildings from which the organisations were operating. In addition, having service users sitting on the reception desk at a drop-in centre provided an opportunity for them to develop customer service skills as they needed to interact with a range of people coming to the organisation for various reasons:

> *'We have members of the public coming in every day… For someone to be able to sit behind the reception and be able to say: 'Hello good afternoon, thank you very much. Can I give you one of these leaflets?' It's all customer service skills that they wouldn't be achieving if they weren't volunteering'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Some of the organisations, or at least parts of them, were run as social enterprises. This created a wider range of work experience opportunities, depending on the nature of the business. Most of the social businesses described were based largely around the restoration, 'upcycling' and resale of second-hand furniture. This generated a range of work experience opportunities including training people in upholstery, retail, administration, deliveries and collections. Other social enterprises included landscape gardening, and running services around void clearances for local housing associations. Where multiple activities were conducted by a social enterprise,

service users were given the opportunity to rotate around them, enabling them to sample different work practices:

> *'They basically get to try different work practices… around upholstering, furnishing, joinery, bicycle maintenance, bit of metal working… so it's learning how to use the tools and apply them to make something, under a mentor system, so they're learning under a professional'* (Managerial level worker, social enterprise)

In some organisations, structured volunteer programmes were offered, requiring prospective volunteers to apply and complete a structured programme of activity over a (semi) defined period. Routes into these programmes were designed in part to mimic the application processes associated with mainstream employment (e.g. application forms and interviews) to provide 'practice' for those who had been out of the labour market for long periods of time. Programmes were also designed to take into account the other support needs and time commitments of the service users – both in terms of scheduling volunteer activities around Job Centre and health appointments, through reducing barriers to volunteering such as only requiring Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks where it was essential to the role, relaxing referencing requirements, and by providing a package of support alongside the volunteer programme to address wider support needs:

> *'There's an application form…it's very basic but it also gets people thinking. I think it says please list three key points of why you want to do [the volunteer programme] and it asks about any other voluntary experience and that kind of stuff… if they've got other things that they*

> *have to do, we'll prioritise their appointments and then we fit the volunteer work around it'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Volunteer and work experience opportunities were thought to have multiple benefits – they provided an opportunity for service users to get into a working 'routine', to develop new and existing skill sets, to gain experience and confidence and to access paid work opportunities:

> *'They are getting, hopefully, some basic but transferrable skills that might stand them in good stead when they move on.'* (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

Engaging in voluntary and paid work also provided an opportunity for service users to demonstrate their capabilities to prospective employers through recent work experience and references, offering a very practical way of addressing inequalities in the labour market:

> *'One big thing that people get when they join the [volunteer programme] is a reference as well. To have a reference is huge and a lot of people don't have anybody that they can use as a reference'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

In some cases, basic training (both accredited and non-accredited) was built into the volunteering and work experience opportunities on offer across the organisations sampled. Whilst serving the needs of the enterprise, this was considered an important part of equipping service users with the skills they needed to move into work:

'So everybody complains but everybody has to undertake a health and hygiene [qualification] *to go and be in the kitchen. Now, [it's a] bit like hiding vegetables in food, we say that if you don't have it you can't go in there and make yourself a sandwich when you want one… but actually when they've done five or six of those things, they can go and work in a café'* (Strategic level stakeholder, residential project and social enterprise)

In this sense skills training was mandatory, however unlike the training which claimants of social security are expected to attend as part of the policy of 'skills conditionality', this training was directly relevant to the activities in which service users wanted to engage. Here a level of 'paternalism' can also be observed – instead of helping adults to recognise the value of engaging in learning, activities were disguised like 'hiding vegetables in food' for the good of the service user. Whilst in the short term this approach may have been effective, it is unclear if such an approach would be helpful in garnering future engagement in learning opportunities.

In others this had not been developed although was being considered for the future development of the programme:

'Eventually I'd like to see that have an element of training and some sort of link to some Qualifications…providing some kind of training programme for people linked to Basic NVQs, that would be the ideal' (Operational level worker, day centre)

One interviewee explained that they had been able to facilitate access to opportunities to learn online, and that internal staff training available through the organisation's intranet was also available to volunteers so they could benefit from the same training opportunities as paid staff members. In some cases, time spent volunteering led on to accessing paid work in the organisation. Where examples of this were given, it was typically part of explicit ambitions and processes designed to help more people with 'lived experience' access paid work opportunities in the sector, in recognition of their status as 'experts by experience'. Several interviewees could offer examples of previous service users becoming paid staff. This suggests a genuine belief and willingness to invest in the skills and capabilities of their service users on the part of homelessness organisations.

Less commonly, interviewees explained efforts made to engage with employers external to the organisation. This ranged from support to identify volunteering and work placement opportunities available in the wider community (for example, working in shops, cafes and a local farm, often run by other third sector organisations) to building up relationships with prospective employers and directly brokering work opportunities for their service users:

> *'We have links with local employers who will take people on trials, on apprenticeships, and stuff like that… we have links with all the supermarkets… some smaller [local] businesses as well'* (Strategic level worker, day centre)

Support to build up confidence and self-esteem

Several interviewees talked about a variety of other activities offered by the organisation which were designed to build up service users' confidence and self-esteem. Whilst not always explicitly employability focused, it was felt that helping someone to improve their confidence was an important part of getting them ready for work.

> *'All the groups that we do are very informal but they're all designed to bring up people's self-esteem, people's concentration skills…working with other people, all things like that… they're all skills that they're going to need in the workplace'* (Managerial level worker, day centre)

This was the case for people with all levels of ability and work experience. As one interviewee explained:

> *'There's people often in many cases* [who have] *had professional careers as well and are very skilled and have degrees from a previous life and maybe a lot of that's gone from what's happened to them as a person as far as their confidence….and we need to build that up'* (Managerial level, day centre)

In some organisations support to build up confidence and self-esteem involved a structured and accredited programme. At other times, confidence building was supported much more informally, and often tied into activities centred on sports, health and well-being. In addition, for one interviewee, being able to point to the tangible achievements of service users whilst they had been volunteering at the organisation was key to building up greater confidence:

'We can say 'What's all this then? You've got PAT testing, you've got this and you've got that - you can go and get a job anywhere!' Because it's not always about their skills to be able to do something, it's about their self-esteem and confidence and awareness of themselves that they <u>can</u> do something' (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

8.3   Discussion

Drawing on new data from interviews with 27 homelessness practitioners, the above has provided an overview of the different activities taking place across organisations seeking to support homeless people to move into or closer to work, including the literacy and numeracy support available as part of this. Without participant observation, it is difficult to ascertain the exact extent and nature of this support, however common themes emerged across practitioners working in different organisations and at different levels, suggesting that a fairly accurate picture has been obtained through these accounts. Furthermore, because the topic of investigation is not something that homelessness organisations are necessarily expected to be engaged in, it is unlikely that respondents would have cause to intentionally deceive or exaggerate, thus the risk of 'social desirability' bias can be considered to be low. In fact, as has been found in other studies (see for example, Black et al., 2013), respondents may indeed have undersold the range of support and opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy in these settings, thus their accounts may in fact understate the extent of educational activities underway. To conclude this chapter, I will now consider what this research has uncovered about the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support in these settings, and whether this

is likely to be appropriate and sufficient to assist homeless people to move into (or closer to) work.

All of the organisations represented were in some way supporting homeless people with literacy (and some with numeracy). Given homeless people's apparent exclusion from mainstream learning provision, homelessness organisations have therefore been shown to represent an important means through which to redress the educational inequalities experienced by many homeless adults. That said, it was clear from the accounts of the interviewees that the extent of this support was rather limited. Most of the support available appears to be designed to temporarily *compensate* for rather than *address* in any sustained way any skills weaknesses experienced by service users. Beyond this, opportunities to participate in learning activities to develop these skills tended to be minimal, ad hoc, and often time-limited. Thus, within the employment and skills support currently offered across Greater Manchester's homelessness sector, the data suggest that whilst there are certainly some efforts to support services users in this area, limited emphasis is placed on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. It is also important to note that literacy and numeracy support occurred alongside a range of other interventions designed to tackle the labour market disadvantage faced by many of the homeless adults these organisations were supporting. The mix of support offered varied across organisations, lending support to Buckingham's (2010) observation that different types of organisations perform different functions and respond to different needs. However, whilst it is important that a range of support is offered reflecting the varied capabilities of and constraints faced by many homeless men and women as they attempt to enter the labour market,

the evidence presented earlier in chapter three suggests they will likely continue to be held back where labour market participation is an aspiration.

More positively, where opportunities were available to develop and improve literacy and numeracy skills, interviewee accounts suggest that these reflected many of the aspects of good practice identified in chapter four. A range of flexible and tailored learning options were offered, with a mix of one-to-one support and small class sizes allowing for support to be tailored to individual learners and allow for the development of communication and social interaction skills. Recognising the multiple and complex needs of those they are supporting, alongside expectations placed on them to attend appointments with a range of agencies, interviewees described offering flexible activities whereby service users can '*dip in and out of provision*' (O'Grady and Atkin, 2006). This approach operated alongside additional support to overcome situational barriers (such as access to technology). Efforts had also been made to understand individual motivations for learning and link opportunities for learning to service users' own goals and interests (Barton et al., 2006; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). Provision appeared to be rooted in the ways in which service users used (or wanted to use) literacy and numeracy in their day-to-day life, rather than based on pre-determined standardised provision. Of particular relevance to those concerned with the role of literacy and numeracy in the labour market, to ensure learning was relevant to the lives of service users, several interviewees also described embedding literacy and numeracy learning in other activities such as the day-to-day operation of the organisation or the social enterprise activities in which it was involved.

Furthermore, interviewees placed great emphasis on the role of professionals and peers in motivating homeless people to improve their literacy and numeracy, helping them to see the relevance of developing these skills in their everyday lives and keeping them motivated to participate in learning activities (Dumoulin and Jones, 2014). They described good relationships between tutors and learners, emphasising the need for supportive and patient teachers, who took the time to listen to the learners' needs and tailor support around them. Interviewees also spoke about the non-judgemental attitude of their staff and external providers and volunteers, and how important it was that they were both skilled in providing support and that they understood the backgrounds and experiences of the homeless people they were trying to support (Barton et al., 2007; Juchniewicz, 2011).

On the other hand, a lack of opportunities for formal accreditation is perhaps a key limitation where a key aim was to support homeless people into work. Whilst several of the organisations represented in the sample facilitated homeless people's progression towards the achievement of accreditation or qualifications where this was seen to be relevant to their goals and aspirations, many were unable to do this in their settings. For some adults this may not be particularly problematic - learning which is directly centred on their own interests and needs is arguably much more valuable than that which takes place in order to help them to pass a test and gain accreditation as the learning can be seen to assist and have a direct impact on a person's day-to-day life. However, where a lack of certification inhibits progression onto further study, this can be rather limiting. Although, in the absence of research exploring the relative merits of accredited and non-accredited literacy and numeracy provision for (potential) homeless

learners the relative value of each in supporting them into the labour market is largely an unknown.

Those narrowly focused on skills-based conceptions of literacy and numeracy would perhaps not recognise the range of support described above as legitimate opportunities through which homeless people might be supported to improve their skills. However, this is an important omission for those concerned with the range of learning opportunities available to homeless adults. Informal learning is the predominant form of learning which takes place within the context of homelessness organisations, and a failure to understand its prevalence and nature can mean that this provision is overlooked. Learning in such alternative, 'informal community settings', outside of the formal education system, plays an important role in offering opportunities to those who are unlikely to engage with 'formal' provision (Tusting 2003), in some cases helping individuals to grow in confidence as learners and move closer towards feeling able and motivated to access formalised opportunities in the mainstream adult education sector.

8.4 Summary

This chapter has uncovered a range of support offered by organisations seeking to support homeless people to move into (or closer to work) and shows how literacy and numeracy support forms part of this to greater or lesser extents. In terms of the nature of support on offer, interviewee accounts suggest that many of the various aspects of good practice identified in previous chapters are present in the support offered by organisations supporting homeless adults. There is therefore clearly a role for homelessness organisations in enabling

homeless adults to participate in literacy and numeracy learning, however the potential for this is not currently being realised as provision is often on a small scale, ad hoc, and in a precarious position. In order to understand why literacy and numeracy forms part of the package of support to varying extents, and identify ways in which existing provision might be enhanced, the following chapter identifies the range of factors impacting on support in these settings.

Chapter 9 Factors shaping the literacy and numeracy support offered by homelessness organisations

The preceding chapter demonstrated that whilst a range of literacy and numeracy support is offered by third sector homelessness organisations, it typically occupies a marginal and precarious position. In this chapter I consider why this is the case. Through a thematic analysis of interviewee accounts, several key factors shaping the extent and nature of provision in these 'educational institutions' are identified. These are: the needs and demands of service users; the roles, abilities and capacity of staff; organisational aims and structures; and national policies relating to austerity, welfare reform and adult education. I argue that this finding is consistent with Boeren's (2016) participation model outlined earlier in chapter four, which demonstrates that adult learning participation is shaped through the interaction of individual, institutional and country-level factors. However, reflecting the complexity of third sector homelessness organisations, and the fact that the provision of learning opportunities is not typically a key aim of such institutions, additional factors were identified which are harder to place within the three tiered model – namely, non-governmental finance and the time and expertise of volunteers.

9.1 Factors shaping the place of literacy and numeracy support

From a thematic analysis of the interviews, seven key factors appeared to impact on the role and nature of literacy and numeracy support offered within the organisations sampled. These were:

1. the needs and demands of service users;

2. the roles and capacity of staff working in homelessness organisations;

3. organisational purpose and structures;

4. national policies relating to adult education, austerity and welfare reform;

5. support from other adult education providers;

6. non-governmental finance;

7. the time and expertise of volunteers.

The first five of these factors map onto Boeren's (2016) model rather neatly: all can be considered either individual, institutional or country-level factors impacting on adult learning participation. However, the latter two are harder to place within the three tiered model. In the following sections I present evidence to support this. All factors are summarised in Figure 3 below.

Volunteers
- Diverse backgrounds, some teaching experience
- Inconsistency of support
- Management difficulties

Staff roles and capacity
- Typically non-specialist
- Few examples of professional tutors

Organisational purposes and structures
- Residential project
- Day centre
- Social enterprise

Alternative funding sources
- Time-limited
- Subject to competition

Institutions

Individuals

Countries

Needs and demands of homeless service users
- High levels of literacy and numeracy 'need'
- Importance of literacy and numeracy in the labour market
- Range of complex needs
- Exclusion from mainstream learning and employment-related support

National policies
- Austerity
- Welfare reform ('work first' and sanctions)
- Adult education

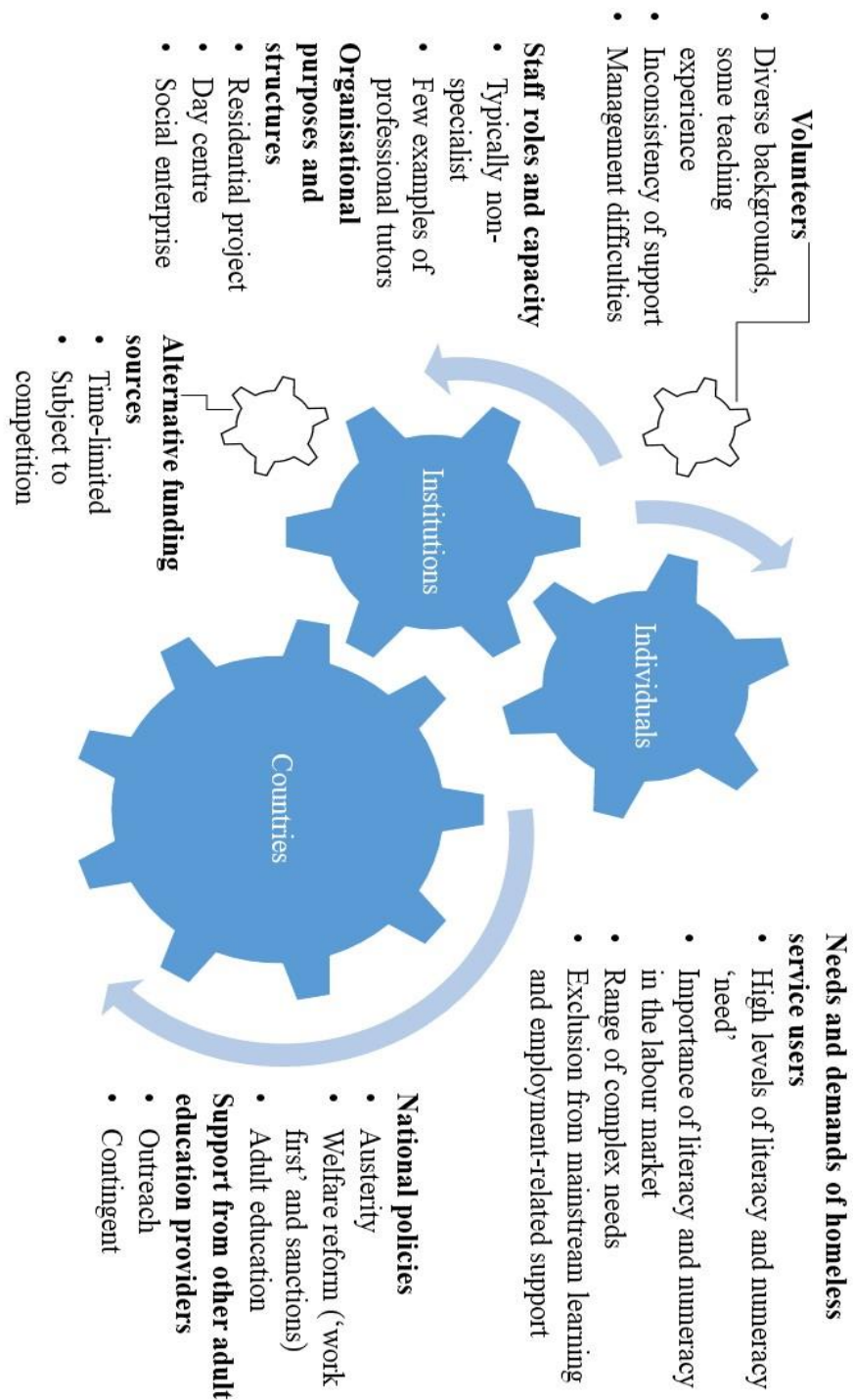**Support from other adult education providers**
- Outreach
- Contingent

Figure 3 Factors shaping the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support in homelessness settings (adapted from Boeren, 2016)

Individual factors: the impact of service users on literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness organisations

According to Boeren's (2016) integrative model, educational institutions are in part shaped by individual level factors as they seek to respond to the needs and demands of learners (or potential learners). In the case of homelessness organisations which are providing a range of support and services, such responsiveness should arguably apply to service users and homelessness provision more generally. In this section I explore how the needs of individual homeless people impacted on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision in these settings.

As shown in the previous chapter, the employment-related support offered by different organisations took a variety of forms. Within this, all offered support with literacy (and sometimes numeracy), although this was often rather limited. On this basis, one may hypothesise that support to develop literacy and numeracy skills is not seen as an especially important aspect of the assistance required to support homeless people into work (otherwise we would expect this to feature more prominently). However, the accounts of interviewees suggest otherwise. Below I outline their reflections on the importance of literacy and numeracy skills in today's labour market, on whether or not they believed the homeless people they were supporting struggle with their literacy and/or numeracy skills, and homeless people's exclusion from mainstream adult education provision.

Perceptions of the importance of literacy and numeracy skills in today's labour market

All interviewees felt that having a good level of literacy and numeracy was important for people to be able to succeed in the labour market. This reflects the range of workplace literacy and numeracy practices identified earlier in chapter three. Many spoke about the 'functional' benefits of literacy and numeracy skills: about being able to write application forms, to read and understand employment contracts, bills, and wages, knowing how much tax to pay, reading written instructions and communicating with people in the workplace. Several remarked that this was despite technological aides such as spell-check and mathematical functions:

'You don't have to be a mathematician, but certainly the basics of the maths. Without that, I'm not sure you can 100 per cent function in a working environment… Literacy, if you get written instruction, how are you supposed to read a written instruction? Or communicate back? You're not going to write the next bestseller… but there are the minimum needs to function in a working environment' (Managerial level worker, social enterprise)

However, one interviewee explained that, whilst important, having a good level of basic skills was not a panacea in terms of helping people to access the jobs market:

'*You can't get far without being able to write… if you're only on sort of Entry One or whatever it is you're not going to do well in a job, and you're gonna really struggle to get one. If you improve it it's not going to guarantee that you're gonna get a job but it's certainly going to make it more likely*' (Operational level worker, day centre)

Whilst interviewees were clear on the importance of literacy and numeracy skills in today's labour market, only a minority mentioned that employers expected and explicitly required people to have these skills:

> '*Regardless of the job role, employers are looking for people with basic literacy and numeracy skills… When I look through the jobs that are advertised, a lot of them – it's required*' (Operational level worker, day centre)

On the other hand, two interviewees felt employers would not reject a person simply for having poor literacy and numeracy skills, rather that they would look beyond this to a person's other skills, attributes and achievements.

> '*It might be a barrier… because people will pick up on poor spelling and punctuation…but hopefully there's more people out there who might think 'oh, do you know what? He's got this recommendation… it says in here he could improve on his literacy and numeracy but he's been involved in all of this… and he's not been too scared to write something down, even though he spells 'back', B-A-K"* (Strategic level stakeholder, residential project and social enterprise)

Whilst not explicit, this perhaps reflects a 'social practice' view of literacy and numeracy, which focuses on what people are doing with literacy rather than on 'correctness'. Although, it is important to consider that whilst such mistakes were not considered to be a problem in the supported employment offered by the social enterprise for which this respondent worked, they would perhaps be more problematic in the mainstream labour market.

Some interviewees explained that the level of literacy and numeracy needed to access the labour market varied according to the kinds of jobs people wanted to move into. In particular, it was felt that certified skills and qualifications were only required to grant access to certain jobs.

> *'If somebody is not planning on being a mechanic and they would be quite happy to be working in a warehouse, the level of numeracy that they have might be fine'* (Managerial level worker, day centre)

> *'If they do want to go on to work in this field* [as a support worker]*, there's always a lot of paperwork involved with that. So it would be a massive advantage for them to be able to do that to the best of their potential'* (Operational level worker, residential project)

This supports the argument that standardised courses or qualifications are not necessarily the most beneficial form of learning for everyone, and emphasises the importance of linking a person's motivation to the learning opportunities available (Barton et al., 2007; Duckworth, 2013)*.*

However, many recognised that there were literacy and numeracy demands in all kinds of jobs, their responses reflecting documented shifts towards greater 'textualisation' of the workplace (Scheeres, 2004):

> *'[E]ven if you're doing a labouring job… you're not just labouring anymore, there's always paperwork attached to it somewhere'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Some felt that improving a person's confidence in literacy and numeracy might help them to move closer to the labour market. However, interviewees were clear that the benefits of this could also be felt much wider in people's lives. Several were also keen to stress the value of developing these skills beyond work and employability. Rather, they highlighted the role that literacy and numeracy play in all aspects of life – for example to be able to budget and manage correspondence. This supports the notion that managing literacy and numeracy demands outside of work are just as important as managing them in the workplace.

> '*I think with being able to read and write the key thing is that you can start to do things for yourself... from benefits to getting a job to understanding what's going on around you*' (Operational level worker, day centre)

> '[Poor] *numeracy leads people open to certainly financial abuse more, and being taken advantage of. That you're more able to manage your money… is a key thing to survive in any environment now'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Moreover, developing literacy and numeracy skills, they believed, was an important part of building a person's confidence and self-esteem, helping to 'empower' people to feel like they had control over their lives and were able to live independently.

> '*Any progress you can make that challenges people's own perception of themselves is really important, even if they never get to level two. The fact that they feel that they're capable of learning those things, and can learn enough to function in a job the same as the next person… I think there's lots of different benefits to people accessing provision like that.*'
> (Strategic level worker, day centre)

In terms of their relative importance in the labour market, a significant minority of interviewees gave equal weight to literacy *and* numeracy skills. As one interviewee commented: '*I can't see how you can get by without a certain level of both*'. Whilst a couple of respondents gave greater prominence to numeracy, this was in relation to specific jobs and on the assumption that a certain level of literacy will have been reached:

> '*At a certain age, you are verbally literate…you can take instruction and you can potentially give instruction. Otherwise how have you survived so long? … Whereas numeracy, being able to count your money, check your bank account, make sure you've been paid properly, dealing with benefits, dealing with housing… I think numeracy is depended on more, has more of an impact than the literacy side*' (Managerial level worker, social enterprise)

The vast majority of respondents, however, felt that literacy skills were more important than numeracy skills. For some, this was due to greater perceived practical uses of literacy:

>*'I just think there's more reading needs to be done, more written stuff that's around than there is numerical need'* (Strategic level worker, day centre)

Others justified this in sequential terms: whilst they felt that both literacy and numeracy were important, they pointed to literacy competences required to allow the development of numeracy skills:

>*'If you can't even read, you're going to struggle sometimes to even kind of access numeracy'* (Managerial level worker, day centre)

For some, the relatively higher value they afforded to literacy was less about the value of these skills in functionalist terms, but was rather related to ideas about what was 'socially acceptable' and therefore the higher levels of stigma and embarrassment related to weak literacy skills compared to weak numeracy skills. This supports the notion of literacy as something more than just a neutral skill, but that it instead has a value that is socially constructed:

>'*Not being able to read and write cripples you in our society. The people who can't do numbers, in my view, are also crippled, but there's a lot of people getting away with it, so it's not as crippling. People are ashamed to say they can't read and write, whereas you get people boasting about the fact that they can't do numbers*' (Strategic level stakeholder, residential project and social enterprise)

>'*The one that really <u>gets to them</u> is the literacy*'. (Operational level worker, day centre, interviewees' emphasis)

In terms of the relative importance of literacy and numeracy skills to other kinds of skills and support to move into work, one interviewee emphasised the importance of the latter:

> '*You can get somebody feeling job ready and confident, and you can put them in a smart suit and send them off to a job interview… but once they're in that day-to-day, if you haven't got them basic skills, then you're gonna still run into those problems*' (Operational level worker, day centre)

Several interviewees also spoke about the importance of helping people to develop their digital skills, however the need for a certain level of literacy and numeracy was noted here. Whilst not all jobs demanded computer skills, interviewees explained how accessing statutory support and services increasingly required their service users to go online. This is considered in more detail later in this chapter.

> '[A]*ny job application now, I know you've got to read it… but then you've got to go online for job applications, housing applications… so again IT skills should be up there with the maths and English*' (Strategic level stakeholder, residential project and social enterprise)

Others explained their belief that 'softer', 'employability' skills and greater confidence and self-esteem could be equally as important for those wanting to move into work:

> *'We would probably say that confidence, self-esteem is possibly more important because with them you can get by'* (Strategic level stakeholder, residential project and social enterprise)

Overall then, the general consensus amongst interviewees was that having a good level of literacy and numeracy was important in order to succeed in today's labour market. However, this did not necessarily translate into acceptance of the commonly held notion that this could or should only be achieved in a standardised way and through certification. Whilst for some this might be important in order to progress to further learning or to access certain careers, for others improving a person's confidence with literacy and numeracy and helping them to be able to cope with everyday literacy and numeracy demands was considered more important than certification.

Perceptions of skill needs and other employment barriers faced by single homeless people

As shown by the literature review, the identification of adults' learning needs is not straightforward, and whether or not they wish to participate in adult learning is the result of a complex interaction of a number of factors. In addition, particularly given the multifaceted nature of the labour market disadvantage experienced by homeless people who are furthest from work, those supporting them to move into (or closer to) it, might consider that improving a person's chances in the labour market would be best served by the provision of other activities, aside from literacy and numeracy support. This might help to explain a lack of focus on literacy and numeracy skills within the overall employment and skills offered, as shown in the previous chapter. Having established that

literacy and numeracy skills were considered to be important in today's labour market, this section now describes staff views about whether or not their service users needed (and wanted) to improve these skills, along with how these skills needs are identified.

Identifying literacy and numeracy needs

Interviewees described a number of methods through which the needs and demands of service users were identified. Through the various referral, registration and needs assessment procedures employed by each organisation, the literacy and numeracy needs of service users were identified in a number of different ways. Skills needs were sometimes discussed directly, however in many instances these processes indirectly revealed literacy and numeracy issues, for example, as people struggled to fill in registration forms.

> *'You ask them to fill out a registration form - very basic: name, address, next of kin… the first thing I'll say is 'Do you want me to write it for you or do you want to write it yourself?' And at that point they'll say 'I can't read or write, would you do it for me?''* (Operational level worker, day centre)

> *'When we do our initial interview we do a pretty kind of comprehensive set of questions about somebody's living circumstances and their background…we do tend to build up a good picture of the kind of obstacles that somebody might have experienced in the past and might*

be going to experience again in engaging' (Managerial level worker, day centre)

Recognising the sensitivity required in helping service users to identify issues with literacy and numeracy, several interviewees explained that skills needs could be identified at varying points, especially if service users were initially reluctant to disclose that they struggled with their literacy to a stranger:

'Sometimes they don't put everything on their referral form. It might be not 'til they've come to [the organisation]*, built up that sort of relationship that things start to come out'* (Strategic level stakeholder, residential project)

All interviewees talked about the diverse characteristics and needs of their client group. In light of this, several respondents emphasised the importance of taking the time to listen to and get to know the people they were supporting, particularly given the varied nature of their service users:

'[T]here are people who have different varied needs [and backgrounds] *… so we have to take time to listen to hear what they say and try to interpret that and try to match their needs with the right services'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

'Whoever walks in that door, whatever problem or issue they have, that's what we deal with!' (Operational level worker, day centre)

Whilst all those sampled worked in organisations which in some way tried to support service users to access the labour market, work was not always an immediate aim or priority for the individuals they were supporting. Similarly, staff reflected that improving literacy or numeracy skills comes much further down the list when an individual does not have a home:

> *'I suppose numeracy and literacy comes a lot lower on the list, if you've got nowhere to live the last thing you're interested in is going on a reading and writing course. And it is, however I do believe that it's a massive advantage if you've got those skills'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

Nevertheless, for many service users, employment was felt to be either a goal or necessity, either in the immediate or longer term. Importantly, whilst some were perceived to be more or less 'work ready', it was felt that most service users were some distance away from the labour market.

In all organisations, interviewees explained how it was important to ensure that a service user's wider support needs were met alongside the variety of employment and skills support offered. This stemmed from recognition of the wider issues that many service users were facing, and reflected the fact that employment and skills did not tend to be the key focus of operations in many of the organisations sampled. It was also to ensure that all service users were not excluded from participating in the activities going on in the organisation on the basis of their wider support needs.

'[W]e have to make adaptations... if someone has got mental health issues by all means we'll have regular breaks, we'll make sure that you're in a good frame of mind. Take into consideration what people's barriers are and work round it individually' (Operational level worker, residential project)

The vast majority of interviewees believed that a significant minority of their service users had very poor literacy and/or numeracy skills:

'There are very few who have even finished school… there's such a huge need' (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

Staff explained how there were varying levels of need, supporting the notion that literacy should not be understood as a simple distinction between those who are, and those who are not, 'literate'.

'[There's been] *None that have been completely where they can't read or they can't write… but they've struggled or they've felt embarrassed about writing in case they did it wrong maybe or they didn't like the way they write'* (Operational level worker, residential project)

One interviewee felt that whilst some service users who struggled with literacy and numeracy would accept help, others would be unwilling to recognise what staff members believed were significant 'skills needs':

'We probably have three categories of people if you looked at literacy and numeracy across the board. We have a group who don't really have

any issues with literacy and numeracy, we have a group who struggle
terribly and need, and will accept, help. But then we have a little pot in
the middle who probably wouldn't accept that they have an issue full
stop' (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

Thus despite having identified a 'need' for literacy and numeracy support amongst some of their service users, staff recognised that this did not always translate into 'demand' for it. This may also explain attempts to embed literacy and numeracy learning into other activities as it was felt that service users might not engage in provision explicitly focused on literacy and numeracy skill development, as described in the previous chapter. However, on the whole, whilst staff felt that there could sometimes be challenges maintaining attendance, there was a demand for improving literacy and numeracy skills where available provision was appropriate to the needs of those they were seeking to support. As one respondent reflecting on a recent literacy and numeracy outreach activities delivered by a local training provider explained:

'*It was really good, really well attended, it was really well supported, and*
really successful' (Strategic level stakeholder, activity centre)

However, despite this engagement, funding was withdrawn due to local authority cuts. The impact of (a lack of) government funding is considered further, later in this chapter.

In addition, particularly regarding literacy, interviewees were conscious of the efforts of some service users to 'hide' issues they had with reading and writing.

'I think some people go through life pretending or just getting by because they can do the basics, but eventually something happens and it comes to light' (Operational level worker, day centre)

Thus, the accounts provide further evidence of literacy and numeracy 'need' amongst homeless adults, supporting a small but growing evidence base (Luby and Welch, 2006; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014).

A role for homelessness organisations in response to exclusion from formal educational provision

Alongside recognising both the value of literacy and numeracy in the labour market, and that many of their service users could struggle with these skills, interviewees also explained that homeless people were commonly excluded from formal educational provision. This further explains the decision to offer at least some form of support with literacy and numeracy in these settings, as third sector organisations step in in the absence of adequate state-sponsored provision. As already highlighted in the preceding chapter, most participants talked about the importance (or at least the potential importance) of offering opportunities for their service users to develop their literacy and numeracy skills (and access learning and skills support more generally) within the context of their own, or similar organisations. The organisations in which they worked, it was believed, offered a place in which their service users felt comfortable and accepted, supporting the findings of previous research conducted in similar settings. Importantly, being supported to learn and develop their skills within a

'familiar', 'comfortable', 'trusted', and 'safe' environment was a key reason why they felt such support should be offered in these specialist settings:

> *'People tell us that they don't feel judged here… they feel valued and respected and all the rest of it and that's what we want to do. Because some people don't feel that anywhere else'* (Strategic level worker, day centre)

Supporting earlier research findings discussed in chapter four, this was juxtaposed with the exclusion they believed their service users experienced from a variety of formal or 'mainstream' services (including, but not limited to, adult education). Many talked about the barriers to accessing formal adult education for the people they were supporting. A majority pointed to a reluctance to access support in an unfamiliar setting due to service users' low confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, interviewees also explained how the *nature* of support in their settings was shaped by their service users. As outlined in the previous chapter, interviewees described provision which was flexible and responsive, reflecting an appreciation of the multiple and complex needs faced by many of the homeless people they were supporting, alongside fluctuations in motivation and self-confidence, and recognising the range of barriers to learning participation that could be faced at an individual level.

This supports the notion that learning in such alternative contexts, outside of the formal education system, can offer important opportunities to those who are unlikely to engage with 'formal' provision (Tusting, 2003; Quinn et al., 2005).

> [T]*here's a real clear need for it to not always sit in college and learning environments… increased access to opportunities in different spaces…*

to kind of make it more accessible, and not always sending people to…

really kind of what they may view as intense adult learning centres and

activities like that because that can also be a real barrier for some

people' (Strategic level worker, day centre)

In addition, interviewees explained that providing support within their organisation also offered opportunities to 'catch' potential learners whilst they were accessing the service for another reason, such as to get a hot meal. For those with chaotic lives, some felt difficulties in remembering that sessions were taking place rather than an active reluctance to engage in such activities might present barriers to participation for homeless adults.

'Some of our service users live quite chaotic lifestyles and when you live

in that lifestyle, all days merge into one, so the fact that you've got maths

and English on a [Tuesday at 2pm]*, kind of becomes less of a priority*

than everything else you've got going on. Whereas if they're here

anyway, it meant people were regularly attending' (Operational level

worker, day centre)

The extent to which provision genuinely matched the interests and needs of service users is of course limited in the absence of consultation with homeless service users themselves. It could also be argued that such organisations have a vested interest in arguing that various services be located within the context of their particular organisations, especially within the context of a challenging funding climate. However, evidence from other research involving service users substantiates these claims (see for example, Luby and Welch, 2006;

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Juchniewicz, 2011). Moreover, the fact that engagement with these services is typically voluntary the very existence of such activities suggests that the provision available does in fact correspond with their needs and interests (otherwise homeless people simply would not engage with them thus rendering them pointless).

Here then, we can see examples of how, in a range of ways, the needs and demands of (potential) homeless learners (at least in part) shape the provision in these settings: it is there because there is a need for it, and it is flexible and tailored to the needs of the homeless people these organisations support. It may seem strange then, given the apparent skills 'needs' experienced by homeless people and the acceptance of the importance of these skills in the labour market, that literacy and numeracy support does not feature more prominently within the package of assistance offered by those services seeking to support their service users into work. Clearly, factors beyond the needs of individual (potential) learners are at play. The following sections therefore move on to explore the key factors operating at other levels which influence the support on offer.

Institutional factors: the impact of practitioners and organisational structures on literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness settings

Consistent with Boeren (2016), interviewees also identified a number of 'institutional' factors which shaped the nature and extent of provision in these settings, namely, the roles and capacity of staff working in homelessness organisations and the structures and aims of the organisations in which they worked. Evidence to support this is presented below.

Staff role and capacity

The sample includes staff with a range of job roles, working at different levels of their organisations – from project and support workers to service managers, chief executives and board members. The accounts of the interviewees suggest that the various specified roles staff were expected to take on, alongside their capacity to deliver, impacted on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support they were able to provide.

Most interviewees described in some way directly supporting their service users to move into or closer to work. This was seen by all interviewees as a legitimate expectation and part of the service offered by their organisation, whether it came from the aspirations and ambitions of service users themselves, or a need to support them to cope with the demands placed on them by an increasingly conditional welfare system. However, given the multifaceted labour market disadvantage faced by many service users (which often sat alongside other multiple and complex needs), staff felt that there was no one, obvious, solution (for example, improving literacy and numeracy skills) which might help them to move into or closer to work.

Several interviewees described supporting people with literacy and numeracy. However, whilst the exact mix of services and support varied across the organisations sampled, interviewees most commonly described themselves as 'generalists'. With a high level of autonomy, their role was guided by the diverse needs and aspirations of the client group, to respond to whatever service users needed help with, whether that was housing, issues with drugs and alcohol,

benefits, mental and physical health, or moving into work. As outlined in the previous section, as far as possible, the support they gave was guided by service users' individual support needs:

> *'You never know what issues you're going to be dealing with, because you don't know who's going to walk through the door on a given day. So you could be working with someone on a job issue and then someone in crisis comes through the door who's got something more immediate that needs to be addressed first'* (Strategic level worker, day centre)

Interviewees explained how this could sometimes be difficult, particularly where staff numbers were small and caseloads were high. However, staff described helping people with their literacy and numeracy where there was a need and they were able to do so:

> *'You just do everything you can to help someone - so if we've got chance to* [support people with literacy] *and we've got time to do it then we will'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

However, interviewees also felt that they did not always have the skills and expertise to support people appropriately. Most commonly, staff had backgrounds in social work. Several worked in probation and youth work. A small number had also worked in other sectors and roles including business, creative industries, and skilled trades occupations. Only one had received training relating to adult literacy, and no staff members were formally trained to support people into employment. Beyond those included in the sample, only two organisations directly employed tutors (in one case only one role was funded on a part-time basis and the tutor's role was primarily to support service

users to develop their ICT skills). Thus, whilst staff might be considered 'professionals' in terms of 'supporting homeless people', when it came to supporting services users with poor literacy or numeracy (or with employment support more generally), they were limited in what they were able to do. Whilst professionalism was observed across the sample in relation to interviewees' day-to-day job roles, staff did not possess the technical capacity to support people to deliver or facilitate literacy or numeracy education. Thus, whilst staff were expected to respond to whatever needs a service user presented with, it appears to have become the norm that they do not deal with literacy and numeracy in any significant way.

> *'I don't have the knowledge base to teach, so people aren't getting what they need'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

This is in contrast to the case of the organisation in which the pilot work for this study was conducted. Here, whilst still only small in number, tutors were employed directly by the organisation to support service users to develop their basic skills. This perhaps reflects the size of the organisation – with a national reach and large funding base, resources had been found to invest in such positions. Such resources, in contrast, may be more difficult to obtain in the smaller organisations operating in areas like Greater Manchester.

Organisational structures and functions

The nature and extent of literacy and numeracy support also appeared to be impacted upon by the structures and functions of the organisations in which the interviewees worked. Whilst all united by a common mission to support homeless people, organisational forms and functions varied significantly. As

part of their activities, all provided some kind of support to help homeless people to move into or closer to work. However, the organisations were all configured in different ways. The sample contained broadly three different organisational 'types' – namely: day or activity centres, residential projects, and social enterprises. Interviewee accounts suggest that these different configurations impacted on both the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support within each context.

In the day centres sampled, staff worked with a relatively large number of service users. In these types of services, service user needs tended to be much more varied, ranging from people in immediate 'crisis' to those with more settled accommodation, or engaged in active job search. Due to higher 'footfall', more 'potential' learners were in contact with the service, however attendance at learning activities could be more sporadic. Staff roles appeared to be more diversified in larger day centres – and here there were the odd examples of skills tutors and planned learning activities.

In the residential projects sampled, a smaller number of staff were working with a relatively small number of service users – this allowed for more opportunities to pick up on needs, develop trusting relationships, and support people informally with literacy and numeracy needs. Particularly where residents were not claiming benefits, support was less focused on assisting people to meet the needs of the welfare system. Similarly, where a transition to alternative accommodation was not imminent, housing was less of an immediate concern. Structured courses were sometimes more possible in these settings, as service users spent more time on the organisation's premises.

In the social enterprises sampled, a key concern was the successful operation of the 'business'. Reflecting some of the key issues raised in the workplace learning literature reviewed earlier (for example, Belfiore, 2004; Wolf and Evans, 2011), opportunities to develop skills through formal training were largely based around the needs of the enterprise, for example, the 'PAT testing' of second hand electrical goods to be sold in charity shops, and workplace health and safety certification. In addition, whilst here there were perhaps more opportunities to pick up on skills weaknesses and provide opportunities for development 'on the job', there was less time for structured courses, particularly during the early stages of the social enterprise. Service users tended to have more settled accommodation than in either of the other 'types' of organisations sampled.

In reality, the above are not discrete categories. Some organisations could be characterised as both residential projects and social enterprises, both activity centres and social enterprises, and so on, and this again appeared to impact on the literacy and numeracy support available. For example, where an organisation was providing accommodation but also operating on a social enterprise model, whilst staff spent more time with and perhaps were able to develop trusting relationships through which it may be more likely that skills needs could be identified, there was less time to spend on support focusing on the development of these skills given a need to ensure the survival of the 'business'. On the other hand, there were perhaps more opportunities to learn and develop skills 'on the job'.

In sum, in terms of institutional factors shaping the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision, interview data suggest that staff roles and capacities

along with the structures and functions of the organisations in which they worked play an important role. Staff reported supporting service users where needs emerged and they were able to do so to varying extents, depending on both their own capacity and the structure of organisations in which they worked.

Country-level factors: the impact of national policy on literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness settings

A number of country-level factors also appeared to impact on educational provision in homelessness settings. Central to the narratives of interviewees was the impact of the national policies of austerity and welfare reform on the services and support their organisations provide. Such policies impacted on educational provision both through a need to divert resources and introduce greater flexibilities in response to the impact of welfare reform, and through reductions in the resources that their organisation was able to access resulting from a sustained period of austerity. In addition, the influence of government adult education and skills policy could also be observed through a lack of state finance supporting educational provision in these settings, and indirectly through the reduction of outreach activities offered by the wider adult education sector.

The impact of welfare reform and austerity on skills support in homelessness settings

Interview data reveal how the wider welfare system impacted on the services offered by homelessness organisations as they respond to the needs of their service users, many of whom were struggling to adapt to a stricter and less generous welfare regime, and who do not tend to benefit from mainstream

employment support through the Job Centre or private sector Work Programme providers (Crisis et al., 2012; Batty et al., 2015). Staff felt that providing employment-related support was important in the absence of appropriate support from statutory employment services:

> *'You don't go to the Job Centre to get a job…You go to the Job Centre for someone to become a buggerance in your life and make life more difficult, not to help you'* (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

Welfare reform also shaped the content of the activities offered by the organisations sampled. Whilst a range of educational activities had taken place in the past, a number of interviewees explained how increasing amounts of staff time were taken up by helping service users to learn about and understand benefit changes, and advocating on their behalf to challenge decisions made by the Department for Work and Pensions.

> *'There's an element of crisis work that has become a priority at times… the number of people in situations where they've been going for week after week without money… that kind of work has taken a priority over the last year or so'* (Strategic level worker, activity centre).

This also involved putting in place or hosting training around improving digital skills in order to equip service users with the skills they need to navigate the new cost-saving 'digital by default' system for administering people's social security payments. In addition, some interviewees described needing to plan course provision around the conditions service users were expected to meet in order to access benefits. For example, provision was planned to allow for

missed sessions and lateness in recognition of service users' need to prioritise attending appointments at the Job Centre. This, it was felt, was not as well catered for in more formal adult education settings such as local adult colleges.

> *'We definitely operate on the understanding that that's gonna happen and we have all sorts of things in place to make sure that doesn't derail things'* (Managerial level worker, activity centre)

> *'It affects the attendance that we do have because they do have appointments on what they need to stick to'* (Operational level worker, accommodation project)

Alongside welfare reform the broader impact of austerity on provision in these community settings featured in the accounts of interviewees. Many of the organisations had experienced significant funding reductions over the preceding few years. In response to this, a number of interviewees explained how they had needed to diversify their funding streams to keep their service running. In some instances, new sources of funding had been used to support learning activities – a small minority of organisations sampled were successful in accessing funds designed to improve community health and well-being to provide learning opportunities for service users. Here we can see directly how government funding priorities (i.e. health and well-being) have shaped learning provision in these contexts:

> *'It amounts to maybe two or three hundred thousand quid over the last few years from health sources, that we've been able to use in relation to things around structured activities … like our* [gardening] *project, activities that will stimulate engagement… It's called health money, but*

it can be used for learning engagement' (Strategic level worker, activity centre)

Interviewees also explained how in the past they had been able to take advantage of free training from the National Health Service (NHS) for both staff and service users who were volunteering and hoping to work in the sector:

'[NHS] *deliver training to any client that's working with clients in* [local authority]. *That's going to get cut… it's really good for them to have their mental health level one, two and three, for their stepping stones, for their learning, but that's not going to be available'* (Operational level worker, accommodation project)

However, this too had recently fallen victim to austerity. Again, here we can see the fragility of provision in these settings and its vulnerability to inconsistent government funding.

The impact of adult education and skills policy in homelessness settings

Reflecting the lack of state-funded learning across the homelessness sector identified earlier in this thesis, most organisations in which the study participants worked were not direct recipients of any sort of statutory employment or education and skills funding. As the major funder of adult education activities, the absence of government funding perhaps explains why support in such settings occupies such a marginal position. Despite repeated assertions about the value of employment and skills support (including literacy and numeracy) in these settings, the government appears to eschew any responsibility to fund it. On the other hand, the very fact that homelessness

organisations are choosing to develop their own support outside of the adult education system (albeit often in an ad hoc fashion) suggests that whether or not the government is willing to support it, they still believe it to be an important part of the support needed by their service users.

There were some examples where organisations had been able to draw down Community Learning funds (from the European Social Fund) to directly provide learning opportunities. However, the specialist learning provider included within the sample explained how accessing funding which recognised the challenges working with their 'client group' was particularly difficult within the current funding climate:

> *'If we go to a hostel and two people show up, and the funding that we've used for that is based on a guided learning hour calculation… we've, you know, we can't… it's not sustainable for us. So we need to find funding that recognises how much it costs to do that well and that's a real struggle at the moment'* (Strategic level worker, activity centre)

Whilst a lack of funding was felt to reduce the extent of literacy and numeracy support their organisations were able to provide, more positively this also meant that they were not subject to the strict requirements that government funding is often accompanied by. Given the tendency for state skills and adult education funding to result in more rigid, standardised forms of adult literacy and numeracy provision (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006; Barton et al., 2007, Duckworth, 2013), the absence of such funding in these settings may also explain the nature of what provision does exist. Without the need to satisfy government standards and outcomes measures, these organisations had greater freedom

to develop support in a way which is guided by the aims and interests of learners rather than pre-determined frameworks which can have little relevance to them.

External adult education providers

The impact of national policy on provision in these settings can further be observed in the level of interagency working between the homelessness and adult education sectors. Recognising the limits of their own capabilities in supporting those with literacy and numeracy needs, interviewees described their attempts to identify and bring in resources from the wider community, in order to better support their service users. A number described how their organisations hosted external adult education providers within their settings. However, such activities were not underway at the time of interview in any of the organisations included within the sample, and in recent years, interviewees described a notable reduction in engagement and outreach work undertaken by local colleges and other external learning providers. Whilst many had hosted tutors from local education providers in the past, they were disappointed at the recent reduction or withdrawal of such support due to funding cuts:

> *'We used to have the* [adult education provider] *in. They used to regularly do stuff at* [the organisation]*. I'm going back several years…particularly literacy classes … but all that funding's gone'* (Operational level worker, activity centre)

It is interesting to note that literacy support appeared to be the most common outreach activity previously undertaken by adult education providers in these settings – but whilst literacy and numeracy funding has supposedly been

protected (at least for adults without level two literacy and numeracy), this protection does not appear to extend to outreach work in these community settings. Relatedly, only one participant mentioned 'Skills for Life', the most significant adult literacy and numeracy policy over the past few decades, reflecting that:

> *'All that concern with Skills for Life has gone … back then, you couldn't turn a corner without somebody telling you the stats about young male illiteracy levels and stuff like that. I don't hear it anymore'* (Strategic level worker, activity centre)

This perhaps reflects the lack of fanfare surrounding current adult literacy and numeracy provision, alongside cuts to the Adult Skills Budget highlighted earlier.

More generally, interviewees also felt that opportunities for learning within the wider community were becoming increasingly limited, thus limiting the potential brokerage role their organisations could play. Where respondents were supporting service users to identify learning opportunities outside of their organisation, several talked about restrictions on the courses available in their local areas. Most concerning was a lack of opportunities for 'older' learners:

> *'If you're under 25, you've got a lot more options…* [but] *if I've got somebody who's 27, who would benefit so much – they don't get a look in'* (Operational level worker, activity centre)

> *'There's a lot of money being spent on the young… and then the older ones are just being put through work programmes, and assumed that with a bit of*

effort they can be ready for work... well it's more complex than that'
(Managerial level worker, social enterprise)

This is a long-standing issue – Hamilton and Pitt (2011) for example, explain how support for younger learners has also often been prioritised over that for adults with complex and multiple learning needs. Furthermore, according to a survey of the homelessness sector in 2010, staff highlighted a lack of opportunities for over 25s (Homeless Link, 2010).

Despite policy rhetoric around the value and economic necessity of lifelong learning, for those who do not achieve at school or soon after, opportunities for learning and improving skills are limited. This is particularly the case for those unable to fund their own participation in adult education courses - interviewees identified a lack of free or low cost learning opportunities, reflecting trends towards increasing consumerism in adult education and a tendency for lifelong learning to reproduce inequalities through the continued exclusion of those with least access to education (Field, 2000; Bowl, 2012). They also highlighted a decline in opportunities to attend night classes - this was particularly relevant for those homeless people who had volunteering commitments during the day and so were unable to take advantage of concessionary opportunities taking place in their local area at this time. Restrictions also extended to the types (subjects) of learning opportunities available which were felt by one respondent not to meet the needs or interests of the homeless people they were supporting.

'[T]here are a number of other colleges who... have found money to be able to fund courses but they tend to be the same old same old... Want to do a level 2 in customer service? Want to do a level 2 in cleaning?

Well no, we don't really - it's all a bit mundane!' (Strategic level worker, social enterprise)

Overall, a range of national level factors have been identified which appear to impact on the nature of literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness settings. This issue is explored in greater depth in two forthcoming book chapters which draw on this research (Jones, forthcoming a; Jones, forthcoming b).

Additional factors impacting on literacy and numeracy support: volunteers and alternative funding sources

In addition to the above, a further two key factors were identified which impacted on both the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision in these settings, namely: the time and expertise of volunteers, and an organisation's access to alternative funding sources. These are now described in more detail before their place in Boeren's (2016) model is considered.

The time and expertise of volunteers

The accounts of the interviewees revealed a heavy reliance on volunteers to support their service users with literacy and numeracy (and the organisations' wider employment and skills work). In many instances, it was the time donated by volunteers that was integral to the ongoing provision of learning activities and support. Several interviewees described being able to draw on the skills and experience of trustees, or from church congregations supporting the work of the charities as and when literacy or numeracy needs emerged, others described volunteers who were retired teachers. One interviewee felt that the

range of professional backgrounds possessed by volunteers equipped people with the skills they needed to teach or train people.

> '[T]*here is this teacher, or ex-teacher, and he suggested* [developing literacy and numeracy support] *to us and we were like yeah, wonderful'* (Strategic level worker, residential project and social enterprise)

In many cases, volunteers had approached the organisation to offer their time to engage in general volunteer work or for specific volunteering opportunities advertised by the organisation which did not relate specifically to skills and learning support. However, after seeing the skills sets of their volunteers, several organisations recognised and had attempted to utilise these particular skills sets and as a result volunteers had provided literacy and numeracy support. Whilst ideally interviewees felt that volunteers with a teaching background were highly valuable, in some cases they believed that a volunteer's 'good will', 'initiative', and sharing the aims and ethos of the organisation was more important.

However, although the time and skills of volunteers was highly valued, a dependence on volunteers to support the ongoing provision of learning opportunities could make service provision inconsistent.

> '*He is a volunteer. So again it's hit and miss. If* [he] *doesn't want to come then we can't force him'* (Operational level worker, residential project)

This is perhaps at odds with the espoused importance of learning opportunities (and literacy and numeracy in particular) for homeless people by the homelessness sector and successive governments (Bowl, 2012).

One of the main challenges for the continued operation of the organisation's employment support activities was the recruitment and sustained engagement of people willing to come and volunteer their time. One interviewee also felt there was a lack of volunteers with the skills necessary to teach literacy and numeracy:

> *'We've got loads of volunteers but where're they gonna come from? You haven't got volunteer teachers hanging around, waiting to come in and do a bit'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

This perhaps exposes a high incidence of 'philanthropic amateurism' (Anheier, 2014, 214) whereby volunteers are expected to tackle social problems despite not being qualified or experienced in various aspects of the support they are providing. Importantly, one interviewee also voiced concerns about the appropriateness of support offered by sometimes inconsistent and inexperienced volunteers:

> *'Providing that one-to-one support requires a real kind of commitment from people which is difficult to guarantee… the last thing we want is those people having yet another bad experience of education'* (Managerial level worker, day centre)

In addition, interviewees described a number of practical challenges in training and managing volunteers. For example, the administrative processes involved in acquiring DBS checks, and providing training to suit the availability of volunteers with family and work commitments. One interviewee described how it could be difficult when individuals began volunteering at their agency with a

'single minded view' of what they were going to do, given fluctuations in service user engagement:

> *'It might be that some weeks they have two or three people that they need to sit with and do it… and the next week, the week after that, nobody... so trying to find people who are adaptable enough to say 'Oh well I'll just teach that person how to use that computer instead* [of literacy]'. [We need] *people who are quite adaptable'* (Managerial level worker, day centre)

It is interesting to note that volunteers were not mentioned as a factor which impacted the employment and skills provision available in the pilot interviews. This may indicate a key difference between the larger, more professionalised homelessness services operating in the capital, and smaller, more localised services in the Greater Manchester area. This underlines the importance of exploring the support and services available to homeless people outside of the capital, and cautions against excluding smaller providers from pilot activities such as STRIVE.

Alternative funding sources

In the absence of funding from the government, interviewees described drawing on traditional third sector funding sources (for example large grant-making trusts and one-off grants from local authorities) to fund learning activities. These income sources were typically time-limited and were subject to a high level of competition from other organisations and causes. As noted above, several organisations also operated, either solely or partially, as social enterprises. Whether or not programmes and support were in place were considered highly

contingent on whether funding was obtained from these other sources (particularly in the absence of government funding).

9.2 Factors impacting on literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness settings: an integrative model

The above has shown how a range of factors exist which impact on both the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support within the services of organisations which aim to support homeless people to move into, or closer to, work. Looking across these explanations, it appears that both the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy provision is the result of a number of factors, including whether or not:

- it is perceived to be something that service users need and want to make use of;

- staff members have the expertise and capacity to provide the necessary support;

- it fits into wider organisational functions and structures;

- financial resources can be obtained to cover funding for posts where staff have the capacity to support service users with literacy and numeracy;

- external adult education providers are willing and able to facilitate appropriate support within the context of these setting;

- volunteers are available and have capacity to offer it.

This corresponds with Boeren's (2016) model as these factors exist at individual, institutional and national policy levels. Whilst not technically

'institutional level' factors, the closeness of volunteers and alternative funding resources to the day-to-day operation of the homelessness organisations in question suggests that these factors should be located in the periphery of institutional level aspects of the model. Further supporting Boeren's (2016) model, and in line with critical realist principles, the factors identified at each of the levels were interrelated, underlining the importance of collective effort (and responsibility) of actors operating at different levels to ensure homeless people are able to access support to develop literacy and numeracy skills in a way that suits their needs. For example, if it was not felt that service users could make use of literacy or numeracy support, it is unlikely, were free provision from an external adult education provider be available, that such support would be established in their settings. Were the need established and free provision available, without organisational structures which lend themselves well to the development of learning activities, establishing learning opportunities may also be unlikely. However, not all the above conditions are necessary for the provision of literacy and numeracy support. For example, where staff do not have the capacity to fully support service users with literacy and numeracy needs, they may draw on the support of volunteers or external adult education providers.

From the accounts of the interviewees, the key factor influencing service development was the needs of homeless service users: all felt that a good number of their service users had poor literacy or numeracy skills and that, whilst it was recognised that there were challenges in motivating them to engage in learning to improve these skills, they would benefit from being

supported to do so. However due to the limited capacity of staff members (both in terms of time and specific expertise around supporting service users with their literacy and numeracy) and a lack of resources to cover such specialised positions (very few dedicated adult educators are employed in the sector), the support that they were able to provide through their organisation was largely dependent on the time and expertise volunteers and external adult education providers were able to contribute. In addition, whilst the varying structures of the organisations sampled each provide opportunities for the development of literacy and numeracy skills, the interview data suggest that these opportunities are not currently being utilised to their full potential.

In assessing the potential of such activities to improving the employment prospects and wider life chances of homeless adults, it is useful to consider the interaction of agency and structure. Through the actions of the staff we can see human agency in responding to the literacy and numeracy needs of service users, but also how staff actions are constrained by the wider social structures in which they operate. Whilst in some way attempting to redress the educational inequalities resulting from an education system which does not compensate individuals for unequal life chances, they are restricted in their efforts by a broader social context within which adult education can be highly exclusionary and is limited in terms of its content, mode and availability. Recognising that *'structure precedes action which… leads to a more or less attenuated structural outcome… which, in turn, provides the preconditions for action'* (Stones, 2001, 180) perhaps suggests that attempts by the homelessness sector to support service users to move into or closer to sustainable employment will be thwarted

as a result of structural factors including a commitment to work-first welfare policies and unchecked labour market inequalities.

This is not to undermine the work that goes on in these settings however. Within the context of such profound inequalities it is vital that spaces exist in which those excluded from opportunities available through mainstream welfare provision can learn, develop and be empowered to move towards an independent life. Moreover, holding the critical realist commitment that individuals not only reproduce but rather do have the power to 'transform' social structures and make changes in the world, it is important not to underestimate the value of such activities.

9.3 Summary

In this chapter I have presented analysis relating to the range of factors impacting on the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy education within the support offered by third sector homelessness organisations. I have identified several key factors, namely: the needs and demands of service users; the roles and capacity of staff; organisational purposes and structures; and national policies relating to austerity, welfare reform and adult education. I argue that these findings are consistent with Boeren's (2016) participation model which suggests that provision offered in adult education institutions is the product of factors operating both within and beyond the particular organisation in question. Additional factors identified were harder to place within the three tiered model (namely, non-governmental finance and the contribution of volunteers), but still be considered consistent with this model, as they operate within a broader social system in which the model is located. Adding these

further elements to the model help to capture a more complete picture of the range of factors impacting on education in these complex community settings.

Chapter 10   Improving literacy and numeracy learning for homeless adults: practitioner perspectives

The third and final research question guiding this study is concerned with improving the literacy and numeracy support provided to homeless adults in third sector organisations. Having identified homelessness organisations as a potential site for facilitating learning, it asks, *How could literacy and numeracy learning be better supported in homelessness organisations?* In this short chapter I provide an overview of practitioner perspectives on how literacy and numeracy learning for homeless adults might be improved, before offering my own recommendations in the following concluding chapter. These views are considered in light of the existing evidence base and theoretical framework provided by Boeren's (2016) integrative model, underpinned by a broader critical realist perspective.

10.1   Improving literacy and numeracy support for homeless adults: what should be available?

All interviewees were asked about the ways in which literacy and numeracy support for homeless adults could be improved, and what could help them to achieve this. Several key themes emerged through their responses. First, most of the interviewees said that they would welcome the development of more literacy and numeracy support for their service users within their settings. They believed that many of their service users who might benefit from support to improve their literacy and numeracy would be reluctant and struggle to engage with formal adult education provision. This was the case for a number of reasons including, service users' reluctance to access support in an unfamiliar setting, difficulties in committing to rigid learning programmes, and a lack of

provision which was developed in line with adults' motivations and interests. In contrast, their settings were described as places in which service users felt comfortable and were able to develop trusted relationships with empathetic staff. It was felt that homelessness organisations offered important spaces in which to both facilitate and broker skills support.

Second, interviewees explained the importance of developing a range of opportunities and activities to facilitate the development of literacy and numeracy. Interviewees stressed that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to literacy and numeracy provision was likely to be ineffective for the people they support. They recognised the significant diversity amongst their service users in terms of levels of literacy and numeracy need, learning styles, motivations and capabilities.

> *'I think for our client group it would be nice to have a variety of courses to cater for individuals, because everyone's different.'* (Operational level worker, day centre)

To this end, several respondents felt that more could be done to create opportunities within the existing activities of their organisations for service users to engage in literacy practices and develop their skills. For example, one respondent suggested asking residents to write the charity's newsletter, another was beginning to consider embedding numeracy education for those working/volunteering in their social enterprise café.

Third, whilst all interviewees felt that provision should be varied, the provision of one-to-one support for those with the weakest literacy and numeracy skills

was felt by some to be important. Several interviewees also emphasised a need to develop support that was regular, ongoing and long-term, with service users able to 'dip in and out' of learning depending on their wider support needs. However, as shown in the preceding chapters, all organisations struggled to provide support of a personalised and sustained nature. Overall, there was a sense that those with the weakest literacy and numeracy skills were not getting the support that they need.

Finally, several interviewees spoke about the importance of incentives for learning. Some felt that there was a need to reward those engaging and achieving in learning and skills activities, for example with gifts or days out. For others, the provision of opportunities for accreditation was important, although interviewees had mixed opinions on this. One was unsure whether or not working towards qualifications would motivate learners. However, several others felt that their service users would welcome and benefit from opportunities to take accredited courses with qualified tutors. Others ascribed less importance to accreditation, placing greater emphasis on the practical uses of improved literacy and numeracy skills, alongside improving the confidence and well-being of those who had struggled in this area. This reflects the way in which literacy and numeracy are valued in different ways in different situations, thus lending support to a social practice view of how these skills should be understood.

10.2   Improving literacy and numeracy support for homeless adults: how can it be enhanced in homelessness contexts?

There were a number of ways in which interviewees felt that homeless people's access to opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills within their

settings could be achieved. Unsurprisingly, given the importance of resources to the successful functioning of any third sector organisation and the services it provides (as described in chapter five), interviewees explained that improving literacy and numeracy support in their contexts was in large part dependent on accessing adequate funding to do so. However, interviewees were largely pessimistic about the prospect of obtaining additional government funding to support literacy and numeracy learning within their settings. Austerity has hit the homelessness sector hard at a time when demand for their services is rapidly increasing. Most of the organisations included in the sample had experienced drastic funding reductions in recent years, and were not hopeful about additional funds becoming available – whether adult education funding or otherwise.

One 'strategic level' respondent felt that they could do more to try to improve their awareness of available funding opportunities in the adult education field. Given that the provision of learning and skills activities are not usually the primary focus of organisations supporting homeless adults, adult education funding is understandably not something with which many in the sample were familiar with. It was felt that those working in homelessness organisations could do more to identify relevant learning and skills funding themselves, but also that the adult education sector should do more to promote the availability of suitable funds.

If funding *were* to be available, interviewees stressed the importance of realistic funding arrangements which recognise the challenges of supporting those with multiple and complex needs to improve their skills. Whilst accepting a need for some level of monitoring and conditions attached to government funds,

interviewees felt that the fewer the conditions imposed, the better, as this would provide the freedom to shape support around individual needs and would not exclude those who were perhaps less likely to achieve externally imposed outcomes.

In the absence of additional funds, a handful of respondents felt that organisations working across the homelessness sector could work together better in order to ensure that all those experiencing homelessness who also struggle with literacy and numeracy are supported as much as possible. For example, where literacy and numeracy support is being provided in one particular organisation, ensuring this is promoted to service users in other organisations would be an important way of opening up opportunities to all homeless people, and ensuring that there is enough demand to enable the continuation of existing activities. Whilst there was a concern that such co-operation may be hampered by the competitive commissioning environment within which many organisations were operating, one interviewee suggested that exploring possibilities for jointly representing outcomes for service users might offer one solution to this issue.

Other suggestions for improving the literacy and numeracy support available to homeless people involved the development of volunteer and 'peer learner' roles. One respondent emphasised how valuable it would be to have '*lots of well trained volunteers on hand*' (Managerial level worker, day centre). Another felt that they might be able to recruit volunteers from local education institutions:

> '*If it was something structured… if we had say like university students that were like doing a teaching degree and they want to come in and*

teach maths once a week then yeah absolutely'. (Managerial level worker, residential project)

Several interviewees suggested that more could be done to involve service users themselves in volunteering and paid roles relating to the provision of literacy and numeracy support. As noted previously, not all homeless adults struggle with literacy and numeracy. Indeed, the homeless population includes some who are highly skilled. With this in mind, alongside the growing recognition of the importance of service user involvement and influence in the support homelessness agencies provide, it was felt that this would be a successful method in engaging more homeless people in opportunities to improve their skills. One interviewee felt this would be particularly valuable where an individual had managed to overcome literacy and numeracy difficulties themselves as their first-hand experience would mean that they would have a greater understanding of the challenges adults face alongside appropriate support to overcome these.

10.3   Discussion

In combination with findings presented in the preceding two chapters, the responses summarised above suggest that homelessness practitioners are well aware of what 'good practice' looks like in the provision of literacy and numeracy support for homeless adults. Whilst in the main not professional adult educators, interviewees knew that the successful adult education provision in community settings requires flexible, varied and person-centred support which is not derailed by the learning barriers often experienced by those with multiple and complex needs.

However, their responses also show little faith in the government to support or enhance the existing provision available across the sector. This is despite decades of policy pronouncements about homelessness organisations as 'Places of Change', the need to locate 'Skills for Life' provision in these contexts, and more recently Matthew Hancock MP's assertion that:

> '*It is wrong that until now excellent education projects led by* [homelessness organisations] *have been denied government funding – today we are putting that right*' (Vivarides, 2014).

Recognising the significance of 'country-level' factors (Boeren, 2016), which in many ways create the structures in which homelessness organisations and the homeless people they are supporting operate, I would suggest that it is unlikely that without substantial support from the government to improve the literacy and numeracy 'offer', provision in these settings will remain piecemeal and highly contingent on the contribution of volunteers and short term funding opportunities. Government support is of course not the only means through which literacy and numeracy might be enhanced in these settings. As highlighted above, there are actions that could be taken by homelessness organisations, the broader sector in which it operates and the individuals who work and volunteer within it. Indeed, the range of provision which exists now does so despite the absence of government support. However, the structural inequalities reproduced by successive government action (and inaction) which result in homeless people being denied opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills require significant intervention on the part of national policymakers. This recognition has guided the conclusions and recommendations put forward in the final chapter.

10.4 Summary

In this chapter I have summarised the key ways in which the homelessness practitioners interviewed felt that literacy and numeracy learning for homeless adults might be improved in their settings. Drawing on the suggestions of the sample, I have identified several ways in which provision can be enhanced. However, I argue that whilst action at the organisational level can be positive, the extent to which meaningful learning opportunities can be offered on any scale with a chance of reaching the many homeless adults who might benefit from such support, will be limited without government support. Optimism from the interviewees about the potential for government to support them in this way was, however, hard to find.

Chapter 11   Conclusions and recommendations

In this final chapter I present the main conclusions and recommendations arising from this research. Drawing on the key findings emerging from both the literature review and the analysis of new data generated through this study, I consider what is now known about both the extent and nature of literacy and numeracy support within the context of third sector homelessness organisations, and the factors shaping such support. I argue that third sector organisations provide an important source of support for homeless adults, however the sector's role in addressing the educational and wider social inequalities experienced by many homeless adults is potentially much greater. In particular, it is argued that without recognition from policymakers alongside significant financial investment, the extent to which such organisations are able to offer high quality literacy and numeracy support and redress educational and economic inequalities is currently, and will remain, limited. The continued lack of investment in opportunities for homeless adults to develop their literacy and numeracy and other skills therefore risks a missed opportunity for homeless learners. After outlining the study's contribution to knowledge and theory development, areas for further research are also discussed. Finally, recommendations for both policy and practice are presented.

11.1   Conclusions

This research has considered the important role (both actual and potential) that third sector organisations can play in facilitating literacy and numeracy education for homeless adults. The research has been guided by three main research questions, namely:

1. What is the role and nature of literacy and numeracy education within the employment and skills support offered by organisations supporting homeless adults?

2. What factors shape the literacy and numeracy education offered?

3. How can literacy and numeracy learning be better supported in homelessness organisations?

In order to answer these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 practitioners working in the Greater Manchester homelessness sector. The sample was drawn from twelve different organisations of varying types and sizes, and included staff working at a range of levels (operational, managerial and strategic). Drawing on the perspectives of these staff, I have explored the literacy and numeracy support offered by third sector organisations which are supporting homeless people to move into or closer to work, alongside the factors shaping this support. I have also considered how support for those with literacy and numeracy needs might be improved going forward.

This research has found that as part of a wider package of support to move into (or closer to) employment, support for those who struggle with literacy and numeracy is a common feature in the work of homelessness organisations. Whilst sector surveys suggest that a significant amount of literacy and numeracy support is being provided in these settings, this research has shown what this looks like in practice. Support appears to mostly involve supporting those struggling to meet the literacy and numeracy demands of everyday life

(including, but not restricted to, looking for work), for example through providing assistance to read and understand official forms relating to welfare benefits and services. However, whilst less common, several interviewees also described a range of activities through which literacy and, less commonly, numeracy learning was currently (or recently) facilitated by the organisations in which they worked. These included learning 'on-the-job' through tasks involved in volunteering and working in social enterprises, working towards accredited qualifications, reading groups and creative writing activities, and more formalised, structured literacy and numeracy support. In a small number of instances this support formed a regular part of the service offer, however in most instances learning opportunities were short-term and ad hoc.

The research presented in this thesis has also uncovered that a range of factors impact on literacy and numeracy support and wider employment-related activities in these 'educational institutions'. Unsurprisingly, as organisations designed to support homeless adults, the needs of service users were an important factor shaping provision. Supporting earlier research findings presented in the literature review (for example, Luby and Welch, 2006; Dumoulin and Jones, 2014), staff believed that a significant proportion of the people they support have a literacy or numeracy 'need'. In addition, the importance of literacy and numeracy skills in today's labour market (as outlined in chapter three) was widely understood and accepted across practitioners working across the sector. Similarly, interviewees recognised several barriers to homeless people's participation in opportunities to improve these skills, ranging from individual motivations and confidence to identify and address literacy and numeracy weaknesses, to exclusion from formal education

provision. All interviewees felt that their organisations were potentially important spaces for either the direct facilitation or brokerage of opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills. On one hand, this explains why literacy and numeracy support exists at all in these settings, and also why the support available is flexible and adapted to the needs and motivations of homeless learners. On the other hand, given the needs around and importance of these skills, it may seem strange that the support offered is not a more prominent aspect of the support offered in organisations supporting homeless adults into (or closer to) work.

Factors operating at an institutional level can in part help to explain this. As has been shown, the roles and capacity of staff and the various organisational purposes and structures shape the opportunities for literacy and numeracy learning in these settings. Significantly, homelessness practitioners do not feel equipped to support homeless people who struggle with literacy and numeracy, and often support is dependent on support from on unpaid volunteers, and short term funding opportunities. However, consistent with a critical realist perspective, it is arguably factors operating at the national policy level which most convincingly explain why provision in these settings is not more substantial. Despite sporadic policy announcements about the importance of engaging homeless adults in basic skills support, this research has shown that literacy and numeracy learning in these settings is not being supported by government funding. The lack of government funding in this area explains in large part why only a limited level of support is available, yet also (and more positively) why the support offered is flexible and designed to suit and fit around the needs of homeless learners. If homeless people are expected (and indeed

want) to move into work, yet are excluded from formal adult education provision, there is a strong argument for enhancing support of this kind across the homelessness sector.

These findings are consistent with Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model. Individual-level factors (the needs and demands of service users), institutional level factors (the roles and capacity of staff and organisational structures), and factors operating at the broader national and policy levels (support from adult education providers, austerity and welfare reform) all impact on the extent and nature of support available in these settings. However, reflecting the complexity of third sector organisations (and the fact that educational provision is not their main purpose), the model requires some modification if it is to be appropriately applied in this context. Adding volunteers and non-governmental to the model ensures that the full range of factors impacting on work in these community learning contexts is considered.

11.2   Strengths and limitations of this research

The research has drawn on interviews with practitioners working in homelessness organisations. Drawing on these accounts, its aim has been to develop an understanding of the nature of literacy and numeracy education taking place in these settings, and the factors shaping this support. Practitioners are well placed to understand both the services and support offered by the organisations in which they work, alongside the needs (whether met or unmet) of their service users. In addition, practitioner perspectives are often neglected in research focusing on homelessness. However, whilst providing novel and sufficient data to answer the research questions and offering valuable insights

on the place of literacy and numeracy education within the organisations in which they work, several limitations must be recognised and taken into account when considering the findings detailed and conclusions proposed.

First, whilst a healthy sample was obtained, capturing the perspectives from those working in a large proportion of organisations operating across the Greater Manchester homelessness sector, it does have some limitations. For example, despite considerable recruitment attempts, it only contains only one specialist skills tutor, and no volunteers. Whilst a lack of specialist tutors in the sample reflects the very small numbers employed directly by organisations supporting homeless people, the absence of volunteers in the sample is more problematic. Given their significance in supporting literacy and numeracy in these settings, this is a regrettable omission. The decision not to interview the users of the homelessness organisations may also be viewed as problematic given that in many cases learners (or potential learners) were found to shape this support. However, I still believe that the decision not to include them was a valid one, for the ethical reasons discussed in chapter six.

Second, with regards to the qualitative data obtained, findings may be subject to doubt due to the possibility of bias. Data obtained from the interviews may contain misrepresentations or omissions, for example where the interviewer's knowledge on a topic is taken for granted, interviewees may omit important details, or participants may be unable to translate meanings into words. In addition, bias introduced through 'social desirability' effects, whereby participants describe their actions in the best possible light, may result in invalid inferences (Grace et al., 2012). Context bias may also have been a factor – all except one of the interviews were conducted on the premises of the

organisation in which the individuals worked. Whilst interviews were confidential and anonymous, this may have impacted on the degree of openness of participants. However, given that the topic under discussion was not a particularly controversial one (i.e. homelessness organisations are under no particular obligation to provide such support), 'social desirability' effects are likely to have been limited. Rather, the greater risk is that details may have been omitted, knowledge assumed and so on, particularly considering that informal learning often goes unrecognised (Falk and Harrison, 1998; Tusting, 2003; Chappell et al., 2009). Thus, fully understanding learning is difficult without direct observation. The findings here must therefore be treated with some degree of caution.

Third, the research presents a snapshot of organisations at a certain point in time. The activities of any organisation are not static but evolve over time in response to changes in the environment in which they are operating. Whilst this research has identified several key factors as important in shaping literacy and numeracy support, observing how the services they provide change over time in response to both factors operating at individual, institutional and national levels may more accurately help to uncover the influence of each on support in these settings. For example, as funding is lost and gained, or as approaches to consulting or co-designing with service users evolve, observing an organisation over time would allow more accurate insights about what results in support and services being sustained, changed or terminated (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, 8).

11.3   Contribution to knowledge and theory development

Through this thesis I have made a number of important empirical and theoretical contributions. First, through bringing together three distinct but overlapping literatures – namely educational research, homelessness, and the third sector, I have responded to Lancione's (2016) call for the need for interdisciplinary approaches to more fully understand the exclusion and disadvantage experienced by homeless men and women, and to identify potential solutions. Through this thesis I have demonstrated the complexities involved in understanding homeless adults' (non-) participation in education, but also the importance of ensuring that this group are supported to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, particularly when many are expected (and also want) to enter the paid labour market. Furthermore, in exploring the issue of homelessness through an educational research lens, this thesis makes a unique contribution in this field.

Second, I have generated new data which shine a light on a neglected topic: namely, the nature and extent of literacy and numeracy provision available to homeless adults in third sector homelessness settings, and the factors shaping it. As potentially important sites for the provision of literacy and numeracy support and adult education more widely, investigating what provision is available in these settings is important in understanding whether or not homeless adults are able to access literacy and numeracy support where they want or need to. Through this research I have demonstrated that whilst literacy and numeracy learning is supported across the sector, current provision is often on a small scale, ad hoc and in a precarious position. Thus, homeless adults who struggle with literacy and numeracy are not being adequately supported to improve these skills. Through exploring practitioner perspectives, the research

has also added to a growing evidence base which identifies literacy and numeracy 'needs' amongst a significant proportion of homeless people.

Third, the thesis has involved a novel application of a theoretical model developed in the field of educational research to phenomena occurring in the homelessness field. In analysing the new data I have generated, I have practically applied Boeren's (2016) Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model. Focusing on one particular aspect of Boeren's (2016) model (i.e. educational institutions), I have uncovered the range of factors impacting on educational support offered by this particular type of 'learning institution'. In doing so, I have demonstrated that her model has wider applicability beyond explaining adults' participation in formal educational provision, and in fact helps to identify the range of factors impacting on provision in informal community contexts. It has shown that, whilst some modification is needed to account for additional factors at play in these complex institutions, the model still remains a helpful way of conceptualising the way in which support is shaped by factors operating at individual, institutional and national policy levels. To my knowledge, this is the first time an attempt has been made to apply such a theoretical framework developed from the educational research tradition to phenomena occurring in the homelessness sector.

Furthermore, the findings lend support to Boeren's (2016) suggestion that multiple aspects of her model of adult learning participation interact – for example the needs of learners are impacted on by national policies of welfare reform, the services offered by homelessness organisations are shaped by the need to respond to these and by the broader context of austerity in which they

operate, and the inaction of national policymakers to support work on the sector can be seen to have contributed to the limited support available. Consistent with this, I have also argued that Boeren's (2016) model can be enhanced by being placed within an overarching critical realist framework which emphasises not only the interaction of different factors but also acknowledges the dominance of structural factors in explaining social phenomena. For example, it appears to be the case that, particularly for the smaller third sector homelessness organisations operating outside of the capital (although this does apply to them all), the relationship between country level factors on one hand and individual and institutional level factors on the other, is rather one directional. Outside of the larger, high profile, predominantly London-based organisations, these institutions seem to have a negligible impact on 'country level' factors – whilst it is possible to conceive that the lobbying activities of larger, higher profile national organisations have resulted in at least some funding for basic skills provision (for example the STRIVE pilot taking place in Crisis and St Mungo's), as a whole, the sector does not appear to have much influence over adult education policy and funding. This is consistent with the critical realist tendency to ascribe greater weight to the role of dominant economic and social structures in terms of shaping social phenomena. This has led me to conclude that whilst organisations have demonstrated a propensity to develop literacy and numeracy support, while government policy and related funding does not recognise, reward and support such provision, it seems likely to remain piecemeal and highly contingent on numerous factors including the contribution of volunteers and short term grants-based funding opportunities.

The final, and perhaps most important contribution, is that this research identifies ways in which educational provision for homeless adults might be improved or enhanced in future. Recognising the influence of different factors on provision in these settings, the recommendations for policy and practice presented below are made which look to make changes on a range of levels.

11.4 Implications for further research

Both the review of existing literature and the primary research presented here suggest several key areas for further research and scholarship. In general, there is a dearth of research which focuses on homeless learners (or potential learners). Only a handful of studies have focused on homeless adults' education and training, therefore there is a strong need to build up the evidence base in this area (for example around perceptions of and motivations to engage in learning, experiences of support offered, barriers to learning participation and so on). There is also a need to explore adult educator and volunteer experiences of teaching in homelessness settings – how they have experienced teaching in these and other 'non-traditional' settings and how they might be better supported to do so. Whilst this research has provided insights into what homelessness practitioners believe is needed to support their service users to develop their literacy and numeracy skills (which complements that found through work with marginalised adult learners more generally), it does not offer a direct assessment of the best way to support homeless people to develop these skills. There is therefore also a need to develop the evidence around and promote 'what works' in supporting homeless adults to both develop their literacy and numeracy skills, and moving into or closer to work. To this end, robust and transparent evaluations of approaches to supporting literacy and

numeracy activities in homelessness settings should be conducted, published and disseminated widely in order to spread good practice in this area. In addition, key to critical realist explanations of social phenomena is the ongoing testing and development of hypotheses. Following from the research presented here, more in-depth studies of organisations which include participant observation and interviews over time might provide a useful route of inquiry in order to test the validity of the finding that educational provision in homelessness organisations can be largely explained through the application of Boeren's (2016) model.

11.5 Implications for policy and practice

UK policymakers appear unwavering in their commitment to the notion that moving into paid work is the key to tackling homelessness and other forms of social exclusion. Successive governments have also held that literacy and numeracy or 'basic' skills are the foundation to individual triumph in the paid labour market. The findings of this research should therefore give them considerable cause for concern. If homeless people are expected to move into work *and* if literacy and numeracy are held to be key to labour market success, their exclusion from appropriate opportunities to improve these skills is a clear policy failure. Not only are homeless people typically excluded from mainstream provision to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, this research has shown how that provided by third sector organisations is often minimal and exists on a highly precarious footing.

Homelessness organisations are a potential space through which educational inequalities can be challenged and redressed. This research has shown that

elements of good practice in adult education exists (albeit to varying extents) across the work of the sector. These organisations offer opportunities to homeless adults to learn flexibly, at their own pace, and to pursue learning that corresponds to their needs and interests. The supportive and non-judgemental nature of those working in these third sector services further lends itself to the creation of a space in which homeless adults can begin to see themselves as learners, despite what have often been negative experiences in the system of mainstream schooling. Furthermore, that homeless people voluntarily participate in the employment-related support available in these contexts is testament to the value of such provision, particularly in light of high sanctioning rates for homeless people who struggle to engage with or meet the expectations of mandatory employment-related support from the state.

Whilst the value of education should not be reduced solely to the instrumental purpose of accessing paid work, improving literacy and numeracy skills can help homeless people to improve their chances of success in the labour market. However, through developing support in line with the needs and aspirations of their service users, the accounts of practitioners support the argument that standardised provision leading to qualification is not necessarily the most appropriate form of learning activity in which homeless adults can engage to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, even where an adult's ultimate aim is to move into work. Instead, an approach which is tailored to their individual barriers, aspirations and capabilities is key to ensuring homeless adults are supported to develop their skills.

11.6   Recommendations

Following the completion of the thesis, I intend to disseminate the findings widely to both policymakers and practitioners in order that they are made aware of the extent of provision currently available to homeless adults, and the various ways through which literacy and numeracy support might be enhanced in these settings. As new funding becomes available (for example, through STRIVE or local funding sources) it is important to take stock of the current state of provision – to consider whether the support currently provided is fit for purpose and, if not, what could be done to improve the literacy and numeracy support available to homeless adults. Given continued moves towards greater local decision-making, and associated calls for evidence to better inform policy-making at the local level, by focusing on a particular area's homelessness sector, it is hoped that the research presented here can help to inform policy and practice in Greater Manchester. That said, the emerging findings are likely to be relevant to anyone interested in or working within this field. Since the research was conducted, the homelessness sector in Manchester has begun to organise at a local level to campaign and influence policy. For example, the Manchester Homelessness Charter asserts that '*everyone who is homeless should have a right to… equality of opportunity to employment, training, volunteering, leisure and creative activities*'.[8] It is hoped that this research will be of use to these and other groups seeking to improve employment and skills opportunities for homeless adults in Manchester and further afield. Below I outline several recommendations for stakeholders in government, the adult education sector and the homelessness sector.

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[8] See https://charter.streetsupport.net/read-the-charter/ accessed 10/11/2017

For the government

Government must ensure that opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills are adequately funded across the homelessness sector. It should reflect and act on the fact that despite sporadic policy announcements about the importance of ensuring homeless adults are given opportunities to develop these skills, a review of the Greater Manchester homelessness sector reveals a dearth of government funding in this area. Following completion of STRIVE pilots, the government should lay out further plans for funding support elsewhere in England.

Given increasing moves towards devolved skills funding, local government must recognise its responsibilities in this area, and outline how homeless people will be supported to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

Available funding must recognise the challenges involved in supporting homeless people to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and build on existing provision which has been developed in response to service user needs, capabilities and motivations.

For the adult education sector

Those administering skills funding at the local level should ensure that existing opportunities for community learning funding are effectively promoted to those working with homeless adults, and where necessary provide support with the application process.

Formal adult education institutions should identify and (where possible) remove barriers to learning participation in their own organisations for those with multiple and complex needs

Formal adult education institutions should ensure that relevant outreach opportunities are communicated clearly to the homelessness sector.

Local colleges, universities and other learning institutions should explore ways in which they could support literacy and numeracy provision in homelessness and other community settings, for example through volunteer brokerage opportunities, thereby increasing the supply of trained volunteer skills tutors available in homelessness settings

Staff working in homelessness organisations should be able to access free (or subsidised) training in adult literacy and numeracy education

Develop courses specifically for those working with homeless or other 'marginalised groups' to support basic skills training

For the homelessness sector

Homelessness organisations should explore the ways in which existing activities can be used more effectively to develop learning opportunities for their service users e.g. social enterprise activities, service user involvement in newsletters and other aspects of the organisation.

Explore opportunities for collaboration between different homelessness organisations. For example, where organisations are unable to fund their own skills tutors, explore the possibility of co-funding models, or promote literacy and numeracy activities to others.

Homelessness organisations should explore the potential for developing 'peer support' opportunities for those homeless people who do not struggle with literacy and numeracy, including those who have overcome poor literacy and numeracy as an adult – for example, fund or identify opportunities for service users to train as 'literacy (or numeracy) champions'.

Explore opportunities for the development of an online 'community of practice' for anyone engaged in (or wanting to engage in) literacy and numeracy support and wider educational opportunities for homeless adults.

11.7   Summary

This chapter has presented the main conclusions and stated the contribution to scholarship arising from this research. In this thesis I have demonstrated the varied educational activities currently underway in third sector homelessness organisations. I have argued that this is an important source of support for homeless adults, however the sector's role in addressing the educational and wider social inequalities experienced by many homeless adults is potentially much greater. Recognising the various factors at play in whether or not adults are able to participate in learning, I conclude that a number of things can be done within existing structures to enhance the literacy and numeracy support provided in third sector organisations seeking to support homeless people to move into (or closer to) work. However, I have also argued that without recognition by policymakers and significant financial investment, the extent to which such organisations are able to offer high quality literacy and numeracy

support and redress educational and economic inequalities is currently, and will remain, limited. The continued lack of investment in opportunities for homeless adults to develop their literacy and numeracy and other skills risks a missed opportunity for homeless learners.

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Appendix One: Research instruments

A.1 Participant information sheet

Research project on literacy and numeracy support in homelessness organisations

You are invited to take part in a research study on the role of literacy and numeracy support within the employment and skills services offered by homelessness organisations. This is part of a PhD being conducted within the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University. Before you decide about whether to take part it's important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it would involve for you. Please read the following information carefully, and ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information (contact details below).

What's the purpose of the study?

My PhD thesis seeks to uncover how employment and skills support is shaped in organisations supporting homeless adults, and the place of literacy and numeracy education within this.

Why have I been invited?

To understand how employment and skills support is shaped, the study is based on the perspectives of people working at all levels of an organisation. As such, I am inviting for interview a variety of staff with strategic, managerial and client-facing roles.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If you withdraw from the study within two weeks of your interview we will not use your data in the project; after this point the data will remain in use.

What will taking part involve for me?

If you are willing to be interviewed we can schedule a time and venue that is convenient for you. The interview itself will be audio-recorded (with your permission) and later transcribed. All data will be anonymised and stored securely. Neither your name, nor that of the organisation in which you work will be included in any outputs from the research process. However, within organisation anonymity is difficult to guarantee – in recognition of this, interview transcripts will be shared with interviewees in order that content can be verified and any alterations can be made up to one month after transcript receipt.

Interviews are expected to last no longer than 45 minutes, and will cover whether or not those working in homelessness organisations believe supporting clients to improve their literacy and numeracy skills is an important part of helping them to access the labour market, their beliefs about the relative importance of this compared to other forms of employment and skills support, how clients can be effectively supported to develop these skills, and whether or not they are able (individually and/or as an organisation) to help their clients given specific job roles/the structure of the organisation/resource constraints etc.

The information given will be used in the researchers' PhD thesis and may also be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher.

Many thanks for taking time to read this information sheet.

Katy Jones
Department of Educational Research
Lancaster University
Email: k.e.jones@lancaster.ac.uk
Tel: 07541202655

If you have any concerns about this research that you would like to discuss with someone other than the researcher, you may contact:

Professor Carolyn Jackson
Department of Educational Research
Lancaster University
Email: c.jackson2@lancaster.ac.uk
Tel: 01524 592883

A.2   Consent form

Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

Project Title: The role and nature of literacy and numeracy education within the employment and skills support offered by organisations supporting single homeless adults

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Name of Researcher: Katherine (Katy) Jones

Please

initial box

1.   I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated July 2015 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

☐

3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher.

☐

4. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations.

☐

5.   I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____ _____ _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

When completed, please return to the researcher. One copy will be given to the participant and the original to be kept securely in the file of the researcher at: The University of Salford, M6 6PU

A.3   Interview topic guide

1. Background: Organisation and role

- General work/history of the organisation (*brief – ethos and values*)

- Nature of client group

- Specific role within organisation (*ask about work history and background – including training, work histories, experience*)

2. Employment support (general)

- What support does the organisation offer? (prompt: job search/application/on work entry/on losing work)

- Is this support provided in house or through links with other organisations?

- What and who influences the level and kind of support available?

a) *Internal factors – management/strategic processes, staff background (+ autonomy/collaboration), user led/personalised, resources*
b) *External factors – funding (level and requirements), networks, employers, knowledge of government agendas/research*

- Perspectives on support/policies in place

3. Literacy and numeracy

- Do you provide literacy and numeracy support?

If yes:

- Is this support provided in-house or through links with other organisations? *Identify any links to mainstream colleges/tutors – benefits/limitations of this?*

- What does this involve? (*Approach to adult literacy and numeracy education – flexible ie able to drop out/re-join, personalised, embedded in other work activities, how is progress assessed- national qualifications? Client feedback?*)

- How is this determined/shaped?

a) *Internal factors – staff background (+ autonomy/collaboration), user led/personalised, resources*

b) *External factors – funding (level and requirements), networks, employers, knowledge of government agendas/research*

Do you think the support offered is effective? What works i.e. previous provision/approach

Appendix Two: Coding Framework

RQ1: What is the role and nature of literacy and numeracy education within the employment and skills support offered by organisations supporting single homeless adults?

a) ***What emphasis do homelessness organisations give to supporting clients to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, within the employment and skills support they offer?***

Type of employment and skills support offered (excluding literacy and numeracy)

Support_advice	*Where services are offering advice and guidance relating to moving into or closer to work*
Support_CV	*Where services are supporting service users to write CVs and job applications (this may be in relation to both literacy skills and CV lay out/presentation etc)*
Support_exp_int	*Where services have created in-house work experience/volunteer opportunities (includes opportunities to get work references from the organisation)*
Support_exp_ext	*Where services have helped service users to identify work experience/volunteer opportunities at other external organisations/employers*
Support_paid_emp	*Where services have created paid employment opportunities which are ring-fenced for those with 'lived experience' of homelessness*
Support_voc_acc	*Where accredited vocational training is offered*
Support_voc_non-acc	*Where non-accredited vocational training is offered*

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Support_confidence	*Where services offer support which aims to build service users' motivation and confidence, including mentoring and coaching*
Support_IT	*Where services offer IT support*
Support_benefits	*Where services support their service users to access unemployment benefits (including form-filling, accessing benefits online, advice on entitlements, challenging/coping with sanctions etc)*
Support_holistic	*Where employment and skills support is offered as part of holistic/person-centred support package*
Support_Variety	*Where services focus on offering a variety of services/activities*
Support_signpost	*Where services signpost their service users to other agencies in order to help them to move into or closer to work*

Literacy and numeracy support offered

Support_lit service	*Where literacy support is currently offered by the*
Support_num	*Where numeracy support is currently offered by the service*
Support_lit_hist	*Where organisations have offered literacy support in the past (historic)*
Support_num_hist	*Where organisations have offered numeracy support in the past (historic)*
Support_lit_fut	*Where organisations would like to offer (or offer more) literacy support in the future*
Support_num_fut	*Where organisations would like to offer (or offer more) numeracy support in the future*

b) **Where literacy and numeracy education does form part of a homelessness organisation's employment and skills offer, what form does this take?**

LN_Nature	*General descriptor of the nature of literacy and numeracy support offered*

LN_Structured	*Where a structured programme is offered to improve literacy and/or numeracy skills*
LN_informal	*Where support is offered on an informal basis*
LN_indiv	*Where support is offered on a one-to-one basis*
LN_group	*Where support is offered to a group of service users*
LN_curric	*Where a set curriculum is delivered to learners*
LN_tailored individuals	*Where support/curriculums are tailored to individuals*
LN_Hstaff	*Where support is offered by in-house staff*
LN_college_teach	*Where support is provided by teachers from local college/training provider*
LN_trained_staff	*Where support is provided by trained tutors*
LN_non-specialist staff	*Where support is provided by non-specialist support*
LN_accredited	*Where the support offered is accredited*
LN_non-accredited	*Where the support offered is non-accredited*
LN_embed	*Where literacy and numeracy support is embedded into other activities/support*
LN_freq	*Frequency of literacy and numeracy support*
LN_creative	*Where creative writing has been used to facilitate the development of literacy and numeracy skills*
LN_digital	*Where literacy and numeracy support has been offered via a digital medium*
LN_context	*Learning context – refers to where the support takes place e.g. in a local college or at the homelessness organisation*
Teacher_Learner	*Nature of teacher/learner relationships*

RQ2: How, and by whom, is the employment and skills support offered by homelessness organisations (including literacy and numeracy education) shaped?

Org_ethos   _Organisational history, aims and ethos (e.g. sustained change/transformation rather than 'edgework')_

User_need   _Awareness, identification and response to user need (incld. Nature of the client group and person-centred support)_

Lit_vs_Num   _Perceived importance of literacy compared to numeracy (and vice versa)_

LN_vs_other   _Perceived importance – literacy and numeracy support vs other forms of employment and skills support_

Per_Resp   _Perceived responsibility (i.e. whose job is it to support homeless adults to develop their literacy and numeracy skills – third sector, adult education, government)_

Learn_context   _Learning context_

Policy_context   _Wider policy contexts – welfare reform, health and well-being, devolution_

Resources and capacity

Funding_avail   _Where/how the availability of funding shapes the support offered_

Funding_nature   _Where/how the nature and source of funding (government, big lottery, grants, contracts, commissioning) shapes the support offered_

Prof_exp   _Where/how the professional experience of staff shape the support offered_

Staff_skills   _Where staff literacy and numeracy levels are perceived to impact on the support offered_

Volunteers   _Where the skills, expertise, and experience of volunteers shape the support offered_

Networks and sector relationships

Partnerships   _Where/how support is shaped by partnerships with other organisations (both other homelessness organisations and others)_

Aware_local	*Where/how the awareness of other services available in the local area shapes the support offered*
Net_AE	*Where/how relationships with the adult education sector (local colleges and training providers) shape the support offered*
Emp_dem	*Where/how knowledge of employer demands shapes the support offered*
Practical_rationale	*Types of vocational training selected for nature i.e. easy and practical, and low start-up costs*

b) ***How do these factors influence the nature of literacy and numeracy support offered?***

[See above + Open coding]

RQ3: How could literacy and numeracy education be better supported in homelessness organisations?

Fund_Res	*Funding and resources*
Comm_AE	*Better communication with adult education sector*
Opps_sharing	*Opportunities for support and sharing ideas*
Opps_small	*Opportunities for local smaller organisations*