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Adult Status, Students with Learning Difficulties and the Basic Skills Curriculum.

Joan Hilary Beverley

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Abstract.

The research examines the adult status of those people with learning difficulties both within and outside adult education. Being adult is considered against Knowles' (1990) definition of adult through the research literature and empirical research.

The research literature is used to investigate the history of how those adults with learning difficulties have been regarded in and treated by society and is used to consider terminology, legislation and the concept of 'difference'. What emerges is the notion that those with learning difficulties have been perceived as a group apart. The empirical research tested contemporary perceptions.

The empirical research poses two key questions: what factors do we actually use to distinguish children from adults and, secondly, how adults with learning difficulties perceived themselves. Data to determine this was obtained by a picture sorting exercise to identify adults, an innovative approach to enable all to participate, and semi-structured interviews with groups of young people and adults with and without learning difficulties. The same research approaches were used with all respondents irrespective of variations in cognitive ability.

The empirical research also examined the views of tutors within the Basic Skills sector in one unitary authority regarding the inclusion in classes of those with learning difficulties. Information from tutors was obtained by questionnaires and follow up interviews. Whilst virtually all respondents were apparently in favour of such inclusion, nevertheless they perceived students with learning difficulties as presenting particular problems.

The research, undertaken in a unitary authority in central England, indicates that far from being a separate group, those with learning difficulties have much in common with all other adults. Indeed when considered against Knowles' definition it is mainly within one domain that there is any real difference. The research literature and the findings from the empirical research indicate reasons for this which are discussed within the thesis. Despite changes in legislation and changes in national policy towards people with disabilities in recent years, it is apparent that very little has changed significantly in terms of status for those adults with learning difficulties and major shifts in attitudes are still required if significant rather than cosmetic change is to happen.

Acknowledgements.

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Preface.

This study seeks to explore the actual and perceived adult status of adults with learning difficulties both generally in society and more specifically within the setting of Basic Skills education in a unitary authority. It is set against a background of a perceived change in societal attitudes towards adults with learning difficulties and disabilities,

In recent years in the United Kingdom there has been a shift in policy both in education and more generally towards those with learning difficulties, which seeks to include them far more both within the community and within education. The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 specifically mentioned adults with learning difficulties; the Tomlinson Report (1996) recommended ways in which those with disabilities and learning difficulties could be more fully included in education; the Kennedy Report (1997) considered how participation could be widened and the Moser Report (1999) and more specifically 'Freedom to Learn' (DfEE 2000) indicated strategies to help those with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve in education. As a result of the Moser Report both the 'Adult Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula' (Basic Skills Agency 2001) as well as the 'Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework' (LSDA 2002), specifically targeted at adults with learning difficulties and 'Access for All' (LSDA 2002), explaining ways of working with those with learning difficulties and

disabilities were produced. In 2001 an addition was made to the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). Known as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (now Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act) this required conformity to the Act in Post-16 education. In a broader arena the White Paper 'Valuing People' (2001) was produced which insisted on the right of those with learning difficulties to have choice and independence. The Enhancing Quality of Life (EQOL) Project (Skill 2002) had as its central purpose to 'improve the quality of life of people with profound and complex learning difficulties and the people who care about them but to do this *with* them rather than *for* them' (Dee et al 2002) thus indicating a shift in thinking and policy.

In the light of this change in policy the research contained in this study has significance for both practitioners and researchers. For practitioners it provides insights into the ways in which those adults with learning difficulties are perceived, both by others and by themselves, although this study does not claim to speak on their behalf but simply records the data discovered. For researchers work with adults with learning difficulties is still largely uncharted territory evidenced by the paucity of literature in the field. There are still therefore considerable areas for research, some of which will be indicated in the conclusions to this thesis.

The terms used in the study need some initial clarification although they are considered in more detail in Chapter 2. As is indicated in the thesis there is no one clearly defined view of what it means to be an adult. It is a term which frequently lacks clarity and it could be that the term varies slightly with every person who uses it. The question of what it means to be an adult is a very pertinent one both for those with learning difficulties who have been, and sometimes still are, regarded as children irrespective of their chronological age and in any consideration of adult education.

'Learning difficulties ' is also a term which lacks clarity and we have no single, clear understanding of it. Further it is used differently in different professional circumstances. 'Learning difficulties' are referred to as 'learning disabilities' within the fields of healthcare and social services which has the potential to confuse the situation further.

In order to analyse these terms the literature review begins with a consideration of how the terminology has developed and how some terms have now become discriminatory. It is also necessary to consider whether the term 'disability' reflects an over emphasis on the medical model and whether or not the social model of disability has been able to redress this balance.

The literature review also considers how those described as having learning difficulties have been perceived both as a threat and as 'different' from the majority of people and how such views and the treatment received as a result has impacted on adults with learning difficulties today both in personal and educational terms.

Finally the literature review considers the implication of legislation on those with learning difficulties and on society and indicates ways in which such legislation may assist those with learning difficulties to participate more fully in education and in the wider society.

The review of the literature thus forms the working framework for the questions explored in the empirical research. The primary question which the research addresses is what it means to be an adult. Such a question implies other questions for until some agreement has been reached about this first question it is not possible to identify what is meant by 'adult status'. If consideration is to be given to adult status more specifically within Basic Skills education then the term 'basic skills' requires some definition. It is also important to ask where the education of those with learning difficulties should take place and why. Allied to all of these questions is the issue of which model of disability is being used when dealing with people with learning difficulties, particularly within an

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educational setting. Finally questions need to be raised about the nature of education, particularly whether or not it should be target driven and the possible implications of this for adults with learning difficulties. For if segregated, target driven provision is insisted upon this will have implications for the adult status of those with learning difficulties, as will the emphasis on a medical model of disability. These questions all relate to the primary question and need to be drawn out in order for adult status to be considered.

At the end of this study conclusions are drawn and recommendations made which hopefully will enhance the adult status of those adults with learning difficulties.

Chapter 1

Introduction.

My perspectives.

The first time I can recall meeting anyone with a learning difficulty was when I was 12 or 13. I had been invited to a party where most of the children and young people had moderate to severe learning difficulties (then referred to as mental handicap). There I met an 11 year old boy whose name I still remember. He spent most of his time smiling and shaking hands with people. He was very friendly and outgoing and in no way frightening or off-putting. I remember being very interested in him in particular and in the group as a whole. Such a positive first encounter possibly influenced my thinking when I began to work with those with learning difficulties.

I had been invited to the party because I was involved with my parents and particularly my mother, in raising money for children and young people with mental handicap (learning difficulties). When my mother and I were invited to the party I do not recall her raising any questions about whether or not we should attend. My mother, I think, would have believed that if we were invited we should accept. She may have regarded people with learning difficulties as being 'unfortunate', a term not unfamiliar at the time, but would not have seen this as a reason not to associate with them or

to prevent me, a 'normal' child, from such association. In fact I cannot recall ever being told to keep away from any group of people other than strangers. My mother's outlook perhaps meant that I was free to be with all sorts of people regardless of their ability or background. She felt, I believe, that everyone should be treated with politeness out of respect for their humanness and that all should be treated with dignity whoever they were and whatever their antecedents. My mother also held a slightly Victorian attitude that some in society were underprivileged and that it was our duty to help them. Generally the ethos throughout my childhood and adolescence was that people should be helped and respected and perhaps this influenced my choice of career, as I first remember saying I wanted to teach when I was 7 or 8. My mother encouraged this.

My father was not particularly outgoing but he never criticised people because of their ability or lack of it. His only concern was that the people with whom I associated would do me no harm. He was not interested in their abilities or social background.

I therefore grew up with the belief that all people should be treated with respect and that those who were 'less fortunate' should be helped and that such help was a duty. Whilst accepting this belief in my teenage years, I later rejected it, not because I was fundamentally opposed to it but because

I began to feel that 'duty' was not the way in which I regarded it. I began to believe that it was more than my 'duty' to do something and that I actually wanted to work with people and that I wanted to do this through teaching.

When I was 11 years old I moved on from my junior school to the local secondary modern school, a school which was streamed with eight classes in each year group. Although placed in the top stream, life at this school meant that I was with people from a variety of backgrounds and of varying abilities. What was significant was that the two lowest streams in the year groups were not educated on the main site but at an annexe about a mile from the school. I recall thinking then that this was a little strange especially as one of my friends, a boy who lived in the same street, was at the annexe. Such segregation was made more surprising by the fact that all the young people in the street played together as a group and he was always with us and able to join in what we were doing. Clearly play was perhaps less sophisticated than it would be for a child of the 21st century, but neither he, nor another girl who went to an open air school, was excluded from our group. This stands in sharp contrast to the experience of one of my students who is a carer for a boy with learning difficulties. She was worried that other children wouldn't play with the boy because they said he went to a school for 'divvies' (a local expression used to indicate people of very low ability and who are regarded as stupid).

At sixteen, after taking O Levels, I transferred to the local High School and from then on my education followed the normal pattern of A Levels and university. During this period I had little or no contact with those with learning difficulties.

I next encountered those with learning difficulties when I began teaching in a secondary modern school in 1969. Part of my role was to work with young people who could not read. Such young people were variously described as 'retarded', 'slow learners', 'backward', and 'remedial', words which had negative overtones and suggested deficiencies in those to whom they were applied. This was my first experience of the 'deficit model'. All the classes in this school were mixed ability and the problems for those with little or no reading skills were soon apparent. For them school must have made very little sense. At this time that I was challenged by a young man to consider the relevance of the curriculum for some people. I was stressing the importance of being able to read and write when the young man said he did not need to do this as he was going to drive a tractor when he left school. He informed me that neither of his parents could read or write, a point which was confirmed by the school. The boy already worked on the farm at weekends and I was aware from other sources that he was very competent in the tasks he performed. In

making this challenge there was no hint of rudeness, but merely a statement that he considered what I was trying to teach him was pointless because it was irrelevant to him. His comments made me consider the relevance of the curriculum offered to the lives of some of the pupils in the school and sowed the seeds of questions which I would later pursue in more depth.

The young man's questioning of what I was attempting to teach him made me question what I was doing and why. Then, as now, it is difficult to establish what people really need to know in order to function in society and reach their full potential. Today there is the desire that all children should be taught the same things, with the National Curriculum being followed in all schools including special schools. The desire to raise levels almost seems to disregard differing levels of ability. In his question that young man raised for me issues which still remain largely unresolved some thirty years later.

My next school was also a secondary modern where I worked with mixed ability classes. Again the problems arose for those with learning difficulties, some of whom should not have been at the school but no places were available elsewhere. My experience of inappropriately placed young people was also happening more generally as there was insufficient specialist provision at a time when the educational philosophy was to

educate those with learning difficulties in segregated provision. Those children were tolerated in school but how much real help and support they were given was questionable. Many of them had at best a fairly fruitless time in school and at worst experienced boredom, frustration and being bullied, not overtly but in the sense that other pupils ignored them or refused to sit with them, particularly where social deprivation accompanied a difficulty in learning. In this school those who experienced the greatest difficulty in learning were usually poorly dressed and had personal hygiene problems. This, like the relevance of the curriculum offered was another issue which would arise again years later in Adult Education.

I left this school when I became pregnant. Our daughter only lived for two days but we were told that had she lived she would have had severe disabilities. I am conscious that by now my husband and I could have been coping with an adult daughter with many of the problems that my students face. I think it is impossible to say how much her life influenced my decision to work with adults with disabilities but it may well have been subconsciously a motivating factor.

The third school in which I taught was a large inner city comprehensive where classes were streamed and it was generally felt that little could be done with the lowest streams. In many instances I think that containment

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was the policy. Some of these pupils, like the young man mentioned above, also questioned the value and purpose of what they were learning. Again this was not normally done with aggression or insolence but was a genuine question to which I could not give an adequate response. Like many pupils previously it was not only reading which was difficult for them, they also had difficulty making sense of concepts and therefore of the world around them. This is not a criticism of an excellent school, but rather a reflection that the curriculum was perhaps not appropriate for these particular pupils and raises the question, as does the practice of following the National Curriculum in special schools, of entitlement to a curriculum versus appropriateness of a curriculum. It is possible that for some children with learning difficulties mainstream schools offer more appropriate provision than special schools. Like many other questions this one is still unresolved.

When I began work as a Basic Skills tutor in Adult Education I knew that all the students would have some difficulty with literacy and/or numeracy, although mostly I was working with people who were seeking to improve their skills to take a new direction at work or to undertake some form of training e.g. for nursing or the police force. Before long, however, I was again involved with those who had moderate to severe learning difficulties and was intrigued by trying to work out how they were learning and making connections. It was apparent that transferable skills, an

understanding of the world around them and a grasp of concepts were more significant factors in learning, or lack of it, than an ability or inability to read.

A colleague and I attempted to make the curriculum accessible for these students by using materials, sometimes adapted from those designed for a younger age group, with which the adults could work to gain confidence. Whilst using such materials I was questioned by a manager, who had little or no experience of working with adults with learning difficulties, about a worksheet which she felt was not 'adult appropriate'. After discussion with colleagues I began to consider what 'adult appropriate' actually meant. The students were happy with the work they were doing because it made sense to them. Asked if they felt insulted by the presentation of the worksheets, they explained that they were only put off when they couldn't understand the work, a comment reiterated by many students since. Many students accepted that they were still in the early stages of learning, particularly in terms of reading, even though they were older.

Now there was a dilemma. Did I produce worksheets which were 'adult appropriate', whatever that meant, but often incomprehensible to the learner, or did I retain the accessible worksheets and produce a rationale for their appropriateness for the students concerned. I researched the issues and

produced a rationale in my M.Ed. dissertation (Beverley 1997a). A problem is inherent in the use of the term 'adult appropriate' in that it could refer to a variety of factors such as adult in concept, adult in presentation, adult in language or adult in content. Part of my research involved considering worksheets and other materials, some not specifically designed for adults and asking tutors, managers and students which they would use. The students often chose those designed for a younger age group, whilst the tutors and managers said they were inappropriate. It is a key feature of Basic Skills education that students should negotiate their programmes of work. This raised for me the important question of how we hold in tension the student's choices with what is deemed to be desirable educationally, a point highlighted in the Tomlinson Report (1996) where ways in which students learn, particularly those with learning difficulties, is a key factor.

Whilst working on my M.Ed. dissertation other points were raised. One central issue was that of what it means to be an adult. Is there a norm of adulthood? What makes a person an adult? Many tutors and managers I interviewed found this a difficult question, particularly in relation to discussion of adult appropriate as a concept because, as one respondent explained, no one had ever asked that question before. It is presumably assumed that everyone knows what it means to be an adult but find the term 'adult' hard to define. It is, however, essential to know and agree

referred via Social Services or did not have a 'condition'. Several anomalies have been created by this where some students in discrete provision have better literacy skills than those in mainstream Basic Skills groups but there is a great resistance to moving them because they will 'upset the balance in groups'. Whilst favouring discrete provision initially for some students I feel it is not desirable educationally to keep students in such provision indefinitely. I would further suggest that decisions about this go back to an understanding or misunderstanding of adulthood, hence the decision to undertake my current research.

The Research Questions.

My experience in education, both in school and within my present work, therefore led me to ask several questions which this study seeks to answer and which will now be briefly summarised.

- The primary question is that of what it means to be an adult and who decides. Without an analysis and definition of this it is impossible to make a curriculum which is adult appropriate because such a term is merely a phrase without meaning. It is therefore essential to identify what is meant when we talk about 'adult' and therefore 'adult status'. This primary question leads into a consideration of four other questions.

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- The second question is what is meant by 'Basic Skills' and how this should be defined. The crux here is whether Basic Skills are the same for everyone or whether such skills vary in accordance with the context of a person's life. Such a question has implications for the curriculum.

- The third question which emerges is where those with learning difficulties should be educated and how this impacts on their adult status. That is whether they should be included in mainstream education or educated in segregated provision,(whether this be in a special school in the case of young people), or in discrete provision in the case of adults.

- The fourth question, which has arisen only comparatively recently for me, is that of what model of disability is used when dealing with people with learning difficulties within an educational setting. I say 'recently for me' because it is only since I began work in Adult Education that I have worked with people with conditions such as Down's syndrome, epilepsy or physical problems such as having little or no speech and cerebral palsy. The question of model is important here because physical conditions, for example Down's syndrome, can be used as a reason for segregated provision and sometimes, although not always, conditions are irrelevant to learning.

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- The final question is the perennial one of what we want education to be. Do we want it to be the development of persons or do we want it to be primarily that which is measurable and quantifiable? Whilst these are not mutually exclusive, in many cases the learning progress of people with learning difficulties, as others, requires the tutor to make observations and comments rather than to use measurements, which do little to further the development of individual students. This question is linked with the choice of curriculum and the curriculum model which is used.

These questions will be addressed by a review of the literature, although comparatively little is written concerning adults with learning difficulties, and by empirical research. The primary question will be specifically addressed by empirical research matched to Knowles' (1990) definitions of adult. The second and third questions will be addressed both by empirical research and by reference to the literature. Questions four and five will be addressed largely through the literature but some aspects of these also emerge from the empirical research.

The research questions have emerged from my life experience and specifically from the context of my teaching. This study will attempt to seek some answers to these and hopefully will contribute to new ways of

perceiving and working with adults who have learning difficulties. As much of the empirical research was conducted with adults and young people with learning difficulties it is hoped to add the views of those with learning difficulties to the knowledge base.

I would stress that throughout this study my interest in those adults with learning difficulties has been purely from an educational perspective. There are issues which may be the concerns of campaigners, but they are not within in my remit and are not considered in the argument which follows.

Structure of the thesis.

As a final part of this introduction an overview of the thesis will be given. The first part of the thesis, Chapter 2 seeks to critically examine the terms 'adult' and 'learning difficulties' which are key to understanding the research. Indicators are given to the use of the term 'adult' and definitions of adulthood are given, with specific reference to Knowles (1990) whose descriptors of adulthood will be used as a tool against which to examine the findings from the empirical research. The use of the term 'learning difficulties' is considered and the point made that in this research the term is used to indicate 'general' rather than 'specific' learning difficulties(e.g. dyslexia). By a critical discussion of these terms the parameters of the research are set.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 give an historical perspective on learning difficulties by reviewing the literature relating to terminology used for those with learning difficulties in the past, legislation and reports impacting on those adults with learning difficulties and the voices and views of adults with learning difficulties on their past treatment and current opportunities.

Chapter 6 indicates how the literature shows that those with learning difficulties are, and have been, perceived as 'different' and that this has impacted on their adult status and indeed their rights to be treated as human beings. In particular this chapter looks at how being described as having a 'learning difficulty' affects adults in education, employment and daily life and how as a result the context of their lives may be seen as very narrow when compared with that of most adults.

Chapter 7 develops the educational aspect of Chapter 5 a little further with a consideration of the Basic Skills Curricula for adults, the assumptions that are made and how this in turn impacts on the adult status of those with learning difficulties both positively and negatively.

Chapter 8 focuses on the unitary authority in which the research was conducted. The geographical location is described in terms of population,

economy, environment, transport and communications, health and social care, housing, leisure and education to give an overview of the area.

Chapter 9 discusses issues raised in research and in particular the research methodology used in the empirical research with emphasis on the approaches used. Such approaches are critical as they have to be accessible to all respondents, including those with complex needs.

Chapters 10 and 11 provide an account of the research findings from interviews with young people and adults with and without learning difficulties. Their perceptions of adulthood and the ways in which adults are different from children were gathered through a picture sorting exercise and by the use of semi-structured interviews. In particular the research explored how people with learning difficulties view themselves and how they operate by asking them directly. An analysis of these findings is given and matched to Knowles' (1990) definition of adult. The findings are also linked to the literature review.

Chapters 12 and 13 gives the findings analysis of a staff questionnaire which sought to see how Basic Skills staff regarded learning difficulties and what they felt were the issues related to including adults with learning difficulties in groups alongside adults without learning difficulties. The

results of both the questionnaire and follow up interviews are analysed and these give some indicators of how adults with learning difficulties are perceived as well as raising issues related to inclusion.

Chapter 14 draws the conclusions from the research and makes recommendations on the basis of what has been discovered, both within the literature and the empirical research.

Chapter 2.

Towards Definitions.

Introduction.

The concept of adulthood is important when considering the adult status of adults with learning difficulties since many of them have not been accorded that status within our society. This chapter will discuss the concept of adulthood in the relevant literature and issues this raises. In particular reference will be made to work by Knowles (1990), whose broad definition of adulthood is supported by others (Squires 1993, Griffiths 1994 and Tomlinson 1995). The term 'adult' will be considered in relation to social, legal and religious circumstances. Consideration will also be given to the term 'learning difficulties'. It is essential to consider initial definitions of these terms as they are key in the research but lend themselves to a variety of interpretations.

What is Adulthood?

As the research seeks to consider adult status the use of the term 'adult' is crucial. It is a widely used term with the assumption that its meaning is clear. On the contrary previous research (Beverley 1997a) indicates that many, including those working within the adult education sector, have never considered what it means to be an adult or how the term is applied. Generally, within society 'adult' is used to indicate persons over a certain

age (Griffiths 1994), or to refer to a type of behaviour, or to indicate that a person is of a given age and has certain roles and responsibilities (Knowles 1990, Griffiths 1994). It also implies a sense of maturity. Our use of language reflects both the way in which being 'adult' is seen and how the concept is set by social expectations. If an older person is said to be behaving in a 'childish' way, it implies the behaviour is inappropriate to that person's chronological age. A very young person may be praised for behaving in a 'grown up' manner whilst an adult behaving inappropriately is sometimes told to 'grow up'.

Broad definitions of 'adult'.

There are two main broad definitions of adult: a chronological definition (Griffiths 1994) determined by the society in which the person lives, and one which defines adult by the roles and responsibilities undertaken (Knowles 1990, Griffiths 1994).

The chronological definition.

The chronological definition is essentially a legal one. In Britain at the age of 18 every person becomes legally an adult, a statement that carries with it the inference of both a legal term and a social understanding. At 18, with minor exceptions, a person is permitted to do everything which adults are allowed to do. The corollary of this is, however, that children in Britain are

permitted to buy tobacco, buy fireworks and drive cars. This would suggest

that there is a period leading up to adulthood where young people are

treated as adults but not as 'full' adults. Apter (cited in Freely 2001) refers

to young people in this stage as 'thresholders', implying that they are about

to enter adulthood but are not yet there. There seems then to be a transition

period which goes on beyond 18 as well as commencing before it (Lovell

1979) which is perhaps linked to the concept of maturity discussed below.

The chronological definition is, however, relatively straightforward.

Roles and responsibilities and transitional markers.

The other broad definition defines adulthood in terms of roles and

responsibilities (Griffiths 1994, Knowles 1990) and perhaps gives a clearer

idea of what it means to be an adult particularly as the chronological age is

not a fixed entity. For example in Britain the age of majority was 21 and

then became 18. Prior to this change there were, and still are, anomalies.

Currently ages for certain activities, for example riding a motor bike,

marriage and consent to sex still vary.

Whilst roles and responsibilities give a clearer indication of what it means

to be adult, Bee (1998) suggests that 'physical and cognitive change in

adulthood is more gradual and *far* more variable from one individual to the

next......' (Bee 1998:334) which would suggest that becoming or being adult is a process rather than a state which one achieves at a given time.

The situation is perhaps further complicated in Britain by the fact that unlike some cultures there is no initiation ceremony marking the transition from childhood to adulthood and thus a new status in the community. The only marker in British culture is the eighteenth birthday party and even this is confusing as twenty-first birthdays are also celebrated as a special event. Other countries have more specific markers. For example in Denmark confirmation is seen as a step towards adulthood (Pattison 2003). In the former East Germany the Jugendweihe (youth initiation) (Sharma 2001) was, and still is, in a different form a marker of transition from childhood. In Jewish society a boy comes of age at 13 and is recognised as a Bar-Mitzvah (son of the commandment) and a girl at the age 12 is a Bat-Mitzvah (daughter of the commandment). Ceremonies are held to mark these events (Beaver et al 1982).

Knowles' views on adulthood.

Given the lack of clarity regarding adulthood Knowles' (1990) suggestion that adulthood can be defined under four categories, biological, legal, social and psychological is helpful. Such a broad definition covers many aspects of adulthood and is similar to that given by Griffiths (1984).

Knowles(1990) suggests that 'we become adult biologically when we reach the age at which we can reproduce' (1990:57). Recently in Britain there has been an increase in pregnancies amongst young teenagers but very few people would describe these young people as adults. Indeed children under 16 are still required to attend compulsory school which is an activity specifically for children (Walshe 2001). So whilst 12 year olds may be biologically adults, they are still legally regarded as children. In addition sexual intercourse is illegal in Britain for anyone under the age of 16. Clearly some of these issues also have social implications in our society as well as legal ones. Taken on its own there would therefore be some problems in Knowles' biological definition.

Knowles' (1990) legal definition is apparently more straightforward. He states:

> 'we become legally adult when we reach the age at which the law says we can vote, get a driver's license, marry without consent and the like' (Knowles 1990:57).

Whilst the age for these activities will vary from country to country, the definition given is unambiguous.

Knowles (1990:57) states 'we become adult socially when we start performing adult roles'. Whilst acknowledging the point Knowles makes, this definition is circular as adulthood is defined in terms of adulthood.

Nevertheless by citing adult roles as '..... full-time worker, spouse, parent, voting citizen and the like' (Knowles 1990:57) Knowles demonstrates society's expectations of being adult. Here it is simply roles which are indicated but within the psychological definition Knowles (1990) suggests that responsibility is also implied, for clearly performing a role and assuming responsibility for it may not be identical.

In his psychological definition Knowles (1990) suggests 'we become adult psychologically when we arrive at a self -concept of being responsible for our own lives, of being self-directing'. It allows for the notion of gradually taking increasing responsibility in making decisions, a key point in a consideration of the adult status of adults with learning difficulties.

Whilst there may be issues with parts of Knowles' definition it does attempt to give a full explanation of what is meant by being 'adult' and so provides a useful framework for considering adulthood, particularly when looking at how others see it, an idea which will be examined critically later in the thesis.

Adulthood as maturity.

Adulthood can also be defined in terms of maturity. Whitbourne and Weinstock (cited in Gross 1996:598) state that maturity 'involves the

ability to shoulder responsibilities, make logical decisions, empathize with others , cope with minor frustrations and accept one's social role'. Such a definition is very close to Knowles' view although he does not specifically mention maturity. Turner and Helms (cited in Gross 1996:598) define maturity as '….a state that promotes physical and social well being….' Gross (1996) states that Turner and Helms say:

> a mature person possesses a well developed value system, an accurate self-concept, stable emotional behaviour, satisfying social relationships, intellectual insight and a realistic assessment of future goals.

Gross indicates that this is rather a 'tall order' but points out that maturity is ' ….not a unitary concept …….nor is it an all-or-none phenomenon, i.e. we can have varying degrees of maturity' (Gross 1996:598). One problem with defining maturity is that it is a very subjective concept with few objective criteria for determining it. Whilst the concept of maturity gives some useful indicators about adulthood it also has drawbacks.

Adulthood as intimacy.

A further way of examining what it means to be adult is expressed by Erikson (cited in Gross 1996) who sees adulthood in terms of intimacy. Intimacy is used to describe deep friendships between partners, for example a husband and wife and between friends. It does not necessarily imply a sexual relationship but rather an ability to relate our deepest hopes and

fears to another person and accept their need to do the same. If this sense of intimacy is not established Erikson argues that isolation will be the result.

Conclusions.

All these views point to two strands which have to be held together. In certain legal and social contexts adulthood is attained at a specific chronological age, but it is also seen in terms of roles, responsibilities, maturity and intimacy. Additionally becoming adult is also a process. The term 'adult' is therefore extremely complex. Knowles (1990), however, arguably provides a workable definition of adulthood from which to begin this study.

Learning difficulties.

In relation to this research consideration also has to be given to the term 'learning difficulties' which has replaced more negative terms such as 'mentally handicapped', 'retarded', 'backward', etc. used to describe those with low cognitive abilities. Sutcliffe and Simons (1993) found that in interviews with people with learning difficulties they preferred the term 'people with learning difficulties' to other terms because it indicated to people that they 'want to learn and to be taught how to do things' (1993:22). Negative terms such as 'mental handicap' were universally rejected with many students preferring to be called simply by their name or

by the neutral term 'student'. 'Learning difficulties' is now the generally accepted term within adult education.

Confusion of terms.

The term 'learning disabilities', originating from a health service background, is also used to describe those with low cognitive ability, implying that this is a disability like many other disabilities and suggesting a deficit. It tends to focus on what a person cannot do rather than on the person and her/his abilities and raises the question of from whose perspective the disability is perceived. Confusion arises because some use the term 'learning difficulties' for those with moderate learning difficulties and 'learning disabilities' for those with more severe difficulties, a point referred to again later in this study. The terms are frequently used interchangeably which leads to confusion.

The situation is made more complex because the term 'learning difficulties' is also applied to those who have a specific difficulty, for example dyslexia, as well as those with a 'general learning difficulty', that is one which pervades most of their life.

A further confusion occurs where Government Reports, for example the Tomlinson Report 'Inclusive Learning' (Tomlinson 1996), speak of adults

with 'learning difficulties and/or disabilities'. This presents a problem as to which group or groups of people the Report is referring, for it is possible to have a disability without having a learning difficulty or to have a learning difficulty without having a disability. The learning styles and approaches will also differ greatly between people and it is questionable whether it is possible to make recommendations for the learning of such a disparate group. The Report 'Freedom to Learn' (DfEE 2000) also refers to '....basic skills needed for adults with learning difficulties and disabilities'. Although learning difficulties and disabilities are dealt with separately within the 'Freedom to Learn' (2000) Report, it is perhaps an indication of how learning difficulties and disabilities are perceived in that they appear in the same report. Both are regarded as 'differences' or 'problems' and as outside mainstream education.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is also confusion about the terminology amongst those working outside the educational field. At a conference in York to discuss the proposed Pre-Entry Curriculum in 2000 a delegate said he had no idea what the term 'learning difficulties' meant or to whom it referred. Frequently outdated terms are used to refer to those with learning difficulties in particular the term 'mentally handicapped' (LSDA 2002). Mencap, a national organisation, still refuses to change its name which helps to perpetuate misunderstandings.

Conclusions.

There is then some confusion over the use of the term 'learning difficulties' which may impact on adult status but within this study it is used to indicate those who have a general problem with cognitive development.

Having briefly considered the terms 'adult' and 'learning difficulties' and their significance in the thesis, the next chapter looks further at language and terminology.

Chapter 3.

An Historical Context: Language and Terminology.

Introduction.

The preceding chapters set the research in context by considering how the research questions arose from professional practice and by seeking to clarify the key terms of 'adult' and 'learning difficulties'. This chapter and the subsequent two chapters will focus on how adults with learning difficulties have been regarded and treated in the past. The historical context is significant because it impacts on and explains their current situation and the ways in which they are perceived today which in turn may affect their adult status.

It is acknowledged that very often a full picture of what happened in the past is not available but rather we are reliant on extant documents and records and, for more recent history, people's memories.

Three strands of thought.

The following three chapters will discuss attitudes to those with learning difficulties. Perceptions of them will be considered through three strands of thought: language and terminology in this chapter, legislation in Chapter 4 and the self perceptions of those with learning difficulties in Chapter 5. Other aspects such as housing, provision in Adult Training Centres and

long stay hospitals and social issues could have been considered in these chapters but the three strands selected were those which would most clearly indicate societal perspectives and the views of those with learning difficulties, both of which are critical to an understanding of the empirical research undertaken and its analysis.

The three strands interrelate and impact on one another. Society's views help to shape government policy, for example public concern about the inadequacies of provision for those with learning difficulties ultimately led to the closure of long stay hospitals (Philpot and Ward 1995, Carnaby 2002) and, more recently, in 2006 inadequacies in provision in Cornwall have led to a national audit of services for people with learning disabilities. Government policy can also help to shape people's views. Significantly these affect the way in which people with learning difficulties are regarded and the provision made for them. These three chapters, whilst quite detailed, are therefore key to an understanding of the research as a whole, particularly Chapter 5 which allows some insight into the experiences of those with learning difficulties and will give greater clarity to an understanding of their responses in the research findings.

This chapter will consider the use of language and terminology to indicate

the ways in which this both demonstrates societal attitudes and affects the perceptions of those with learning difficulties

Background issues.

Theoretically language expresses people's thoughts (Crystal 1997) but it can also be used to disguise people's thoughts and so the use of language becomes extremely complex (op cit). In theory language also expresses concepts but it is possible for the language to change whilst the concepts remain fundamentally the same and so different terminology actually expresses the same concept. The use of an appropriate term does not therefore necessarily indicate a shift in thought by the person using it.

Further language changes with the passage of time. Whilst a word remains constant it can take on new meanings (Bryson 1990). With regard to terminology therefore, it is critical to consider both its original context and what it implies today. This is particularly true when examining the somewhat negative terminology used to describe those with learning difficulties in the past and the terms in current use especially as they link to perceptions of social acceptability (Mittler and Sinason 1996). For example the term 'idiot' was originally simply a category of learning difficulties but today is mildly abusive and may indicate the social acceptability of those to whom it is directed.

Categories of learning difficulty.

An early reference to learning difficulties comes from fifth century Ireland where the Brehon Laws identified distinct categories of people, 'idiots, fools and dotards; persons without sense and madmen'. (McConkey in Mittler and Sinason 1996:193). McConkey indicates that people in these groups were exempted from certain punishments and were protected. It was also the responsibility of the community or clan to look after such children (op cit). In the sixteenth century Daniel Defoe argued for the setting up of 'public fool houses' but it was not until the nineteenth century (McConkey 1996) that public provision was made partly because universal education had given rise to more perceived 'idiots' (op cit). Such very early categorisations have resonance with later categorisations such as those found in the 1944 Education Act.

Terminology warrants further exploration, particularly the terms 'idiot', 'dotard' and 'fool'. Whereas in the Brehon laws they merely defined categories of people, in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the term 'idiot' was an official category of the 'feeble-minded' (Cole 1989). However such words are still in current use as terms of discrimination or abuse. The Oxford English Dictionary (Soames 2000) defines an 'idiot' as 'a mentally deficient person who is permanently incapable of rational conduct' or as 'a very stupid person'; a 'fool' as ' a

person who acts unwisely, one who lacks good sense or judgment' and a 'dotard' as 'a person who is in his dotage' that is a person who is in 'a state of weakness of mind caused by old age'. All these terms are very negative descriptors, focusing on a deficit model and signifying people with very limited cognitive ability. The descriptors 'idiot' and 'imbecile' were also part of educational terminology applied to the 'feeble minded' (Cole 1989) many of whom by 1909 were regarded as non-educable, a situation only redressed in 1970.

From around 1870 other terms were used to indicate those with learning difficulties some of which are still used inappropriately today. Current usage is perhaps also an indicator that whilst language may change, either by legislative reform or by an increasing desire for political correctness, many people's concepts and perceptions do not and therefore they are unaware of the need to change their language.

In the late nineteenth century some with learning difficulties were referred to as being 'feeble minded' (Cole 1989), a term which has resonance with 'dotard' used in a former age and implies a person whose mental capabilities are very low. The Oxford English Dictionary (Soames 2000) defines 'feeble minded' as meaning 'mentally deficient' and, perhaps significantly, adds the phrase 'especially with a mental age of 8 or 9'.

Implicitly then today this would be applicable to persons above that age, particularly to adults and would impact upon their adult status.

The Royal Commission of 1889, paid little attention to the feeble minded stating that whilst they should be separated from other scholars, imbeciles and idiots should be placed in residential institutions but separated from lunatics, that is those who had mental health difficulties (Carnaby 2002). The 'feeble minded' were regarded by some as a nuisance to society, for Sir James Crichton-Browne at the turn of the nineteenth century described them as 'our social rubbish' (Cole 1989: 44), a view which became dominant with the advent of the industrial society which had little time for slower workers or those unable to work.

In 1908 Chief Medical Officer Newman wanted LEAs to recognise three grades of those with learning difficulties, namely the dull ('slow in understanding or stupid') and backward, the educable feeble minded and the non-educable (Cole 1989). Within these grades are the roots of the categories applied to those with learning difficulties today, though none would now be regarded as ineducable (Carnaby 2002).

At the beginning of the twentieth century the term 'backward' or 'dull' was adopted to describe those with learning difficulties, as evidenced by the

1921 Education Act (Cole 1989, Stakes and Hornby 1997). The use of the term 'backward', defined as 'having made less than normal progress' (Soames 2000) persisted and is still found in popular usage. Implicit within the definition is the concept of the norm, a rate at which everyone should progress and failure to do so is a deficit which has to be redressed. At the beginning of the twentieth century 'defective', was also used which covered those with both physical and mental difficulties and which remained until the 1944 Education Act. 'Defective' implies a person in whom something is wrong and is somehow imperfect or incomplete.

In the 1944 Education Act the term 'mentally defective' was replaced by the term 'educationally subnormal'. 'Subnormal' again implies that there is a norm to which all are expected to conform or to reach. Many regarded as 'subnormal' as children, were still treated this way in everyday life as adults (Humphries and Gordon 1992).

'Remedial' also described those who found learning difficult. The term, still in use in the early 1970s, implied that there was a 'cure' for those with learning difficulties and that their deficit in learning ability could be 'remedied', an indicator of the influence of the medical model on provision for people with learning difficulties (Stakes and Hornby 1997). The notion of 'catching up' remains firmly embedded in Government

thinking in the twenty first century particularly in the field of Basic Skills

DfEE 2000). Hence, even though terms such as 'remedial' or 'retarded' are

no longer used, the underpinning concepts which led to such terminology

remain.

The 1970 Education (Mentally Handicapped Children) Act transferred

severely subnormal children from the National Health Service (NHS) to

the Local Education Authority (LEA). Two more terms used to denote

those with learning difficulties then were 'mentally handicapped' and

'severely subnormal'. 'Handicapped' indicates a condition that:

> markedly restricts a person's ability to function physically, mentally,
> or socially' (Oxford English Dictionary 2000). 'In the middle decades
> of the 20th century **handicapped** was the standard term used in
> reference to people with physical and mental disabilities. However by
> the 1980s it has been superseded, in British English, by **disabled.**'
> The term handicapped now 'is regarded as dated, if not actually
> offensive' (op cit) if used in this context.

Terminology in Adult Education.

The current terminology in use in Adult Education is that of 'learning

difficulties' which retains some negative overtones but avoids the extremes

of the past. Many adults with learning difficulties prefer this term (Sutcliffe

and Simons 1993, Department of Health 2001). Whilst 'learning

difficulties' is used within Adult Education, Social Services and the Health

Service use the term 'learning disabilities' (LSDA 2002:5). Again these

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terms reflect the historical background of disability and of learning difficulties in particular where a medical model has been predominant.

Terminology and models of disability.

The term 'additional needs' is sometimes used within Adult Education to denote those with physical and learning difficulties. Whilst more positive it reflects a deficit model by placing emphasis on 'need'. Recent documentation suggests the best descriptor is 'a person with additional support needs in a learning context' (LSDA 2002:10). Even this does not remove the emphasis on 'needs'.

In the curricula documents for Adult Education (LSDA 2002) there is a stated and definite move away from defining people by their conditions. There language is discussed in detail and instructions given on the terminology which should and should not be used (LSDA 2002). Adjectives may no longer be used as nouns. So, for example, the descriptors are 'people/learners with epilepsy' and not 'epileptics' and 'people/learners with diabetes' and not 'diabetics'. Those with learning difficulties are to be referred to as 'learners/students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities' and not as having 'special educational needs (SEN) or severe learning difficulties and disabilities (SLDD)'. The term 'disabled' should be used and it is stressed that 'crippled', 'invalid',

'retarded', 'a person with a mental age of....' and 'handicapped' should never be used (LSDA 2002). Perhaps, however, the most significant point which is made in the section on terminology is that the term 'non/not disabled' should be used and the term 'normal' should be avoided as it implies that disability is 'abnormal'. This represents an enormous advance in thinking and attitudes as it places those with learning difficulties and other difficulties firmly within the learning community and does not label them as in some way 'different'. It also does not detracts from their status as adults.

Labelling and its effect on status.

Parents, understandably, want to know what is wrong with a child who does not develop in the same way as his/her peers but the idea of something 'wrong' reflects again the strength of both the medical model and the deficit model. Labelling a child's difficulties provides an explanation of their child's behaviour or problem which can be relayed to others. Significantly the naming and identification of a 'condition' also currently leads to additional funding for the child and extra help within the education system. However after school the label the child has been given often remains into adulthood (Sutcliffe and Simons 1993, Simons in Malin 1995) and assumptions are made on the basis of the label. Such assumptions could potentially disadvantage the student. As Tansley and Gulliford (cited

in Stakes and Hornby 1997) suggest attendance at a special school can produce a long lasting stigma of abnormality. Labelling has therefore always presented a problem to those with difficulties even after adulthood is reached, thus impacting on their adult status.

Conclusions.

This chapter has shown how most of the terminology used to refer to those with learning difficulties in recent history has been very negative, emphasising the condition or difficulty rather than the person. The word 'needs' reinforces this, implying that the person lacks things that are necessary or a certain course of action is required to alleviate the needs. Often those with learning difficulties are seen to be passive, possibly as a result of attitudes which have given rise to the terminology discussed above. People with learning difficulties are often seen as incapable of achieving, as having a deficit, as being abnormal, as having a predominant medical condition and being of little use to society. The strengths of those with learning difficulties have usually been minimised, although their potential for work and development was recognised by the asylum movement in the Victorian era (Carnaby 2002), whilst great attention has been paid to those things which they find hard. All these factors have resulted in those with learning difficulties being viewed in a very negative way which has contributed to the societal attitudes which perceive such

people as 'different' and not fully adult. It has also contributed to the low self -esteem experienced by many people with learning difficulties and has impacted on their self concept (Coopersmith 1967 cited in Gross 1996).

The language and terminology used to describe those with learning difficulties reflect the medical model with its emphasis on conditions and disabilities and the deficit model which emphasised those things a person lacked. Both of these models significantly influenced the way those with learning difficulties were treated.

Language and terminology has, therefore, played a significant role in influencing people's perceptions of those with learning difficulties. Much of the terminology has stemmed from legislation. As a result the next chapter will focus on legislation and its impact on those with learning difficulties.

Chapter 4.

An Historical Context: Legislation and Reports.

Introduction.

The preceding chapter considered the language and terminology used to describe those with learning difficulties both in society and education and its overall negative impact on them. This chapter will examine legislation and reports which have affected this group, particularly adults with learning difficulties. Some reference is made to the way in which children were regarded to help identify why adults with learning difficulties also were treated as they were.

Before the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.

Throughout the nincteenth and twentieth centuries much legislation has been passed regarding the education of children and young people with learning difficulties (Cole 1989, Pritchard 1963) but adults with learning difficulties were largely ignored until the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, described by Tomlinson (1996:4) as 'a landmark in the development of education policy'. It is a landmark since it was only in 1970 that the terms of the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act were altered in law and then this only applied to children. The 1913 Act resulted in adults with learning difficulties spending their adult lives in their families, in hospitals or in occupation centres which became adult training centres (Tomlinson

1996). The 1913 Act meant that many children with learning difficulties were not permitted to attend school and had their difficulties ascribed to a medical definition relating to a physical or mental difficulty. The 1944 Education Act further endorsed this and those with difficulties were subjected to a medical examination or intelligence testing to establish the need for special education in separate establishments and until 1981 such children were referred to as 'educationally sub-normal'. This led to isolation. From the mid 1970s attitudes began to change. The Education Act (1976) required that where possible all children were educated in ordinary schools. In 1978 the Warnock Committee put forward far reaching proposals to achieve this, not least by locating the difficulties in the provision of education rather than the individual child. Tomlinson (1996) suggests that these changes, implemented in the 1981 Education Act and amended and extended by the 1993 Education Act, benefited the children themselves, other children, teachers and the families of the children with difficulties.

These changes directly affect adults with learning difficulties within adult education because depending on the current age of the individual adult with learning difficulties, he/she may have been 'excluded altogether from education, included but isolated within it, or increasingly regarded as part of the whole work of the education service' (Tomlinson 1996:3). From

1970 further education was increasingly involved with provision for those

adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In 1973 a survey (cited

in Tomlinson 1996) revealed that only 10% of those leaving special schools

entered further education. A further 9% entered some form of residential

course but as with the figure of 10% a breakdown between those with

learning difficulties and other disabilities is not made. A further 51% were

suitable for further education but no provision was available. Again this

figure is not broken down into those with learning difficulties or with other

disabilities.

Further changes in provision occurred with the formation of the Manpower

Services Commission (1974) and its promotion of youth training schemes

as a result of a sharp rise in youth unemployment. Basic education was an

important feature of these schemes as those with learning difficulties were

becoming increasingly disadvantaged in the labour market. Evidence from

a survey by Stowell (cited in Tomlinson 1996:3) showed that there were

'250 courses of this kind, in approximately half the colleges in further

education in England' (Tomlinson 1996).

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act.

The brief survey above gives some indication of the position when the

1992 Further and Higher Education Act was passed. It is a 'landmark'

(Tomlinson 1996:4) for two reasons. Firstly the 1992 Act placed those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within the scope of further education and thus treats them as other adult students. Secondly it signified that the government attached importance to the provision made for them. Further those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were the only group of students specifically mentioned in the 1992 Act (Tomlinson 1996).

The 1992 Act states that 'Each council shall have regard to the requirements of persons having learning difficulties' (1992 Further and Higher Education Act Section 40) and further that for persons under 25 with learning difficulties adequate provision must be found.

The 1992 Act raises the question of why adults with learning difficulties suddenly appeared in government policies. Tomlinson (1996) gives some indicators in the introduction to the Inclusive Learning Report. The Inclusive Learning Report committee had been asked to establish whether the new legal requirements for educational provision for those with learning difficulties/and or disabilities were being satisfied and if not, how this could be remedied. Of the situation existing before the 1992 Act Tomlinson (1996) says the following:

There was not any complete description of existing provision as

inherited from the former local education authorities (LEAs) and in the specialist residential colleges. There were no agreed definitions by which to set the boundaries of the enquiry. There had been very little research into appropriate ways of learning, curriculum or management.

Means by which to assess the learning achieved, by stages to assist in further learning or summatively to register achievement, were comparatively under-developed. Progression from school to college was not managed to the same depth in all areas. And, although many LEAs, colleges, health and social services authorities, and voluntary organisations had collaborated successfully in the interests of students with learning difficulties, progress countrywide had been very uneven and everywhere the sudden lifting of the further education colleges out of the local government system had left jagged edges.

Tomlinson (1996) indicates that there was no uniformity of provision across the country and in some geographical areas there may have been very little provision.

Three years later, in the National Report from the Inspectorate 1998-1999 on National Awards for Students with Learning Difficulties (FEFC 1999:2) the inspectors make the following observation:-

This report has been compiled at a time when there is a particular focus on basic skills provision. The report of the learning difficulties and/or disabilities committee, chaired by Professor John Tomlinson, has significantly raised awareness of the needs of students who have difficulties with learning, the concept of which was developed in the committee's report, and defined as the achievement of a good match between the learner, what is to be learned and how and where it is to be learned, is now seen as an entitlement for every student. The current concern to break down social exclusion and widen participation in further education has increased pressure for the development of pre-foundation level and level 1 courses for students who traditionally would not have enrolled for a college course. Most recently, the report of the committee chaired by Sir Claus Moser on the national

development of basic skills, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start*, has brought this area of work into national prominence.

Changes within society and education.

During the late 1980s and the early 1990s changes were taking place in the care of many adults with learning difficulties. In 1990 the NHS and Community Care Act was passed. There was also a move away from the concept of Adult Training Centres to Social Education Centres and Resource Centres.

The 1990 NHS and Community Care Act resulted in the closure of many long stay hospitals for those with learning difficulties and a move towards community care. Some people who had been relocated wanted, or were encouraged, to engage in education, especially in further education colleges and LEA provision.

Adult Training Centres were adjusting their focus from training adults with learning difficulties in vocational areas to providing opportunities to learn new skills and most centres became known as Social Education Centres.

In the mid to late 1990s changes were taking place in education particularly in basic skills with a growing Government awareness that up to 7 million adults in the UK had poor basic skills (Moser 1999). A number of

initiatives followed aimed at increasing people's ability in basic skills. As it was considered an area in which some of those with learning difficulties needed to improve, classes were set up to address this issue.

The above factors, taken alongside the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act's direction to councils to 'have regard' to those with learning difficulties, should have given many educational opportunities to those adults with learning difficulties which may have enhanced their adult status. However an issue was which courses the FEFC was willing and able to fund. There were misunderstandings about funding, with many institutions believing that funding was reliant on students obtaining external awards. This had two results. One was that a number of Awarding Bodies produced courses leading to accreditation (e.g. Open College North West Start Up FAME – Foundation Accreditation in Mathematics and English) aimed at those with learning difficulties. The other was that misunderstanding about funding led institutions to close courses such as Independent Living for those with learning difficulties. As stated in The National Report from the Inspectorate- National Awards for Students with Learning Difficulties (1999:1f) 'The FEFC has issued guidance to colleges in several circulars…… confirming that funding for provision for students with learning difficulties is not dependent on them studying for external awards'. The advice was misunderstood by many institutions and so many

students with learning difficulties being excluded when the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act was designed to protect and include them. This situation came to the fore again in 2006 with questions about funding for those with learning difficulties.

Location of learning difficulty.

Following the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, there were a number of reports concerning adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the state of basic skills difficulties in England and Wales. The Inclusive Learning Report (Tomlinson 1996) was very significant as Tomlinson, like Warnock before him, locates the difficulty in the teaching and the environment and not solely within the person and focuses on the correct match between the learner and the learning environment, rather than the perceived 'differences' of those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The Moser Report.

The Moser Report 'A Fresh Start' (1999) focused on improving the literacy and numeracy skills of adults. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities were not considered in this report. Indeed in the foreword to the report Moser states :-

We have not been able to consider the special needs of adults with

learning disabilities who wish or need to improve their basic skills. We are conscious of the important concerns at issue. In particular, there is need to ensure that sufferers from dyslexia are helped with targeted basic skills programmes, where needed. This calls for a special study, following this report, to assess where its recommendations are appropriate and where they should be supplemented. (1999:4)

The statement implies that those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities other than dyslexia are a special case and are somehow different. Moser's terminology is also worth noting as he refers to adults with 'learning disabilities' rather than 'learning difficulties', thus reverting to a medical model, unlike Tomlinson.

Curriculum entitlement.

In May 2000 'Freedom to Learn' looked specifically at the basic skills needs of those adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It emphasises that all adults with learning difficulties should have 'the entitlement to a broad basic skills curriculum' (DfEE 2000:29) but learning outcomes were still set within national standards unattainable for many adults with learning difficulties. The report also stated 'Where learning outcomes are below the level of the national standards they should be referenced to individual goals rather than standards.' (2000:29) thus acknowledging that there are those who will never reach national standards for basic skills but that, in accordance with the 1992 Further and Higher

Education Act, they still have a right to learn and to acquire basic skills at an appropriate level and with an appropriate curriculum.

Two initiatives followed the Moser Report. The first was the production of the National Standards for Adult Numeracy and Literacy and the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula which set out the content of what should be delivered in literacy and numeracy programmes in further and adult education (Basic Skills Agency 2001). The second development was the production of the Adult Pre-entry Curriculum Framework for Literacy and Numeracy (DFES 2002) designed for adults with learning difficulties and based on the recommendations made in 'Freedom to Learn' (2000), thus placing adults with learning difficulties firmly on the learning agenda.

The Disability Discrimination Act.

Two further recent Acts of Parliament impact upon the status within society of adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (amended further in 2005) and the amendments made to it by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. The second of these clarifies the position of those with disabilities within both schools and Post 16 education. Under the Act a person is considered to be disabled if he/she has 'a physical or mental impairment, which has an effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities' and the effect

is substantial, adverse and long term (longer than 12 months). The Act also covers sensory impairment, learning difficulties and hidden disabilities. As far as education is concerned discrimination against those with a disability can occur in one or both of these ways. Firstly discrimination occurs where a 'responsible body', that is an education provider, treats a disabled person less favourably than non-disabled people for a reason which relates to the person's disability and that such treatment cannot be justified for any other reason. Secondly discrimination occurs where a responsible body fails to make a reasonable adjustment when a disabled student is placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with a person who is not disabled. In 2006 Disability Equality Duties became law, which seek to ensure that all people with disabilities, including those with learning difficulties, are treated fairly.

Societal attitudes.

Society's views towards those with learning difficulties and disabilities have changed over the last two or three decades but the roots of this change go back to immediate post-war Britain. The 1990 NHS and Community Care Act and the White Paper 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001) which emphasises the four key principles of rights, independence, choice and inclusion for those with learning disabilities reflect this. Thinking and policy in recent years emphasise inclusion rather than social

exclusion and a move towards tolerance rather than a total ignoring of those with disabilities and learning difficulties (Felce in Mittler and Sinason 1996).

Increasingly in the latter part of the twentieth century ideas of social justice and equality gained ground, as did the right to live in a less restricted way with rights to developmental opportunity. Large institutions gradually became regarded as inappropriate for those with learning difficulties. People were beginning to understand more fully the nature of learning difficulties and to view those with them as less threatening.

In Britain the foundation of the welfare state also 'set a new context for defining the function of institutions for those people who clearly required help and support' (Felce in Mittler and Sinason 1996:128). Gradually hospitals and institutions came to be seen in terms of the benefits they brought to their users rather than as places where people were incarcerated to keep them away from the rest of society. The sometimes scandalous events which still occurred in institutions were brought to the public attention and the public as well as politicians and service providers saw that many institutions were places where patients were humiliated and their human dignity removed. This situation has still not been fully addressed as events in Cornwall (2006) indicate.

In the 1970s a shift in thought saw learning difficulties increasingly regarded as an educational problem rather than a medical problem. If medical care was not needed then hospitalisation was not required either. Educational research was demonstrating that many adults with learning difficulties were employable and many more could learn functional skills (O'Connor and Tizzard,1951and Clark and Hermelin 1955 cited in Mittler and Sinason 1996). There was also a move emanating from the Scandinavian countries (Tyne in Brown and Smith 1992) for 'normalising' the lives of those with learning difficulties. Others such as Wolfensberger (Brown and Smith 1992) were making similar radical suggestions in the USA and these concepts of 'normalisation' influenced service reform for those with learning difficulties in Britain.

In the 1990s Care in the Community (NHS Care in the Community Act 1990) was adopted so most people with learning difficulties are now living in the community alongside non-disabled people. Many still need support to do this and there are still problems:-

> The move from large institutional scale to groupings on a much more human scale has not always been matched by an equal degree of reform to the process by which people come to live together, their status and their rights within their accommodation, their degree of control over their lifestyle and how their needed support is arranged.'
> (Felce in Mittler and Sinason 1996:141)

Impact of changes in legislation in the unitary authority.

Changes nationally were also reflected within the unitary authority in which the research took place. The Council Adult Education Service had provided some classes for those adults with learning difficulties since the early 1980s. In the late 1980s there was a real move forward in basic skills education which increased in the 1990s.

In the late 1980s Adult Training Centres were adjusting the focus of their work from training adults in vocational areas to looking for opportunities for those adults with learning difficulties to learn new skills, a change reflected in the renaming of most Adult Training Centres to Social Education Centres. This change of direction impacted on the adult education service and colleges as they were approached to find educational opportunities for adults with learning difficulties and a number of classes were therefore initiated. Here a problem emerged in that some adults with learning difficulties regarded attendance at the Adult Training Centre as work and were unsure about changing to a less structured lifestyle (Unitary Authority Adult Education Service documents – Unpublished 1990). Such attitudes raise the question of whether these changes actually lessened the adult status of those with learning difficulties because whilst the contract work may have been monotonous and regarded by some as

degrading, many adults with learning difficulties felt it gave them a real job like other adults (op cit).

Conclusions.

This chapter has shown how the changes in legislation reflect changes in social attitudes towards people with disabilities both within and outside the educational sphere. Perhaps, however, society now tolerates those with learning difficulties but largely ignores them. Much provision is still discrete, both in education and in day services and so although protected by legislation adults with learning difficulties are not yet included fully in society and this impacts upon their adult status. As a result the next chapter will consider the views of those with learning difficulties themselves.

Chapter 5.

An Historical Context: Voices and Views.

Introduction.

The previous chapters have indicated how language describing those with learning difficulties has been negative because of social attitudes and values and how, until comparatively recently, some people with learning difficulties have been excluded from both education and society. Both of these factors affected their adult status.

This chapter will focus on the voices and views of those with learning difficulties to indicate some of their perceptions of themselves and to consider how they were regarded in the past. These views will be put into context by a brief analysis of how those with learning difficulties were regarded by society and the factors influencing those views. An understanding of such a context is critical for an appreciation of the research findings from interviews with young people and adults with learning difficulties and for their implications.

Factors affecting the treatment of those with learning difficulties.

A key factor influencing society's treatment of those with learning difficulties was the model of disability which was used. Two models of disability were particularly influential in the past, the religious model

(Humphries and Gordon 1992, Lapper 2005) and the medical model (Nind et al 2003). The religious model saw disability as divine punishment or retribution for some past wrong. Such a view led to guilt both for the family of the person with a disability and the person themselves. As a result a disabled child was often hidden away. The medical model emphasised a person's condition rather than focusing on the person. The influence of these two models and their effects will become apparent in the voices of those adults with learning difficulties.

Both written and oral evidence is difficult to obtain concerning the views of people with learning difficulties themselves as they are often not able to write about their experiences and until very recently there was not a great deal of interest in these people by researchers. Until the late 1980s and the early 1990s many were still in long stay hospitals for the mentally handicapped and society had little reason to be aware of them. Adults who lived in their own local communities were mainly catered for by Adult Training Centres (Malin 1995), to which they were bussed on a daily basis. Adult Training Centres usually catered for between 80 and 100 people and were oriented to sheltered work. Many were located in industrial areas. Within the unitary authority in which the research was conducted the Adult Training Centre was situated on the outskirts of a market town, well removed from the major urban conurbation. Whilst adults in the Training

Centre were theoretically in the community the only times the general public would be aware of them was as they travelled to and from the Adult Training Centre in a large bus.

Until recently there has been little work done to collect the memoirs of those with learning difficulties. Even those who were able to speak about their lives were reluctant to do so as in the early part of the twentieth century people with many kinds of difficulties lived in fear due to a number of factors. Some people still believed that problems related to mental health or disability were demon possession, as demonstrated by the beliefs of the Eugenics movement and Muscular Christianity. Such fear was evident even among those who were deaf, blind or physically disabled who lived with the constant fear of being removed from their families and being sent away to live in an institution (Humphries and Gordon 1992).

Those who have learning difficulties frequently have additional difficulties such as physical disabilities or epilepsy. Epilepsy until comparatively recently was linked to the notion of demon possession.

> During the first half of the (twentieth) century disability was surrounded by ignorance, fear and superstition. Age old beliefs that the birth of disabled child was a form of divine retribution still persisted.... A few were of the opinion that children with disabilities- often those who had epileptic fits – were possessed by the devil. (Humphries and Gordon 1992:12).

A survey conducted by the National Society for Epilepsy (May 2003), showed that up to 2% of the population in Britain still believes that epilepsy may be caused by evil spirits and that it is contagious. (Thomas 2003:1). Such a religious model of disability, led to fear of the person and a desire to contain them.

For all people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities there was society's fear that they might produce others like themselves, a view reflected in the science of Eugenics (Black 2003). Eugenics enshrined the belief that those who were mentally disabled were undermining the health of the nation. This belief fuelled the idea that such people should be separated from the rest of society and contained to prevent further contamination, a view reflected in the obsessive way in the strict segregation of the sexes within institutions (Humphries and Gordon 1992) and the way in which some nations, for example the United States of America, sterilised those with learning difficulties (Black 2003, Kelves 1995). Humphries and Gordon (1992) record the experiences of Evelyn King, who grew up in a mental hospital in Leeds:

> Years ago we daren't talk to the boys. Oh no, we had to keep away from them. We didn't even look at them. Girls used to be on one side and boys on the other. If we talked to the boys , you could get in real trouble. I did get frightened to get into trouble for what I say to the boys. So I just kept my mouth shut.' (Humphries and Gordon 1992:102)

As Evelyn King indicates, there was fear relating to association with the opposite sex. A similar picture is painted by Ernest in 'Memories of the Colony' (Atkinson and Williams 1990).

Other fear also existed. Patients in mental handicap hospitals were afraid to speak out because this resulted in punishment.

> Punishments [villa] 17 it were when they used big punishments. They were scrubbing floors and carrying sand, bags of sand, and if they dropped them there is somebody behind them to tell them to pick them up and keep carrying them. And when they scrubbed the floor, they had to scrub it again, keep doing it all the time, that's why they got tired! They used to be in pyjamas and they used to have a dressing gown on. (Atkinson and Williams 1990:158)

The concept of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Muscular Christianity influenced the way those with learning difficulties were regarded (Humphries and Gordon 1992). Muscular Christianity emphasised fitness and athleticism, ideas which were stressed to young people in schools and in uniformed organisations such as the Boy Scouts. Muscular Christianity was also closely allied to pride in the British navy and army and linked to imperialism (Humphries and Gordon 1992). Such pride influenced the notion of a superior race and was linked with the Eugenics movement (Kevles 1995) in that both movements had similar philosophies. Pride in the nation and the idea of the 'master' race led to the belief that those who were 'unfit' in whatever way should not be permitted to breed. The rise of Muscular Christianity was arguably disastrous for

those with learning and physical difficulties because the stress on physical fitness was a goal totally unattainable for them and because of the notion of a superior race in which those who were perceived to be inferior had no place. Fathers too who produced a disabled son or daughter felt that this reflected poorly on their own masculinity.

Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth and for much of the twentieth century there existed a climate of fear for those with physical and learning difficulties and the feeling that they should be separated from society. This resulted in much of the literature on the lives of people with learning difficulties concentrating almost totally on the theme of stigmatisation (Atkinson and Williams 1990), ignoring the personal and social identity of those with learning difficulties which again affected their status as adults.

It is possible to describe a person either negatively or positively and by differing criteria, a point made by Shearer (in Mittler and Sinason 1996:209) where a child is described both negatively and positively. Put negatively:

> Peter will be eight for the rest of his life. But he can't walk properly or talk. And in another eight years he won't be looking forward to dating girls or getting a job. Like thousands of other children, Peter is severely mentally handicapped. Like them he will need loving care from specially trained staff for the rest of his life.

Put positively

> Peter is eight and growing up fast. Last year, he took his first
> independent steps. He's growing more adventurous all the time as he
> explores his community and makes new friends. He's enjoying learning
> to sign to them on his signboard, too. Like other children with severe
> mental handicap, Peter is learning far more than we thought possible
> only a few years ago.

Whilst Shearer (op cit) speaks of a child, the same factors can be applied

equally to adults.

When, as Atkinson and Williams (1990) suggest, the personal and social

identities of a person are swept away what we have left is what they

describe as a 'spoiled' identity, an identity which is 'distorted and given

unwanted meanings' (Atkinson and Williams 1990:13), that is a person's

identity has been destroyed. A similar point is made by Borland and

Ramcharan (Ramcharan et al 1997:89) where they speak of 'excluded

identities' for those with learning difficulties. Is not this, however, the

purpose of institutionalisation? In institutions individualism makes overall

control more difficult. The result has been that many of those with learning

difficulties have become passive.

Two factors emerge from this. Firstly there was the factor of society's

fears of those with learning difficulties which led to them being segregated

from society. Secondly there was a necessity for hospitals for the mentally

handicapped to attempt to destroy personal identities in order to impose a control over the patients. Sometimes they failed to control because the sense of self 'remains stubbornly resistant to assault' Atkinson and Williams (1990:13).

The views of those with learning difficulties.

At the beginning of the twenty first century it may be assumed that much of what happened in the past has disappeared (Carnaby 2002). Most hospitals which housed those with learning difficulties are closed and former patients now live in the community. What to 'live in the community' means and whether people with learning difficulties wanted to live in the community are questions which remain, for the far reaching changes brought about by the National Health Service (NHS) Care in the Community Act (1990) were not done in consultation with people with learning difficulties. Bill Challis (1990) describes the closure of the hospital where he lived in this way:

> May I, as a patient with many years spent in mental hospitals express with horror the very thought of being put into what is termed a 'community home'?.....Having reached the age of nearly 70, I am well settled here. ......I have been through a system which destroys all thinking . I have spent most of my life incarcerated behind bars, high walls and locked doors for so long, that I do not feel secure if I am not behind them. (Atkinson and Williams 1990:99).

Two issues are apparent from this comment. Some adults with learning

difficulties, who had been separated from society, were aware of such segregation and they had no opinion and no voice. Some adults with learning difficulties believe that they have not been taken seriously by society and have not been allowed to control their lives (Atkinson and Williams 1990, DfES Doris 2001, DfES Ian 2001, DfES Justine 2001). Interviews for previous research (Beverley 1997a) and discussions with adults with learning difficulties suggest there is some justification for this view. A distinction must be drawn here between not being capable of doing these things and not being permitted to, for whilst not every adult with learning difficulties is able to take total control of his/ her own life many are still prevented from doing so. Doris Clark (DfES Doris 2001), who eventually was able to move into her own flat commented:

'Now, I live in my own flat. It is mine. I can do what I like…… There is nobody to tell me what I can and cannot do. It is my responsibility to make sure that I look after myself and my flat.' (DfES Doris 2001:12)

At 16 Doris left school and because she had learning difficulties was sent to live in a long-stay hospital. She says of that decision:

I did not have a choice about whether or not I went into the hospital. I hated it. I had no freedom. At night, the doors of the hospital wards were locked. If you wanted to leave the hospital you had to ask for permission (op cit:6).

Doris is only now in her forties indicating how recently the ways in which adults with learning difficulties are treated have begun to change.

Anya Souza, who has Down's Syndrome, feels her problem is not having a learning difficulty but in the ways other people perceive it. 'My biggest problem is that people think I can't do things and I think I can' (DfES Anya 2001:30). She also believes that testing for Down's syndrome during pregnancy is wrong.

> I spoke at a conference in Barcelona (in Spain). They were talking about testing people who might have a baby with Down's syndrome. I gave them my mouth. I said, Why are you doing this? Why are you treating us like animals? (Anya 2001:28)

Such a view perhaps links back to the ideas of more than a century ago when it was considered so important to prevent the 'feeble minded' having children. The testing of pregnant women is rarely linked to the idea of a superior race so dominant almost a hundred years ago, yet perhaps the desire for 'perfect' children has its roots in almost the same philosophy. Anya's comments however challenge society's perceptions of people and also raise the issue of whether or not society's attitudes towards those with learning difficulties have indeed changed. She also indicates that those with learning difficulties have a right to respect as human beings (Fritzon and Kabue 2004), a point sometimes disregarded in the past. The great difference from a century ago is that Anya now has the freedom to challenge pre-conceptions about those with learning difficulties. She also comments

> I've got friends who aren't Down's who've got learning difficulties worse than mine. I tell them, we're not all perfect so just admit it. It's

nothing to be ashamed of. (DfES Anya 2001:28)

That statement contains challenges to the notion of a perfect race and asserts the rights of everyone to be a part of society. She further states that those with learning difficulties should make, and live by, their own decisions.

> Families, friends and services need to know when to stop giving orders and start discussing, and when to start letting us live with our own decisions. (op cit:28)

Anya's comments raise many issues about how those with learning difficulties have been treated. It is questionable whether or not societal attitudes towards adults with learning difficulties have changed in recent years. Society perhaps still perceives them as passive and unable to make decisions. Possibly it is easier to hold this view because then society can still dictate the terms under which they live. Anya's questioning of testing for Down's syndrome during pregnancy raises the fundamental question of not whether those adults with Down's syndrome and other learning difficulties have the right to be treated as adults in the sense of making their own decisions and living independently but whether they have the even more fundamental right to be treated as people.

Anya also questions another view of society. Many people are uncertain about those with learning difficulties to entering into sexual relationships

(Carnaby 2002, Sutcliffe and Simons 1993). In her book, however, Anya says: 'I live in the flat where I grew up. I love the flat. I live there with my partner, Paul.'(DfES Anya 2001:22) Thus she states the right of those with learning difficulties to form relationships in the same way as other adults.

The medical model of disability questioned.

By inference Anya also questions the medical model of disability. When she was born the doctors told her mother she would be 'physically and mentally handicapped for the rest of her life' (Ramcharan et al ed. 1997:4). She describes this statement as a 'silly thing to say' a point vindicated by the fact that she now lives virtually independently and is a stained glass artist. Although she has a condition which doctors refer to as Downs' syndrome she points out that first she is a person (op cit). This raises the question of whether the medical model has been used to define who people are.

Changes since 1990.

There has then been considerable change since 1990 when the NHS Care in the Community Act resulted in many with learning difficulties coming out of hospitals and being encouraged to take an increasing responsibility for their lives including campaigning for their rights (DfES Graeme 2001). Self-advocacy groups are becoming quite powerful and those with learning

difficulties feel that this gives them a voice (O'Kane and Goldbart 1996, Sutcliffe and Simons 1993).

More adults with learning difficulties in the present century are encouraged to feel a pride in their achievements. Graeme (DfES 2001) says:

> I often ask my sisters, Lyndsay and Katrina, and my brother Stuart what my Mum and Dad would think about me. They say my parents would be very pleased with what I have achieved in life (DfEs Graeme 2001:28).

This is a sharp contrast to a century ago when many families were ashamed of their disabled children (Humphries and Gordon 1992).

Whilst there have been significant changes in the ways those with learning difficulties have been treated particularly in the last decade societal views do not change rapidly. Many still fear those with learning difficulty and, within education, feel stigmatised by their presence. Whilst Muscular Christianity and imperialism no longer hold sway as they did at the beginning of the last century, a new force has taken over in the form of advertising, which in a different way demands perfection. Speaking of Stan, Bayley (in Ramcharan et al 1997:160) says

> Stan feels alone in the world without a single true soul mate, close companion, sexual partner, without love. He is confused about his disability, unsure whether it is illness or punishment, supernatural or accident . The media daily thrusts images of perfect men and women at him and he wants his own life to match those images – he wants marriage with a beautiful (fantasy) woman, he wants a family (he has

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been rejected by his own), he wants material success and a car. The media can successfully create such identity problems for most people and Stan has less ability than most to separate fantasy and stylised images from everyday reality. By the standards of the TV advert, Stan judges himself badly.

Thus the loneliness of those with difficulties to which Humphries and Gordon (1992) refer is still present, as is the influence of both the religious and medical models of disability. Whilst many adults with learning difficulties now have more fulfilled lives this is not always so. Relationships help to define who we are (Firth and Rapley cited in Ramcharan et al 1997) and yet many adults with learning difficulties have problems with interpersonal relationships. Services often look at how people with learning difficulties cope in practical ways and then assume that they can cope generally in life (Ramacharan et al 1997).

Conclusions.

This chapter has shown how those with learning difficulties are still stigmatised, find they do not match media and society stereotypes and find relationships difficult. It is arguable therefore that their life is only superficially different from a century ago and they are still not regarded as fully adult. There is supposed progress but in reality not a great deal has changed. Labels may be different and people may be cared for in different ways but it is possible that institutions are still there in a different form and some adults with learning difficulties are still feared and detached from

society, rather than being adult persons who can relate to others and are afforded respect and adult status. As a result the notion of being regarded as 'different', which is crucial to an understanding of the research findings, will now be examined.

Chapter 6.

Learning Difficulties and Difference.

Introduction.

The preceding three chapters considered how in the past society has regarded and dealt with those with learning difficulties and how those with learning difficulties have perceived this. The literature indicates that people with learning difficulties have been ignored, segregated from society and, in some instances, exterminated partly because the dominant models of disability were the medical and religious models. The chapters have also indicated that within education the curriculum offered has been relatively narrow. This chapter will examine the ways in which society currently regards many people with learning difficulties and disabilities as being 'different' from the rest of society socially, physically and intellectually. Such 'difference' impacts on the areas of education, employment and daily living and thus directly on adult status. Perceptions of difference will be considered against the background of a society in which theoretically inclusion is promoted, particularly within education.

The discussion in this chapter is based on the view that there are essentially two perceptions of people: one which states that whilst every person is an individual, all people are fundamentally the same (Bee 1997,Ceyrac 1982) and the other which states that some people are different from the majority

(Black 2003, Peters cited in Ramcharan et al 1997)and as exemplified by Wyndham's 1955 novel. The possibility that learning difficulties and disabilities are socially constructed will also be considered, as will the implications of this for those whom society defines as being disabled. Education, employment and daily living will be considered in relation to this.

Reference will be made to a variety of sources. One significant source is academic research literature based on data collected on relevant issues but fiction, autobiographical and biographical material also give important insights. Fiction is able to reflect societal attitudes in a direct way and the use of autobiography and biography enables the views of parents, carers and those with learning difficulties to be considered.

Background issues.

There have been suggestions throughout history, and particularly in Britain during the last two centuries, that those with learning difficulties or disabilities, are 'different', a view rooted in two perceptions of those with learning difficulties. The first perception is that families who produce a child with learning difficulties are the target of divine retribution for some wickedness committed (Stakes and Hornby 1997, Humphries and Gordon 1992, Pritchard 1963). Whilst this view has lost most of its influence and

the majority of academic theologians (Barrett 1967 and Kieffer cited in Barton and Muddiman 2000) reject it, nevertheless traces of it still persist. The second view is that those with learning difficulties have some sort of mental health problem and so are to be feared and avoided. Learning difficulties and mental health problems are often confused, especially where the person with a learning difficulty has an attendant physical difficulty such as epilepsy or cerebral palsy. In the past both seizures and uncontrolled spasms, with the allied problems of voice production and control of the volume of speech, were also linked to demon possession (Humphries and Gordon 1992) and 'madness'. Thus at this level alone those with learning difficulties are regarded as 'different'.

A society has expectations of how people, particularly adults, should behave. Such expectations are not spelled out but are unspoken and undefined (Bee 1997). Only non-conformity to the expectation is questioned. The expectations, which may be seen as a 'norm', relate mostly to social behaviour and social acceptance but there are also indications that to be 'normal' intimates that a person is without a disability (Barnes 1990), either physically or cognitively. Barnes (op cit) indicates that our society places value on 'physical wholeness' and that we have a 'tendency to formulate opinions of others on relatively superficial information such as eye contact and physical appearance.' It may also indicate that learning

difficulties and disabilities are a social construct, formulated by society partly to protect itself by distancing those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Society wants to make clear what is expected of 'normal' people whilst at the same time not describing some as 'not normal' (Access For All 2002) in an attempt to move away from language which excludes.

Such a use of terminology regarding disability may merely reflect the current social attitudes that help inform the discourse which surrounds it. Whilst terminology may appear irrelevant to the non-disabled for those with disabilities it is crucial for as Mittler (1996) suggests:

> ……the language which parents and professionals use in public…..is not to be dismissed as 'mere political correctness'. Using a phrase such as 'the mentally handicapped' reflects a stereotyped assumption that *they* 'are all the same'. For a while it was customary to talk about 'people with disabilities', until it was pointed out by self-advocacy groups that if they have to be referred to *en masse* at all , their preference was for 'disabled people', since they saw themselves as ordinary people disabled by social barriers and institutions.

Language is not merely therefore an issue of political correctness but rather a reflection of society's attitudes towards those with disabilities and how they are perceived.

The norm which is left unvoiced and without clarification is perhaps very similar to the norm of a human being, postulated by Wyndham for fictional purposes, in 'The Chrysalids':

And God created man in his own image. And God decreed that man should have one body, one head, two arms and two legs: that each arm should be jointed in two places and end in one hand: that each hand should have four fingers and one thumb: that each finger should bear a flat finger-nail....... (Wyndham 1955:6f)

Also from Wyndham comes a view of those who do not fit the norm; 'Accursed is the mutant in the sight of God and man' (op cit 68). Whilst using the vehicle of a work of fiction Wyndham does perhaps reflect society's perceptions of the norm of being human and of those whom society perceives as being different. It is arguable that fiction is able to reflect accurately society's perceptions and attitudes even though they are presented through story.

At the opposite end of the scale to Wyndham's description of normal and abnormal is the view that there is no such thing as 'normal' and 'abnormal' but that there are simply people. Such a view is expressed by Ceyrac (1982) when speaking of herself in relation to meeting a man with both learning and physical difficulties:

Like Claude I had my fears, my vulnerability, my sensitivity; I had the same desire to love and be loved, the same need to be accepted and recognised. Like Claude, I too had so much difficulty accepting my limits, failures, broken illusions, frustrations, the sufferings of life and my own angers and depression. Yes, basically we are all the same. (Ceyrac 1982:25).

The discussion as to whether people are the same or different can be situated between these two poles of the clear definition of 'normality' as

expressed by Wyndham and the view that there are simply people. There will also be varying degrees of attitudes to 'normality' within this dipolar view. These two perspectives raise the further question of whether difference is regarded as negative or positive. A negative view implies that there are those who are not quite human (Fritzon and Kabue 2004, Ramcharan et al 1997) because they do not function like the majority of society. A positive view accepts diversity and values each person as an individual. Robertson (1998) links such views to arguments regarding the quality of life experienced by those with learning difficulties and links the negative perspective to ongoing unquestioned eugenic perspectives. Vanier (1984) is unequivocal on this question when speaking of 'normalization' for people with learning difficulties, a concept which originated in the Scandinavian countries, he says:

> This concept has value, if we understand it to mean that each person has rights and that no one must be excluded from the human community because of a handicap. But, if by 'normalization' we mean that everyone is 'normal', that everyone must be the same, then we deny differences and this is wrong. (Vanier, J 1984:56).

This may also indicate differing views of disability between the Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom and again lead to the possibility that disability is socially constructed.

Difference can then be seen as deviance from society's expectations and requirements and something to be feared or disliked, or it can be seen

positively as every person being different and having unique qualities and gifts (Ramcharan et al 1997), giving a richness to humanity. It is also true that to refer to a group of people as 'normal' is a meaningless concept because the vast range of people in society are all different as they are all individuals.

In Britain people whom society perceives as different are still not fully tolerated. Prior to the advent of industrial society asylums were originally created with the purpose of educating those with learning difficulties to reach their full potential (Carnaby 2002). Industrial society focused on work and productivity and those who were slower were disregarded. From the middle of the twentieth century attitudes began to change towards those with learning difficulties and the development of community services to support them is still ongoing. History shows (Cole 1989) that differing disabilities have been regarded differently, particularly in the field of education. The blind and partially sighted have, for the last two hundred years, been reasonably well provided for in academic education (op cit 1989). Even so this was usually in segregated provision, segregated from other people and by gender (Pritchard 1963). Perhaps this is because this group in every other respect appears 'normal'. In terms of social acceptability they behave in a way which fulfils social conventions. Their speech and movement is not affected. The deaf and hearing impaired have

also received education which has taken account of their difficulties but less so than the blind and partially sighted (Cole 1989). Deafness often affects speech and so deaf people are sometimes perceived as also having cognitive difficulties (Humphries and Gordon 1992).

For people with learning difficulties the situation is perhaps worse than those with many other disabilities. People are often fearful of what they see as bizarre behaviour in some adults or children who appear naughty and disobedient such as children with autism or AHDD. Speaking of a 16 year old with learning disabilities in relation to the arts Birkett says the following:

> Children with learning disabilities, like Tom, enjoy going out just as much as other children. Despite their parents' desire to give their children experience of the arts, though, these families are imprisoned by people's attitudes – those of both venue staff and other visitors. Last year (2002), a survey by the charity Contact a Family (Caf) of over 1,000 families with disabled children found 68% didn't use public play and leisure facilities for fear of being made to feel uncomfortable. (Birkett 2003)

Whilst Birkett speaks of a young person, many carers and tutors of adults with learning difficulties experience the same forms of rejection. The literature suggests that those with learning difficulties are regarded either more fearfully than those with other forms of disability or with less understanding (Fling 2000, Jackson 2004)).

Education.

The primary reason for such rejection of those with learning difficulties is perhaps that learning difficulty is not generally well understood as until recently many with learning difficulties were kept within institutions and were not seen in the community. There are also other reasons. Britain, like many nations, places a high value on cognitive skills and academic success. Successive governments have emphasised academic achievement. Wilby, in the late twentieth century, commented about comprehensive schools:

> The trouble with our comprehensives is not that their academic standards are too low but that they are too high. Academic standards still have a virtual stranglehold on English education. (Wilby cited in Murphy and Torrance 1988:13)

This attitude can be seen both in the ongoing debate about academic and vocational A Levels, where vocational A Levels, despite the comments made by Dearing (1996) are regarded by many as less important and by the failure of the tri-partite system of secondary education established by the 1944 Education Act. As Barton and Tomlinson suggest, even with the introduction of the comprehensive system of education and the removal of certain forms of early selection:

> .....competition and differentiation remained endemic to schooling. 'Ability' was still very narrowly conceived in terms of the cognitive with success via competitive, formal examinations legitimating such attitudes and ideology (Barton and Tomlinson in Cohen and Cohen ed. 1986:47).

Traditionally there has been an over emphasis on academic subjects with a watered down version of the curriculum given to those with learning difficulties (Stakes and Hornby 1997) which disadvantages those with low cognitive ability, many of whom are only just starting to realise their educational potential when they leave school (Sutcliffe 1990). Emphasis on academic abilities disadvantages them educationally but also has social and personal implications:

> This very narrow definition of ability, grounded in the curricular evaluation of the cognitive-intellectual, has its effects on pupils. Ability labels are not seen by pupils as mere *descriptions* of part of their total set of attributes as human beings; they are seen rather as generalised *judgements* upon them. Because the mastery of the cognitive-intellectual domain is so essential to success in school, ability labels carry rich connotations of pupils' moral worth.
> (Hargreaves cited in Cohen and Cohen 1986:47-48)

For those with low cognitive ability a feeling of failure or inability to succeed carries over into adult life and affects their adult status. Frequently they are regarded as being incapable of making a contribution to society because of their cognitive difficulties and are again seen as passive. Hargreaves makes an important point. A label is more than a descriptor of educational achievement. It makes a judgement about the person and speaks of the expectations seen of that person. If expectation is low then there is little motivation to improve.

The other focus within education in contemporary society has been the

emphasis on equipping young people to contribute towards the national economy. People are therefore regarded as human capital in the global market place:

> The message, for both Britain and America, is seemingly clear – for both nations to compete effectively in world markets, educational goals must be based on the needs of business, and, in turn, business must contribute to and be actively involved in education' (Unwin 1991:81)

Those with learning difficulties become part of a system geared towards employment which, for many of them, will never become a reality and are regarded, whether rightly or wrongly, as having very little in terms of human capital.

Whilst those with learning difficulties have some human capital to offer, this is diminished by the two-fold emphasis on academic ability and contribution to the economy. They are seen as 'different' because they can neither achieve academically nor make a realistic contribution to the economy in society as it is currently organised. Those with learning difficulties could be employed in manual and repetitive work, particularly in catering and horticulture but their contributions are not those which society values.

Factors affecting those with learning difficulties in everyday life.

There are other ways in which those with learning difficulties may be perceived as 'different'. At birth parents may have been told to expect little of their disabled son/daughter (Ramcharan et al 1997).Within education some children with learning difficulties are still segregated in special schools particularly during or after primary school. Very few adults with learning difficulties are employed in full time jobs and often spend much of their time in activities related to Resource Centres /Social Education Centres. Many adults with learning difficulties need help to cope with daily living and so live at home with parents and carers, in residential accommodation or in minimum support accommodation. These factors have implications for independence, self esteem, social networks and adult status.

Points of separation from society.

Ramcharan (1997), after interviewing Anya Souza, a woman with Down's syndrome, recognises her belief that birth, primary education, secondary education and the move to employment are the times when 'separations' from society can take place. Consideration will be given to these perceived times of separation. There is a fifth 'separation' in relation to everyday living.

Birth.

At birth many parents were, in the past, told to expect little of their child with disabilities (Ramcharan et al 1997). Historically many disabled children were simply left to die or, occasionally, were killed either by parents or by a conspiracy between doctors and midwives (Humphries and Gordon 1992), particularly where families lived in poverty and were unable to cope with such a child. Families sometimes placed a disabled child in an institution where s/he was brought up at little cost to the family (Humphries and Gordon 1992, Addley 2001, Lee cited in Mack 2001). Other children were kept at home by their parents but were largely hidden away (Humphries and Gordon 1992). Even in twenty first century Britain parents still sometimes exhibit a different attitude to a disabled child from that which they exhibit to their other children. Thus birth and early childhood can thus be a time of 'separation' both from a disabled child's family and from the wider community, particularly when the 'label' a child is given, for example Down's syndrome, is regarded as more important than the person (Ramcharan et al 1997).

School and Further Education.

The next time of separation is the point when a child begins school Ramcharan (1997). Children with learning difficulties were often placed in special schools although since the recommendations made by Warnock

(1978) many are now placed within mainstream schools. This second separation is described thus by Anya Souza:

> ……..the next place I went to was a special school. I think you might say this was the second 'separation'. My mother had fought hard to ensure that as I was an infant that I was looked upon by the family and society as just another infant and not as a Down's Syndrome baby. Now it was time to start me on the long road of making contact with society. (Ramcharan et al 1997:5)

Children placed in special schools may experience an unnecessary dislocation from the community in which they live. Even if they attended a local school they would perhaps not be accepted by others. This presents a dilemma for those who have the responsibility for placing children in an appropriate educational setting. If they remain in mainstream education the school, whilst legally required to meet their needs, might experience difficulty in doing so and they may be subjected to taunts and ridicule from other children. Once placed in a special school, however, they frequently lose all contact with the children in their neighbourhood and where there is contact it is often unhelpful as they are seen as children who have to be educated elsewhere because they cannot cope with the demands of 'normal' school. Special schools therefore separate out some children from all other children, a separation which can also continue throughout adulthood (Ramcharan et al 1997).

Ramcharan, in discussion with Anya Souza identifies the move from

primary to secondary education, a point at which many children with learning difficulties have moved from mainstream school into a special school, as another possible time of 'separation' from society. Souza, however, points out the advantages for young people with learning difficulties staying in mainstream school:

> ....I would not have learned as much in a special school; I would not have made ordinary friends; I would not have learned to deal with people who made fun of or discriminated against me; I would not have known about society at large; I probably wouldn't have taken the same interest in boys; and so on. I would have been less educated in class-type work and not educated at all about those things that make you a valuable member of society. It doesn't matter if you pass exams. You are really there to find your place in society and the world. To separate people out from society from the start is to say from the start that you are not, and never will be, a part of this society and world. (Ramcharan et al 1997)

This view raises a fundamental question about the nature and purpose of education. Education has, in recent years, become increasingly geared to passing tests and less concerned about a broad preparation for adult life (Cole 1989).

For those with learning difficulties it seems impossible to escape the fact that others believe that they are different. When young people leave special schools which often have large catchment areas they lose contact with their peer group and are isolated from their peers in their local community. They then have few social networks except those provided by organisations

like the Gateway Club an organisation specifically for those with learning difficulties with the disadvantage that young people with learning difficulties only come into contact with similar young people. This narrows their peer group and some indeed have no peer group post-school (Hornby and Kidd cited in Hornby 2000).

Adult Education within the unitary authority in which the research was conducted reflects the situation in schools. In both colleges and the Adult Education Service those with learning difficulties are on the same campus or within the same centres as other students but are often taught in discrete provision allowing for little interaction with other students.

Within Basic Skills in the Adult Education Service most adults with learning difficulties are taught in discrete provision for two reasons. Firstly it allegedly enables staff to meet student needs if they are taught separately. Secondly it is felt that those with learning difficulties will 'put off' other students as adults without learning difficulties may feel they are 'labelled' by the presence of those with learning difficulties (Sutcliffe 1994). As Sutcliffe (op cit) suggests this may be because adults who have literacy and numeracy difficulties tend to have low self esteem and confidence. Admittedly it would be difficult to include all students with a learning difficulty in 'mainstream' groups and keep an adequate balance between

those with and those without learning difficulties, as the service has insufficient groups to do this. In failing to do this, however, the service is in fact replicating the situation in schools with the attendant difficulties.

Discrete provision has the potential for in-built problems (Ramcharan et al 1997) for many students are bussed to a class and spend much of the week with the same group of people. Potentially therefore arguments or tensions are brought into the classroom.

There are those students within discrete provision whose literacy skills are equal to those of some students in mainstream groups. Where this is the case there can be little academic or social justification for keeping these learners in a more restricted environment. Social behaviour is sometimes cited as the reason for students being retained in discrete provision but such retention is perhaps discriminatory.

There are two main disadvantages of discrete provision. Adults in discrete provision have a very narrow peer group and are unable to measure their attitudes and behaviour against a range of other people and to realise that some behaviours tolerated and understood by members of their group would not be tolerated elsewhere (Griffiths 1994, Sutcliffe 1990). Placement in discrete provision may also limit horizons and avoid reality.

Both of these impact negatively on adult status. Placement in appropriate mainstream groups may prevent this whilst giving an adult with learning difficulties a broader peer group.

Within basic skills provision there is no real need to segregate those who are seen as 'different' because they have a learning difficulty, as each learner works on his/her own learning programme, designed to meet individual needs and related to the Core Curricula for Adult Literacy/Numeracy (2001) or to the Pre-Entry Curriculum (2002), which will be considered in the next chapter. There is, therefore, no pedagogical reason why some students should be excluded. In 1897 Montessori realised that mentally defective children 'presented chiefly a pedagogical ..... problem' (Montessori cited in Pritchard 1963:178, Tomlinson 1996). If the reason is not pedagogical and there are no behavioural problems present, then there seems no adequate reason not to include them alongside other learners. Research, based on questionnaires to all the Adult Education Service Basic Skills staff which will be analysed later, indicates that staff have no major problem with including those with learning difficulties in mainstream groups. Observations and conversations with staff indicate that few students leave or object when students with learning difficulties join their groups as does research cited by Sutcliffe (1992). It seems that fear of difference at management level is more a factor in the retention of discrete

provision than student or tutor acceptance of those with learning difficulties.

Discrete provision may still be appropriate for adults who need a secure environment in which to learn or as a progression route to a mainstream group but many remain in discrete provision simply because they have a learning difficulty. They are segregated because of their perceived differences rather than included on the basis of the factors they have in common with other adult learners. This again impacts on their adult status.

Employment.

Adults with learning difficulties have been and are seen as 'different'-in the field of employment (Broomhead in Tilstone et al 1998, Griffiths 1994). The move from education into employment is seen by Ramcharan et al (1997) as the fourth possible time of 'separation'. Very few adult learners with learning difficulties are in employment. In the past there were jobs available for those who had low cognitive ability but changes in manufacturing and the requirement of greater literacy skills have made most jobs impossible for those with learning difficulties (Griffiths 1994). Data from 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001) indicates that less than 10% of people with learning difficulties have jobs. Attempts are made to find suitable employment but mostly this is in very part time

positions. A great number of adults are placed on job experience which does not develop into employment. There are a number of reasons for this which are considered below.

It would not be financially viable for many adults on benefit to work in a low paid job as they would lose many of their entitlements as a person with a disability (Ramcharan et al 1997) although this situation is gradually changing. Families would then be affected quite severely.

Many firms and businesses are willing to take on adults with learning difficulties to give them experience or to employ them on a very part time basis but it would not be economic to employ them on a full time, permanent basis. Many such adults work much more slowly than the average worker which presents difficulties for the employer. Another problem encountered is that whilst an adult with learning difficulties will often work quite effectively at a repetitive job he/she is unable to cope if a problem occurs. Anecdotal evidence supports this. It is then quite unlikely that most adults with learning difficulties will find employment other than sheltered employment such as Mencap's Café Ivy scheme. Whilst such schemes have a place they only provide a work environment where again the majority of people have learning difficulties.

It could be argued that in a nation where unemployment is a factor adults with learning difficulties are not any different from others who are unemployed. Being unemployed, however, has a number of implications. First employment provides income which is earned and brings with it a sense of value and self-esteem (Sutcliffe 1990). It also makes one a contributor rather than a beneficiary, an active participant rather than a passive recipient of allowances (op cit). Further Watts and McNair (1995) argue that the term 'work' covers more than employment. Comparing it to learning as a broader concept than education they say:

> Similarly, work covers employment and recognises its crucial importance, but covers other work too: self-employment, for example, and all the household work and voluntary work, not to mention shadow-economy work, which sustain communities and enrich their quality. (Watts and McNair in Bradshaw 1995:163)

Sutcliffe (1990) makes the same point. Quoting from a report carried out for the Welsh Initiative for Specialised Employment she indicates that adults with learning difficulties felt working had changed their lives in a number of ways, for example getting to know people, having their own money and feeling better about themselves. Parents interviewed for this report suggested that their adult sons and daughters had changed as a result of employment. They stated that:

> 'He sees himself as an ordinary person - working, earning, saving spending.'
> 'More grown up.'
> 'Matured. Takes a great interest in life.'
> 'Sees himself as more of a man and an independent person.'

'Much more independent.'
'More mature and willing to discuss.' (Sutcliffe 1990:73)

Many adults with learning difficulties undertake various forms of voluntary work, for example, assisting in charity shops but few work placements lead to employment and they simply move on to another work placement. Choice here seems to be important because many people choose to work within the home or to undertake voluntary work. For those with learning difficulties their choice is restricted by two factors. Firstly it is not that they choose to work in a voluntary capacity but rather it is the only employment option. Secondly, it is sometimes questionable how much choice they have been allowed in their daily programmes (Garside in Stuart and Thomson 1995) such as a work placement.

Apart from the economic and self worth aspects (Sutcliffe 1990) being in employment also brings other advantages including a social network and the chance to work with other people on an equal basis. For those with learning difficulties it is an opportunity to demonstrate skills they have which are not solely cognitive and, depending on the work environment, to meet and work alongside adults without learning difficulties (Broomhead in Tilstone et al 1998, Sutcliffe 1990).

Work for those with learning difficulties makes them like every other adult

(Whelan and Speake cited in Tilstone et al 1998). Much conversation in Britain hinges on employment. Employment is held in esteem in Britain (Broomhead in Tilstone et al 1998) and those who are unemployed are devalued. If, as an adult with learning difficulties, one is held in fairly low esteem already, the lack of employment further devalues that person and affects the recognition of their adult status.

Work also gives a routine to daily life. Some adults with learning difficulties preferred the contract work of the past (Beverley 1997a) and were at first suspicious of adult education because they felt that attendance at the Resource Centre was their work and attending a class would prevent them from working (Unitary Authority Adult Education Service 1990 Unpublished Papers).

Daily Life.

A fifth point of separation identified in the literature (Barnes in Ramcharan et al 1997) is in daily life. Many adults with learning difficulties are unable to live totally independently and many need a great deal of care (Fitton and Wilson in Philpot and Ward 1995). For some it would perhaps be easier to gain independence if the ethos in society was not that of a 'blame culture' which readily resorts to litigation and makes parents, carers and others unwilling to allow adults with learning difficulties to take acceptable risks

(Carnaby 2002, Richardson and Ritchie 1989, Roberts in Ramcharan et al 1997).

Other issues relative to risk and safety are clear from the evidence (Richardson and Ritchie 1989, Sutcliffe 1990, Ramcharan et al 1997). Often families are a barrier where risk taking is concerned. In practical ways risk is diminished. For example anecdotal evidence suggests that adults with learning difficulties are often not allowed to make hot drinks or to iron. Frequently they have not been allowed to cross the road or to buy things in a shop without supervision and yet many are capable of performing these tasks. Whilst complete protection from danger may seem desirable to parents or carers, it inhibits the attainment of adult status and keeps the adult a dependent 'child' (Dee et al 2006). There has to be a planned 'letting go' (Ward et al 2003) as with any child. Perhaps this is more difficult for parents of a child with disabilities who may already experience some guilt at having given birth to such a child. Evidence for this problem is found in Richardson and Ritchie (1989) where the views of two parents are juxtaposed:

> The biggest enemies the mentally handicapped have got are their
> parents....Over-protective. Won't let them go, won't let them make
> their own mistakes. I've realised this for many years and fought against
> it and that's why we've taken so many chances with Stuart.
> Father of Stuart, aged 31. (Richardson, A and Ritchie, J 1989:42)

And:

One mother explains:

Oh, no, I won't let her use the kettle, make tea. Oh, no. I won't let her do anything like that because I'm frightened she'll burn herself. The only thing she does do , she went out with her cup and poured herself some more tea while the water was in the kettle....I won't let her do ironing. Nothing like that. I just won't let her . She probably could, but I just won't let her. I won't take the chance. (op cit 43)

Another area of daily life where those adults with learning difficulties may be regarded as 'different' is in the choice, or lack of it, of accommodation and a choice of with whom they live. Evidence from 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001) indicates that only 6% of people with learning difficulties have control of who they live with and only 1% have choice over a carer. Many adults with learning difficulties remain at home cared for by parents who often may be quite elderly. This situation has implications for these adults. Apart from the possibility of being over-protected and not encouraged to perform routine tasks for themselves they may only relate to older adults and so lose the benefits of living with an appropriate peer group. Evidence from 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001), based on a study by the Hester Adrian Research Centre in 1999, indicates that only 30% of people with learning difficulties had a friend who did not have a learning difficulty, was not a member of their family or was not paid to care for them. Parents may also select their clothes, in some cases preferring those designed for an older age group, and their leisure interests. Richardson and Ritchie (1989) illustrate these

difficulties by giving a parent's view of a hostel for those with learning difficulties as opposed to the home situation:

> [His clothes] were in the bag just the same as when he left home. He said he had a bath in the middle of the week but why not put clean clothes on? [Perhaps] they left it to David to sort of choose his clothes because I always do that for him. ... ... And another thing I didn't like, one of the boys who was working with David all day had to go back to prepare tea for them. I didn't think that was a very good idea. Well, I should have thought that there'd be someone there to prepare a meal. (op cit:67)

This illustrates the level of dependency which could be found when an adult with learning difficulties remains at home into adulthood. Anecdotal evidence from students indicates that these types of situations still occur with great frequency. Similar situations also arise with people in care homes who are often still over protected (Tyne in Tilstone et al 1998).

Other adults with learning difficulties move into residential homes and this, too, is not without problems (Tilstone et al 1998). People with learning difficulties are grouped together in living accommodation (Dowson in Ramcharan et al 1997) and are sometimes required to live with people with whom they have nothing in common except that society deems that they have a learning difficulty (op cit). Other aspects of their lives and individuality may not be considered (Tilstone, Florian and Rose 1998). From a societal perspective there are advantages in terms of the cost of care but adults with learning difficulties are more obviously 'different' when

seen in a group. Living in residential care means that their peer group is again other adults with learning difficulties or staff but they have no natural peer group (Richardson and Ritchie 1988, Hornby 2000). There is, of course, the counter argument that those adults with learning difficulties are better relating to 'their own kind' (Sutcliffe, 1992), that is that those with learning difficulties will always have to relate to others with learning difficulties and so grouping them together is not a problem but this would presumably be little different to the long stay hospitals of the past. Perhaps another way is to consider communities like L'Arche where those adults with and without learning difficulties live together (Vanier 1982).

A third option for those adults with learning difficulties is to live in minimum support accommodation where help with household tasks and other aspects of life is given but the residents are encouraged to become independent. The advantage of this type of accommodation is that usually it is a 'normal' house in an 'ordinary' street (Nirje cited in Brown and Smith 1992) with perhaps slightly more chance for integration with the local community but again the residents in each house will all be people with learning difficulties.

There are adults with learning difficulties who do live independently, are in some instances married or have a partner (DfES Doris 2001) but to a large

extent this is still quite rare, as 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001) indicates that most adults with learning difficulties still live at home.

Sexuality.

One other area of life where adults with learning difficulties are both seen and treated as though they were 'different' is sexuality (McCarthy in Carnaby 2002). Few adults with learning difficulties have children. In the past any sexual relationships for adults with learning difficulties were felt to be inappropriate as evidence from Humphries and Gordon (1992) and Atkinson and Williams (1990) suggests. Sometimes adults with learning difficulties are not given adequate sex education (Ramcharan et al 1997). Same sex relationships are still seen negatively in most residential and day services (McCarthy and Thompson in Philpot and Ward 1995) and in fact until very recently the 'possibility that people with learning difficulties may have gay, lesbian or bisexual identities has not been considered' (Walmsley and Downer in Ramcharan et al 1997:43).

Learning difficulties as a social construct.

The points made in this chapter lead to one final question which is whether learning difficulties and disabilities are a social construct, a social creation resulting from the way in which society is organised (Crow in Nind et al 2003). Clearly it would be possible to organise society so that those with

learning difficulties could be more fully included. It would be possible for many to be employed if the economic structure on which our society is based were to change. More appropriate forms of accommodation could be found, although these appear to have changed dramatically in the last two decades from long stay hospitals. All things, however, require social and political will for significant change to take place and such change depends on who has or can obtain power as well as the empowerment of those with learning difficulties (Ramcharan et al 1997) who traditionally have been powerless.

Conclusions.

At the beginning of this chapter it was argued that people either have a positive or negative view of learning difficulties and disabilities; those who view everyone as different but essentially the same and those who seek to measure people against a perceived norm. Those with a positive view, who see society as including all people will regard learning difficulties and disabilities as a social construct and a result of the way society chooses to organise itself. Those, however, who regard some people as being outside 'normal' society will see learning difficulties and disabilities as a reality with which society has to deal or which society can largely ignore.

Stigma has been attached to many people by the giving of a label which

signifies how society views the people thus labelled and influences how they are treated. If, for example, following the medical model we see those with learning difficulties as 'sick' we will place them in hospitals. If we regard them as all being the same we will be inclined to house them together. If people with learning difficulties are still perceived as 'subnormal' they will be denied employment.

From the evidence presented in this chapter it is clear that adults with learning difficulties in Britain are disadvantaged in many ways by the society in which they live and are perceived as 'different'. They are segregated from society from the time of birth, during compulsory education and into adult life. Older adults may have been deemed ineducable and younger adults may have been educated in segregated provision. As adults they find that they are unemployable and have to live in accommodation which is not of their choosing and with people they may not like (Tilstone et al 1998). Some may not be permitted to take calculated risks which would allow them to experience a measure of independence. All these factors may lead to those adults with learning difficulties being perceived, and therefore treated, as 'different' from other adults and this in turn impacts on their adult status and frequently leads to them being regarded as 'perpetual children' (Dee et al 2006).

The following chapter will consider the basic skills curriculum for adults with learning difficulties in terms of its relevance, how it impacts on adult status and whether it implies a 'difference' in those adults with learning difficulties. The problems of a lack of inclusion in the educational context referred to in this chapter will also be considered.

Chapter 7.

The Basic Skills Curriculum.

Introduction.

In Chapter 1 a question was raised about the nature and relevance of the curriculum for those people with learning difficulties generally and more specifically within Adult Education Basic Skills provision and the impact of it on their adult status. Previous chapters have explored how those with learning difficulties have been, and are, perceived as different and how this significantly prevents them from being regarded as adults. The current chapter will explore the nature of the Basic Skills curriculum, its relevance to adults with learning difficulties and the possible perspective it gives regarding the adult status of such learners. Consideration will be given both to the development of the Basic Skills curriculum and how it operates in relation to learners. It will be demonstrated that the curriculum itself presents a dilemma with regard to its influence on the issue of adult status.

Basic Skills defined.

Before examining the curricula relating to Basic Skills it is important to define such skills. Currently the definition given by Moser (1999) in the report 'A Fresh Start' is used. Moser defined basic skills as:-

> the ability to read, write and speak in English, and to use
> mathematics at a level necessary to function at work and in society in
> general.(Moser 1999:2)

Such a definition excludes many with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities and was amended in 'Freedom to Learn' (2000):

> The definition of basic skills used in *A Fresh Start* should be
> interpreted or expanded to include sign, symbol, gesture and methods
> of augmented communication. (DfEE 2000:29)

Curriculum issues.

Prior to 2001 there was no specific nationally devised curriculum(Dee et al

2006) for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within basic

skills education. The subject area was usually delivered by practitioners

with some experience of teaching basic skills to adults without learning

difficulties who adapted their strategies to meet the needs of this fairly new

client group, some of whom until 1990 had not been a part of the local

community.

As the 'Inclusive Learning Report' (Tomlinson 1996:15) indicates, prior to

the gathering of evidence for that report, there had been no 'national

examination of further education for students with learning difficulties

and/or disabilities'. Tomlinson (1996) also states that there 'was no

systematic, comprehensive evidence about the number of participants or

the extent of their participation' (op cit :16). Thus nationally there was no

clear idea of how many students there were with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities, how fully they participated in education, or in what they were participating.

After the recommendations made in the report 'Freedom to Learn' (DfEE 2000), it was decided that an Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework for Literacy and Numeracy would be produced to be used in conjunction with the Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula (Basic Skills Agency 2001) developed as a result of 'A Fresh Start' (Moser 1999). The Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework was designed for those students who fell below the standards required for the Core Curricula and was based on the structure of the 'P Scales'. The 'P Scales' indicate pupils progressing towards Level 1 of the National Curriculum and are used particularly in special schools for children and young people who have not attained the levels at which the National Curriculum begins. The 'P Scales' were developed from the mid 1990s by staff in special schools as an alternative to inappropriate National Curriculum levels. The Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework itself is part of the overall Government strategy known as 'Skills for Life' which is designed to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills.

The Adult Pre- Entry Curriculum Framework and its implications.

The Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework is divided into levels referred

to as 'Milestones' and is referenced in a similar way to the Adult Numeracy

Core Curriculum and the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum.

The Core Curricula themselves:

> draw heavily on the following existing and planned curricula:
> - The twin frameworks for teaching literacy and numeracy that are elaborated in the national Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy;
> - The key skills units of communication and application of number developed by QCA;
> - The revised National Curriculum for English and mathematics introduced in schools in September 2000;
> - Adult literacy and numeracy curricula and initiatives that have been developed in other countries (and, in particular, in the United states of America, Australia, Canada and France).
>
> (Basic Skills Agency 2001 pp1-2)

The Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework for Literacy and Numeracy

acknowledges the very disparate group of people to whom the term

'learning difficulties and/or disabilities' is applied and makes the following

significant points:-

> The curriculum framework is designed for a wide variety of learners, all of whom are **individuals** with unique abilities, interests, motivations and aspirations.
> These learners range from people who appear to be functioning at the earliest communication levels, to people who already have literacy and/or numeracy skills but are working below Entry 1 of the Adult Literacy and Adult Numeracy core curricula.
> ....Adults with cognitive learning difficulties are not developmentally like children, and approaches that work with young children are unlikely to be successful with them. (Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework 2002:4)

The reference to 'young children' here is of critical importance as a similar

point is made by Sutcliffe (1990) regarding the use of pre-school

equipment by some practitioners working with adults with learning difficulties. There is, however, an ongoing debate about age-appropriateness and the use of learning materials (Beverley 1997a, O'Kane and Goldbart 1996) and whether or not use of material deemed inappropriate encourages societal views of those with learning difficulties as 'eternal children' and thus denies their adult status.

Much about the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework is very useful. It acknowledges the place that adults with learning difficulties have within the education system and thus enhances their adult status. It also provides a structured approach for the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, starting from a very fundamental level. In literacy, for example, the first Milestone in Speaking and Listening has as its descriptor to

encounter activities and experiences; while they are present they may be
- passive
- resistant
- responsive (Adult Pre-entry Curriculum Framework 2002:30)

The significance of starting from this level is that it is possible to include all learners. The Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework then progresses through the Milestones until at Milestone 8 it dovetails into the Core Curricula for Literacy and Numeracy. The Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework is also intended to be used in non-educational settings, for

example by those supporting independent living. In the introduction to the document the following point is made:

> Teachers and trainers may also be working in care, health or community settings with people with learning difficulties, even though they may not describe themselves as 'teachers' or 'educators'. Such teachers and trainers may include those supporting people in independent living, who will be able to use the curriculum framework to help individuals develop specific skills that will increase their independence and improve their lifestyle. (op cit:3)

Such an idea fits well with the with recommendations made in 'Freedom to Learn' (2000) that 'the teaching of basic skills is rarely integrated with the rest of people's lives' (2000:26) which implies that this should be the case.

It does not seem to fit so well however with the concern that there is:

> ….lack of expertise nationally in teaching basic skills to adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There has been little research or practical help to identify effective strategies for teaching and learning. There are too few opportunities for improving practice through good quality training. This should be addressed as a priority. (op cit:3)

It also contradicts the regulation that even volunteers within basic skills should have a Level 2 or equivalent in English and Mathematics.

Despite the positive aspects of the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework there are some criticisms. First it is a framework. In the introduction to the document it is stated:

> The framework on its own does not provide a set syllabus to be followed by a group of learners, nor is it a teaching manual (LSDA 2002:1).

Secondly it is structured on a curriculum designed for children, as indeed in part are the Core Curricula for Basic Skills. These points warrant a brief discussion. Whilst the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework is only a framework and not intended to be prescriptive, it is likely to be used as a teaching manual as throughout the document sample learning activities are given. Further, although it is not prescriptive, learner achievement has to be referenced to it if such achievement is to draw down funding.

The Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework is based on a curriculum designed for children and so may again give credence to the perception of those with learning difficulties as 'eternal children'. Whilst it may be argued that it is not possible to progress in literacy and numeracy until the basics have been grasped, there is an inherent danger that those with learning difficulties will constantly repeat the same type of work, although in differing contexts (Tyne in Tilstone et al 1998). Such work may focus on those things in which they have not succeeded in the past and lead to a negative experience of education, a point made by Sutcliffe (1990). Whilst there are dangers of drifting into the deficit model if literacy and numeracy are over emphasised some students see them as attributes of adulthood (Beverley 1997a).

In the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework only standards for literacy

and numeracy are given, as in the Core Curricula. Underlying this there is an assumption that basic skills for adults with learning difficulties are solely literacy and numeracy and, from 2006, ICT. Even though in the report 'Freedom to Learn' (2000) basic skills is redefined to include sign, symbol, gesture and methods of augmented communication, this still reflects a fairly traditional view of basic skills. Such an assumption is questionable. Recent research (Brewer 2003) indicated that within companies employing young people, working with others was considered an important skill. Indeed in 'Freedom to Learn' (2000) it is stated that:

> Teachers and learners made it clear that in their view the learning of skills such as self-advocacy, independent travel and working alongside others are just as important. Indeed they may be more important for some people. (2000:8)

Such evidence suggests that there are many skills those with learning difficulties need to develop which may be more important than literacy and numeracy but are still basic skills, such as working with others. Skills may include appropriateness in terms of behaviour, dress and volume of voice in varying situations. Whilst the last of these may be linked to speaking and listening, the others are not covered by the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework. They would be regarded as 'soft' outcomes or 'incidental' learning but may be more significant than many learning outcomes which attract funding.

It is also important that those with learning difficulties access a broad

curriculum. Many adults with learning difficulties take part in a wide range

of courses such as aromatherapy, music and movement, keep fit, arts and

crafts. The issue here is the context of the learning, for much provision can

be specifically for those with learning difficulties rather than those open to

the general public, as within the unitary authority in which the research was

conducted. The Inspection Report (2000) for the unitary authority, written

after a commissioned private external inspection, makes the following

points about the curriculum offered to those with learning difficulties

and/or disabilities:

> The discrete provision for adults with learning difficulties and
> disabilities was mainly of a high standard and well supported by the
> positive partnerships between the adult service, voluntary organisations
> and social services. Although the service has introduced a Befriender
> scheme to promote access to mainstream classes, no examples of this
> were observed during class visits. The majority of provision currently
> takes place in local community centres, which provide opportunities
> for inter-agency work. However, as this provision is not incorporated
> into the work of the main centres, it reduces opportunities for students
> with learning difficulties and disabilities to access other provision. The
> new...... centre has good access and provides excellent opportunities to
> develop more integrated provision. It was apparent from class visits
> that there are a large number of students with learning difficulties in
> basic skills provision but not in other adult education classes. Whilst
> this might reflect the needs of those individual students, it was not
> evident that such needs analysis had taken place. The service should
> investigate whether basic skills provision is the most appropriate
> activity to meet the needs of students within this target group.
> (Inspection Report 2000:10)

It would be possible for those with learning difficulties to access more

courses but many courses now have some form of accreditation attached to them which involves some reading and writing, or at least organising a portfolio.

A recent development has been to try to embed basic skills in other subjects and activities such as cookery or crafts and in programmes of workplace training and family literacy (Basic Skills Agency 2000). Whilst excellent in theory, it does have far reaching consequences and cost implications.

A problem also arises where the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework is used outside a specifically educational context. Whilst the integration of basic skills into the whole of a student's life is desirable and would overcome problems such as a person being taught the same skill in different ways, again there would be funding implications. For such an idea to work effectively there would need to be constant inter-agency collaboration which would be extremely time consuming and costly. Whilst therefore the notion that 'Basic skills for those with learning difficulties should be set within an inter-agency framework' ('Freedom to Learn' 2000:29) is excellent theoretically, it is possible the practical implications have not been adequately considered.

The use the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework by staff other than

tutors should to assist clients raises some questions. Firstly it is important that those using the framework understand how to assess learning needs and how to implement the framework particularly when, although context free, it is written from an educational perspective. Secondly staff such as carers may experience time constraints and be ill equipped to deliver the skills outlined in the framework, especially without further training. All staff working in the educational sector underwent three days training in the implementation of the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework, despite the majority being trained teachers, suggesting that a thorough understanding of the document is essential.

As well as being based on the structure of the 'P Scales' the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum framework design, although it stresses the individual nature of adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, seems to be based on notions of instrumentalism, that is a curriculum which aims to deliver a specific product. In twenty-first century Britain this product is the development of a skilled workforce as indicated by Armitage et al (2003:189):

> Instrumentalism, as it operates in the UK at the start of the twenty-first century, sees a highly educated workforce as essential in meeting growing international competition and values high levels of numeracy and literacy, subject areas covering aspects of science and technology and anything else seen as relevant to achieving this goal.

In the Foreword to the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework John Healey, the Minister for Adult Skills states :

> As part of the drive to raise standards, we are improving the quality of literacy, language and numeracy provision so that **all** adult learners can be guaranteed good teaching and support, no matter what their starting points are or where their learning takes place. People who have learning difficulties play an important role in all aspects of life. If Britain is to fulfil its aim of being a fully inclusive society, everyone should be able to fulfil his or her potential and gain the skills to participate and contribute (2002:vii).

From this statement and the fact that it is assumed that a proportion of those with learning difficulties will progress through the standards specified in the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework incrementally, (although both lateral progression and skills maintenance are recognised) and move on to the Core Curricula ('Freedom to Learn' 2000) it may be fair to deduce that the curriculum has been designed at least in part to improve the skills of the workforce. Whilst appropriate for some adults, for the vast majority of adults with learning difficulties to acquire basic skills at Level 2, the Government's target, will remain an impossibility. Without basic skills at this level most jobs are not open to people. It is difficult therefore to see why such a curriculum design has been used for this learner group, other than the stated aim of raising standards to improve Britain's economic situation. Such a choice of curriculum design is made even more difficult to comprehend when 'Freedom to Learn' (2000:27) makes the following assertion:-

In addition to literacy and numeracy, the basic skills requirements for people with learning difficulties should include the essential skills for everyday living, learning to learn, communication skills including IT skills, creative skills to promote self expression, and confidence building skills. These basic skills should be viewed against the overall needs of the individual and set in the context of the society in which they live. If the Moser definition of basic skills is interpreted literally, many people with learning difficulties would be excluded from the basic skills curriculum derived from the proposed standards.

The inclusion of these areas in the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework would have resulted in a much broader curriculum which might have been more relevant to adults with learning difficulties particularly with regard to adult status. These areas are not included and therefore such learning is regarded as incidental rather than fundamental. This impacts on adult status as the most useful basic skills for adults are not covered by the curriculum and are not specifically taught. Healey's statement also poses some problems when in the introduction to the White Paper 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001) it is stated that people with learning difficulties are marginalized, a view supported by the research literature.

Conclusions.

It has therefore been shown that the Adult Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework has its advantages, particularly because it recognises the rights of all adults to participate in education and gives a structure to the acquisition of basic skills. Nevertheless it has its drawbacks in that it defines basic skills very narrowly, although more broadly than Moser

(1999), and is based on a curriculum structure designed for children. The ideas of inter-agency use and working are theoretically excellent but such ideas would require very significant changes in working practice to be effective which would potentially have enormous cost implications. It should perhaps therefore be regarded only as a significant step in the right direction to providing a suitable and adequate curriculum for those adults with learning difficulties. The issues of access for those with learning difficulties to a broader curriculum and to 'mainstream' classes still require considerable work both nationally and within the unitary authority where the research was undertaken. For this to happen there needs to be a much greater awareness, amongst both basic skills staff and non basic skills staff, of the needs and potential of those adults with learning difficulties. In subsequent chapters which report the research findings, some issues concerning the inclusion of adults with learning difficulties alongside those without learning difficulties will be addressed.

The dilemma mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. On the one hand a nationally recognised curriculum for those with learning difficulties acknowledges them as adult learners but on the other it may not equip them adequately for the life they lead. The development of a curriculum which operates nationally is advantageous in that it will lead to greater equity of provision which is not

dependent on the geographical area in which a person with a learning difficulty is located. As all learners are now included in the basic skills strategy this will in turn enhance the adult status of those with learning difficulties. However a curriculum which is designed in a way which promotes the development of skills aimed at enabling people to contribute towards the economy for those who are unlikely to find full time employment has to be questioned. Similarly a curriculum which has as its fundamental structure a curriculum designed for children may lead to adults with learning difficulties still being regarded as 'eternal children' with all that such a view implies for them as adults.

The next chapter will consider the geographical context of the research as a prelude to the empirical research conducted.

Chapter 8.

The Research Context.

The empirical research, described in the subsequent chapters, was conducted in a unitary authority in central England. This authority was created in 1996. It covers an area of 85,000 hectares and caters for a population in excess of 150,000.

The unitary authority covers a mainly largely agricultural area, with a number of market towns surrounded by many villages. There is also a substantial urban area, described by Armstrong (1983) as 'an industrial island' which serves much of the unitary authority in terms of employment, shopping facilities and colleges.

Population.

Almost half of the population of the unitary authority, over 70,000 people, live in the urban area. Overall, 71% of the population live in this urban area and in the other towns. The remaining 29% live in the numerous villages, which vary considerably in size. There is a small but significant non-white British population, who come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, constituting approximately 1.6 % of the total population and largely situated in one part of the urban area.

Economy.

The local economy of the unitary authority was established on both traditional industries and agriculture. From the 1980s many of the industries either underwent a decline or changes in work patterns which resulted in high unemployment. Action taken to regenerate the economy included large investment by central and local government, improvements to communication links, a marketing of the area, support given to businesses, improvements to industrial sites and increased opportunities for training. Such initiatives lowered the high unemployment figures. In addition to these regeneration initiatives new industry, predominantly involved with manufacturing, was attracted to the area. As a result more multi-national companies came to the region. In the early 1990s the major industry again came to the fore and the newer industries underwent a period of consolidation. As a result of these changes the local economy now has a more diverse range of industry.

The traditional heavy industry remains one of the largest private sector employers. Alongside this industry are industries involved in power generation and the production of petrochemicals. Since the early 1980s, when alternative sources of employment were being sought, employment in the service sector has grown, for example in the tourism industry.

Agriculture still plays a very significant part in the economy of the unitary authority with nearly 89% of the land being in some form of agricultural use. Much of the land is very good and the majority of it is used to grow crops or left fallow.

Environment.

The landscape of the unitary authority is very varied. Much of the countryside provides a rich haven for wildlife. Within the area there are 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Many of the towns and villages are conservation areas and have a number of listed and historic buildings. There are also a number of operational mineral extraction sites within the area.

Transport and Communications.

Motorway links in the area are excellent both for travel across country and for the north-south corridors. The rail networks are also extremely good and are an important part of the national network. Within the unitary authority two thirds of all households have a car, which is the national average. There is an airport nearby which has developed to the full status of a regional airport, with international scheduled flights and full customs facilities.

Health and Social Care.

The unitary authority has one hospital providing most services. Additionally services are delivered to the community at clinics, GP surgeries, in schools, in the home and in the community.

The Social Services department protects and promotes the needs of a wide range of vulnerable groups. Such groups include the elderly, people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, people with mental health problems, people with substances misuse problems, people with AIDS/HIV, families who are under stress and children who need protection.

Housing.

The majority of housing in the authority is within the private sector. This sector accounts for almost 80% of the housing available. The remaining properties are mainly council owned, with less than 2% being owned by housing associations. Some of the council owned property is specifically designed to cater for people with special needs, including the elderly, those who are wheelchair users, people with disabilities and those with learning difficulties.

Leisure.

The unitary authority has a variety of leisure facilities including libraries, theatres and cinemas. There are many sports facilities which include swimming pools, sports halls, squash courts, indoor bowls and fitness suites. In addition there are football pitches, cricket squares, bowling greens, hockey pitches and tennis courts. Parks, children's playgrounds and allotments are also available. There are museums featuring both local history and transport. There is also a large council owned country park.

Education.

Within the unitary authority there are eighty five schools which comprise fourteen secondary schools, forty four primary schools, twelve junior schools, thirteen infant schools and two special schools. Twenty five of the primary schools have nursery provision. Three of the secondary schools have sixth-forms offering a wide range of courses.

Until September 2003 the two special schools were all age schools, one catering for children and young people with moderate learning difficulties and the other for those with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. From September 2003 two new schools have been established to cater for the range of learning difficulties. One is a primary school and

the other a secondary school with a post-16 unit. A portage service is also available for pre-school children.

There are two colleges within the authority which provide further and higher education. One is a sixth form college which has over 1,400 students aged 16-19. The other provides full and part time further and higher education courses for people aged over 16 and has over 10,000 students, 2,000 of whom are full time. Both colleges offer Entry Level courses and many students from the special secondary school enter this provision. The sixth form college caters for young people with learning difficulties up to the age of 19 but has no adult provision for this category of student. Much of the work done with 16 to 19 year olds with learning difficulties is based around work on lifeskills. The other college offers a range of foundation courses, including basic skills, for young people but only offers limited provision for adults with learning difficulties. Much of the Skills for Life provision available for adults consists of short courses which are not aimed at those with learning difficulties. Whilst there are some opportunities for study for those adults with learning difficulties, for example, independent living, these are not aimed at a vocational qualification. The college has satellite centres as well as its main campus. The Adult Education Service delivers much of the adult education within the authority. Whilst there are currently five main Adult Education Centres,

courses are available at many locations throughout the area for many curriculum areas including basic skills. Within the service the basic skills area is quite large and there are many opportunities offered for adults with learning difficulties. Some of these opportunities are in classes especially for those with learning difficulties, with some work based provision also available through the Mencap Café Ivy (a training café) scheme. The council is committed to lifelong learning and welcomes learners of all abilities. Adult education is also provided by both colleges and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

Conclusions.

Whilst the unitary authority is not large, neither is it monolithic. It has both urban and rural areas and relies on both heavy industry and agriculture for employment. Although the population is largely white British, nevertheless there is a significant number of people from other ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Apart from a university it has the full spectrum of educational provision. This then was the context for this research.

The next chapter describes the research methodology used in a consideration of being an adult from the perspective of adults and young people with and without learning difficulties. The findings and analysis of this empirical research will be viewed in the light of the literature research

in Chapters 10 to 13 in order to draw some conclusions concerning the adult status of those with learning difficulties and the role basic skills education plays in this status.

Chapter 9.

Research Methodology.

Introduction.

The focus of this chapter is to consider the research methodology used for the empirical research. This will be done by first discussing research methodology more broadly and then by giving a technical description of the research. The chapter will therefore be divided into two sections.

The current study, which considers the adult status of adults with learning difficulties, is set within the qualitative research paradigm. Such an approach seemed appropriate as an attempt was made to discover and record the perspectives of these adults by asking them to describe their views. A qualitative approach was used for there is a tremendous difference between the sort of enquiry appropriate for understanding physical reality and the sort of enquiry needed for understanding the mental life of individual persons (Pring 2000). Further it was decided to use a case study approach within the qualitative paradigm as such an approach would be capable of producing a 'rich, thick description' (Merriam 1985) and in doing so would both allow the views of those with learning difficulties to emerge and the opportunity to compare these views with those expressed by both adults and young people without such difficulties.

Case study within the qualitative paradigm also fitted well with my own epistemological perspective which perceives truth as relative to situations.

Section One.

Quantitative and qualitative research.

From the late 19th century, following the lead taken by Durkheim and Comte, the positivistic scientific model of research was deemed to be an appropriate model for social research. Comte, an empiricist, believed that true knowledge of the world was to be discovered only through sense experience. Durkheim took Comte's views further and put forward 'rules' for social science research which followed very closely those procedures established by research in the natural sciences. Durkheim suggested that in order to maintain objectivity, there should be a distance between the researcher and the researched believing that this would eliminate personal bias. There is, however, a difficulty here for underlying such a stance is a particular view of the world, a view which sees the world as both independent from, and external to, individuals and a view which stands in sharp contrast to the complex and 'messy' situation which exists in the real world (Robson 1993). For Durkheim society and the persons who constituted that society were seen as distinct entities. This approach developed into positivism, a position where a statement is only regarded as

true when it is either empirically verifiable or a necessary truth (Ayer 1946) such as that contained in mathematical statements , for example $2 + 2 = 4$. The position of the logical positivist would, therefore, severely limit the type of investigation which could be undertaken, for apart from statements which are empirically verifiable or necessarily true all other truth is mediated through a subject. Even in scientific experiment the initial design is produced by a person, that is a subject. Apart from design, data is filtered by subjects and in this way could lose some of its objectivity and mask important data.

Further the position taken by the logical positivists relies on certain key assumptions about both individuals and their behaviour. Firstly it is assumed that human behaviour is predictable and that it is subject to pressures both internally and externally. Secondly it is assumed that it is possible to observe and measure both the behaviours and the pressures. This is perhaps questionable.

Despite these criticisms the scientific model provided the most widely used model for social science research and the basis for much educational research. In recent years, however, questions have been raised as to whether the scientific method is the only route to knowledge of the social world for it is apparent that the subject matter of the natural sciences and

that of the social sciences differ considerably (Pring 2000). Many researchers therefore felt that the scientific method was not the most appropriate method for investigating the social world and this has led to much debate between those who advocate the scientific model for social research and those who do not. The implication of supporting the scientific model for social research is that there is no difference between the natural and social worlds and so the methods which are applicable in the former are also applicable in the latter.

The difference between the two worlds is, however, the key point made by those of the interpretative tradition who are opposed to the positivist way of thinking. They argue that human beings are not mechanistic. Rather they are able to exercise choice and to express their individuality. In other words human beings are subjects not 'things'. Further they construct their own social world and give it meaning. The meanings they give to their worlds have to be discovered and perhaps the scientific method does not provide an adequate tool to uncover such meanings. So, for example, it is important that individuals are able to explain and give meaning to their actions rather than that their actions are simply observed, for the same action could have a variety of meanings depending on who was performing it and in what circumstances.

Scientific research looks for causal links which are able to be observed and tested against an hypothesis and uses quantifiable data such as surveys, questionnaires, structured interviews and statistics. Such data can lead to statistical reliability and validity not least because large numbers are usually involved in the samples which allow more easily for generalisations to be made. These approaches are however open to question. For example the use of questionnaires appears to be objective and to give answers which may be easily analysed but in reality they give rise to a number of issues. Perhaps the most significant of these is whether or not the answers are valid, for it would be possible for a number of people to answer yes to a question but for very different reasons. The questions themselves may also be subjective or perhaps the wrong questions to ask. This is not to discuss in detail the use of questionnaires but to suggest that even methods used in quantitative, scientific research may be open to criticism.

One significant factor which must be taken into account in social research is the life context of the people who supply the data as the background from which the data emerges. Looking at social research from this perspective it may be argued that to consider a small number of cases is as important as considering large numbers, in order to identify the context and meaning which individuals ascribe to their lives and to begin to see things from their position.

Looking at research in this way leads to a consideration of generalisation, that is to deduce from a number of instances that a similar situation exists also in instances which have not been observed. Views amongst researchers differ on the significance of generalisations with some arguing that it may be possible to make generalisations from specific cases (Bassey 1999). There is also a philosophical issue here of whether unless every instance is observed a situation can be held to exist for there may always be an exception. In other words generalisations are at best suggesting that something is very likely to be the case rather than that it is the case. Whether generalisation of outcome is necessary or not must surely to some extent be determined by the purpose and nature of the research. It does, however, seem important that research methods may be generalised in order that a piece of research may be replicated.

Qualitative research arose partly in response to the dissatisfaction with the appropriateness of scientific method in social research. It was argued that if the natural and social worlds were different then different approaches were needed to investigate them. As indicated above the two paradigms view people in different ways, either as objects to be observed or as thinking, feeling beings who express themselves through 'language and symbol' and are able to reflect on situations (Hitchcock and Hughes 1989).

Interpretative researchers therefore tend to concentrate on understanding

language and meaning rather than relying on observed behaviours.

> Interpretative researchers therefore take seriously the question of
> language and meaning and give priority to first unravelling actors'
> descriptions of events in a qualitative fashion rather than focusing upon
> observers' descriptions in a quantitative fashion……
> As a result interpretative research might be said to be deliberately open
> ended, prepared to change direction or take a developmental view and
> accept the possibility of using a variety of sources of data since the
> social world is so complex. Interpretative models of social research will
> therefore be geared towards faithfully reconstructing the actors'
> perspectives. This carries with it the suggestion that description will
> come first and explanation second (op cit:29)

Qualitative or interpretative research also allows the researcher to be

involved in the research rather than maintaining the somewhat aloof

position adopted by those who favour the scientific method. In other words

the involvement of the researcher is recognised. This is not to suggest a

total lack of objectivity. Indeed Lacey (in Hammersley ed. 1993) indicates

that researcher involvement may actually prevent bias and thus assist

objectivity.

Within a phenomenological approach the researcher is required to

'bracket' phenomena so that they are approached without presuppositions

which means that the researcher is able to consider only the phenomena

themselves in order to see how they are constituted. Approaching

situations in this way allows for the essence of the things themselves to be

revealed. The key concepts which underlie phenomenology are twofold.

Firstly that people play a role in making things happen, that is they construct their own social worlds. Secondly that people share a common perspective on facts in everyday situations and language provides a means of both identifying and communicating their ideas. These two concepts however make the assumption that people do indeed see the world in the same way and that they use language identically. In order to pursue any research it is perhaps necessary to make these assumptions. However it must be recognised that this is not necessarily the case and in this study has to be looked at with care.

After considering both the quantitative and the qualitative paradigms I felt that the qualitative approach was more appropriate to elicit people's perceptions. A quantitative approach could have been used by use of a questionnaire which could have identified whether or not the respondents fulfilled generally accepted adult roles (Knowles 1990). Such a questionnaire could have been sent to large numbers of people but would only have revealed relatively superficial facts about people's lives and not allowed their opinions to be expressed. For example a question could have been asked such as 'Do you have a job?' But how would it have been possible either to define the type of job or the reasons for having/not having a job? Given that what was being considered in the research was people's

perceptions, that is phenomena, the qualitative paradigm seemed to offer more scope for obtaining the data required.

Having decided upon qualitative research it appeared that three possibilities presented themselves. It would have been possible to conduct a survey by means of a questionnaire but perhaps on a limited scale. Firstly the questions would however have been quite complex because a simple 'yes/no' response would have been unlikely to give detailed information about people's views. Secondly a complex questionnaire, such as that used with the teaching staff, might not have been returned, or indeed understood, by those with learning difficulties. Thirdly there would also have been little opportunity to see why the questions had been answered in a particular way unless follow up interviews were undertaken.

The second possible approach was that of a survey using semi-structured interviews which would have given scope for discussion and more freedom to explore people's perceptions. However to have conducted such interviews on a large scale would have been both difficult to arrange and would have been too time consuming for one researcher.

As one of the purposes in conducting the research was to inform practice a third option presented itself. This was the option of a case study. Case

study had the advantage that it would be possible to study a single unit and from that to give some indicators which may be applicable in other areas. As this was the chosen method it is necessary to explain both its advantages and its potential weaknesses. Having considered both of these I believed that this approach was the most likely to elicit the relevant data by allowing the perceptions of those both with and without learning difficulties to be fully described.

Case Study.

From my perspective the strongest argument for the use of case study was that it was likely to provide a 'rich, thick description' described by Merriam (1985). It would also be possible to use different approaches within the case study which were particularly applicable to specific groups of people. The approaches envisaged were those of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, both of which are typical of the tools used in case study research.

A case study allows explanation of a unique case or a particular instance which could be for example a person, a particular institution or phenomena within a single Local Education Authority. It is an intense examination of the particular and in its reporting it tends to use the language of the participants which I felt would be particularly useful in this study. Within a

case study the distance between the researcher and the researched is narrowed so that the process becomes in many instances more of a negotiation.

In common with other research paradigms case study has both strengths and weaknesses not least because the literature varies on what actually counts as case study. Bassey (1999), for example regards case study as a study in a 'singularity' whereas Cronbach (1970) suggests that all social research is case study. Yin (2003) sees it as an empirical enquiry that examines a phenomenon within the context of the real world. One of the main criticisms of case study research is that it does not have within it the capability to generalise the results (Atkinson and Delamont 1985). Further Pring (2000) also questions its ability to be objective both in relation to the reality it describes and with regard to the truth of the claims it makes.

Case study also has strengths. One of the key strengths identified by Cronbach (1975) is that it permits phenomena to be interpreted within a context. Becker (1968) makes an observation which is useful in the context of this thesis, that case study allows for a wide-ranging understanding of the groups being studied.

The literature therefore indicates that case study research allows for a focus

on description and explanation. It is also able to produce a snapshot of phenomena which in the case of the current study would be useful to inform practice. In particular Merriam's (1988) view that as well as being descriptive case study research allows for focus on a specific situation or phenomenon, that it provides insights and allows more generalised concepts to emerge from context grounded data is helpful in the context of eliciting the views of adults with learning difficulties.

The case study approach raises some general philosophical issues. One is whether the researcher is able to let the data speak for itself. Certainly in this study one of my key concerns was that the data was recorded in the language of the participants and that as well as my explanations of the data the reader would engage directly with the views of those adults with learning difficulties.

Another issue is whether it is possible to generalise from the particular. Clearly in purely philosophical terms this would prove very difficult but it is perhaps important to consider both the concept of generalisation and the purpose of case study. A common criticism of case study has been that it is difficult to transfer the knowledge gained to other situations. Some (Cronbach 1975, Erickson 1986 and Walker 1980) suggest that the notion of generalisability has to be reconsidered in a way which reflects the

underlying assumptions of qualitative research which does not centre on scientific truth. Patton (1980) argues that case study research provides perspectives and is not aiming to provide a singular truth. Within the current study it would be very difficult to provide such a singular truth, in fact such a concept would have little meaning where perceptions are being sought. Merriam (1988) also considers that the descriptions provided by the case study approach give a strong information base to the project which in turn strengthens its external validity.

Problems with the internal validity of case study have also been identified, for example Cook and Campbell (1975) These centre around the problems of the findings being individual to the groups studied; the fact that each case study takes place in a specific setting; the uniqueness of the participants' particular history and the uniqueness of the constructs used to describe their worlds. Others, for example, LeCompte and Goetz (1984) claim that the case study has a high internal validity because of the fact that the researcher works closely with the participants and that interviews are able to generate more concrete data than tools used in many research designs. Merriam (1988) further suggests that strategies such as a check on researcher bias and clarification of the researcher's assumptions alongside an involvement of the participants in the research at all stages help to

ensure that there is a balance between the unique case and generalisations which may be made from it.

Within the context of this study when all aspects of case study research had been examined it was still considered to be the best way of proceeding, in particular because of the ability of the case study to provide description and focus on the language of the participants.

Ethical issues.

A research project of any type raises ethical issues and this is particularly so when the participants are vulnerable people. These issues are mainly discussed in the next section which gives a technical description of the research undertaken. Here it is important to make some general observations.

A key guideline stressed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004), and of particular relevance here because of the nature of many of the respondents interviewed in the empirical research, is that of respect for persons, 'regardless of age, sex, race, religion, political beliefs, lifestyle or any other significant difference' between such persons and the researcher. Linked to this it is crucial that all who participate in the research give their informed consent, including the use which will be made

of the information obtained. It is also vital that the participants are informed of the processes which will be undertaken in the course of the research. Researchers must also recognise the right of a participant to withdraw from the research at any stage. These factors are of particular importance when the researcher is a tutor and the participants are students, for then the researcher has to take particular care not to use his/her position of perceived power to put any form of duress on the students.

In particular the BERA guidelines give specific guidelines for research study with children, vulnerable young people and vulnerable adults. The last of these categories applies to adults with learning difficulties. The guidelines state that in 'the case of participants whose age, intellectual capability or other vulnerable circumstance may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to undertake their role' (BERA 2004) it is incumbent on researchers to explore ways in which they can still be enabled to make authentic responses. Further in these circumstances researchers must also seek the approval and collaboration of those who act in guardianship (for example, parents) or as 'responsible others' (for example, social workers). It is also the responsibility of the researcher to comply with any legal requirements regarding vulnerable adults. It is a further requirement that as vulnerable participants may easily experience distress the researcher must take all

necessary steps to prevent this. It is important to put participants at their ease and to avoid any comment or action which may lead to distress or discomfort on the part of the participants.

The guidelines also indicate that the design of the research should not advantage one group of participants over another and as this was a particular concern in the research design for this study steps were taken to avoid it.

Confidentiality is another important aspect of any piece of research and is considered the norm for such research. It is assumed that the participants will also remain anonymous. All participants must be accorded the rights of confidentiality and anonymity unless they, their guardians or responsible others give specific permission for that to be waived. Such permission should be given in writing. There may be occasions when participants wish to be identified if publication of their original work is involved. Further researchers must have participants' permission to disclose any personal information to a third party and records of such disclosures must be kept. It is also vital that researchers store data securely and that publication does not breach the confidentiality and anonymity agreed with the participants.

In conducting the research with all participants these ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to as will become apparent in the technical description of the research which follows.

Section two – a technical description of the empirical research.

Introduction.

Robson (1993) says of research in 'real life' situations such as the office, home or school:-

> ....one of the challenges about carrying out investigations in the 'real world' is in seeking to say something sensible about a complex, relatively poorly controlled and generally 'messy' situation. (p.3)

The empirical research in this thesis falls into this category but with the added complexity of involving adults with learning difficulties. Although there is still relatively little research conducted with adults with learning difficulties, there is a growing body of research data collected from children of school age with disabilities.

In the context of research with children with special needs Mertens and McLaughlin (1995) make two points which are also pertinent to research with adults with learning difficulties. The first is that those who research in this area 'must be aware of the unique context and special populations for their work' (1995:2). The ways in which the context of this research is

unique and the reasons why the population is special will be analysed below. The second point which Mertens and McLaughlin make is that:

> Teachers and other educational personnel find themselves face-to-face with children who need an appropriate education for which an adequate research base is lacking. (op cit:2).

For adults with learning difficulties in Britain this is also the case. One recent example of the inadequacy of research in the area of adults with learning difficulties relates to the recent production of a Literacy and Numeracy Pre- Entry Curriculum (2002) for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and further identified by Dee et al (2006). The Curriculum was based on the 'P' (Performance) Scales for children in special schools who fall below the starting point of the National Curriculum. Whilst that research had been undertaken in order to produce the 'P' Scales for children no similar research had been conducted to analyse the needs and steps to achievement for adults who fell below the range set out in the Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula. Consequently this could indicate that the Pre-Entry Curriculum for adults may be based on inappropriate standards, that is on those applicable to a much younger chronological age range.

Ethnography, an approach very relevant to this study, may be regarded by some as producing 'soft' data but it has the advantage that the researcher

goes into a situation '….unarmed, with no questionnaires, interview schedules or observation protocols to stand between them and the cold winds of the raw real' (Ball 1993). Such a venture is advantageous in appropriate situations, including this research, where it is important to seek the views of respondents without intermediaries, particularly where those views have previously never been sought or have been largely ignored.

Although Mertens and MacLaughlin's ideas of a 'unique context' and 'special populations', are terms which have implications for this particular piece of research they should not be seen as regarding those with learning difficulties as different from other adults, there is, however, still a 'unique context' and a 'special population' in that adults with learning difficulties are sometimes not able to speak for themselves or, in many cases they will not have not been encouraged or empowered to do so. An ability to advocate for one's self would be assumed and expected of other adults. Many adults with learning difficulties have been segregated from society in a number of ways as identified in the literature, whilst most adults live within society. Many adults with learning difficulties, unlike the majority of adults, are unable to read and write. There are not many contexts in which, when conducting research with adults, permission has to be sought from a third party such as Social Services for adults to speak for themselves and in order for the research to take place.

Such a situation leads to the question of ethical issues when dealing with a research population of this nature. To conduct this research permission had to be sought from a third party, in this case Social Services, even though the research involved those who were legally adults, that is in this instance persons over eighteen, who happened to be described as having learning difficulties. Social Services did not hesitate in giving permission and were very supportive but it does raise the question of the ways in which such adults are viewed in terms of their adult status. It also raises other issues. Clearly those with learning difficulties are regarded by society as being vulnerable and as such have to be protected. Ethical guidelines produced by BERA (2004) stress that research with children or with any participants who have impairments that limit understanding and or communication so that they are unable to give their real consent requires special safety requirements. The guidelines further stress that permission should be sought from those acting in loco parentis for both children and those over 18 who experience difficulties as stated above.

Whilst accepting the need for care to be taken with both children and vulnerable adults the guidance raises questions. Who, for example, defines whether or not a person over 18 is or is not able to give consent? It may also be argued that the need for consent for such persons is dependent on the kind of research being conducted and the impact it may have on the

participants. If the research involves any form of experimentation involving human subjects then clearly there is a need for fully informed consent to be given but it is perhaps questionable how far such consent can or ought to be given on behalf of another adult. If the research undertaken is of a general, less intrusive nature, such as that contained in this thesis, consent must obviously still be obtained but in this case adults over 18, even those who experience difficulties would still be able to give consent for themselves not least because nothing in the research process will impact in any detrimental way on the participants. A further ethical point is raised. In the past, as the literature has indicated, many of those with learning difficulties were largely ignored and others spoke on their behalf. If we are to obtain the views of those with learning difficulties it is crucial to speak to them directly but it could be that there are those in society who would not wish this to happen and may therefore withhold consent even thought the adult with a learning difficulty may be willing to participate in a research project.

Consideration of approaches.

The factors indicated in both sections above helped to determine the approaches used in obtaining the empirical data in order to answer the research questions. Five sets of data were required to answer points regarding adult status:-

- How both young people and adults with learning difficulties viewed adulthood.

- What the commonalities and differences were between those with and without learning difficulties.

- Whether the respondents were aware of adults as distinct from children and where they saw the point of transition.

- How the respondents perceived being an adult as different from being a child.

- How tutors and managers within Basic Skills viewed the descriptor of 'learning difficulties' and how they regarded the possibility of including those with learning difficulties in groups alongside adults without known learning difficulties.

The findings would then be used in order to address the overall aim of the research which was to seek to establish whether or not those adults with learning difficulties were significantly 'different' as much of the literature and the segregation of such adults would seem to imply and, if such difference existed, how this impacted on their status as adults.

It would have been possible to have based this research on one of the models of disability, in particular the tragedy model (Nind et al 2003), the medical model (Bailey in Clark et al 1998, O'Kane and Goldbart 1996,) or the social model (Booth and Ainscow 1998, Nind et al 2003, O'Kane

and Goldbart 1996, Ramcharan et al 1997,) even as developed into the affirmative model (Nind et al 2003) of disability. Such a possibility was rejected because to have used one of these as a basis for the research would have taken disability as the starting point as has frequently been done in the past. In other words the focus of the research would move from the person to the disability.

The use of Knowles' (1990) definition avoids the apportioning of onus of responsibility and enables adults with learning difficulties to be considered first and foremost as adults. It also provides the possibility to look at a new model, that is to look for what all adults have in common and use that as the focus rather than consider again either perceived deficits within society or within an individual. If any differences, other than the differences which exist between individuals in general, are apparent between those adults with and without learning difficulties the approaches proposed in this chapter will potentially allow the reasons for those differences to be identified. To start from a model of disability would be to assume such differences exist and possibly therefore to begin from a negative perspective. Using Knowles' definition and matching responses to it also permits many attributes of a person to be considered rather than focusing merely on the one attribute of disability which Kunc (cited in Giangreco 2003) suggests frequently happens. To focus on the attribute of disability,

as do all the models of disability, would be to overlook the many other attributes of persons with learning difficulties and would produce an unhelpful bias in an examination of adult status.

As indicated in Chapter 2 where definitions of adulthood were examined, Knowles' (1990) definition was selected because it attempted by reference to the four areas defining adulthood (biological, legal, social and psychological) to give a broad picture of what it means to be adult. Knowles does not mention the intellectual domain of adulthood which for this particular study was advantageous. Society does not define whether or not a person is an adult on the basis of their intellectual ability, although this factor may influence other judgements which are made about people.

Consideration was then given to what research approaches were available to fit this very complex situation. The first approach considered was a survey by means of questionnaires. Questionnaires would have given access to a wide sample of students with learning difficulties but the problem here was that people with learning difficulties often have limited or no literacy skills. Whilst questionnaires could have been used with a parent or carer acting as an amanuensis this presented further problems in that it would be potentially problematical to establish whether the response might be that of the parent or carer writing what he/she thinks the person is,

or ought to be, saying. It would not therefore be possible to ascertain whether the views stated were those of the adult student with learning difficulties or those of the parent/carer.

The next approach which was considered was a case study involving only two or three students. Such an approach would have had the advantage that it may have produced detailed information but inevitably on a very small population. There were, however, several disadvantages. One was an ethical issue of whether it was appropriate for a tutor in Adult Education to ask questions which would have fallen outside that remit. There is also the difficulty that sometimes the student population is mobile and therefore it would have been unwise to base a great proportion of the research on a small number of students who might subsequently cease to attend the groups. In addition to this it was felt that the research questions would perhaps be better addressed by a larger sample than case study of this type would permit.

Case study was still felt to be appropriate as the fundamental research questions were seeking to identify how the respondents regarded adults and adulthood (Yin 1994, Hitchcock and Hughes 1995) for which this seemed the best approach. It would be possible to conduct a locational educational case study, described by Bassey (1999) as a singularity, within the Adult

Education Service of the unitary authority. Such a study would be located totally within the unitary authority and give a 'rich, thick description' within that location. The main focus would be on adults with learning difficulties but also other groups from the same unitary authority would be involved in order to make comparisons. A case study of this nature could also be conducted mainly within the natural environment of the class situation for those with learning difficulties. It would seek to establish the perception of adult status of adults with learning difficulties based on the findings. A case study could also be seen as 'a step to action' (Cohen and Manion 1994:123) to benefit staff and students within the unitary authority. Generalisations and replication are often a difficulty with using a case study approach but it may be possible to replicate the research in other locations using the approaches described in the research design below. It could also lead to establishing what Bassey (1999) describes as 'fuzzy propositions', that is it would be possible to say that the findings from the research and their implications may apply in other locations. The decision was made to conduct such a case study and possible approaches within this framework were then considered. All methods had to be accessible even for those with complex needs and this was a major consideration.

Having decided on a case study approach the tools to facilitate such an approach were considered. The use of open-ended or semi-structured

interviews, typical of the approaches frequently used in social science and educational research, would afford the opportunity to speak directly with adults with learning difficulties and allow for non-verbal means of communication for those with little or no natural speech. Others working in the field had also used interviews, for example Sutcliffe (1993), Sutcliffe and Jacobsen (1998), Jacobsen (2000) and Giangreco (2003), when seeking to determine the views of adults with learning difficulties and disabilities regarding self advocacy and educational provision. The method had also been used by myself in previous research (Beverley 1997a). Whilst having the disadvantage of being time consuming it would nevertheless give the opportunity to speak with people face to face without the intervention of carers and so the only agenda which would have to be taken into account was my own. The approach would also allow interviewees the opportunity to respond individually to points made and allow me the possibility of asking more penetrating questions. It would also permit me to make appropriate adjustments throughout where the need for this arose, for example to clarify questions or responses.

As many of the respondents would have learning difficulties, semi-structured interviews would give direction but allow sufficient flexibility for opinions to be expressed. It was also decided to interview students in groups rather than on a one to one basis. The rationale for this is that many

students with learning difficulties do not respond well, if at all, on a one to one basis (Beverley 1997a) but function better within a group situation where another person may initiate a response. There is the obvious difficulty that it is almost impossible to assign a response to a specific person but as the research was primarily concerned with attitudes in general, rather than being able to attach a response to a specific respondent, this was not seen as presenting a problem. Group peer pressure could be a factor in this approach but it would also be possible by working with small groups to ensure that each person was able to participate in the discussions.

Research design.

Having decided to conduct a case study and having concluded that the use of semi-structured interviews was the best research tool given all the factors above, it had to be decided what sort of a sample was required. As both perceptions of adulthood from an adult perspective and a developing perspective were being examined it was decided to interview both adults with and without learning difficulties and young people with and without learning difficulties. A chronological definition of adult was used so that all adults interviewed were over 18 years of age. In order to ascertain the views of young people it was decided to interview pupils in Years 7 – 11. The obtaining of such data would make it possible to compare views regarding adult status.

The key group for the research was adults with learning difficulties. Here two possible options presented themselves. It would be possible either to interview people with whom I was not familiar or those with whom I was familiar. It was decided to interview groups of adults with learning difficulties with whom I was familiar and who were willing to participate in the research. There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach. In its favour was the fact that many adults with learning difficulties take a considerable time to establish rapport with a new person and the presence of an additional person in a teaching situation would affect the dynamic of that group and thus interfere with the learning taking place. This would have been unacceptable and perhaps counter-productive to the line of enquiry. Where some respondents had communication difficulties a knowledge of these difficulties and familiarity with their communication skills was advantageous. The advantages of working with familiar groups seemed to outweigh the disadvantages also in that a trust had already been established and groups were very willing to assist in the research. The disadvantage of interviewing known groups is that there is always the possibility of being subjective but I was aware of the need to avoid this and used transcripts of tapes to check the data. I used only the data collected during the interviews and not any prior knowledge of the respondents.

Adults without learning difficulties were also interviewed. These

participants were all volunteers who were known to me but were not part of my teaching groups. They belonged to two church social groups and were simply selected on the basis that they were adult, that is over eighteen years old, did not have any apparent learning difficulties, were willing to participate in the research and lived within the unitary authority. It was important to ascertain views of adults without learning difficulties so that the findings from the adults with learning difficulties could be compared with them as well as with Knowles (1990).

In addition it was decided to interview two sets of young people aged between 11 and 16. All would be unknown to me prior to the interviews. Three schools in the unitary authority would be approached with a view to involvement in the research, two special schools and one comprehensive school. The special schools were both area special schools, that is the catchment area was the whole of the unitary authority. One school catered for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and the other for pupils with severe learning difficulties, including profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). Both of these schools were all age schools and one included a post-16 facility. All pupils in these schools would be invited to participate in the research and the purpose of the research would be explained to them as would the fact that they could not be identified from the data.

The comprehensive school used from those within the unitary authority was where the head gave permission for entry. As both special schools were small compared with comprehensive schools, as is usually the case, year groups similar in size to those in the special schools would be interviewed in the comprehensive school. Although the head would select groups to be interviewed from each Year group it would be requested that none of those interviewed in this school would have a known learning difficulty and that a broad range of ability would be represented if possible.

Attempting to conduct interviews with adults (Beverley 1997a) and young people with learning difficulties is challenging in that many of them have problems with limited expressive and receptive language and concepts (Sutcliffe 1990). Questions may be answered literally when a literal answer is not required and rhetorical questions may be answered as they are assumed to be identical to questions which do require answers. It is sometimes necessary for a question to be broken down into a series of questions in order for it to be fully comprehended and, as Sutcliffe (1990) indicates, students may respond to a question which they do not understand. Some words or terminology are unknown to them in terms of the word itself or its meaning (Jacobsen 2000, Mertens and McLaughlin 1995). These factors require the interviewer to be as certain as possible that the questions being posed have been fully comprehended. It is therefore

crucial that the researcher is both aware of the language limitations of those with learning difficulties and has the opportunity to make adjustments to language where necessary. Semi-structured interviews would afford the researcher the opportunity to check on all these points (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995, Robson 1993).

Adults were interviewed on the basis of whether or not they had a known learning difficulty but were not sub-divided any further. Adults without learning difficulties who took part in the research were selected purely on the grounds that they did not have a learning difficulty. It was important to know this as if any had a learning difficulty it could have impacted on the findings. The adults without learning difficulties had no known prior knowledge of the research area and lived in the same unitary authority as all the other respondents.

The interviews in both the special schools and the comprehensive school were to be carried out in groups or, in the case of more severe and complex learning difficulties, individually with a teacher present who in some instances might be required to help to interpret the responses given, that is explain what the respondents were saying where there were speech or communication difficulties or give possible reasons for the answers.

In the interviews all respondents would be asked what made adults different from children and what things adults could do that children could not. The young people would additionally be asked how they saw life as an adult. Clearly this was an inappropriate question to ask of those who had already attained adulthood. It was hoped that the use of semi-structured interviews would permit prompts to remind the respondents of the questions being considered.

One of the key questions was to establish whether those with learning difficulties were able to distinguish adults from children. It was apparent, given the nature of some of the difficulties with which people would present, that a method had to be found to use alongside the interviews which was not entirely dependent on language and concepts. One way of achieving this was to use pictures with all the groups interviewed, an innovative approach, so that those with little or no natural speech, or those with language or conceptual difficulties, could express an opinion. This was felt to be a good way forward by both the schools and by colleagues in speech therapy. Such advice confirmed my decision to use pictures as a research tool.

The pictures (see Appendix 1) depicted people of varying ages from infants to the elderly. They were selected from a range of magazines and

catalogues to cover age, gender and ethnicity. The groups interviewed were to be asked to place the pictures into two categories, namely adults and children. The intention was to see if children and adults could be distinguished and where the transition came by observing in which group the teenagers were placed. The use of this exercise would mean that every person interviewed would be able to take part and respond to some extent. It was decided to use this exercise immediately prior to the interviews in order both to establish a rapport with those who were unfamiliar and to focus on the subject under discussion.

In addition to the interviews general observations were made during teaching sessions and attitudes and comments were noted. Such observations clarified some of the difficulties with language and is detailed in the research findings.

One of the major difficulties in this research was attempting to see how others perceived those adults with learning difficulties. It is virtually impossible to achieve this by direct questioning as few people will give negative statements about how they view those with learning difficulties. It is, however, perhaps possible to gain some insight into this from both the literature and from anecdotal evidence. It is often possible to infer attitudes by the observation of behaviour rather than by direct questioning which

may give the answer people believe is the one wanted rather than a true opinion.

Finally research was done to ascertain the views of Basic Skills teaching staff and managers within the unitary authority Adult Education Service as to whether it was desirable to teach those adults with learning difficulties alongside adults without a known learning difficulty and to see how such staff perceived 'learning difficulty'. It was decided to use questionnaires as the simplest way to obtain the initial information. The questionnaires were followed up by interviews to further discuss points raised where staff were willing for this to happen.

It should be emphasised that all the strategies used for the research were worked out prior to the research taking place and were not developed consecutively as the research progressed. All groups undertook the tasks in the same sequence ensuring as much as possible a consistency of approach across the groups.

All the interviews were recorded by means of a tape recorder and then transcribed. Such a process ensured that the actual words used by the respondents were retained accurately rather than being recorded in note form and then written up later. Use of this approach diminished

possibilities of error in interpreting notes. All groups/individuals would be asked to consent to this process and if there were any objections then notes would be used. The use of a tape recorder would enable the interviews to be conducted without the interruption which would potentially have arisen if notes had been taken. It would also facilitate the maintenance of eye contact with the respondents and enable the researcher to concentrate fully on the respondent especially in some instances where there were communication difficulties.

By comparing and contrasting the data collected from adults, young people and staff and by comparing them with Knowles' (1990) definition of adult to establish commonalities and differences it would be possible to ensure that a form of triangulation took place.

Ethical issues in relation to the research were considered in particular informed consent and anonymity (Cohen and Manion 1994). All the respondents indicated a willingness to participate in the research the nature of which was explained to them both by myself and the head and teachers in the case of the schools. One school additionally requested parental consent for the young people to be interviewed. Social Services also gave permission for the adults with learning difficulties to participate as

explained above. All respondents were assured that no-one could, or would, be individually identified.

Conclusions.

Research with adults with learning difficulties is a comparatively new area as many such adults only began living in the community in 1990. Semi-structured interviews have been used by others in the field and were felt to be a method which would give the most accurate results. It is hoped that in particular the use of pictures in a research context to enable respondents to express ideas and opinions could become a useful tool.

Having decided on a case study approach and the groups of respondents who would be interviewed the task of conducting the research began. The following table indicates the groups interviewed, the number of respondents and the approaches used and gives an overview of this. It will also provide a useful reference point for the subsequent chapters which detail the findings and analysis of the empirical research.

Table 9.1 Summary of the research.

Groups interviewed.	Number of respondents.	Approaches used.
Special School A	25	Picture sorting. Semi-structured interviews
Special School B	9	Picture sorting. Semi-structured interviews
Comprehensive School	40	Picture sorting. Semi-structured interviews
Adults with learning difficulties	27	Picture sorting. Semi-structured interviews
Adults without learning difficulties	10	Picture sorting. Semi-structured interviews
Basic Skills staff	19 (questionnaire) 9 (follow up interviews	Questionnaire. Follow up interviews with some staff.

The table above gives a summary of the research. It indicates the groups interviewed, the approaches used the contexts in which the research was undertaken and the number of participants. In all 130 respondents took part in the research of whom 120 were interviewed (transcripts available). The following chapters are structured around this table.

Chapter 10.

Research Findings and Analysis.

Introduction.

The current chapter and the next three chapters will focus on the research processes and report and analyse the findings (ref. Table 9.1).

In Chapter 2 a detailed examination was made of the ways in which adulthood is perceived and they are briefly summarised here for reference. Adulthood in some societies is defined solely on a chronological basis, so at a specified chronological age a person is deemed to be an adult. In Britain that age is 18. Such a chronological definition takes no account of responsibilities or the maturity of the individual, which many consider to be implicit in being an adult.

Adulthood may be defined in terms of maturity or of roles and responsibilities (Knowles 1990, Griffiths 1994 and Whitbourne and Weinstock cited in Gross 1996). Consideration must also be given to the issue of how adult status is conferred (Griffiths 1994); that is whether it is arrived at by right at a given age, whether it is achieved by conformity to the definitions given in terms of responsibility and maturity, or whether it is conferred on individuals by others.

The empirical research was undertaken to attempt to establish views on both the perceptions of adulthood and the inclusion of adult students with learning difficulties alongside adult students without learning difficulties. It was conducted with a number of young people and adults across the ability range, some of whom were defined as having learning difficulties. The young people interviewed were under 18 and the adults over 18. The research entailed asking three questions. The first related to perceptions of the point at which transition from childhood to adulthood took place and, from pictorial information alone, the main factors which distinguish adults from children. The second question related to how young people and adults with and without learning difficulties perceived both adulthood and themselves as adults. Answers to these two questions were sought from young people and adults with and without learning difficulties. The third question attempted to discern the views of Basic Skills tutors concerning including adults with learning difficulties in groups alongside adults without a learning difficulty.

It was crucial to find a way in which all those interviewed could indicate differences between children and adults as some respondents had no natural speech. In consultation with one of the special schools it was decided that a way to overcome any potential difficulty would be to use pictures as identified in Chapter 9 (see Appendix 1).

In the interviews every group, or in one school each person, was asked to identify which pictures were of adults and which were of children. The only exception to this was Year 9 in the comprehensive school who were interviewed before the pictures had been finalised to meet the school's timetabling requirements. This exercise (referred to as the sorting exercise) had two main strands. The first was to see whether children and adults could be accurately identified. The second, and possibly most important, was to determine how each group identified teenagers, that is whether teenagers were regarded as children or adults. The categorisation of teenagers would help to identify where those interviewed saw the point of transition from childhood and adolescence to adulthood. The groups were also encouraged to sequence the pictures from infancy to old age as an indication, particularly for those respondents with learning difficulties, of whether they had a perspective of life span and development.

Each group was asked to sort the pictures into two groups, children and adults. Any they could not categorise they were asked to keep separately. The groups were asked to come to a decision about the pictures as a group, which allowed me, the researcher, to listen to and record the process of the decision making as well as the final decisions.

None of the groups interviewed had any specific difficulty in understanding

the task they were required to perform except some young people in the special school for those with severe learning difficulties, referred to as School B below. Whilst all the groups defined teenagers as a separate group, that is neither children nor adults, in some groups pictures of teenagers were moved several times between the child/adult categories before a final decision was made. All groups were then questioned about how they made the decisions and their responses are recorded and analysed below.

The research groups.

School A.

School A is a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties. Each year group, Years 7 to 11, was interviewed sometimes as two smaller groups. Small groups were requested by the school to allow greater opportunity for participation and to cause minimum disruption to the school's schedules.

Table 10.1 School A – respondents interviewed

Year 11	6 males 1 female
Year 10	4 males
Year 9	3 males 2 females
Year 8	2 males 1 female
Year 7	3 males 3 females

School B.

School B is a school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties. In this school pupils in the secondary phase are divided into younger seniors (Years 7, 8, and 9) and older seniors (Years 10 and 11). The interviews were conducted on this basis. In this school some of the interviews were conducted on an individual basis with a teacher present to help with communication particularly where pupils had little speech or were on the autistic spectrum. This strategy, suggested by the school due to the difficulties experienced by many of the pupils, seemed appropriate. The younger seniors were interviewed on a 1:1 basis. Due to the severe nature of some of the difficulties experienced by the senior pupils it was not possible to interview all of them but some were interviewed.

Table 10.2 School B – respondents interviewed

| Older seniors | 1 male 2 females |
| Younger seniors | 4 males 2 females (All interviewed individually) |

School C

School C is a comprehensive school mainly attended by pupils from an urban area. It was not possible to interview Year 11 pupils as they were involved with GCSE examinations at the time when the head gave permission for the interviews to take place. Year 9 did not take part in the sorting exercise.

Table 10.3 School C – respondents interviewed

Year 10	5 males 2 females
Year 9	6 males 4 females
Year 8	6 males 4 females
Year 7	5 males 4 females.

Adults with learning difficulties

The adults in these groups had some known learning difficulty, varying from moderate to severe and were interviewed in mixed ability groups with no differentiation made on the basis of the severity of the learning difficulty. The adults were all from my teaching groups and were interviewed in relatively small groups to afford opportunities for them to respond. Two respondents were interviewed individually as they had not been present when the groups were interviewed but this did not prove successful. Reasons for potential problems with one to one interviews have been discussed in Chapter 9 where they were considered inappropriate for this particular study.

Table 10.4 Adults with learning difficulties – respondents interviewed

Group 1	4 males 2 females
Group 2	4 males 2 females
Group 3	2 males 5 females
Group 4	4 males
Group 5	3 males 1 female

Adults without known learning difficulties.

The adults in this category were interviewed in two groups. None had any known learning difficulty and the groups were of mixed ability.

Table 10.5 Adults without learning difficulties – respondents interviewed

Group 1	2 males 3 females
Group 2	2 males 3 females

These groups remained the same throughout the research.

Results.

A key point of interest in the picture sorting exercise was to establish how

the respondents categorised teenagers. This proved to be a considerable

area of debate amongst all groups and the results are given below.

Table 10.6 Categorisation of teenagers – school respondents.

	School A					School B		School C		
	Y11	Y10	Y9	Y8	Y7	Older Seniors	Younger Seniors	Y10	Y8	Y7
Adult	*	*			*	*		*		
Child										
Separate group	*		*	*						*
Unsure							*		*	

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Table 10.7 Categorisation of teenagers – adult respondents

	with learning difficulties.					without learning difficulties.	
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 1	Group 2
Adult				*			
Child							
Separate group	*		*			*	*
Unsure		*			*		

A significant fact in the charts above is that whilst some respondent groups were unsure how to categorise teenagers, none believed that they were children. Year 11 respondents in School A were interviewed in two groups with one group believing teenagers to be adults and the other a separate group but no specific reasons were given for the decisions. Year 10 in both School A and School C considered teenagers to be nearer to adults than children, as did the Older Seniors in School B. One respondent in Year 7 at School A described teenagers as 'grown up children' and Year 8 respondents in this school stated that teenagers were a separate group, but 'nearer' to adults than to children.

Some groups found it difficult to decide in which groups teenagers belonged and moved the pictures of teenagers from group to group but often did not give specific reasons for their decisions. Year 9 in School A

decided that teenagers were a separate group because they looked very young but were of adult size. After discussion they stated that the teenagers looked older than the children but younger than the adults. They concluded therefore that teenagers were 'in the middle', that is between children and adults, a point also made by Year 8 in this school.

Year 8 in School C were uncertain how to categorise teenagers but then differentiated according to gender. Female teenagers were placed with the children but male teenagers were placed with the adults. Groups 2 and 3 of the adults with learning difficulties also categorised male teenagers as men but were unsure whether teenage females were children or adults. For the adults without learning difficulties there was no problem with categorisation of teenagers but there was considerable debate about the point at which adulthood began.

Table 10.8 Ability to distinguish babies and older people - school respondents

| | School A | | | | | School B | | School C | | |
	Y11	Y10	Y9	Y8	Y7	Older Seniors	Younger seniors	Y10	Y8	Y7
Older people	*			*			*	*		
Babies			*	*	*		*	*		

Table 10.9 Ability to distinguish babies and older people – adult respondents

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 1	Group 2
Older people	*					*	*
Babies		*		*		*	*

Many respondent groups were aware of life span, in particular Year 10 in School C who put all the pictures in the correct order from infancy to old age, Year 8 in School A and the adults without learning difficulties. Initially some respondents in the Younger seniors in School C had some difficulties with identifying older people but either could not give a reason for this or could not verbalise it. Again, however, the correct responses (where responses were given) were apparent across all the groups and did not appear to be linked to whether or not a learning difficulty was present.

Factors defining adults and children.

Many issues were raised by the respondents in their considerations of whether the pictures were of adults or children but where reasons for decisions were given three key factors emerged; size, clothing and appearance. The tables below indicate the frequency of these responses.

Table 10.10 Factors distinguishing adults from children – school respondents.

	School A					School B		School C		
	Y11	Y10	Y9	Y8	Y7	Older Seniors	Younger Seniors	Y10	Y8	Y7
Clothes	*			*	*			*	*	*
Size	*		*	*	*		*	*	*	*
Appearance	*		*					*	*	*

Table 10.11 Factors distinguishing adults from children.

	Adults						
	with learning difficulties					without learning difficulties	
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 1	Group 2
Clothes	*		*		*	*	*
Size	*	*		*			
Appearance			*			*	*

Reasons given for the decisions.

Young people with learning difficulties.

Adults had grey hairs and some men were bald.

Teenagers and children wear more sports clothes.

Adults wear suits.

Adults wear longer clothes than children.

We looked at their faces and 'length' (height).

Adults are big. Children are small.

Children are younger.

A man was described as 'a big mister'.

Young people without learning difficulties.

The person's appearance, clothes and size (height) were considered.

Adults and children were distinguished by considering facial expressions.

Children were described as cute whereas adults looked more serious.

Children were smaller and dress less formally, that is 'they don't wear suits and those sorts of clothes'.

Children 'look different from adults' in terms of facial expressions.

Adults with learning difficulties.

Children were little or small.

Children and adults wear different clothes.

A male teenager was initially considered to be a man because 'he had a tee shirt hanging out of his trousers'.

A female teenager was considered to be a girl because she 'has short hair and jeans' and a girl would be more likely to wear jeans than a lady.

Hairstyles, looks and appearance.

It was considered that children looked more 'scruffy' than adults.

A teenage female looked like a lady 'because she had boobs'.

The taller of two children must be the older one.

Adults are older.

Adults without learning difficulties.

Age was seen as crucial with children being defined as 'under 16'.

Clothes and stance (the way in which a person presented physically).

Maturity was a cited as a criterion for making a decision regarding whether

a person was a child or an adult.

Dress, hairstyle and apparent age.

Language.

In interviews in School A and with some groups of adults with learning

difficulties the terminology used had to be changed because the

respondents were unaware of the terms 'adult' or 'grown up'. The only

terms with which the younger respondents were familiar were 'boy' and

'man' and 'girl' and 'woman'. Some school respondents were aware of the

term 'grown up' but unsure of the term 'adult'. Some adults with learning

difficulties used the term 'grown up' rather than 'adult' and 'lady' rather

than 'woman'. The possibility of a necessity to adapt the interviews to suit

the needs of the respondents was considered in the previous chapter as part

of the rationale for selecting semi structured interviews as an appropriate

research method. Here such an adaptation was essential for the interview to proceed.

Analysis of Results.

The picture sorting exercise indicated that all groups of respondents could categorise the pictures on the basis of children or adults. Where teenagers were identified they were regarded as a separate category, although not all groups mentioned teenagers initially. Most of the groups, both those with and without learning difficulties, could identify both babies and the elderly and comprehended progression through life from infancy to old age.

The categorisation of teenagers proved very interesting especially among the young people. Perhaps those in Years 10 and 11 regarded teenagers as adults because this was how they regarded themselves, whilst those in the lower secondary year groups felt teenagers were adults because they were older than them or, as a Year 7 pupil at School A expressed it, were 'grown up children'. The views among the young people interviewed regarding the identification of teenagers depended more on the age of the respondents than on whether or not they had a learning difficulty. Younger respondents still saw themselves as children whereas older young people saw themselves as already adults. This would suggest a common view of adolescence irrespective of having or not having a learning difficulty. If

there is no significant difference in the way adolescence is regarded by those young people with and without learning difficulties then the question must be asked whether or not this is always recognised by society.

Research suggests that there is no difference in the age at which physical maturity is reached in young people with learning difficulties and without learning difficulties (Goldstein 1988 cited in Griffiths, 1994). The current research indicates that young people with learning difficulties are well aware of their approaching adult status. The question must then be raised as to whether many of them will achieve it as society and families are often reluctant to permit this to happen (Griffiths 1994, Sutcliffe 1992). This will be examined further below.

Another important factor which emerged from the picture sorting was the lack of appropriate language known and used by those with learning difficulties. It was surprising that many respondents in School B had no understanding of the terms 'adult' or 'grown up', despite the fact that many of them were rapidly approaching adulthood. This specific issue had not been envisaged in planning the research but as indicated in the research methodology possible difficulties with language and concepts had been considered. Significantly, exactly the same issue arose in some of my teaching groups outside the period in which this research was undertaken.

During a discussion about being an adult at least four students said they were not adults but 'grown ups'. Clearly this latter term was familiar to them but one wonders what they had thought 'adult education' was intended to be. Such a lack of appropriate vocabulary raises significant questions about provision made for adults with learning difficulties. A deficiency of appropriate vocabulary differentiates them from other adults and yet the term 'adult' would appear no more difficult to learn than the terms 'grown up', 'man' or 'lady'. Such a lack of vocabulary has a twofold impact on those with learning difficulties. Firstly it accentuates their learning difficulty. Secondly, and more significantly, it makes them appear younger than their chronological age and reinforces the image of people with learning difficulties as 'eternal children' (Griffiths 1994, McConkey in Mittler and Sinason 1996).

The responses from each group on the criteria used to categorise the pictures can be summarised under three main headings of size, clothing and appearance. Most of the groups interviewed referred to some or all of these (See tables 10.8 and 10.9 above). Each of these criteria will now be examined, particularly in relation to those adults with learning difficulties.

Size.

The first criterion used by many of the groups was that of size. In discussion with the respondents it became apparent that by 'size' 'height' was indicated. The inference therefore was that adults are taller than children. Whilst an over generalisation, as some adults are shorter than children, the point that adults are generally taller than children is nevertheless valid and presumably has something to do with the term 'grown up' being frequently used as a synonym for 'adult', implying 'full sized' and 'fully developed'. Many adults with learning difficulties are short in stature. If adults are regarded as generally being tall this could imply that they are not fully 'adult'. Height taken on its own is perhaps less significant than the criteria of clothing and appearance but nevertheless most respondents believed that to be adult one had to be taller than a child.

Clothing.

Clothing was also used as a criterion for categorising the pictures by virtually all the groups. Many respondents stated that adults and children dress differently and in particular that adults dress more formally than children, with one group stating that adults wear 'things like suits'. In our society clothing is important in two specific ways. It is expected that dress is appropriate to both age and context. Dress is very strictly governed by convention. For many adults with learning difficulties such convention is

not always appreciated. In some cases dress is used by others to blur or disguise the adolescent or adult status of those with learning difficulties. Griffiths (1994) speaks of:

> styles of dress which either blur all sexual characteristics, for example loose fitting tracksuits or jumpers and jeans etc., which are either very childlike or very middle-aged so that adolescence is denied (Griffiths 1994: 13).

Anecdotal evidence exemplifies this point. In Adult Education classes some students wear clothes suited to either a much younger or much older age group. My own experience was of a lady in her forties who always appeared in class wearing a navy blue cardigan and a tie. She wore ankle socks and carried a satchel. One assumes she was dressed, or chose to dress like this, because she was attending 'school'. It made her stand out to the extent that colleagues regularly commented on her appearance. It would seem essential that those with learning difficulties dress like other adults and are taught the importance of wearing clothes appropriate to their age. There is always the possibility, alluded to by Griffiths (op cit), that some who care for those with learning difficulties encourage inappropriate dress to deny their adult status and retain them as children or that older parents/carers select clothes they themselves would choose. Tracksuits are also worn by many students as indicated by Griffiths (op cit).

Clothing should also be appropriate to context. There are many reasons not

to conform to convention but where convention is not adhered to the person failing to conform should be aware of this. Many adults with learning difficulties do not appear to recognise the conventions surrounding dress. Examples from Adult Education classes illustrate this. Frequently at Christmas many students with learning difficulties attend wearing Santa hats. When it is explained that this is inappropriate within classes or on an educational visit many seem quite offended. In the summer many students, both male and female, in their forties or fifties frequently appear in shorts and baseball caps. Choice of dress does not, strictly speaking, matter but it raises two issues. Firstly it tends to make students with learning difficulties distinct from other students, especially when they are in a group. Secondly if such lack of convention is not addressed the students may be unaware that a convention exists. In the research findings many respondents suggested that adults dressed more formally than children and young people and so failure to conform to this expectation might also make some people distinct from others. Perhaps there will always be tensions where students choose for themselves what they wish to wear but appropriateness of dress should be discussed. If students then choose to wear what may be deemed 'inappropriate' they will be aware of this.

Another factor regarding dress should be mentioned although it did not arise in the research contexts above. That is the tendency for many adults

with learning difficulties to overdress by wearing many layers of clothing. Overdressing is a fairly common factor, sometimes also seen both in children and in some cases where people are not used to being indoors. For adults with learning difficulties overdressing has the effect of making them appear different from others as well as complaints of being too hot or feeling unwell.

Appearance.

The third criterion used to distinguish adults from children. was that of appearance, a point also raised by Barnes (1990). Commonly facial appearance was indicated and specifically that adults tended to look more serious than children. Additionally some respondents specifically referred to hairstyles and expressions. If facial expression is a distinguishing feature of adulthood this has implications for those with learning difficulties. Many adults with learning difficulties, particularly those with Down's Syndrome, have distinctive facial features. Some have a somewhat vacant expression and appear to be staring into the middle distance. Others do not focus on the person speaking to them and have little concept of eye contact and personal space. These factors influence facial expression. Such physical appearance and expressions would distinguish them from other adults.

Stance or gait was also mentioned. Observation indicates that many adults with learning difficulties move or stand differently from the majority of adults. Such stance or movement in this instance does not refer to those adults who have an accompanying physical difficulty.

Implications of size, clothing and appearance.

When all the factors examined above are concentrated in one individual, namely short stature, inappropriate clothing and a distinctive facial appearance, then none of the criteria by which adulthood was recognised in the picture sorting exercise are present. In order to enhance the adult status of such an individual as much should be done as possible to minimise the obvious differences. This is not to advocate drastic measures like plastic surgery for those with Down's Syndrome (Ramcharan et al 1997) but to suggest that appropriate clothing, hairstyle and body language would partially redress the balance.

One final point remains. One respondent, who had an acquired learning difficulty rather than having had a learning difficulty since birth, identified as adult a female because 'she had boobs'. She was the only adult with learning difficulties to recognise such physical development as moving towards adulthood. This, and other information retained from the time when no learning difficulty was present, raises the issue of whether adults

with an acquired learning difficulty should be handled differently within an educational setting from those born with a learning difficulty. There are potential differences between those with acquired and those with inherent learning difficulties but a detailed discussion of this is outside the parameters of this research.

Conclusions.

It may be argued that the picture sorting exercise only elicited data about being an adult in terms of observable, physical characteristics and that is only one aspect of being an adult. It ignores, for example, the notion of being an adult in a context of intellectual and social behaviour. The latter features were tackled despite their difficulty later in the interviews. Observable features, such as size, clothing and physical appearance were, however, particularly relevant in the research as they are the first things others notice about a person. Such observable features are often the basis for initial assumptions made by others about an individual.

The findings from this section of the research are, I believe, very significant, even if limited to observable features. They also raise questions about what are basic skills for those adults with learning difficulties. For example is an awareness of social convention a basic skill? The question of what constitutes a basic skill will be discussed further below but remains of crucial importance. The next chapter gives further

findings and analysis from the empirical research and matches them to

Knowles (1990) definition of adult.

Chapter 11

What Makes Adults Different From Children?

Introduction.

The second part of the research with the groups specified in Chapter 10 centred around the question of what are the things which make adults different from children. The findings detailed in this chapter are based entirely on the interviews. Although reported separately for reasons of clarity, these responses and the results from the picture sorting exercise were obtained on the same occasion.

Each group interviewed was asked in what ways they believed adults to be different from children. The young people interviewed were also asked what they thought it would be like to be an adult and what things they thought they would be able to do as an adult which they could not do as a child/young person. Similar responses came from the various groups as would be expected.

The research findings will be reported in tables and then analysed. The respondents' views are grouped together under the headings of biological factors, legal factors, social factors and psychological factors. These headings match the elements of the definition of 'adult' as perceived by Knowles (1990) and lead to an understanding of how people perceive adult

status. These are broad headings as some of the data fits more than one category. Comparisons will then be made to examine both commonalities and differences in the responses of the groups interviewed.

The biological definition. Results and analysis.

Knowles states:

> we become adult biologically when we reach the age at which we can reproduce – which at our latitude is in early adolescence. (Knowles 1990:57)

The statement that 'we become adult biologically when we reach the age at which we can reproduce....' is very significant particularly when other research indicates that those with a learning difficulty, specifically people with Down's syndrome, reach sexual maturity at the same age as those without learning difficulties (Goldstein 1988 cited in Griffiths 1994). Such research indicates that both adolescents and adults with learning difficulties are as able to reproduce as those without learning difficulties.

The current research explored whether the respondent groups, and specifically those groups of young people and adults with learning difficulties, were aware of biological aspects of adulthood. The responses for each group will be summarised below.

The first set of tables show the responses of the respondent groups matched

to Knowles' biological definition of being an adult.

Table 11.1 School A. Biological definition – responses.

Year 11	Voice breaks, pregnancy and relationships.
Year10	Find a girlfriend, start puberty, have children.
Year 9	Sexual intercourse, menstruation, marriage.
Year 8	Marriage.
Year 7	Marriage, boyfriend.

Table 11.2 School B. Biological definition- responses.

| Years 10 and 11 | Ladies wear bras. |
| Years 9, 8, 7 | Boys become men and girls become women. |

Table 11.3 School C. Biological definition – responses.

Year 10	Have sex (but can have sex earlier), marry, have children.
Year 9	Sex, puberty (seen by this group as the move from childhood to adulthood).
Year 8	Being a parent.
Year 7	Puberty, having children.

Table 11.4 Adults with learning difficulties. Biological definition – responses

Group 1	Parents
Group 2	Adults can have babies
Group 3	Parents, female characteristics
Group 4	Parents
Group 5	Grandchildren

Table 11.5 Adults without learning difficulties. Biological definition – responses.

Group 1	Adults have sex.
Group 2	Sex, puberty, shaving (males), development of figure (females).

In School A all the Year groups showed an awareness of the biological nature of adulthood. It is apparent that the knowledge of biological factors either increased with age, or the older Year groups were more willing to discuss them. Some of the comments were very specific and accurate, for example the age at which a boy's voice breaks or a girl begins menstruation. In many instances the pupils interviewed expressed a wish to have children, either as older teenagers or as adults and clearly saw themselves in the role of parent. Thus their awareness of the biological factors of adulthood and their knowledge of this were consistent. Such knowledge and consistency may be due to the teaching given in school but to discover how the knowledge was acquired was outside the remit of the research. Here it is only possible to say that they linked biological developments to the process of moving into adulthood.

The responses from groups of pupils in School B many of whom had severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties were less detailed, commensurate with their lower level of cognitive ability and development. Nevertheless the respondents showed a clear awareness of

the biological aspects of adulthood. The fact that 'ladies wear bras' was cited as an example of being an adult, demonstrates the fact that physical developments in the progress towards adulthood were recognised sufficiently to be commented upon.

The respondents in Years 7, 8 and 9 also cited the importance of physical change as an indicator of adulthood and acknowledged that there was a point of transition between childhood and adulthood. Given the cognitive difficulties of all of the respondents this response had not been expected.

In the interviews the respondents in Year 10 of School C were very specific about biological aspects of adulthood but made one very significant point, that whilst sex, that is sexual intercourse, may be related to adulthood, many people can and do take part in sexual activity whilst they are still technically children. Puberty was mentioned by two year groups and significantly Year 9 pupils saw puberty as the transition point from childhood to adulthood. Year 8 pupils only alluded to the biological definition of adult by stating that adults were able to have children and in fact Year 7 pupils were more specific.

From the data collected the following points can therefore be made.

Amongst the responses from the young people interviewed in special schools and a comprehensive school there were more commonalities than differences. Whilst some respondents were more specific than others this was not entirely dependent on cognitive levels and all were aware of biological changes in the transition from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood.

The responses indicate a developing awareness of the biological factors in the process of the transition to adulthood. The younger year groups in all the schools tended to be more general about the biological aspects of adulthood whereas Years 9, 10 and 11 were more specific perhaps because many of the older young people would themselves be undergoing biological change and may therefore be more inclined to refer to it. Factors relating to sexuality also tend to be dominant during the teenage years and therefore would be known. What is more interesting is that there is very little difference in the responses from School A and School C. School B respondents gave less detailed comments and whilst this reflects their cognitive level there was, nevertheless, still an awareness of biological factors in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

All the responses given by the young people fit into the pattern of development during early adolescence outlined by Bee (1998), where she

describes the process of sexual maturity. It may therefore be concluded that learning difficulties did not appear to impact significantly on the awareness of the biological aspects of adulthood in the early teenage years, any more than a learning difficulty makes a person less able to reproduce. Even those young people with severe learning difficulties showed some knowledge of biological changes between childhood and adulthood. In some instances limited knowledge may be the result of a young person with learning difficulties being 'protected' and not being given full access to information about biological changes as parents/carers may not envisage them having children of their own (Barnes in Ramcharan et al 1997) rather than an inherent inability to comprehend biological changes which take place as adulthood approaches. Barnes (op cit:82) also indicates that many parents would support 'the possibility of close loving relationships' (but)'without a sexual content', which may in turn impact on information given to young people.

The responses from the adults with learning difficulties were far less detailed than those from the groups of young people. Apart from Group 2 and a respondent in Group 3 the only acknowledgement of the biological aspect of adulthood was by reference to parents and to mums in particular. Unlike the school respondents none of the adults with learning

difficulties saw themselves in the role of parent. Some respondents in Group 2 were aware that adults have babies and one respondent in Group 3 suggested that a lady 'has boobs' but these were the only statements made regarding the biological aspect of adulthood. There may be reasons for this. An analysis of the groups of adults with learning difficulties interviewed revealed that, so far as could be established, none of the respondents were married or had a partner. Thus many of the biological aspects of being an adult, particularly those relating to reproduction, may have had little relevance in their lives. Whereas some of the young people interviewed looked forward to becoming adults and having partners and children, the groups of adults with learning difficulties had attained that status and sexuality and the biological aspects of adulthood played little part in their lives. Some of the respondents had 'girlfriends or boyfriends' but the relationships referred to would usually be described as a friendship rather than implying a sexual relationship. It is perhaps as Barnes (1997) suggests that parents and carers are reluctant for their adult children to be involved in a relationship which has a sexual content. It is possible that generally adults are less likely to discuss biological issues as overtly as young people. It may be that the respondents in these groups, many of whom were older adults, were unaware of biological factors beyond those they mentioned as they would possibly not have been given such information as young people and, as

the literature indicates, in the past sexual relationships were not open to them (Humphries and Gordon 1992). Despite all of these points, however, there was still a recognition of some biological factors relating to adulthood.

Whilst Group 2 of the adults without learning difficulties gave a more detailed response than Group 1, nevertheless both saw reproduction as an aspect of adulthood which matches Knowles' (1990) definition. Whilst the biological factors indicated in the table above were specifically mentioned it was not such a major indicator of adulthood as it was for some of the young people interviewed. Again this may simply reflect adult attitudes as opposed to the attitudes of younger people.

All the groups interviewed recognised the biological factors of adulthood in terms of reproduction, either by specific references to sex or by mentioning roles, for example parent, where reproduction may be implied. The only major difference from the respondent groups was the amount of detail given but in no instances was there a total lack of awareness of either reproduction or physical and biological changes as an aspect of being an adult.

Additionally during teaching sessions students with learning difficulties

have made specific reference to both menstruation and, in one instance, contraception within the context of their own lives. Such comments clearly indicate an awareness of biological factors.

The results of the current survey considered alongside the evidence from Goldstein (cited in Griffiths 1994) indicate that biologically those with learning difficulties are no different from those without such difficulties. If this is so then the fact that there is a general feeling (op cit) that people with learning difficulties do not reach sexual maturation at the same time as their peers has to be regarded as a societal perception which influences their adult status. Such a perception possibly has historical roots in that as McCarthy in Carnaby ed. (2002:151) indicates 'In the past, the sexual rights, needs and feelings of people with learning disabilities were ignored or deliberately repressed.' This could also indicate why adults with learning difficulties, especially some of the older adults interviewed, alluded to roles such as parent but made little other reference to the biological factors of adulthood.

The legal definition. Results and analysis.

Knowles states that he sees the legal definition of adulthood as:

> we become adult when we reach the age at which the law says we can vote, get a driver's license, marry without consent and the like (Knowles 1990:57).

The difficulty inherent in this definition is that in Britain the ages for the activities which Knowles lists vary from seventeen to eighteen. If smoking and legal sexual intercourse were added to the list as activities included in 'the like', then the age at which a person became an adult would currently range from sixteen years to eighteen years. Apart from this anomaly Knowles' definition is very clear. There is a further point. As the legal age for various activities does vary, this indicates, as Lovell (1979) suggests, that becoming an adult is a process. From the legal perspective this is a strong argument.

As is evident from the interview data most respondents were aware that to undertake certain activities a person had to be a specified age. Many were aware that this legal requirement in some instances was largely disregarded. The results are shown in the tables below.

Table 11.6   School A. Legal definition – responses.

Year 11	Voting, gambling, buying adult videos, driving a car and going to the pub.
Year 10	Drinking (alcohol), work, watching adult videos, driving, smoking, doing the Lottery and attending Rave parties.
Year 9	Smoking, drinking (alcohol) and driving.
Year 8	Marriage and driving.
Year 7	Driving, paid employment, watching 18+ films, marriage, divorce and drinking (alcohol).

Table 11.7   School B - Legal definition – responses.

Years 10 and 11	Able to work and go to the pub.
Years 7, 8 and 9	Able to work.

Table 11.8   School C. Legal definition – responses.

Year 10	Able to drink, drive, marry, be a home owner, work, gamble, have shares and premium bonds and have to pay for medical treatment.
Year 9	Able to drink, drive, gamble and marry. An adult is someone over eighteen.
Year 8	Able to drink, drive, get a job, earn money and buy a house.
Year 7	Able to drink, get a job, earn money, drive, vote, donate organs, give blood, join the armed forces and gamble. Have to pay tax and can receive benefit. Become an adult at 18.

Table 11.9 Adults with learning difficulties. Legal definition – responses.

Group 1	Able to drink, smoke and get a pass (bus pass).
Group 2	Able to smoke and drink.
Group 3	Able to buy drinks.
Group 4	Able to work (teachers specified).
Group 5	Nothing specified.

Table 11.10 Adults without learning difficulties. Legal definition - responses.

Group 1	Able to vote, marry, drive and go to pubs. Have to pay full fares on public transport. Can go to night clubs. A person is liable under the law.
Group 2	Subject to law (at 16). Become an adult at 18 and then able to vote, marry, join the armed forces, have sex, leave home, work, buy property, witness a will, do jury service. Can be punished for wrong doing.

The above table relating to School A indicates that all the Year groups were

very aware of activities which are the preserve of adults. Many respondents

were less clear about the age at which many of these activities were legally permitted and the age at which a person legally became an adult.

Whilst Year 11 respondents were certain that a person could not vote until s/he reached eighteen years of age, they were unsure of the age at which a person could take part in the National Lottery and complete scratch cards. Ages for these activities were given variously as sixteen, eighteen and fifteen. Evidence from the interviews indicated that the Lottery and scratch cards were more familiar to them than voting and yet the age for voting was known. Only one respondent alleged she had 'done voting' helped by her mum. Probably she had accompanied her mother to vote as clearly she could not have voted. It is possible that observing an activity would be equated with having done it oneself but perhaps Year 11 pupils had indeed bought a Lottery ticket or scratch card. Whilst the Lottery was regarded as an adult activity, one person remarked that 'we can (play the lottery) at sixteen' implying that at sixteen people are not adults. For whatever reason, however, the respondents in this group were less clear about the age for certain aspects of gambling with which they appeared to be familiar than the age for voting an activity with which they were not familiar. The age at which one can legally drink was stated to be eighteen as was the age for buying adult videos. Driving a car was also identified as being an adult activity with the age for obtaining a licence given as sixteen and the

respondents were aware that in order to drive a car one had to pass a test. Confusion here may have been because sixteen is the legal age for driving some vehicles, for example a scooter. Whilst confused about the legal age for driving a car, the process of being legally allowed to do this, that is taking and passing a test and obtaining a full licence was clearly understood. One respondent stated 'At sixteen you can get your driving licence and when you've passed your driving licence you can go out in a car.' Whilst the language was confused and the age incorrect, the process was understood.

Year 10 pupils in School A identified drinking (alcohol), working, watching adult videos, driving, smoking, doing the Lottery and attending Rave parties as adult activities for which a person has to be a particular age. Again there was confusion about the age at which a person legally becomes an adult with ages given as twenty, eighteen, nineteen to twenty and seventeen or eighteen. The person who suggested seventeen could only justify the response because s/he felt that at seventeen a person is more grown up. The reason some respondents suggested other ages is that many thought in concrete terms, making generalisations from a particular instance and relying heavily on life experience. One respondent gave the age for becoming an adult as eighteen because 'my brother Andrew is eighteen and he's an adult'. A second respondent who suggested nineteen

to twenty years of age believed this because 'my cousin will be nineteen this year' and 'an adult she'll be'. Such statements demonstrate an understanding of becoming an adult at a certain age even though the age specified was incorrect. These respondents were making considered responses by reflecting on their experience of people they believed to be adults and suggesting that their ages were the age at which a person becomes an adult. Such a thought process also indicates an ability to generalise from the particular, which those with learning difficulties are frequently thought not to possess. It further indicates that for those with cognitive difficulties life experience, and perhaps experiential learning, is of crucial importance.

Year 10 respondents in School A also discussed the age for participation in the National Lottery and scratch cards. They believed that the age varied for buying scratch cards depending on the outlet from which they were purchased. This demonstrates a very pragmatic approach to issues based on local knowledge. One respondent stated 'That's what it (the age for purchasing scratch cards) is down my local Spar shop. Fifteen'. The statement may have demonstrated either a lack of knowledge on the part of the respondent or that fifteen year olds were able to purchase scratch cards from this outlet. This indicates that if a correct legal age is not known those with learning difficulties may reflect as knowledge what they experience

and more specifically from what is known from a particular instance, rather than what is legally the case. As many learn from concrete experiences this is to be expected and reflects a retention of knowledge even though the facts given appear inaccurate. Year 10 respondents were also aware that drinking (alcohol) and smoking were adult activities. The legal age for drinking (alcohol) was given as eighteen but no definitive age was given for smoking. Attending Rave parties was considered to be an adult activity but no age was given. Thus these respondents had a very clear idea about the legal definition of adulthood and where their responses did not conform to the actual legal ages, they were both reasoned and logical.

Year 9 respondents in the same school cited smoking, drinking (alcohol) and driving as adult activities. They were uncertain of the age at which a person becomes an adult but suggested nineteen or twenty. The discussion which accompanied these decisions raised some interesting points and is quoted here:-

    (Me) 'When do you think you become an adult? At what age?'

    (Response) 'About nineteen. No twenty.'

            'Yes. Nineteen'.

    (Me) 'Why do you say nineteen?'

    (Response) 'No. That's (at age nineteen) a teenager. That's a

        teenager.'

'No. It's not. Nineteen's an adult.'

No, it's not. Nineteen is still a teenager.'

(Me) 'Do you think nineteen is still a teenager?'

(Response) 'Yes at nineteen you're coming up to adult'. (See Appendix 2)

The group then went on to suggest that one legally became an adult at twenty and finally decided it was at eighteen years of age. The dialogue above indicates that whilst the respondent was inaccurate in suggesting twenty as the legal age for attaining adult status the reasoning behind the view is sound. The word 'nineteen' implies that one is still in one's teens at that age. Not unreasonably, therefore, the respondent suggested that a person is still a teenager at nineteen and therefore cannot be an adult. For many people with learning difficulties language may be misleading and they may tend to give literal interpretations to words and language (Jackson 2002) and an issue raised in Chapter 9. Whilst inaccurate it is a logical answer and rather than being wrong it indicates that the respondent had given a carefully considered answer. The fact that those with learning difficulties frequently give careful consideration before responding to a question is often overlooked. If an inaccurate response is given this may indicate that they are reflecting what is, rather than a total lack of knowledge. For example, if someone smokes at fourteen, a person with a learning difficulty may suggest this as the age for smoking. The answer is

based on observation of particular instances and, although inaccurate, is not random.

Year 9 respondents in School A accurately identified the legal ages for driving and drinking. Whilst one respondent believed that a person had to be eighteen to smoke this was quickly rectified by others who already smoked. For those with learning difficulties such discrepancies in thinking raise another issue similar to that around the scratch cards discussed above. It is confusing when people smoke at fourteen for a person with a learning difficulty to realise that a person cannot legally do so until sixteen. The idea of a legal age to engage in an activity as opposed to what is socially tolerated at a younger age leads to problems for some people with learning difficulties as the subtleties of this may not be fully appreciated. It may be assumed that if some people buy cigarettes below the age of sixteen then this is permitted. Such confusion does not apply to all people with learning difficulties and some people on the autistic spectrum, for example, may refuse to do anything which the rules forbid, assuming they know the rules. However, for some people with learning difficulties socially acceptable deviations from rules and the keeping of rules may be confusing.

Year 8 respondents in School A identified marriage, work and driving as adult activities but no specific ages were given other than that these were

activities for people older than them. They specifically saw marriage as an indicator of adulthood because after stating that Year 10 and 11 pupils may be regarded as adults they added that they were not 'quite adults but they're getting to adults. They're not married yet.' It is not possible to say whether or not they were aware of legal ages and simply did not mention them. What is clear, however, was that they attributed the activities and functions specified to adults.

Year 7 respondents in School A identified driving, paid employment, watching eighteen plus films, marriage, divorce, drinking and being allowed to adopt a baby as adult activities. The age at which a person became an adult was not specified, except by implication. They stated that adults are able to watch films for fifteen and eighteen year olds which they themselves could not watch, so they may have been aware that at eighteen a person is an adult.

It is unclear why there was so little mention of age in the responses from Years 7 and 8. Possibly adulthood was not particularly relevant to these pupils, who saw Year 10 and 11 pupils as still only becoming adults. For Years 7 and 8 adulthood was still distant and perhaps they were simply not interested or because of their learning difficulties they were unable to project into the future or to be specific about something which was not an

immediate concern. Becoming an adult was more relevant to the older pupils who were approaching adulthood, some of whom already smoked or obtained National Lottery tickets and scratch cards, and were therefore more likely to be aware of the ages required to participate in these activities. All the Year groups in School A were aware, however, that there were those activities in which adults alone could participate.

The younger age group in school B only identified that adults work. The older age group also identified this and regarded going to the pub as another factor of being an adult. There was no awareness of the age at which a person became an adult. Given that all these pupils had complex learning difficulties they would possibly not be aware of age, even perhaps their own. It is likely that these pupils were reflecting their experience of adults and therefore they may have been unfamiliar with activities such as smoking if it did not form part of their social environment. One respondent in the older age group mentioned a social club by name and it may therefore be deduced that this was probably because her family had links with this institution.

Like the Year 7 and 8 pupils in School A these pupils were uncertain of, or did not mention, specific ages for activities. The complex nature of their learning difficulties would have made this less likely as they may not have

understood number and perhaps not related age to specific activities. This must not be equated with saying that they were unaware that there were adult specific activities. Account must also be taken of the fact that many activities in which adults engage may not be open to these pupils and would not, therefore, impact on their lives and that they may simply be reflecting their own social environment.

The above table indicating the responses from School C show that the respondents gave a very complete picture which matches to Knowles' (1990) legal definition of adulthood, far more so than any of the other school groups questioned.

Year 10 pupils were aware that a person could drive a car at seventeen and drink alcohol at eighteen. Adult status was not defined, however, by drinking alcohol as they suggested that children as young as eight could drink, presumably with parental consent, a point which demonstrates an awareness of legal requirements but further shows a knowledge of the application of rules. This stands in marked contrast to Year 10 pupils in School A who perhaps saw their experience as the norm or the legal requirement. Whilst Year 10 In School C acknowledged that to be in full time employment one had to be an adult, this was not seen entirely as a legal requirement because it was suggested that even twelve year olds

could work and many teenagers had part time employment. Thus the acquisition of employment was seen as more of a process than simply applying to adults. The other factors to which they referred were all things for which a person would be required to be an adult except the Lottery.

One discussion raised some significant issues which more properly belong under the psychological definition but will be dealt with briefly here as it also relates to legal age. Year 10 respondents felt that if young people or children commit a serious offence they should be treated as adults. They knew that adult offenders would be dealt with by an adult court and that adults who commit an offence can be sent to prison, whereas younger people cannot. They believed, however, that if a person acts like an adult when committing a crime then that person should be regarded and treated as an adult. They further believed that by the age of ten or eleven, or even younger, a person should be responsible for his or her actions. It was acknowledged that the degree of responsibility a person had was perhaps dependent on upbringing. Again this suggests that for these respondents becoming adult was regarded as a process for which the legal definition is not helpful. It further suggests that the psychological definition of adult given by Knowles, (1990:57) where he states that 'we become adult psychologically when we arrive at a self concept of being responsible for our own lives' and 'the process of gaining a self- concept or self-

directedness starts early in life' is accurate if indeed people as young as eleven can be seen as being responsible for their actions. The statements made by these respondents also question the legal system which regards even older teenagers as children. The response of this group could indicate that they see themselves as already taking responsibility for their lives. This point will also be referred to under the psychological definition of adult. Further it also shows them giving much more detailed consideration to what 'being an adult' entails when compared to the pupils in the other schools.

Year 9 respondents defined an adult as someone over eighteen. They recognised other aspects of being adult which matched Knowles' (1990) definition, including being allowed to drink, drive, vote, gamble and marry. They also mentioned that a person cannot be deported under eighteen and whilst it was unclear why this had arisen it reinforces the fact that eighteen was seen as the age at which a person becomes an adult. Having one's own passport was regarded as an indicator of being adult but again confusion arose as one can have a passport before being legally an adult.

Year 8 in School C identified some factors which defined adults. They were specific about eighteen being the legal age at which a person becomes

an adult and knew that a person has to be seventeen years of age to drive a car.

Year 7 respondents in School C identified a number of factors which indicated adult status. Whilst they were aware that a person legally became an adult at eighteen it was felt that at eighteen a person was a still a teenager. It was further argued that at nineteen a person is nearly an adult and becoming adult. This is very significant as it replicates the point made by Year 9 pupils in School A and discussed above, where it was argued that people of nineteen are still teenagers. In School C no reason was given for this view but it is interesting that this point reoccurred here but with a younger Year group and could perhaps be accounted for by the fact that the respondents in School A may have experienced developmental delay.

The research indicates that all the respondents in the schools had some notion of the legal definition of adult. It suggests that younger comprehensive school pupils perhaps had less idea of the ages at which certain activities were permitted than the older pupils in the special schools, particularly School A. It is reasonable to deduce therefore that an awareness of the legal definition of adult has more to do with chronological age, experience and conceptual development than with cognitive ability. The data indicates that the nearer a person gets to the age at which

activities are permitted the greater the awareness of the legal age required for them. The current research suggests therefore that learning difficulty does not significantly affect such awareness and that the majority of pupils in School A were as aware of legal ages for activities as their counterparts in School C. Whilst there may have been a less detailed awareness in School B it was still present despite the respondents having complex cognitive difficulties. It may therefore be concluded that many young people with learning difficulties are as aware of being legally an adult as young people without learning difficulties and that there is no major difference in awareness of legal ages between them. It may also be deduced that those with learning difficulties perhaps rely on their particular experiences of situations and that possibly some issues may be less well known to them.

Most of the adults with learning difficulties who were interviewed were unclear about the age at which a person becomes an adult and a small minority were not even certain that they were adults. Possible reasons for this will be mentioned briefly here and discussed in greater detail below. Many of the adults with learning difficulties interviewed were unclear about their ages although many of them knew their birthdays and some the year of their birth. This information also underpins anecdotal evidence known to me from my weekly sessions with them. It is possible either that

age may be unimportant to them or that they do not relate a figure to age. Some may not remember age as it does not affect their daily life. A small minority of the respondents were confused by the language and in subsequent teaching sessions it emerged that whilst one person knew she 'was not a kid', and she was 'a grown up', the term 'adult' seemed unknown. Only a small minority of respondents were confused in this way but it is interesting that exactly the same problem was encountered in School B where the pupils interviewed had complex learning difficulties. Some of the adults with learning difficulties interviewed had equally complex problems, some of them having previously been pupils at School B. The more significant factor was that the respondent most confused by the term 'adult' did not have complex learning difficulties and had been educated in a mainstream school. The same confusion over the term 'adult' also arose within a teaching session with a group of adults with learning difficulties and raises again the issue of the importance of teaching appropriate terminology to adults with learning difficulties especially when they attain adult status and also have the capability to learn such terminology.

Group 1 respondents were unclear about the age at which a person became an adult, suggesting ages of seventeen, eighteen and twenty, with one respondent suggesting thirteen. They were aware that a person had to be

eighteen to drink but one respondent admitted to 'having a beer' at the age of seventeen. This group recognised that as adults they were entitled to a 'pass', that is a bus pass which is available to adults over eighteen who are capable of independent travel. A bus pass was regarded by the respondents as an adult entitlement in that they did not have them when they were at school. They were unable, however, to suggest at what age passes were available. The responses here are a further illustration of the point that essentially the ages which they see as linked to adult activities and therefore to Knowles'(1990) legal definition of adult, relate mainly to those activities which impact on their daily lives.

Group 2 referred to smoking and drinking as adult activities, which again match Knowles' (1990) legal definition, but no specific ages were given. They gave no age for becoming an adult although, as will be seen in the analysis of the social and psychological definitions, they were very aware of adults being different from children.

Group 3 only suggested being able to buy drinks (alcoholic) as a factor which matches to Knowles' (1990) definition. They attempted to specify the age at which they believed a person became an adult suggesting ages of thirteen, fourteen or sixteen. One person said he was not yet an adult but 'in between being a child and an adult'. As this person was thirty plus, it must

be assumed that he either did not know he was an adult or was totally unaware at what age a person became an adult. Of the seven respondents in this group four immediately stated that they were adults and after initial uncertainty two others agreed that they too were adults. It is possible that the terminology of 'adult' caused some confusion but in this particular group that is an unlikely explanation as there was no confusion in the picture sorting exercise. There is perhaps another and far more important explanation. In the interview the respondents were asked what differences there were for them as adults compared with when they were children. The response given was perhaps one of the most significant in the entire research. The response was 'there were no differences for them as adults'. Contained within this statement is the crux of the whole problem with the adult status of adults with learning difficulties which this research seeks to explore. The statement relates again to the description of such adults as 'eternal children' which Sutcliffe (1992) and McConkey (1996) both reject. Whilst they might reject it, clearly some adults with learning difficulties imply that such a descriptor might be accurate. It is also possible that in order to keep them dependent, particularly until recently, parents and carers may not have stressed adult status to those with learning difficulties. The reasons which may lead to this view are considered below but the remark that nothing had changed for them since they were children is critical to the current discussion.

Group 4 were unable to identify much that matched the legal definition of adult other than to state that adults are able to work. They also gave the age for becoming an adult as twenty one or twenty two. This was reasonably accurate as the respondents in this group were older and may well have believed that twenty one was the age at which adult status was achieved. This links in with the response by an older lady in Group 2 of the adults without learning difficulties who still thought that parental consent for marriage was needed until a person attained twenty one years of age. It is therefore feasible that the response of this group had more to do with age and life experience than with a lack of knowledge.

Group 5 were not able to suggest any factors which linked to the legal definition of adult other than giving the age for becoming an adult as thirty five. There was general agreement about this age but it was not apparent why it had been suggested. That there was agreement is not surprising as those with learning difficulties will sometimes agree with another speaker if they themselves are unsure of the reply. Possibly the suggestion relied on practical experience as was evident in School A but this has to remain theoretical as no explanation was offered.

What emerges from the responses of the adults with learning difficulties is that the majority related age to adult status even if the ages given were not

always accurate. They realised that people had to be of a certain age to perform some activities. Both of these factors indicate some awareness of being legally an adult.

A much greater range of activities was suggested by the adult respondents without learning difficulties which match Knowles' (1990) legal definition of adulthood. This is not surprising given the greater cognitive ability of these two groups and their life experience when compared with those of the adults with learning difficulties. Despite this, however, Group 1 did not specify the age at which a person becomes an adult. In Group 2 an older lady was confused about the age of majority still believing it to be twenty one.

Group 2 stressed the legal nature of adult status more than any other group interviewed, particularly with regard to the workplace with reference to the operation of machinery. This reflected their life experience in industry. Whilst Group 2 did not give a chronological age for a person achieving adult status, they stressed that as an adult a person becomes 'liable under the law'. This, for them, was a key factor and in this respect was similar to responses from Group 1 of the adults without learning difficulties and those of respondents in School C.

Group 1 of the adults without learning difficulties also stated that engagement in adult activities is dependent on age and so technically a person could be regarded as an adult in some aspects of life from the age of sixteen onwards. The example given to support this view was that a person becomes subject to the law at sixteen, although legally not yet regarded as an adult. It was also felt that the category of 'juvenile' in the workplace (as defined by the Factories Act) was a useful one because it acknowledged a transition period between childhood and adulthood and indicates that this group also viewed becoming an adult as a process (cf Lovell 1979).

What emerged very clearly from these two groups, as indeed it did from some of the other groups, is that British Law is somewhat ambiguous regarding the age at which a person does legally become an adult. For whilst this age is eighteen, some of the activities usually seen as attributes of adulthood are legally permissible below this age. Within the research findings smoking (although this is set to change), having sex, driving and some forms of gambling are examples of this. It is not therefore surprising that Luke Jackson, a thirteen year old with Asperger Syndrome, makes the following point:

> British Laws are so strange that they don't give any guidelines to teenagers as to when they are considered 'grown up'. ....You can have sex at sixteen years old but need to ask a parent's permission to get married before you are eighteen. You can smoke at sixteen but cannot go into pubs and buy alcohol till you are eighteen. ......it does

make me wonder what they are meant to do from the age of sixteen to eighteen – sit at home and smoke and have sex? (Jackson 2002:179)

Although written with an element of humour and with a clear understanding of legal ages to perform activities, Jackson nevertheless makes an extremely important point about the confusing nature of British law which is even more confusing for those with learning difficulties. It is therefore to be expected that some respondents with learning difficulties were not sure, or did not state, the ages at which some activities could be undertaken. In general, however, all the respondents with learning difficulties had an awareness of the legal definition of adult as described by Knowles (1990) and demonstrated above and further realised that to engage in such activities enhanced their status as adults.

The social definition. Results and analysis.

It has been indicated above that adults with learning difficulties are adult in terms of both the biological and the legal definition given by Knowles (1990). There is evidence to suggest that they are capable of reproduction and therefore become adults when this function is possible. In Britain all persons become legally adult at the age of eighteen. In these two respects and in relation to these two aspects of Knowles' definition, it is therefore arguable that adults with learning difficulties are adults and should therefore be accorded adult status.

The two more crucial aspects of adulthood for adults with learning difficulties are those which Knowles describes as the social definition and the psychological definition. As considered in Chapter 6 it is often in the social areas of life where adults with learning difficulties are perceived by others to be different.

Of the social definition Knowles (1990:57) says this:-

> '....we become adult when we start performing adult roles, such as the role of full-time worker, spouse, parent, voting citizen and the like.'

Leaving aside that it is possible to argue that Knowles' definition could be described as circular, in that it defines 'adult' in terms of adult roles, he nevertheless makes some very significant points. It is precisely by undertaking the roles he lists that a person is regarded as an adult in society, not perhaps where a person just fulfils just one of these roles but where a number are fulfilled concurrently. It is in performing such roles that adults with learning difficulties find enormous problems, for the society which requires them to take on these roles in order to be considered an adult, also denies them the opportunity to do so. This was established by reference to the literature in Chapter 6 and will now be considered by reference to the research findings.

Table 11.11 School A. Social definition – responses.

Year 11	Parent, relationships and worker.
Year 10	Worker, student, partner and parent.
Year 9	Worker.
Year 8	Worker, parent, spouse and student.
Year 7	Worker, parent, spouse and home owner.

Table 11.12 School B. Social definition - responses

Years 10 and 11 (older seniors)	Worker.
Years 7, 8 and 9 (younger seniors)	Worker.

Table 11.13 School C. Social definition – responses.

Year 10	Spouse, parent, home owner and worker.
Year 9	Spouse, parent and worker.
Year 8	Worker, home owner and parent.
Year 7	Spouse, parent, home owner and worker.

Table 11.14 Adults with learning difficulties Social definition – responses..

Group 1	Worker (within the home situation) and parent.
Group 2	Parent and worker.
Group 3	Parent.
Group 4	Worker.
Group 5	Grandparent.

Table 11.15. Adults without learning difficulties. Social definition – responses.

Group 1	Spouse, worker, parent, property owner and member of a jury.
Group 2	Worker, spouse and parent.

Analysis.

The above table indicates that many Year groups in School A were clearly

aware of the roles which adults perform. They both identified such adult roles and envisaged that they themselves would perform them.

Year 11 regarded having children as very important and saw this as taking place within a relationship, whereas Year 10 pupils referred to the role of parent as simply disciplining children. Year 10 pupils assumed that they would have children.

Perhaps unusually Year 9 respondents did not mention being a parent although they referred to sexual intercourse. The question may therefore be raised as to whether they linked sexual intercourse to having children. It is possible that they did and did not mention it but it is also possible that the compartmentalised thinking which characterises many people with learning difficulties may, in some cases, in fact prevent them from making such connections or at least verbalising them. Equally it is possible that because there are many teenage pregnancies that such lack of comment simply reflects non-causal thinking which is common amongst adolescents of all cognitive abilities. If this is the case then it would further indicate that adolescents with learning difficulties are similar to all other adolescents.

Year 8 referred to parents but more indirectly. They saw parenting as an adult role but did not specifically refer to themselves in such a role, in marked contrast to pupils in Years 11 and 10.

Some Year 7 pupils responded in a similar way to those in Year 8 in that they recognised the role of parent as an adult role but did not see themselves in this role. Others, however, knew that adults have babies, one commenting 'I hope I don't have them'. Discussion indicated that the respondent was fearful of pregnancy rather than not wishing to have children. The point was clarified in the interview by another respondent saying: 'She likes them (babies) when they're out but not when they're inside'. Such comment further demonstrates an awareness of pregnancy. It was not possible to tell whether having a baby was linked to an understanding of parenthood in this instance and perhaps the comment has more resonance with Knowles' biological definition.

From all the responses it was evident that the pupils regarded being a parent as an indicator of being adult, whether it was they themselves in the role of parent or whether it was ascribed to others. It is significant that Year 10 and 11 pupils clearly saw themselves in such a role in the near future and further assumed that this was a part of being an adult. These facts indicate that pupils in these year groups are beginning to regard themselves as adults.

The other role, which is an indicator of adult status and was mentioned by all year groups in School A, was that of worker. The older pupils saw

themselves as workers whilst the younger pupils recognised being a worker was a factor of adulthood and in some instances had ideas about the type of employment they would prefer.

Most respondents also referred to attendance at college after school. Such progression is actively encouraged by the school so reference to college was likely to feature quite prominently in the responses. Beyond college, or in one or two instances training, many were able to indicate their preferences for employment but the older pupils were acutely conscious that for them finding employment would be incredibly difficult. Discussion at a different time with the Head Teacher supported their feelings, for whilst transition from school to college or a training scheme is straightforward, beyond that these young people usually find it very hard to obtain employment, a view supported by a member of the local careers guidance team. One young person interviewed stated that 'I think there isn't much in jobs going now'. When Year 11 pupils were asked directly whether they felt it would be difficult to get a job after college all except one, a girl who wished to go into caring, replied that it would. A boy who wished to join the army or the police knew that in reality this would be extremely hard for him.

Some of the older pupils had little real knowledge about the types of

employment they wished to enter whilst others were clear about this. One boy who wished to be a fitness instructor only said he would have to be 'be fit of course' and 'I'd have to work the equipments'. On the other hand another boy in Year 9 who wished to join the army knew he would have to take exams which would be fairly difficult. A Year 10 pupil who wished to be a bricklayer said he would like to do this because he was doing bricklaying at college on a vocational course. Many pupils stated that they would work with their parents or with another member of their family, for example an uncle.

The younger pupils displayed a mixture of realism and dreams with regard to employment, typical of the age group. A Year 8 respondent said he would love to be a Formula One driver but would probably work in his dad's chip shop, which he had already begun to do. He would also have liked to work in a garage. He further believed that an education was necessary for all these, in particular he stated 'Well you need an education to work in a chip shop. So you'd have to go to college, get a degree and then work all your life.' This response also demonstrated a partial grasp of the requirements of employment. His remarks about 'getting a degree' to work in a chip shop may sound unusual but it is possible that other members of his family are at college and he has amalgamated this fact into

his knowledge of 'adult'. His emphasis on the importance of education perhaps indicates that this has been stressed to him.

Year 7 pupils also showed a mix of dreams and reality with reference to employment. One pupil said 'I might come to school and work'. I'd be the headmaster.....or I'd be the teacher'. When asked if this was possible the response was 'No not really. No because you'd have to take exams first.' Again in Year 7 one boy wanted to join the army to see places other than his home town but it was unclear whether he realised other implications of the army. Another pupil wished to work in gardening but related this to gardening for people he knew.

All the possible occupations mentioned in this school were in the main the type of employment pupils may achieve with the possible exception of the police, army, teaching and car mechanics. Yet the fact is that after leaving college or a training scheme most are unlikely to obtain employment in their chosen areas, if at all. This raises questions both about building expectations and society's ability to help these young people achieve their ambitions. It must also be asked whether and at what point these young people should be made aware of the fact that they will be very unlikely ever to obtain employment, particularly as recent Government figures suggest that 71% of the workforce have skills at Level 2 or above (Skills

Strategy Progress Report – One Year On 2004) and Moser (1999:24) points

out that those with poor basic skills are:

> most likely to end up in unskilled or semi-skilled low grade work;
> twice as likely to have been made redundant or sacked from their first
> job; four times more likely to experience long-term unemployment.

Such figures indicate that for people like these pupils, who have very low

basic skills, most jobs are closed to them. Such facts raise questions about

the purpose of education for these pupils and relates to the question raised

by one of my pupils over thirty years ago and discussed in Chapter 1.

Suffice to say here that the vocational bias of much education is perhaps in

this instance inappropriate because by placing emphasis on employment it

would appear that these young people are being set up to fail.

A further issue raised is the one of entitlement. Before the advent of the

National Curriculum those with learning difficulties were able to

concentrate on areas such as literacy, numeracy and life skills. The

National Curriculum carries with it the entitlement of all pupils to follow it

and so for those young people with learning difficulties the debate now

centres on appropriateness of learning versus entitlement to learning.

Whilst entitled to a broad based curriculum as any other child, such an

entitlement carries with it the implication that expectations may be raised

which cannot be met. Some parents also argue that too broad a curriculum

detracts from the acquisition of basic skills which would be of more use to

these pupils. This dilemma is particularly critical in the area of employment. It may be good for pupils to have experience of work such as bricklaying and car mechanics but this may encourage them to aim for something which is unachievable.

Many respondents across the Year groups indicated that following school they would attend college. In reality there is little option for them. Their only choices are college or, where it is still possible to obtain a place, a training scheme. They assumed that a job would follow time spent at college. The reality is that many of the young people attending college are placed on discrete courses and mix very little with other students. Many do not have the qualifications to follow a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) course. College for them is therefore essentially a continuation of school. Such comment is in no way critical of the colleges which work with these young people but reinforces the fact that for most young people with a learning difficulty the hope of employment often does not become a reality.

Lack of employment may impact on relationships for young people with learning difficulties. Without money they are frequently not able to live independently. After school and college their network of friends often disintegrates and they sometimes become very isolated. Their parents speak

of adult sons and daughters having no friends nearby and even whilst still at school a Year 7 respondent stated 'I don't like .....(my home town) much now.' When asked why he responded with 'It's boring.' Asked why he felt this he replied 'Nothing to do. No friends around much.' When a girl in the same group said that she was his friend he responded with 'You don't live down my end'. At the age of eleven or twelve he was beginning to experience the isolation which frequently results from having a learning difficulty and which often becomes more accentuated in adult life when there is no natural peer group (Department of Health 2001).

The respondents in Special School A therefore regarded obtaining work as a key indicator of being an adult. Allied to this was the view that being a student was also related to adult status, as was being married or having a partner and being a parent.

As is apparent from the above table relating to School B, the only aspect of being adult referred to by the respondents which matches Knowles'(1990) social definition of adult was the role of worker. 'Work' in this instance referred both to work inside and outside the home with little distinction made between them.

In the younger seniors two of the respondents were able to identify what

jobs they would like to do as adults. One wished to be a lorry driver like his father and the other said he would like to work at Butlins. Other pupils referred to work done by their mothers within the home.

The older seniors also saw work as a factor of adulthood though none mentioned working themselves. One girl knew that after school she may attend college but was unaware of anything beyond that. There was also some awareness of work done by parents.

Given the very complex nature of the learning difficulties of the respondents in

School B work was not perhaps relevant to them. Despite this, however, they still regarded work as a feature of being adult.

From the table relating to School C it is apparent that the responses relating to the social roles of adults were similar across the year groups and are very similar to those identified by pupils in School A. Although the role of home owner featured more prominently in the responses of School C pupils this role was also mentioned by a Year 7 respondent in School A.

The major differences were in the nature of the responses about the role of worker. Most of School C pupils were clear about employment and mostly

were likely to achieve their ambitions. The pupils in School A, particularly those in the older age groups, were often clear about what they wished to do but were also aware of the difficulties they would face.

Year 10 respondents in School C believed that adults work and were aware, not surprisingly as many of them were working towards GCSE examinations, that employment was dependent upon achieving qualifications. Such a link was very clearly perceived. Additionally they were aware of the requirements of employment in that they referred to the need to be punctual and polite when employed. They felt that failure to comply in this way would lead to loss of employment. Having a proper job was also seen as a responsibility and as necessary to provide for their children.

Year 9 pupils also identified the role of worker as one of the factors of being adult. For most respondents in this year group attendance at college or university after school followed by employment was regarded as the norm. Whilst the expectation of the respondents in the main was that they would find well paid jobs, the point was made that failure to obtain employment did not detract from adult status. It was felt if a person was unemployed that person was still an adult. Like Year 10 pupils, they expressed the view that education was important to obtain employment and

that a job was necessary to be able to provide for a family. Employment was also regarded as important both to obtain money and for enjoyment. Enjoyment seemed to relate to job satisfaction.

Whilst Year 8 pupils also identified the role of worker as significant in being an adult, they placed less emphasis on it than Years 10 and 9 pupils, perhaps because the world of work was more distant for them. Attendance at university and having a 'big executive job' were both mentioned.

Respondents in Year 7 also referred to the role of worker as part of being an adult. They acknowledged that adults have 'proper jobs and an income'. 'Proper jobs' relates to the fact that many of the young people interviewed stated that teenagers also work but many wished to distinguish this type of work from the full time permanent employment they expected as adults. The importance of work in adulthood was indicated by the respondents as it was one of the first things mentioned when they were asked what they would like to do when they were older. They also referred to going to college but, unlike the older year groups, did not link this directly to work.

Allied to the role of worker was that of home owner. Pupils in Years 10, 9 and 7 regarded owning a home as part of being an adult. For Year 10 pupils having a house of their own was seen as the norm. When asked what they

saw themselves doing as adults, owning a home was high on their agenda. Year 9 respondents mostly believed they would have their own houses but with a note of idealism as some suggested they would have large houses in the country.

One pupil in Year 8 also believed that shortly after becoming an adult s/he would 'be living in a nice big house'. This view was questioned by others who pointed out that the speaker would not be able to afford a big house. Again in these responses the mixture of realism and dream is evident. Year 7 pupils did not specifically mention home ownership but referred a great deal to living independently, implying that they would either be home owners or tenants. For this group home ownership was not such a prominent issue as for other year groups.

All groups of respondents in this school referred to the role of parent as a feature of being an adult, similar to the older pupils in School A. Year 10 pupils saw themselves in the role of parents and stressed the need to look after their children, to provide for them, to set them an example and to bring them up properly. Here 'properly' was not defined but probably related to the other points made about providing for children and setting them an example. The responses detailed aspects of parenting and indicate that the respondents had a clear idea of what would be expected of them as

parents. Year 11 pupils at School A also referred to having children but beyond pregnancy and producing children did not discuss much about bringing up the children. Year 10 pupils in School A, however, responded in a way which was similar to that of Year 10 pupils in the comprehensive school in that they saw disciplining their children as a part of being a parent. In the case of pupils in School A it was a very pragmatic response in that a pupil referred to 'slapping his kids' when he was an adult. This may reflect his experience of parents but such a response at least demonstrates an awareness of the need to discipline children, even if perhaps inappropriately.

Year 9 respondents in School C mentioned looking after a family as a part of adulthood. Being a parent is perhaps implicit in this statement but no other references were made to the role of parent.

Year 8 pupils saw the role of parent as an attribute of being an adult but did not see themselves in this role. They stated for example that 'Parents have a different attitude and they look at things and see danger'. Such a statement referred to their parents rather than to this group seeing themselves as parents.

Year 7 pupils saw themselves as having children when they were older and

also were aware of the responsibilities of being a parent. Such awareness was demonstrated by references to the fact that adults have to feed their families and that they have to look after the welfare of their children.

All the year groups in School C therefore identified being a parent as a factor of being an adult. The fact that they also referred to responsibilities in this respect is interesting because this concept of responsibility overlaps with Knowles' (1990) psychological definition. This is not the only instance of overlap within the definitions as will be demonstrated later.

Three of the four year groups interviewed cited being a spouse as a factor of being an adult. The exception to this were the respondents in Year 8. It is interesting that Year 10, like the respondents in Year 9 and Year 7 referred to marriage as opposed to having a partner. The pupils in School A referred to marriage but also referred to 'getting a girlfriend and settling down'. The reasons for this difference are not clear but it is possible that the responses reflected their experiences of family. Whatever the differences and similarities the idea of being a partner/spouse was common to pupils in both schools. Pupils in Year 7 also linked divorce to marriage as a factor of being an adult – 'adults get married and divorced'. Again this may reflect their experience.

The other perhaps significant factor in the responses from School C was that sex was not linked to marriage. It was almost regarded as a separate entity, which perhaps reflects current attitudes. The pupils in Special School A, however, tended to link finding a girlfriend/boyfriend, pregnancy and the production of children as the reason for a couple being together. It would be interesting to establish how far these attitudes are a reflection of home life and a reflection of education in school on these issues but this is outside the scope of this study. Suffice to say this fact provided an interesting difference between the respondents in the two schools mentioned.

Many respondents in School C saw being able to vote as a marker of adulthood. Again this is interesting because Knowles (1990) refers to 'voting citizen' under the social definition and yet this also features in the legal definition and is another example of the overlap referred to above.

In conclusion it is evident that the pupils interviewed across the year groups in School C expressed views of being an adult which concur with those of Knowles (1990). It has thus been established that, like the respondents in School A, they had a wide-ranging view of the social aspects of being adult and further were able to perceive themselves in this

role. Again, as in School A, the more senior pupils had perhaps a deeper grasp of the issues involved.

All the young people interviewed looked forward to the future and had some ideas of the things that they would be able to do. There was a sense of moving towards adulthood and of becoming increasingly responsible and independent amongst all the young people irrespective of cognitive ability.

In addition to the roles indicated in Table 11.14 above, all the respondent groups of adults with learning difficulties emphasised things that adults could do which children could not. Amongst these were shopping, crossing the road and getting dressed. Whilst children are able to do these things the responses reflect the life experience of the respondents where for them, as children, such activities would not have been undertaken independently. There is also a further issue. Many of the responsibilities which they believe appertain to being an adult also demonstrate taking increasing responsibility in daily life and should therefore more properly be discussed under Knowles' (1990) psychological definition. They are alluded to here because for many respondents they indicate a move to taking on an adult role.

Compared with most respondents in school the adults with learning

difficulties indicated fewer roles which could be matched to Knowles' (1990) social definition. In reality they mentioned two, that of worker and parent (grandparent is included here). This fact is not surprising as it reflects their experience of adult life. All would recognise the role of parent from their experiences of home life but none of them saw themselves in this role. Perhaps this is because often their role is seen as to remain the 'eternal child'. Yet they regarded themselves as adults and spoke of protecting children. Perhaps then those with learning difficulties have a very confusing social role. On the one hand they are invariably protected by families or carers and yet on the other hand acknowledge that children, not adults like them, need such protection. For people who, because of their learning difficulties, already find the world hard to understand such a confusion perhaps places additional difficulties on them.

The same is true to some extent of the role of worker. Many had a clear idea of work within the home but few referred to work outside this context. Work outside the home would not be within their experience and in the case of older adults they will not remember parents working. For them as adults, work does not play a significant role in their lives and so they see attributes of the social aspect of adulthood as being able to cross roads, shop and get dressed and washed. This reflects again the problems associated with the lack of employment opportunities for those with

learning difficulties, discussed and analysed in Chapter 6 with reference to the literature. As far as could be established within teaching sessions none of them were home owners, none had partners or children, few, if any had ever been in full time employment. Only a few voted, none drove a car and mostly they were 'cared for'.

Despite these problems the respondents gave answers which could be matched to Knowles' (1990) social definition in terms of worker and parent even though their own experience of 'performing adult roles' is different in kind to the experience of many adults. These respondents were unlikely to see themselves in socially adult roles when, as indicated in the literature, families and society attempt to prevent them fulfilling such roles, particularly in permitting them to take risks.

The responses given by the two groups of adults without learning difficulties were very similar to those given by the respondents in School C and to some responses from pupils in School A. They referred to voting as an adult role, as did some of the pupils in schools, which again overlaps with the legal definition.

Their responses were also seen to be in marked contrast to the responses from the adults with learning difficulties, both in their depth and breadth.

However, as well as being able to generalise about experiences and rules, the adults without learning difficulties were essentially relying on, and reflecting about, their life experiences. Whereas the adults with learning difficulties had very limited experience of the social roles of adults, these two groups drew on their experiences of employment, marriage, being parents and taking part in jury service to explore what it means to be an adult. Those without such experiences cannot engage in such reflection.

The adults without learning difficulties gave a full range of adult roles, which could be linked to Knowles' (1990) definition, without any difficulty. For these adults life experience played a prominent role in that they were able to reflect this in their answers. Those adults with learning difficulties also reflected their life experience when giving responses which matched to the social definition but in their case life experience was more restricted and was to some extent different in kind.

This section has established the fact that all the respondents, including those with complex learning difficulties, discussed factors which could be matched to the social role of being adult. The chapter has further demonstrated the importance of experience in understanding the nature of adulthood. This point is also made by Knowles (1990:59) where he says of adults:-

> By virtue of simply having lived longer, they (i.e. adults)
> have accumulated more experience than they had as youths.
> But they also have had a different kind of experience. When I
> was 15, I had not had the experience of being a full-time
> worker, a spouse, a parent, a voting citizen; when I was 30, I
> had had all those experiences.

The fact is that those adults with learning difficulties have had few, if

any, of these experiences by the time they are thirty, or older. Further

the respondents who believed that there were no differences for them

as adults from when they were children, were, perhaps

unintentionally, making precisely this point. The social roles which

most adults take for granted are mostly not accessible to those with

learning difficulties. It is this which adds to people's perceptions of

them as somehow 'different'. It is also because, although not everyone

undertakes all the roles mentioned by Knowles (1990) in his social

definition of adult, most adults fulfil most or some of them. Those

with learning difficulties usually fulfil one or none of them, despite

the hopes shown by young people with learning difficulties that they

will. Clearly the ability to carry out such roles is, to some extent,

dependent on the level and nature of the learning difficulty but for

many adults with learning difficulties they will not be able to perform

roles which make them socially recognisable as adults. This means

that either other roles have to be acknowledged by society or that

those with learning difficulties will never move into adulthood and

will remain 'eternal children'. The alternative is, as Griffiths (1994) suggests, that for these adults, particularly those with a profound cognitive difficulty, the dignity and status allied to being adult must 'be conferred by others'. Such a statement implies a willingness on the part of others to do this. Conferring adult status on adults with learning difficulties is an important consideration for those involved in the delivery of adult education.

In conclusion then it has been shown that those adults with learning difficulties are biologically and legally adults. If the traditional roles appertaining to adult status socially are adhered to it would have to be argued that many adults with learning difficulties are not socially adult due partly to the restrictions imposed by society.

The next section will consider Knowles'(1990) psychological definition of adult which is perhaps the most significant of all his definitions for the learning process.

The Psychological definition. Results and analysis.

In the previous sections three parts of Knowles'(1990) definition of adult have been considered, namely the biological, legal and social definitions. It

has been established that whilst adults with learning difficulties generally conform to the biological and legal definitions more difficulty is experienced in the application of the social definition, largely due to the expectations of society and in particular the limitations placed on those with learning difficulties by society.

The final part of Knowles' definition is the psychological definition which Knowles describes as the 'most crucial' (Knowles 1990:57) for learning and therefore pertinent to this thesis. Of the psychological definition Knowles says the following:-

> we become adult psychologically when we arrive at a self-concept of being responsible for our own lives, of being self-directing. (op cit)

Knowles explains the psychological definition of adult a little further:

> But it seems to me that the process of gaining a self-concept of self-directedness starts early in life (I was almost completely self-directing in learning to use my leisure time by age five) and grows cumulatively as we become biologically mature, start performing adult-like roles (I was a magazine salesman and paper-route entrepreneur in high school), and take increasing responsibility for making our own decisions. (op cit:57)

It is to this notion of 'taking responsibility for making our own decisions', or, put another way, making choices and gaining independence, that the responses of the groups interviewed will be matched in order to analyse the psychological aspect of adulthood, particularly as perceived by those with learning difficulties.

Tables providing a summary of the findings will precede the analysis of the responses.

Table 11.16 School A. Psychological definition – responses.

Year 11	Can decide when to have a family and able to choose employment.
Year 10	Can make decisions about a job, a partner and social life.
Year 9	Choosing a job.
Year 8	An awareness of choosing a job, adult responsibilities towards children.
Year 7	Choice of home and geographical location, choice of job.

Table 11.17 School B. Psychological definition – responses.

Years 10 and 11	Able to go out on one's own and wash independently. Choice of social life.
Years 7, 8 and 9	Some awareness of choosing employment.

Table 11.18 School C. Psychological definition – responses.

Year 10	Leaving home and becoming independent. Being responsible and mature. Taking on responsibilities and specifically responsibilities to bring up children properly.
Year 9	Being sensible and able to look after one's self. Leaving home. Being responsible for own actions.
Year 8	Independence. Living independently.
Year 7	Responsibilities e.g. paying bills. Looking after families. Choosing a job. Living independently.

Table 11.19 Adults with learning difficulties. Psychological definition - responses.

Group 1	Adults can cross the road on their own, they can use fires, they can go shopping on their own, they have bus passes and they are able to talk to strangers.
Group 2	Adults can cross the road on their own, they can go out and they take on some responsibilities.
Group 3	Felt there were no real differences for them as adults but added that adults can go shopping on their own, and were more able to cross roads independently.
Group 4	Adults are able to read and write, they are able to dress themselves independently and they teach children the difference between right and wrong.
Group 5	Adults can cross the road on their own and they can get dressed (presumably independently).

Table 11.20. Adults without learning difficulties. Psychological definition – responses.

| Group 1 | Adults gain independence, make decisions and leave home. A person becomes responsible for his/her own actions and is generally responsible. |
| Group 2 | Adults are mature and responsible. They have independence. |

The responses indicate that all groups interviewed in School A regarded choice as being a factor of adulthood, whether this choice was in terms of where a person chose to live, choice of a partner or choice of employment.

For Year 11 pupils choice related mainly to deciding when to have children and selecting a job, although they were very aware of the limited choice of jobs open to them. They were also aware that as adults they were able to take decisions, a point illustrated by one pupil who said it was a choice as to whether they attended college and that attendance was not compulsory.

'You can quit college. My brother was there for a week and he didn't like it and he didn't have to go.' There are other implications present in this statement, for as well as stating educational options that are open to adults it also implies rights that one has as an adult in that the pupil's brother had the right not to attend college.

Year 10 made similar points about the choice of employment and again were aware of the difficulties around finding a suitable job. They also made reference to the kind of social life they would choose, citing examples such as going to Rave parties, sleeping over at friends' houses and going to youth clubs. Initially these activities could be regarded as an inappropriate response in terms of choice of social life as an adult as they suggest things usually done by teenagers rather than adults. However for many young people with learning difficulties the options open to other teenagers are not always open to them. It is likely, therefore, that they are expressing what they would like to do as teenagers and transferring these forward into adult life where they were aware that they could choose what they wished to do. They may also have not been fully aware of the type of social life followed by many adults.

Year 9, like Years 10 and 11, saw selecting employment as a feature of

being an adult and realised the difficulties for them surrounding employment.

Year 8 were also aware that as adults they would be able to choose a job. Though aware of the types of employment they may choose, the problems surrounding employment were not so clearly considered as in the older year groups. Nevertheless Year 8 were still aware of choice and decision making as a factor of adulthood.

Year 7 also referred to employment and to 'getting a house'. Some of the respondents were unsure about living independently because they wanted to stay with their families, which at the age of eleven or twelve is quite reasonable. There was, however, an awareness that at some point they would live independently and be employed. Employment had not been considered in any depth probably due to the younger age of the respondents. The world of work for them was in the distant future. Even though this was the case one respondent said he wished to join the army to see different countries and many had ideas of what employment they might consider as adults.

Linking back to the social definition it is interesting to note the emphasis placed on work and in particular that many respondents saw the choice of

work as an important factor of being adult, whilst also aware of the limited opportunities which awaited them. It is clear that the respondents in this school were conscious of an emerging sense of being self-directed, particularly in years 9, 10 and 11.

The differences in the responses of each Year group also indicates a developing sense of responsibility. The younger respondents stressed choice in terms of employment and whilst this fact was recognised by the older respondents (Years 10 and 11) they also referred to choice of partners and having a family.

Although the responses given in School B were briefer than those given in School A, due to the more limited cognitive skills of the pupils interviewed, they were remarkably similar. Work and social life both featured in the responses. Living independently did not but it is unlikely that this option would have been presented to any of these respondents or indeed be viable for most of them due to the nature of their difficulties. Washing oneself and going out on one's own were, however, mentioned and these were seen as markers of independence.

The older seniors referred to a choice of social life in that one respondent said when she was older 'she will go to the pub and disco and do Irish

dancing'. Like some of the respondents in School A she placed attending discos into adult life, rather than recognising it as a teenage activity. Again it could be that it is something she would like to do but was not permitted to do or that she was unaware of activities appropriate to an adult age. Whilst adults do attend discos it would more usually be regarded as a teenage activity. Apart from this, however, the respondents had an idea of becoming more independent and making decisions and choices.

An initial survey of the table showing the responses from School C indicates that the responses of the older year groups in this school are much more abstract in nature than those of the older respondents in the other schools. Despite this, however, there are a number of similarities in the responses of the pupils in School C and the other two schools, especially with regard to living independently and choosing employment. The older respondents in School C linked the twin concepts of rights and responsibilities which was not so apparent in the responses of the other school pupils. They saw the right to leave home and live independently but allied this to being responsible for one's own actions and taking on responsibilities such as looking after a family.

Year 10 in School C identified independence as a key feature of being an adult both by stating things which adults could do such as having their own

homes and providing for their families and also by suggesting that children 'rely on their parents therefore they are dependent'. They also regarded responsibilities as very important, particularly in relation to employment where punctuality and politeness were identified. Throughout the interview the responses indicated an acute awareness that maturity allows people to make choices and define their own lives but alongside that adults also had to take on responsibilities which would not be expected of younger people. A similar point was made to a lesser extent by pupils in School A by implication.

As in School A choice of employment was also seen as important. For School C pupils there were far fewer restrictions on the type of employment which might be chosen. Fewer restrictions meant that the type of employment sought was not frequently mentioned but virtually all the young people interviewed assumed that they would enter full time employment should they choose to do so. The question for them in terms of being self-directing was more to do with the type of employment they might select rather than considering what jobs would possibly be open to them, as was the case in School A. Such choice gives them more scope for self-direction as adults than those with learning difficulties who have a limited range of options from which to choose.

Year 10 respondents believed that if a young person or child committed a serious offence that person should be treated as an adult. They also believed that by the age of ten or eleven, and perhaps even younger, a person is responsible although it was agreed that the age at which a person was able to assume responsibility was dependent on a person's upbringing. Here it must be asked whether they were repeating opinions they had heard or were making independent decisions which they had not, perhaps, at this stage internalised. It could be argued, however, that regardless of the stage which these young people had reached in internalising opinions they were moving towards the idea of self-direction of which Knowles (1990) speaks. Before ideas and opinions are internalised they are often accepted and modified. An example of this is that many young people will repeat ideas and notions they have heard discussed in the home environment and as teenagers will accept them or reject them. If accepted they may later be rejected or modified by increasing experience. Thus even if the pupils in Year 10 were simply repeating the views of others until they modify such views they are their views.

Most Year 9 respondents saw a progressive move towards self-direction as almost all spoke of moving from school to sixth form college to university to a job as the norm. Within this pattern they would make choices in terms of subjects to be studied and a choice of university. Again this indicates

they have a very wide range of options which are not open to those with cognitive difficulties. Whilst following a degree course obviously demands a certain level of cognitive ability, being a student has wider implications. It gives a young adult the chance to live independently and make decisions for themselves. As well as encouraging independence and self-directedness it also provides a natural break from the familiarity of the home environment. Such chances are not available to those with learning difficulties and this is linked to life 'markers' which may not exist for those with learning difficulties. A caveat must be added here. For 'looked after' children and young people a form of independence may come at a much earlier age due to their life circumstances, in particular being separated from their natural families. In general, however, it is more difficult for those with learning difficulties to experience self-directedness as they move through adolescence to adult life.

Year 9 also regarded being responsible in employment as very important, citing the correct use of machinery and punctuality in particular. Behaviour was seen as an important indicator of adult status in that it was felt that adults 'have to be better behaved than children'. Again this was linked to being responsible for actions.

Year 8 respondents cited independence and living independently as

markers of adulthood. Both of these imply the making of decisions and choices. Although some saw living independently as important, some like the respondents in Year 7 in School A, stated that they would be living at home. The developmental stage of these respondents is illustrated by the comments of some who said they would be living independently but would return home for meals or if they were hungry because, as one respondent said, 'my mum always has things like bacon in the fridge.' Such a statement suggests a move towards being self-directed and may indicate an incomplete understanding of what is actually involved in living independently. Equally returning home for meals is quite common amongst those who otherwise live independently and so perhaps the respondents were becoming more self-directed than the statement would suggest. Like one Year 7 respondent in School A, one respondent wanted to travel. Others saw having a job and a house as the norm.

There is a surprising feature of their responses. They were a Year 8 group and many responses are similar to those given by Year 7 pupils at School A. The reasons for this are unclear. If the reverse had been the case, that is Year 8 pupils in School A giving responses similar to those in Year 7 in School C this may have been attributable to developmental delay of those with learning difficulties. Clearly this is not the case and it is not viable to attribute developmental delay to those pupils in School C. There is an

important issue here. Sometimes low cognitive ability is too readily given as the reason for such discrepancies when there may be other factors.

Year 7 in School C saw responsibilities such as paying bills and looking after one's family as a part of being an adult. They also spoke of choosing a job and living independently. All of these statements are very similar to responses given by other pupils.

In the responses of all the year groups in School C independent living was seen as an expectation. In School B there was no reference to this aspect of adulthood and it was only specifically mentioned by Year 7 in School A. This indicates a marked difference in opportunity to become responsible and self directing between those with and without learning difficulties. Those without learning difficulties expect to live independently and so direct their own lives. Such an expectation was not apparent amongst pupils with learning difficulties although perhaps some of them will eventually live independently. There is a further point. Society expects that most young people will become independent but this does not appear to extend to those with learning difficulties. Probably it does not because the fact of having a learning difficulty tends to lead to the assumption that such people are dependent and must not be encouraged or even permitted to take risks (ref. Chapter 6). If a young person is not allowed to perform simple

tasks such as making a drink or ironing clothes, it is unlikely that such a person will ever be able to live independently. Thus the taking of risks and the move towards self-directedness are inextricably linked and the lack of one almost inevitably leads to the lack of the other. A similar point will be made in the consideration of the responses of adults with learning difficulties.

One thing which is apparent from the tables above is that the responses from the adults with learning difficulties are so different from those given by the young people in all the schools. As will be seen in the next section they are also very different from the responses given by the adults without learning difficulties. The possible reasons for this will be discussed below but first of all the nature of the responses will be considered.

All the groups interviewed gave very practical responses when speaking of choice and self direction. Many mentioned crossing the road and dressing themselves as examples of independence and therefore of self direction. Group 1 mentioned these two factors but also added the facts that adults, unlike children are able 'to use fires', indicating taking on responsibility as adults for performing certain tasks. By implication they felt that adults could talk to strangers. They actually stated that children could not talk to strangers, implying that as adults this restriction was lifted. Shopping

independently was also a marker of independence as was having a bus pass for travel.

Group 2 also cited crossing the road independently but additionally saw going out and taking on some responsibilities such as looking after birds and being responsible for cleaning out their cages, as attaining self-directedness.

Group 3 did not feel there were any significant changes for them as adults other than being able to shop on their own and to cross roads independently.

Group 4 identified different aspects of self-directedness from many of the other groups. They spoke about being able to read and write as adults. They also referred to dressing themselves independently similarly to pupils in School B. The respondents believed that adults taught children the difference between right and wrong which brought a moral and ethical dimension into the concept of being self-directed and this response was therefore similar in some respects to those given by the pupils in School C. These responses suggest that for this group being psychologically adult included academic ability and making ethical choices although the basis for such choices was not discussed.

Group 5 saw independence similarly to some other groups of adults with learning difficulties and to pupils in School B in that they only mentioned independence in crossing the road and in getting dressed.

Unlike respondents in School A and School C the adults with learning difficulties made no mention of choice in relation to employment or accommodation. All the responses were very practical and concrete in nature, very much in accord with the practical and experiential way in which these students learn. There is, however, another factor. For adults with learning difficulties hopes and expectations about the future and being an adult no longer exist. They would not speculate about choosing employment because they know that they will not obtain paid employment. They would not talk about choice of where to live because that choice is not for them a reality. Usually the main decisions about where a person with a learning difficulty lives is dictated by circumstance. Perhaps this is true for many in society but for those with learning difficulties choices may be even more limited, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The adults with learning difficulties, for the most part however, still see choice as a factor of adulthood. The major difference is that they are only able to exercise choice and independence in a limited context (Ramcharan et al 1997). Crossing the road independently therefore, for some adults with

learning difficulties, may be as significant a move towards self-directedness as living independently is for someone without a learning difficulty. By crossing the road independently a person with a learning difficulty may have overcome one of the greatest barriers to becoming self-directed, the barrier of being permitted to take calculated risks.

Given these factors it is probable that within the life context of adults with learning difficulties the things which they cited as indicative of choice and independence and therefore matching to Knowles' (1990) psychological definition, are for them as significant as factors mentioned by other respondent groups such as living independently and choosing employment.

Perhaps the major difficulty is that whilst those with learning difficulties see their moves towards independence as important, society does not, as most people are able to cross the road, dress themselves and go shopping independently at a very early age. Even if developmental delay is taken into account for those with learning difficulties the factors they saw as indicative of choice and independence are not important in society as a whole. It is assumed that these are tasks everyone does and the ability to perform them is therefore mainly disregarded. It is often not appreciated that these are regarded as markers of adulthood by those with learning difficulties and that considerable efforts may have been made to achieve

this somewhat limited independence. The task for those with learning difficulties, as established earlier, is made more difficult because in some cases parents or carers do not want their 'child' to become independent, whereas for most young people becoming independent is the norm. Given the low cognitive ability of many adults with learning difficulties and the barriers which society and some families and carers create, any achievement of independence is significant.

One further factor needs to be mentioned here. Knowles states:

> the process of gaining a self-concept of self-directedness starts early in life.... and grows cumulatively as we become biologically mature, and start performing adult-like roles.' Knowles 1990:57)

Whilst this may be true for most people in society it is not the case, as data from the interviews indicates, for those adults with learning difficulties. Whilst such adults certainly become biologically mature there is little evidence to suggest that they begin to perform generally recognised adult like roles. This militates against them arriving at self-directedness, except in very concrete and limited ways and has significant impact on their adult status.

As is evident from the summary above the responses given by the two groups of adults without learning difficulties were similar to many given by both School C respondents and to some extent those in School A. The main

difference is that the responses from the adults without learning difficulties are more abstract because the adults in these two groups had the benefit of life experience and were able to reflect on that when interviewed.

The responses are similar in some respects to those given by the adults with learning difficulties although initially this may not appear to be so. The adults with learning difficulties reflected on life experience to the extent that they could see ways in which they had become independent although the situations in which such independence was exercised were very different. Nevertheless this is an important similarity between the adults with and without learning difficulties.

Both groups of adults without learning difficulties clearly saw self-direction as an important factor of adult status, giving examples of living independently, choosing employment and being generally responsible for their actions. Being responsible for one's actions is a major difference between them and those adults with learning difficulties who are often regarded as not being responsible for their actions. Frequently this may be true for some find it difficult to see a cause and effect connection but equally many such adults are able to see and accept consequences of actions. Seeing such a link between cause and effect is vital if adults with learning difficulties are to achieve independence such as any other adult.

Conclusions

The research results indicate that all those interviewed have some concept of being adult matched to the four sections of Knowles' (1990) definition. The analysis of the findings indicates that there are more commonalities than differences between the respondent groups. All the respondents were aware of being biologically adult and in the case of young people and adults with learning difficulties this is supported by evidence from the research literature.

All the respondents were aware of being legally adult. For some this awareness was in terms of specific activities which were open to adults rather that an awareness of legal ages to perform certain activities. Nevertheless there was an awareness present.

In terms of Knowles' (1990) social definition of adult the respondents were aware of, or fulfilling, the roles by which he defined being an adult. For those with learning difficulties there was an awareness of being a worker, a parent, a partner/spouse even though few do, or perhaps will, themselves fulfil these roles, partly due to the restrictions imposed by society.

The psychological definition, the concept of being self-directed, is perhaps the most difficult for those with learning difficulties to fulfil because until

comparatively recently society did not want this group to be self-directed. To some extent that is why many people with learning difficulties were placed in long stay hospitals in order that others would direct them. The respondents from these groups were, however, able to give indicators of ways in which they and others achieved independence as adults.

An awareness of independence was apparent in all groups of respondents. Whilst initially there would seem to be differing degrees of independence referred to by the respondents this is not perhaps the case. For whilst it might appear that a greater degree of independence is implied in buying a home than crossing the road, it is also important to consider the backgrounds of the respondents. For many with learning difficulties to be able to cross a road without supervision might be as enormous a step towards self direction as purchasing a property. It would seem therefore that the range of independence referred to by the respondents may not be so vastly different as it first appears, at least in its significance to the respondents. Society would, however, regard some things as barely indicating independence.

It is therefore fair to state that the research indicates many similarities between those with and without learning difficulties. Where such similarities do not exist the reason may often be attributable to the limited

life context experienced by many with learning difficulties. This does not imply that if the life contexts of all the respondents were identical the similarities would be identical, for cognitive abilities will always be a significant factor. What is apparent is that to restrict those with learning difficulties in terms of making choices and taking some risks will inevitably limit their scope for decision making and independence as adults. Perhaps the question remains whether society wishes to stress difference, as it has done in the past, or to celebrate diversity.

The next chapter will report the findings from the questionnaire to staff on the inclusion of those with learning difficulties within Basic Skills groups, that is groups which are not discrete provision.

Chapter 12.

Research Findings – Staff Questionnaire.

In this chapter the research with staff will be described and findings given. An analysis of the findings will be considered in the following chapter. The research was conducted with 26 staff, both managers and tutors, working in the area of Basic Skills for the unitary authority in which the research took place. All staff in this curriculum area were invited to participate. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix 3) and follow up interviews.

The research with the staff focused on one of the central issues which arose from both the research findings and the literature, the exclusion of those with learning difficulties from many areas of life. Such exclusion, or a lack of inclusion, of those with learning difficulties also exists within education. Exclusion is a complex area for it is seen by some that children, young people and adults with learning difficulties are not segregated from others but historically have been placed in the educational provision which best meets their needs. Such an argument within adult provision would be in agreement with Tomlinson's view of inclusive education as a best 'match' or best 'fit' model (Tomlinson 1996:26). A model such as this may be desirable in educational terms but it ignores the broader perspective of the life of a person with a learning difficulty. It effectively separates

education from other aspects of life and in so doing mirrors what happens in the wider society. Whilst such education may be inclusive in that it puts the learner and the learner's needs at the centre of provision, it fails to take a more holistic approach and see the learner's other needs. As a result those with learning difficulties are often as segregated in educational situations as they are in daily life which, as demonstrated earlier, may also effectively segregate the person from the community and impact on their adult status.

Discrete provision for those with learning difficulties and classes composed entirely of those with such difficulties are a part of Adult Education and other Post-16 provision within the unitary authority. Within the Adult Education Service much work is done on a contract basis with Social Services which results in many groups composed almost entirely of Social Services clients taking part in outreach as part of day services provision. The major difficulty is not that the learners enter the Adult Education Service via this route but that it is almost impossible to ensure progress to a 'mainstream' basic skills group. Again there are some valid reasons for this. There are many discrete groups and to ensure progression to non-discrete groups for a large number of students would, it is argued, cause an imbalance in the basic skills groups which it is feared may 'put off' those students without a learning difficulty.

The research with Basic Skills staff was conducted in an attempt to look more closely at discrete provision and groups composed entirely of students with learning difficulties. The purpose was to try to establish the views of tutors and managers within the Basic Skills sector on the inclusion of those students with learning difficulties into basic skills groups rather than in discrete, or similar, provision.

The methods chosen to conduct the research were a questionnaire and follow up interviews. A questionnaire was sent to all the twenty six staff and responses were received from nineteen.

One respondent, a manager, replied but refused to answer any of the questions without further clarification. The reasons for her refusal were contained in a letter in which it was stated that:

> Since your research is into the adult status of students with learning difficulties, then I believe it is you who should define 'learning difficulty' consistent with your research parameters.

Such a definition was not possible since the research was trying to establish how the respondents defined the term 'learning difficulty'. Secondly she made the point: "I then want to know what you mean by "Basic Skills' groups."

Since Basic Skills groups and discrete provision are obvious within the provision made by the Adult Education Service it was difficult to see how

this could be clarified. She said that these were the key issues for her and only responded to question 5 on the questionnaire with the above remarks. To have given further clarification to this respondent would have affected the research findings so it was decided to accept the response given and not seek to elicit further information.

After the questionnaires were returned follow up interviews were then conducted with nine respondents who agreed to be interviewed to explore their responses in a little more depth.

A questionnaire was selected as the most suitable research tool as it enabled the views of most staff to be discerned in a time effective way. Unlike the decision to use interviews with the students, where a questionnaire would not have been viable, the use of a questionnaire with staff enabled the collection of all the relevant information quickly and in a form which was relatively easy to analyse. The only exception to ease of analysis were the responses to question 5. It would have been possible to give pre-set headings for the issues and asked for responses to these which would have made analysis easier but this would have had two possible effects. Firstly it could be seen as leading the respondents. Secondly the use of such a method would not have allowed for a wide variety of responses. A questionnaire was also used because whilst it was felt that most staff

would take the time to complete it, far fewer, as was seen to be the case, would have agreed to be interviewed. By using a questionnaire the sample was larger and arguably more representative and reliable. The follow up interviews were intended to develop issues raised in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained six questions, three of which were based on a scale of 1 – 5 with tick boxes, two of which were open ended and a final question which asked whether or not the respondent was willing to be interviewed. These questions referred to terminology, inclusion of those with learning difficulties in groups alongside other students without such difficulties and issues surrounding including those with learning difficulties in non-discrete or specialised groups. (See Appendix 3).

Terminology.

In order to clarify the language used to describe those adults with learning difficulties, the first question asked 'What do you understand by the term 'learning difficulty''. Of the nineteen responses received four people did not attempt to answer this question. Most who answered believed a learning difficulty to be an impairment in the ability to learn which might stem from cognitive, sensory, neurological, physical, emotional or mental problems. Many felt that the definition was also allied to the fact that people with a learning difficulty perform and understand

less well than the 'average' person of their age. In two instances the terms 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability' were used interchangeably with one respondent stating 'I would use the term learning disability for students with a mental 'handicap' or disability, either innate or acquired'. A second respondent felt that 'everyone will probably have learning difficulty' but regarded a 'disability' as more severe. A third felt that 'everyone will probably have some 'condition' that can affect learning but I tend to use the term 'learning difficulty' to mean people with a learning disability'. Many saw that a learning difficulty could be general or specific. One respondent felt that the term 'learning disability' indicated a greater difficulty and so the choice of terminology was dependent on the severity of the difficulty. Two respondents specifically linked learning difficulties to problems in acquiring basic skills.

Some issues arise from these responses. Virtually all the respondents who answered this question were aware of the causes of learning difficulties and of the effects on learners. One respondent realised the implications for the whole of a person's life by stating that social relationships were affected as well as learning. Two respondents used the term 'handicap' which was surprising when such terminology is no longer appropriate (DfES 2002) and has not been for a number of years. No respondents seemed aware of the background to the terms 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability',

the former being used in educational settings and the latter in a health and social services setting. All were aware, however, of the effects of learning difficulties on the lives of students within an educational setting.

Inclusion or segregation.

The next three questions on the questionnaire sought to obtain the views of the respondents on whether or not adults with learning difficulties should or should not be included in non-discrete basic skills groups.

The second question on the questionnaire was in the form of a statement: 'No students with learning difficulties should be included in Basic Skills groups alongside students without learning difficulties'. The respondents were asked to tick one box from, Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't know, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The responses to this statement are indicated in Table 13.1. One respondent did not answer.

Table 12.1 Staff responses to including no students with learning difficulties alongside those without learning difficulties.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	0	0	10	8

The above table indicates that all respondents felt that adult students with learning difficulties should not be educated completely separately from

other students. One respondent whilst disagreeing with the statement said she would have preferred to be able to qualify her response. When interviewed her concerns related to whether it would be possible to integrate a person with a severe difficulty into a group where everyone needed help. In principle, however, she was in favour of inclusion.

The third question was also in the form of the following statement: '**Some** students with learning difficulties should be included in Basic Skills groups alongside students without learning difficulties.' Again the respondents were asked to tick one box from the following Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't Know, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The responses are indicated Table 12.2 Staff responses to including some students with learning

Table 12.2 Staff responses to including some students with learning difficulties alongside those without learning difficulties.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3	14	0	1	0

Again there was overwhelming support for including some adults with learning difficulties in basic skills groups alongside students without learning difficulties. One respondent did not reply. One respondent disagreed with the statement but qualified the response by stating 'If "should" read "could" I would have ticked agree.' and was not therefore opposed to inclusion. A second respondent would also have preferred the

statement to have read 'could' rather than 'should'. Another respondent also wanted to qualify the response to say what would happen in an ideal situation. She believed that in such a situation 'learning difficulty' students should be integrated with others. Other issues were raised around this which will be discussed below.

The fourth question was again in the form of a statement that: '**All students** with learning difficulties should be included alongside students without learning difficulties.' Again respondents were asked to tick one box from the choice of Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't Know, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The responses are given below in Table 12.3.

Table 12.3 Staff responses to including all students with learning difficulties alongside those without difficulties.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	0	3	14	1

Again one respondent declined to reply. These responses indicate that whilst all of those questioned were in favour of some students with learning difficulties being included, none indicated that all students with learning difficulties should be included in groups with students without learning difficulties. Three respondents were unsure about this. Superficially this may look like a negative view of including those with learning difficulties. When the reasons were given, which were mainly around support for those

with learning difficulties, in response to question 5 and during the follow up interviews, the reverse was in fact the case.

Question 5 asked: 'What for you are the key issues about having/not having students with learning difficulties in the classroom?' It generated a large number of responses covering a wide range of issues. These will now be reported in a table and then considered in detail, for they provide an understanding of many of the important issues from an educational perspective for those working with adults with learning difficulties.

Table 12.4 Key issues for staff concerning the inclusion of adults with learning difficulties alongside students without such difficulties.

Inclusion to promote tolerance and understanding	5 respondents
Problems for students without known learning difficulties	9 respondents
Additional support	11 respondents
Behaviour	5 respondents
Attention seeking	4 respondents
Staff training, experience and development	3 respondents
Curriculum issues	11 respondents
Tutor workload	6 respondents
Social acceptability	9 respondents
Balance in groups	5 respondents
Safety issues	1 respondent
Raising the self esteem of students with learning difficulties	3 respondents
Retention of discreet provision	7 respondents
Setting up students to fail or raising self esteem?	1 respondent
Protection	2 respondents
Environment	2 respondents
Resources	1 respondent
Deciding on a student's suitability for a particular group	2 respondents
Agreement of other students to inclusion	1 respondent

<u>Inclusion to promote tolerance and understanding.</u>

For those for whom this was a key issue it was felt that inclusion promoted tolerance and understanding and that those without learning difficulties can learn from those with learning difficulties. One respondent stated that having those with learning difficulties in the classroom alongside those students without learning difficulties: '……. (is) creating a more tolerant attitude in future societies by promoting their acceptance as valuable and equal persons in a learning group.' Such a view was endorsed by four other respondents and is in line with the unitary authority's Policy on Inclusion which states:

> Inclusion in Education involves a process of increasing participation for all students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools, early years, youth and adult education, and other settings. (Council Policy on Inclusion 2001:1)

It is also similar to a statement made by David Blunkett in 1998 that:

> Education is vital to the creation of a fully inclusive society, a society in which all members see themselves as valued for the contribution they make. (Council Policy on Inclusion 2001:1)

In this respect inclusion was seen as a two way process from which all would benefit.

One respondent believed that lack of tolerance amongst adults was the direct result of children with learning difficulties being segregated from

other children (Ramcharan et al 1997) and sent to special schools. She believed that this would change in the future as increasingly children with learning difficulties and disabilities were included in mainstream schools and that younger adults were more tolerant than older adults as a result of such changes.

Problems for students without known learning difficulties.

Related to this very positive response about the importance of tolerance and understanding was a point regarding the attitudes of other students to having those with learning difficulties in the group. It was felt that some students without learning difficulties, already embarrassed by their own lack of ability in basic skills, may feel that they are considered to have learning difficulties. This is particularly pertinent for managers who feel that those with learning difficulties may 'put off' other students but this has not been the experience of many tutors and students and research by Sutcliffe (1992) also indicates that this fear is unfounded. One respondent believed that whilst students had left her group because of the presence of those with learning difficulties, this could not be proved as no-one would actually admit that that was the reason for non-attendance. Another respondent believed that some students were embarrassed by the presence of those with learning difficulties and felt that this was due to segregation. As a result those without learning difficulties 'instead of accepting them for

how they are, shy away because they are embarrassed. They don't know how to speak to them and how to treat them.' Such attitudes were felt to lead to the student with learning difficulties being ignored. Neither respondent was suggesting these as reasons for not including those students with learning difficulties but were relating the views of some students without learning difficulties. Both believed that the attitude to those with learning difficulties was the result of upbringing.

One respondent, whilst anxious about the views of those without learning difficulties to the presence of students with learning difficulties in the same group, suggested that it could be positive in that all would realise that they needed support. This was seen as common ground for all students.

What is important, as some respondents indicated, is the handling of inclusion, particularly by the tutor, and the amount of additional support given to enable it to be successful, a point endorsed by Sutcliffe (1990).

Contrary to the view that students without learning difficulties are 'put off' by students with learning difficulties, one respondent said that the 'other students (i.e. students without learning difficulties) ….in a basic skills group are very willing to support' (i.e. those students with learning difficulties). She had found tremendous support from other students

particularly where there was no volunteer supporting the group. The same respondent indicated that she had not experienced problems with other students accepting those with learning difficulties.

The responses indicate that the majority of respondents believed inclusion in non-discrete provision to be desirable for adults with learning difficulties. Such inclusion must have the support of the tutor and, where possible, support from other group members if it is to work successfully. Other students may not be comfortable with such inclusion and this has to be addressed in a constructive way.

Additional support.

Additional support for those students with learning difficulties who are included in basic skills groups was another key issue identified in the questionnaire responses and the follow up interviews. The main concern was that students with learning difficulties, particularly those only able to work on their own for relatively short periods of time, should receive adequate help. Many respondents stressed that they were not indicating that those with learning difficulties sought attention more than other learners but that many would need one to one, or fairly intensive, learning support.

The use of support staff was seen as problematical because it could lead to

the students becoming dependent unless the staff were fully trained. The issue of dependence was raised by one respondent in both the responses to the questionnaire and the follow up interview. She felt that blanket care, given throughout life in this country, actually prevents those with learning difficulties achieving sufficient autonomy. Autonomy can also be limited where too much support is given in the classroom. Such an issue is linked to staff training for there is no specific qualification for supporting adults with learning difficulties.

Behaviour.

Behaviour was cited as critical for deciding whether or not students with learning difficulties should be placed in groups with students without learning difficulties. Behaviour fell into three main categories. Students who present with challenging behaviour were identified but the respondents believed that very few fell into this category as those who have challenging behaviour are usually taught initially on a one to one, or small group, basis and included in larger groups once they are able to cope and when their behaviour ceases to be a cause for concern. Secondly students who behave inappropriately were identified. Examples of inappropriate behaviours included talking too loudly for the situation, acting in a manner expected of a younger chronological age group and demanding an inordinately large proportion of the tutor's time. One respondent cited the example of a

student who walks round the room 'touching people' which she felt may present a problem in some groups. Many of these behaviours stem from the fact that there has been little opportunity to mix with peer groups without learning difficulties and frequently stop when it is apparent what is expected within the group. One respondent cited seeing how other students behave as a positive reason for including those with learning difficulties. Thirdly there are behaviours intrinsic to a person's condition. One respondent gave the example of the ritualistic behaviour often performed by people within the autistic spectrum. The problem here is twofold. The student wants to be able to perform the rituals in a safe environment but they can be disturbing and distressing for other students. The respondent who raised this issue stressed that such behaviour was a part of that person's 'normality' and should be respected as such. She further added that 'I find for some of my students A. jumping up and tapping the floor does cause a disturbance. There will be a couple of students who will shout out to him "Sit down A. Get on with your work. Stop doing that. Stop mucking about". That for A. causes yet another problem because he doesn't want to upset other people. He wants to go through his ritual and they are sort of frustrating him.' Spasms in a person with cerebral palsy may also alarm other students. In these cases perhaps careful and simple explanations by the tutor are needed to reassure other students but without

drawing more attention to the person concerned with the inherent danger of implying that the person is in some way 'different'.

It is clear that behaviour does present difficulties but these are present whether a person is placed in discrete provision or within a 'mainstream' group. The concern, however, about whether a student with behavioural problems would disrupt other learners is a valid one, mentioned by many respondents. There is the additional question of whether it is any more justifiable to disrupt other students with learning difficulties than it is to disrupt those without. The respondents did not regard behavioural issues as sufficient grounds for retaining discrete provision except where a student may feel more comfortable in a discrete group.

Attention seeking.

Allied to problems of behaviour is the problem of seeking attention. Attention seeking is a complex area for not all those who seek attention have learning difficulties and equally not all those with learning difficulties seek attention. One factor raised under additional support is that some students with learning difficulties have a very short concentration span and therefore need a variety of tasks during a session. Frequently therefore they are more demanding of tutor support but not in a negative way which the term 'attention seeking' could imply. From the interviews with staff it

would appear that they were using the term to indicate demand on tutor time rather than that those with learning difficulties craved attention. If so, the problem could be overcome by the use of appropriate additional support staff for which funding is available in some instances.

Staff training, experience and development.

Respondents raised the point that tutors should be adequately trained and experienced in order to work with adult students with learning difficulties. Training is a major problem for there are virtually no teaching qualifications for teaching adults with learning difficulties. The qualifications for teaching Basic Skills do not address in any detail the skills needed to teach adults with learning difficulties.

One respondent suggested that teaching adults with learning difficulties could be seen as a development opportunity because it required the tutor to break information down into very small steps. The teaching of adults with learning difficulties was seen to 'imbue the tutor with the feeling that she is reaching a wider range than pure academic standards'. Further it was seen 'to provide the tutor with stimulus for having to break down information and be aware of the steps that lead to where she is aiming.' The tutor was seen to be very much aware of the process of teaching when working with this specific student group.

Curriculum issues.

Curriculum issues were important for more than half of the respondents. The opinions expressed fell into two main groups. Firstly some respondents expressed concerns over whether those students with learning difficulties could adequately participate in group work with those without learning difficulties due to a lower cognitive level than others in the group. It was believed that if the learning difficulty was very severe there may be no point in the student being in the group as there would be little or no common ground with other students. Secondly, concerns were expressed about the effects on lesson pace and content when those with learning difficulties were included in the group. Some suggested that other students may not find their work challenging if group learning was significantly altered to accommodate those with learning difficulties. For group work this is a legitimate concern. One respondent felt that this difficulty could be overcome by starting the session with a common theme and then differentiating work according to ability. Two respondents felt that as most students worked at individual tasks this was not an issue. Others questioned whether some students with learning difficulties wanted basic skills support anyway and this goes back to the issue of the degree of real choice that they have in how they spend their time and of what is a basic skill. The respondents' main question seemed to be how far students could cope and would feel comfortable with the situation. Concern was expressed that if a

student was unable to participate in group work this may isolate them again.

Tutor workload.

Some respondents felt that having students with learning difficulties within a basic skills group would inevitably increase the tutor workload, both in terms of resources and in demands on time within the session. It was felt that this could be overcome with good support staff and good learning resources appropriate to the ability of the learner. There remained the issue of the time required to differentiate resources in order to make them accessible to all learners.

Social acceptability.

Concern was expressed about how acceptable other students would find a student with a learning difficulty. Such acceptability was seen on many levels but particularly in terms of social acceptability. As indicated above, some respondents were concerned that other students' learning may be affected by the presence of a student with learning difficulties who may make demands and behave in an unacceptable manner. Concerns were expressed that other students may not want students with learning difficulties in the group. This was a key issue for staff.

The responses covered many different aspects of acceptability which related particularly to the behaviour of the adults with learning difficulties and the attitudes of other students towards them. One manager felt that there 'needs to be an appropriate level of behaviour/independence apparent in any student accessing a 'mainstream' basic skills group'. The difficulty here is that there was no indication of what was meant by 'appropriate'. Another manager made the point that 'students with learning difficulties must be able to cope with being in a group with people as adults', implying that the behaviour and attitudes exhibited by people with learning difficulties may not always be acceptable to other adults. One respondent said that only the 'right' people should be included in basic skills groups. No indication of what was meant by 'right' was given but this probably referred to behaviour and attitudes.

One respondent viewed the idea of social acceptance as other people being educated to accept the student with a learning difficulty. A further respondent supported this view by stating that whilst some students with learning difficulties may 'lack the capacity to socially interact' we should 'look at how inclusion could increase their social skills as well'. She believed that others should accept students with learning difficulties as they were. A third respondent suggested that adults with learning difficulties develop socially when placed within a non-discrete basic skills group.

One respondent saw part of the function of education as to develop people's social skills. She regarded this as a priority particularly where it related to communication, making the following observation. 'I noticed actually when a group of students (with physical difficulties and some with learning difficulties) came down to the village (where she lives) for a fun run they all went back to the pub afterwards. They were sitting there and they didn't really say much to each other and I thought how nice it would be to devise games where the aim would be to communicate with one another. That to me would be a priority rather than doing individual work with them.' The statement highlights both the need for the development of social skills as part of education and one of the main issues in basic skills education, that of group work as opposed to individual programmes of work.

Two major views were therefore expressed with regard to social acceptability. There were those who believed that students with learning difficulties have to achieve a particular level of behaviour, a level not clearly specified, before being included in a basic skills group. Others believed that inclusion within a basic skills group would assist in the development of social skills.

<u>Balance in groups.</u>

The need for a balance in groups between those students with and without learning difficulties was raised. The concerns were about the number of students with learning difficulties who could be effectively included in a 'mainstream' basic skills group. One respondent suggested this should not be more than one third of the total number of students in the group as this sort of ratio was crucial for 'both sides to benefit'. Here the numbers had to do with effective learning and teaching in terms of the support available and it was felt that if those with learning difficulties exceeded a third of the group neither they, nor the other group members, would receive adequate support.

Another respondent believed that students with learning difficulties should constitute no more than a quarter of the group because she felt that some students with learning difficulties attended adult education classes for 'primarily social reasons and because they enjoy the activities'. Whilst she had no problems with this she believed if too many students attended for such reasons it could significantly change the nature of the group.

A third respondent suggested that careful consideration had to be given to the balance of a group, as too many students with learning difficulties may put other students off. She believed that such feelings were due to the way

people had been brought up but for some people there was still a stigma attached to having a learning difficulty and whilst this should not be the case it was sometimes still a problem.

Another respondent believed that groups of learners had to be balanced in terms of ability to work as a group to ensure at least some similar ability or common ground. Whilst willing to include those with learning difficulties she believed that each student had to be considered on an individual basis as did the group into which he/she was to be placed in order to ensure an effective match, thus enhancing the teaching and learning. The balance here was seen as the individual versus the whole group.

Safety issues.

One respondent mentioned issues regarding safety believing that there were increased needs for safety in rooms used by wheelchair users or people with learning difficulties. A particular issue was how to get help when staff were required to teach in a remote location, for example a village hall, where no mobile phone was available. This was considered a specific problem where all the students had learning difficulties and there was no volunteer support. The respondent felt it was an issue in any group because the Adult Education Service is responsible for students when they are attending classes.

<u>Raising the self esteem of students with learning difficulties.</u>

It was suggested that inclusion of those with learning difficulties in a basic skills group alongside students without learning difficulties raised their self esteem. One, a manager, made the following statement: 'Integration of students with learning difficulties is important both for them and for others in the group, raising awareness by the latter and raising self esteem of the former'. Integration was thus seen as benefiting both those with and without learning difficulties.

A similar point was made that inclusion within a basic skills group gave the student with learning difficulties 'a feeling of being equal and valued within themselves'. Once included and accepted within such a group a student with learning difficulties would feel 'these students are bright and I'm accepted' and that there was kudos in being a part of such a group.

Another respondent stated that it was important for those with learning difficulties to be included in groups with students without learning difficulties because all could learn from each other. She perceived such learning as essentially a two way process between those with and those without learning difficulties and believed that it was important for those with learning difficulties to have the opportunity to 'integrate with people who are regarded as "normal" in society'.

All these respondents believed that inclusion within a basic skills group would increase the self esteem of those adult students with learning difficulties and benefit those without learning difficulties.

Retention of discrete provision.

Many respondents, whilst generally in favour of inclusion, believed that discrete provision should be retained for some students. As indicated above, in the questionnaire responses fifteen people stated that they did not believe that all students with learning difficulties should be included in basic skills groups alongside students without known learning difficulties. Such a response implied that they were in favour of the retention of some discrete provision.

In follow up interviews respondents were mainly concerned with the protection of students with learning difficulties. One felt that it would not be possible to include all students in basic skills groups because it depended on the individual student and his/her needs. She felt that placement in non-discrete provision for some could be detrimental as it could affect self-confidence if the student with learning difficulties felt 'less adequate' than his/her peers. In some situations a student was better placed in discrete provision, for example where a student exhibited ritualistic behaviour, but that this was solely for the protection of the

student. The respondent stressed emphatically that overall she was in favour of inclusion but believed that there were some circumstances where discrete provision was more desirable.

Another respondent, whilst not opposed to inclusion, felt that each student had to be considered individually regarding placement within a group, a view supported by another respondent who also had questions about including some students because of their social behaviour. It was implied that for those students for whom inclusion in basic skills groups alongside students without learning difficulties was not a possibility then discrete provision should be retained. There was no suggestion that such people should not continue to be students.

One respondent saw discrete provision as a useful stepping stone because students with learning difficulties may benefit from initially spending some time in discrete provision. It was implied that they would move on to other groups.

Another respondent believed that non-discrete groups for some with learning difficulties 'may be an unusual and may be a frightening experience for some people'. She felt that this was because 'they (i.e. those with learning difficulties) are too cloistered and too protected'. She further

stated that whilst some discrete provision should therefore be retained she was opposed to such protection and cloistering believing that in reality it was to protect society rather than to protect those with learning difficulties.

Another respondent believed that there 'was something perverse' about placing students who may never acquire literacy skills in a group where others would achieve such skills. This links in with the notion of destroying confidence mentioned above.

All the above respondents were generally in favour of inclusion but believed that, for the reasons stated, there were those students for whom discrete provision was necessary, either as a short or long term solution.

Setting up students to fail or raising self esteem?

The concern here was that students with learning difficulties included in basic skills groups without adequate support may well 'fail'. It was not indicated in which ways they might 'fail' except that the respondent envisaged the students included would be following a similar programme to other members of the group and so presumably regarded it as 'keeping up' with others. The respondent was, however, also in favour of inclusion in that she viewed such inclusion as 'raising self esteem' of those with learning difficulties.

It was believed that a student placed in a group of more able students might feel inadequate but the converse of this, and the more positive aspect, was that they might also feel that there was 'kudos in being with a group like that', as stated above.

Protection.

Respondents referred to the fact that they believed that adult students with learning difficulties were 'over protected'. One believed that such protection led to a lack of autonomy. The other believed that it was allegedly to protect those with learning difficulties but was in fact to protect society.

The first respondent believed that an inherent danger of discrete provision was that it kept people in a 'narrow sort of box' whereas inclusion in a wider group encouraged them to make friends, gain respect and show respect to others. She further believed that the 'more an unusual person is amongst a group then s/he is going to be accepted and liked'. She also used an analogy to develop this view. She said 'some of my students look at me and tell me I'm old but once they get to know me then they stop viewing this old/young attitude. We're friends then. We respect each other. We've got things that we.....relate to'. She also explained the situation which she had encountered in Holland in the 1970s where people with learning

difficulties and disabilities were encouraged to be independent. She

believed that in Britain such independence was not aimed for but rather

'blanket care from cradle to grave is not giving enough autonomy and it's

not allowing people to be themselves' and to find out where their strengths

and weaknesses lie. She believed that this resulted in those with learning

difficulties becoming over reliant on others and as a result of this passive,

rather than active. She felt this attitude was apparent also in the learning

situation particularly within discrete provision.

Environment.

One respondent believed that it was important to learn in a situation where

privacy was possible given the potential mix of students within a learning

group, particularly where those with a learning difficulty were going to be

included and that such privacy would not be possible in all the learning

environments. He also linked this with resources, believing that sufficient

and appropriate space was the most important resource if students with

learning difficulties were going to be included effectively alongside

students without learning difficulties.

Another respondent also referred to the learning environment expressing

the concern that because many students with learning difficulties live a

very 'cloistered' existence that they may 'not be used to being in that

environment', that is an environment where they were required to learn alongside students without learning difficulties.

Resources.

The concern was that the resources should be effective but 'effective' was not defined. Staffing was mentioned here.

Deciding on a student's suitability for a particular group.

The view was expressed that it was important to place a student in a group appropriate to his/her level. As virtually all groups are of mixed ability it is difficult to establish what was meant here other than the distinction which exists between discrete and non-discrete provision.

One respondent was concerned by the apparently arbitrary placement of students. She stated 'I think the class should be looked at very carefully before another student is put into it because by inserting one student into a group, if you are having a group approach it can affect the whole.' The point seemed to apply to the placement of any student not just those with learning difficulties.

Agreement of other students to inclusion.

One respondent stated that she thought that all students in the group should be happy with the inclusion of a student/students with learning difficulties. She gave no indication of how this could be achieved nor how such agreement could be sought.

These then were the range of issues which emerged from the responses to question 5 on the questionnaire and from the follow up interviews and which the respondents regarded as key. These responses will now be analysed further in the following chapter.

Chapter 13.

Analysis of Findings From Staff Questionnaire.

Many expected points arose from the staff questionnaire, for example the emphasis on support. It is, however, on the unexpected issues that this analysis will principally focus.

The key factor to emerge was the overwhelming support for the inclusion of students with learning difficulties in groups alongside students without learning difficulties. All respondents, except the one who declined to answer, supported the inclusion of at least some such students within basic skills groups other than discrete provision. The findings further indicated that none of the respondents thought that all students with learning difficulties should be taught in completely segregated provision.

Support for inclusion was perhaps to be expected for two reasons. Firstly some of those interviewed were already involved in teaching adults with learning difficulties. In many cases this was from personal choice and indicated a positive attitude towards these adults but this does not imply specific training for this work as will be shown below. One respondent explained 'I ended up with the Social Services group because nobody else wanted to do it and I'd expressed an interest'. It is, however, worth noting that 'nobody else wanted to do it'. Secondly few people would admit to

being opposed to inclusion as it would not seem 'politically correct' to express such an opinion in the current climate either in society or in education which are both theoretically pro–inclusion. Not to favour such a policy implies that one is against a particular, minority section of society, a position which many people are unwilling to state openly even should they hold such a view.

Support for inclusion appears therefore to be very positive but there is here a deeper issue. Whilst support was expressed for inclusion for at least some of students with learning difficulties alongside students without learning difficulties, many fears surfaced in the responses to the question about the key issues for each respondent in having such students in the classroom. These were mainly around behaviour and classroom management. Every respondent believed adults with learning difficulties would in some way present problems, suggesting that the apparent positive response has to be reconsidered. The respondents in fact indicated both their expectations and perceptions of those with learning difficulties and these were not as positive as the initial responses suggested.

The expectation and perception in most instances was that those with learning difficulties presented with problems unlike those of students without learning difficulties. For example they would have behavioural

difficulties, they would seek attention, they would create extra work and they would need additional support. It was assumed, therefore, that they were in some way different from other adult students. Such a view is hard to justify. It is possible for any learner to present with these needs and having a learning difficulty does not mean that a person will automatically have problems. How much the difficulty is a 'problem' will depend on classroom management and teaching methodologies, to which some respondents referred. Additional support and adequate resources can alleviate these perceived problems for without them staff will feel more vulnerable and be less inclined to work positively towards inclusion. There are students for whom they will genuinely be required.

A main concern expressed by many respondents was that to include a person with a learning difficulty within a group would increase the workload for the tutor. Within the Basic Skills sector all students are working on individual learning programmes which means that most teaching is not done on a group basis, as in other curriculum areas. It is not entirely clear, therefore, why a student with a learning difficulty makes extra work as all that would be required was work suited to the student's specific needs and targets like other students in the group. If including a student with learning difficulties increases the workload for the tutor, it must be the case that in discrete provision where all the students have

learning difficulties but where there is still a wide range of ability also creates additional work. It would seem therefore that such a point reflects perceptions about inclusion and learning difficulties rather than being particularly significant of itself.

One issue mentioned by a number of respondents was that those students without learning difficulties would feel stigmatised by the presence of those with learning difficulties. Whilst it was agreed that this should not be the case, nevertheless it demonstrates the fact that others see those with learning difficulties as different. Not only are they seen as 'different' but some students without learning difficulties did not wish to be associated with them. This presents an issue for both managers and tutors as in a sensitive area such as Basic Skills it is important that all students feel comfortable within the group. The issue is how to include those with learning difficulties whilst at the same time retaining those who feel stigmatised when they are present. Such an attitude suggests not only a negative perception of those with learning difficulties but also a negative self-perception. Those with learning difficulties are seen as a threat as they remind those without such difficulties of their own needs. As one respondent suggested there is also the fear that those without learning difficulties are perceived by others as having a learning difficulty. 'Students without learning difficulties may see this as a reflection of their

own capabilities – depending on their personal embarrassment of having to attend a basic skills group'.

There is a further issue relating to the attitudes of students without learning difficulties. For funding to be maintained it is important to retain all students. If introducing a student with learning difficulties means that others will leave this presents management with the problem of retention which impacts on funding. For tutors there is a potential problem if some students overtly refuse to relate to a student with a learning difficulty. There is no easy solution to this but such views lead to the maintenance of discrete provision and a reluctance to include those with learning difficulties.

One unexpected issue concerned terminology. No clear understanding of the terms 'learning difficulty' and 'learning disability' was demonstrated, with some respondents simply using them interchangeably or to denote levels of difficulty. As many of the respondents worked with adults with learning difficulties this was quite surprising. It does, however, denote a more positive aspect in that most respondents who worked with groups of adults with learning difficulties perceived them simply as students and individuals and so were probably not too concerned with descriptors.

One unexpected use of terminology was that of the term 'handicap', a term which has not been used for some considerable time. More importantly it demonstrates a perception of adults with learning difficulties which reflects both negativity and a deficit model.

The responses suggest it is almost a requirement that a student with a learning difficulty has to be the 'perfect' student. There is an expectation that such a student will cause problems and ideally reassurance should be given that this will not happen. So it has to be ensured that the student is socially acceptable, behaves appropriately, does not demand attention and has support, as indicated by a number of the responses. All these may be desirable but no such requirement is made explicitly of other students. Further it is not clear what is implied by these requirements which at best are very subjective. For example many respondents mentioned the importance of social acceptability but this was not clarified. Neither was it specified acceptable to whom. It indicates a perception that those with learning difficulties behave in ways which are unacceptable. As few respondents were able to give examples of what was meant by 'social acceptability' it could be concluded that is an empty concept. It suggests that those with learning difficulties are simply regarded as different and unacceptable to most people. A similar point was indicated by one respondent who stated that the 'students with learning difficulties must be

the right people to be integrated into the group' but again no clarification was given. Conversely often the reason some adults with learning difficulties 'stand out' is because they are polite, helpful and tidy (Sutcliffe 1992), possibly due to over compensatory social training in order to ensure that they 'fit in' to society.

It would seem that a degree of conformity is expected from those with learning difficulties which is not applied to all students (Sutcliffe 1992). Every tutor has those students who present problems which stem from a number of causes but these are not frequently a learning difficulty. It seems therefore unreasonable to demand higher standards of behaviour and acceptability simply because an adult has a learning difficulty.

Many respondents agreed that those who work with adults with learning difficulties should be properly trained but only one respondent had had any formal training in this area and that was to work with children. All other respondents had entered this sphere of work by accident rather than by design as indicated above and this raises a number of questions. There is a view held that almost anyone is able to teach those of lower academic ability but this is demonstrably not the case. A similar argument used to be used in connection with teaching young children. It is essential that those who teach adults with learning difficulties should be well trained and

qualified for the work. At present there is little opportunity for this, as virtually no formal qualifications are available. Perhaps this indicates the way in which this aspect of education has been regarded and the lack of importance placed upon it.

Many respondents recognised the importance of the 'hidden curriculum' for those students with learning difficulties. As targets become more dominant within education there is a very real danger that the 'hidden curriculum' will be disregarded. For many students interaction which takes place within a group is crucial for building confidence and self esteem. It is hard to measure these aspects of learning and they do not feature in the Basic Skills Curricula (The Basic Skills Agency 2001). Many respondents believed that inclusion supported the 'hidden curriculum' particularly in terms of an increase in maturity for those with learning difficulties and in the development of 'acceptable' behaviour. Such benefits are becoming more difficult to prove and are increasingly undervalued in an age where the achievement of targets is regarded as the primary focus of educational activity.

Allied to this point some respondents indicated that some students with learning difficulties attend classes for largely social reasons or because they enjoy the activities which take place. These reasons were perceived as a

problem by some of the respondents because it was felt that such motivation affected the overall group and therefore potentially the learning. It is difficult to see why this should present a problem as in many adult education classes students attend because they enjoy both the company and the activities. In Basic Skills, however, the increasingly dominant vocational bias and the strong emphasis on outcomes means that all students have to reach specified targets. Those with other motivations and agendas present difficulties for the tutor who has to ensure that all students achieve specified outcomes. For those with learning difficulties social interaction and enjoyment of activities are entirely valid reasons for attending a class, not least because they enhance the adult status of the individual. A similar point is made by Ainscow who refers to:

> ....the tensions and dilemmas that have been created by what some people see as the contradictions between the Government's agendas for 'raising standards' and 'social inclusion' (Ainscow 2001:2).

Within the responses more emphasis was placed on students' perceptions, or the respondents' perceptions of these, than had been expected, particularly the view that some students left groups because of the inclusion of those with learning difficulties. It is impossible from the evidence to say how general this is. The question is whether the reason given by the tutor is accurate as virtually no student, as the respondents suggested, would give that as a reason for non-attendance. The question will always remain

virtually impossible to answer as most people will agree that the inclusion of those with learning difficulties is desirable, even if they do not actually believe this. The same is true in society where many will support the idea of those with learning difficulties being out in the community but do not actually want them in their immediate neighbourhood. Such a view is perhaps not surprising when one considers how those with learning difficulties have been regarded historically.

There was one further unexpected issue. Some respondents spoke of a key issue being that of a shared learning process and equal relationships. Sharing and equality was described as being between all learners in the group and between tutor and learners. Some respondents believed that those with and without learning difficulties could learn from each other, a crucial point as it moves the learning process into a new arena for those with learning difficulties. According to this view they are no longer the passive recipients as they have so often been portrayed but active participants who are able to assist in the learning of others. Within groups which espouse this philosophy such students are accorded an equal status with other members and tutors, both as learners and as adults.

Some respondents expressed a concern regarding the protection of students with learning difficulties. They feared that inclusion within non-discrete

provision may prove threatening to a student with a learning difficulty but this potential problem could be overcome by careful preparation for the student, the group and the tutor. There is a need to manage carefully all inclusion to ensure success and to avoid 'setting up students to fail' to which one respondent referred. Management of inclusion requires time and expertise to work productively for all concerned. If time and careful management are employed the difficulty mentioned above of students without learning difficulties being anxious about learning alongside those with learning difficulties may be overcome because everyone would be aware of what was taking place.

Overall the findings from the staff questionnaire and interviews indicate a dichotomy present in the thinking of those who teach adults with learning difficulties and basic skills groups. Ostensibly there was support for the inclusion of those with learning difficulties but this was tempered by concerns around the issues which such inclusion might involve. There was still a latent anxiety that those with learning difficulties were in some way different from other students and had the potential to cause problems for both the tutor and other learners. Such latent anxiety reflects a fear of those with learning difficulties evidenced in the literature.

The next chapter will pull together the strands from the literature, the

interviews with those with and without learning difficulties and the findings from the staff questionnaire and both draw some conclusions and make recommendations regarding the adult status of those with learning difficulties, society's perceptions of them, educational provision and the research process.

Chapter 14.
Conclusions and Recommendations.

In the Introduction to this thesis a number of questions were raised, all of which emerged from professional practice. They are summarised here:

- The primary question was that of what it means to be an adult and who decides this.

- The second question asked what is meant by 'Basic Skills'.

- The third question related to where those with learning difficulties should be educated.

- The fourth question was to consider which model of disability was used particularly when dealing with adults with learning difficulties in an educational setting.

- The final question was concerned with the nature of education for adults with learning difficulties particularly in relation to the curriculum.

Together these questions provided the framework for an investigation of adult status of those with learning difficulties.

The **primary question** - what it means to be an adult and who decides this.

In relation to the **primary question** the terms 'adult' and 'learning difficulty' were discussed and what makes a person an adult and what constitutes a learning difficulty were considered. The literature provided

evidence that adults described as having a learning difficulty are still viewed by many as 'eternal children' (Dee et al 2006, McConkey 1996, Sutcliffe 1990) rather than as adults (Bee 1998, Beverley 1997a, Freely 2001, Griffiths 1994, Gross 1996, Knowles 1990, Lovell 1979). In some cases they are regarded as 'not quite human' (Ramcharan et al 1996, Williams in Ashworth 2003). Indeed it was only in 1971 that the United Nations called for people with mental disability to be recognised as human beings (Fritzon and Kabue 2004).

The literature indicates how those with learning difficulties have been given labels with negative connotations (Carnaby 2002, Cole 1989, DfEE 2001, McConkey 1996, Stakes and Hornby 1997, Sutcliffe and Simons 1993) encouraging people to match the expectations of the label (Ramcharan et al 1997) and giving a negative image to society (Atkinson and Williams 1990, Mittler and Sinason 1996). Such labelling often defines the context in which those with learning difficulties are educated.

The literature also provides many examples of how those with learning difficulties were excluded from society (Humphries and Gordon 1992, Thomas 2003) ranging from the total exclusion enshrined in the eugenic movement (Black 2003, Kelves 1995), to the sterilisation movement (Black 2003), to incarceration of those with learning difficulties and finally

to the exclusion of those who now theoretically live within society but are not yet a part of that society. Whilst eugenics is perhaps now outmoded Anya (DfES 2001) suggests that exclusion is still practised in the twenty first century by testing foetuses and offering termination if the foetus is found to have a disability.

The literature provides evidence that exclusion from many aspects of society was due to fear of those with learning difficulties (Cole 1989). Reproduction was particularly feared because of the effects it would have on society, both weakening the nation and the burden it would place in terms of care, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Muscular Christianity (Humphries and Gordon 1992) was dominant. Evidence from the literature regarding epilepsy (Thomas 2003) shows a fear still present in society.

All these fears led society to restrict the lives of those with learning difficulties, who faced lack of employment, lack of choices and lack of independence (Brown and Smith 1992, Tilstone et al 1998), issues only now beginning to be addressed by 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001). Such restrictions impacted on the perceptions of those with learning difficulties and prevented them from assuming adult roles and status.

The literature further indicates that parents/carers were extremely reluctant to permit their adult children to take risks of any sort (Richardson and Ritchie 1989, Sutcliffe and Simons 1993), a point also evidenced by anecdote. Fear of risk taking is further exacerbated by the litigation culture which exists in modern society. Avoidance of risk hinders development towards adulthood and may also dictate the type of educational provision offered.

The perspective indicated by the literature should, however, be considered alongside the research findings. In relation to the **primary question** of what it means to be adult, adults with learning difficulties regarded themselves as adults and gave clear examples of how society has restricted their development by allowing them a very limited context in which to live out their lives. The data collected from the young people with learning difficulties indicated that they have aspirations for adult life and a desire to live in society in the same way as those without learning difficulties. In contrast to the picture presented in the literature they saw themselves as living independently with partners and children of their own. They hoped for employment but also acknowledged that this may present problems for them due to their inability to achieve qualifications. Alongside these expectations they were realistic about the opportunities open to them and in some cases feared isolation. This stands in contrast to the literature which

showed that society has limited expectations of adults with learning difficulties and actually disregards them. It is difficult to see how the hopes and aspirations of young people with learning difficulties are therefore achievable. If this is so then an increasingly vocational bias within education will not be helpful to these young people who in effect are being set up to fail.

The research evidence indicated that adults with learning difficulties have far more in common with adults without learning difficulties than differences and yet it is the differences which have been emphasised. When matched to Knowles' (1990) definition of adult it is mainly in the social domain that substantial differences appear, largely as a result of the restrictions which society has placed on those with learning difficulties, as a consequence of perceiving them as both 'different' and as recipients within, rather than as contributors to, society.

What is meant by 'Basic Skills'?.

With regard to the **second question** concerning Basic Skills and the curriculum, the literature shows that people with learning difficulties have frequently only been given access to a narrow curriculum, often focussing on societal perceptions of what was important for them (Sutcliffe 1990) and frequently with a vocational bias inappropriate to the needs of those who

may never be employed. A lack of entitlement to a broad based curriculum has potentially further restricted their life opportunities. The over emphasis on basic skills, still restricted to literacy and numeracy despite recommendations to broaden it, is an indicator of this (Sutcliffe 1990).

In relation to the **second question** the empirical research showed that literacy and numeracy, whilst important for some respondents, were not the predominant basic skills sought by adults with learning difficulties (Sutcliffe 1990) many of whom stated within the classroom situation that they wanted to work in manual employment such as washing up or collecting trolleys. A small minority of respondents did refer to basic skills in that they considered reading and writing as a marker of adulthood.

Where should those with learning difficulties should be educated?

The **third question** related to where those with learning difficulties should be educated. The literature shows that those with learning difficulties were usually educated separately both within school and in adult education. The disadvantages of this are illustrated by Anya (2001) and Ramcharan et al (1997), as are the advantages of inclusion in mainstream provision. However, the literature indicates the fear felt by people without learning difficulties of being regarded as 'like them' if they associate with those with learning difficulties (Sutcliffe 1994), a point also raised in the

empirical research. Such a view again impacts on the context of learning and may be a significant factor in the retention of discrete provision.

The empirical research indicated that despite adults with learning difficulties being given a negative image, evidence collected from the staff questionnaire suggested that most Basic Skills staff were willing to include students with learning difficulties alongside other students. The questionnaire did, however, reveal a 'fear factor' amongst staff with regard to including adults with learning difficulties alongside those without learning difficulties, best described as latent anxiety. They expressed concerns at a lack of adequate resources in terms of staffing, equipment, support staff and appropriate training. Other issues raised stemmed from these fundamental points which have not been, and are still not being, addressed by national government and therefore by managers within the unitary authority.

None of the adults or young people with learning difficulties commented on where they were educated. Perhaps this was for them the norm and would not therefore be commented upon. It would seem that it is only those without learning difficulties who possibly do not wish to work alongside those with such difficulties.

<u>The model of disability used particularly when dealing with adults with</u>
<u>learning difficulties in an educational setting.</u>

The **fourth question** related to the model of disability used. The literature

indicates the influence of both the medical and religious models. The

religious model of disability (Barrett 1967, Barton and Muddiman 2000,

Humphries and Gordon 1992, Pritchard 1963, Stakes and Hornby 1997) led

to people with disabilities being hidden away out of a sense of guilt or

shame. Anecdotal evidence suggested that these attitudes still persist. The

long dominant medical model of disability also led to conditions being

focused upon rather than persons, particularly in the sphere of education.

It may be argued that a learning difficulty is not a disability as such but a

social construct similar to the social model of disability which states that

physical or intellectual impairment 'only become disabling because of the

rejecting and oppressive response to such impairments by the non-disabled

world' (O'Kane and Goldbart 1996:89). Throughout the interviews with

both the young people and adults with learning difficulties no respondents

at any time alluded to being disabled but such a label was applied to them

by others. Such evidence is paralleled in teaching situations where virtually

all adults with learning difficulties describe themselves as non-disabled.

This enhances the view that to regard those with learning difficulties as

disabled possibly has more to do with societal perceptions than with

disability. As more and more demands are made in terms of achieving qualifications and the norm is regarded as achieving Level 2 this societal perception may deepen and widen.

The nature of education for adults with learning difficulties particularly in relation to the curriculum.

In relation to the **final question** regarding the nature of education the literature indicated that the curriculum, including Basic Skills, is vocationally biased and target driven rather than directed towards personal development.

In the empirical research some staff respondents believed that a broader curriculum would be beneficial and one emphasised the importance of personal autonomy. It is possible however that some may oppose this for a broader curriculum, especially one with practical aspects may be regarded as posing greater risks to those with learning difficulties.

The literature, parts of the empirical research and some anecdotal evidence indicate a predominantly negative view of the way in which those with learning difficulties were and are regarded by society, in particular the lack of value and status afforded to them. Clearly this then detracts from them

achieving an adult status which is recognised by the society in which they live.

Also indicated is a narrow and inappropriate curriculum and learning context and a restricted view of what is a basic skill in the context of learning difficulties. Such restrictions further inhibit the realisation of adult status.

Final observations.

Throughout the empirical research the research approaches chosen, in particular the pictures, allowed all respondents to participate irrespective of their level of cognitive ability. Such approaches permitted all respondents to express their opinions.

Despite the recommendations of 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001) those with learning difficulties may still remain marginalized unless there are attitudinal changes towards them in society. Recent legislation may help the situation as it will influence behaviour and therefore attitudes. Ways must be found for those with learning difficulties to participate in employment, to make choices and to be independent as other members of society. Such independence may always prove difficult for as both the literature and the research findings indicate there is the dilemma of how far

independence can be achieved when there is also a need to protect those with learning difficulties. Often those with learning difficulties are prevented from taking risks as is evident from the literature and a lack of opportunity to take some risks may also inhibit the move towards adulthood and lead to dependency. Many with learning difficulties will always need support but it is how this support is given both within and outside education which will ultimately influence their attainment or otherwise of adult status.

The Mental Capacity Act (Department of Health 2005) has become law. The provisions of the Act assume that persons, including those with learning difficulties, are capable of making decisions until they are proved not to be capable. Much of what has been discovered and presented in this thesis will have relevance in the light of this Act of Parliament.

Changes in attitude require people to look positively at those who have learning difficulties. Most students interviewed want to work either full or part time or in the voluntary sector or within the home. Some are beginning to live more independently and to choose with whom they live. The thesis suggests that such changes should be encouraged to enable each person to achieve adult status and play a full part in society and not be treated

differently or marginalized because of a perceived learning difficulty or disability.

Education, it is argued, has a large part to play in changing attitudes. Teachers influence both the language and concepts learned, thus enabling people to express themselves more adequately. Where the curriculum is less restricted and more broadly based verbal skills are more likely to be acquired. In Basic Skills the greater emphasis now placed on speaking, listening and communication should develop these skills and enable those adults with learning difficulties to advocate more effectively for themselves in the future.

One unexpected finding which would warrant further study was that some young people and adults with learning difficulties did not comprehend the term 'adult' knowing only the term 'grown up' or 'man' or 'lady/woman'. This lack of understanding occurred both in the research interviews and in work in the classroom. The reasons for this were unclear and it was not within the remit of the current study to research this.

The reasons why adult status has not been afforded to those with learning difficulties in the past have been explored and the thesis has indicated both how those with learning difficulties regard themselves as adults and also

the hopes of young people with learning difficulties as they move towards adulthood. The role of education, in particular Basic Skills education has been examined, as have the views of those who teach in this sector. For all to achieve adult status changes in attitudes both by government and by society are required. Unless such change takes place the adult status of those with learning difficulties will not be recognised. Their educational opportunities will continue to be restricted. As a result they will always be 'eternal children' and able to say as one respondent pointed out 'nothing has changed for us since we were children'.

Recommendations.

The Conclusions section has pointed to some recommendations. The need for changes in societal attitudes towards adults with learning difficulties to enable them to achieve full adult status has been indicated. Within the context of this thesis it is only possible to highlight the importance of this huge subject. Such change requires people at all levels of society to engage with the problem from government to researchers and practitioners. Researchers and practitioners have a key role in that they are able to highlight specific issues and bring them to the attention of a wider audience.

The issues contained in the preceding arguments are extremely complex,

involving the problems which arise for people with a low level of cognitive ability and the perceptions and fears others have of such people and the ways in which this low cognitive ability may manifest itself. Such fear of those with learning difficulties must be overcome, particularly when it arises more from perceptions than from reality. The data indicates that even those who teach adults with learning difficulties were unsure of the meanings of the terminology used to describe them. This, taken alongside the importance of adequate training for staff indicated in the staff questionnaire suggests that greater priority should be given to training.

The Adult Education Service could hold training events about the nature of learning difficulties for staff, students, those involved in the care sector, training organisations and employers and a wider audience, presented and packaged in a way that people would find interesting and enjoyable. The training could be linked to the widespread interest in courses such as Deaf Awareness, Sign Language and Lip Reading.

The importance of changes in legislation regarding those with learning difficulties must be cascaded to society as a whole. More needs to be done to ensure ongoing, adequately funded education for those with learning difficulties in a variety of curricula areas. The issue of funding is again a priority in 2006 where emphasis is placed on younger people achieving

Level 2 rather than on continuing education for those of a lower cognitive ability.

Fear of those with learning difficulties was indicated both in the literature and, to a lesser extent, in the empirical research. One way of overcoming a fear of those with learning difficulties is through education particularly through an affirmation of the importance of government funded training initiatives linked to 'Access for All' and the 'Pre-Entry Curriculum Framework' which allow participants to explore the nature of students' difficulties and to seek to find ways of addressing them. It would also be useful if staff other than those involved in the delivery of basic skills could also be included in this training. Within the unitary authority in which the research was conducted awareness is being raised through training linked to the Disability Discrimination Act, including the recent amendments to this Act and the work linked to Disability Equality Duties (2006).

Within Basic Skills and other curriculum areas 'taster' courses should be provided for adults with learning difficulties, to demonstrate the types of activities and learning available and to enable them to make informed choices about joining classes.

Employers should be made aware that many adults with learning difficulties could contribute towards the economy if suitable ways were found for them to work. Initially this may need to be in sheltered workshops but this should be regarded as a first step otherwise those with learning difficulties will again remain segregated from the wider community. Such sheltered employment already operates on a limited scale within the unitary authority within which the research was conducted but without clear progression routes and often therefore remains at the level of work experience.

On a national scale the way the economy works should be reviewed so that real jobs could be found for those with learning difficulties. Related to this a way must be found to negotiate the benefit trap, so that those who are able to work but still require considerable additional support are not financially disadvantaged by being employed. Work could be done at a local level in partnership with Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) with employers, training schemes and Valuing People Boards to raise awareness both of the needs of those with learning difficulties and the skills they possess.

Adequate support is required for parents and carers to enable them to work through and acknowledge the changed status of their adult child. One way

of approaching this could be through an emphasis on life 'markers' and encouraging parents and carers to acknowledge the importance to their adult children of attendance at events marking rites of passage as many of them may not experience these for themselves, for example finding a partner or having children.

If support is given in the fields of education, employment and family life this will contribute significantly to attitudinal change within society. Allowing people to experience change will in turn modify their attitudes and lead to a change of attitude within society.

People without learning difficulties should be encouraged to meet those with learning difficulties, preferably on a one to one basis (Sutcliffe 1994), to realise that those with learning difficulties are not fundamentally different from other people. Such meetings, perhaps within a social or educational context would in part help to overcome the fears referred to above.

Many of the above are initiatives which could be undertaken locally providing that there is the will to move forward towards a more inclusive society, a society which is endorsed by the Government in 'Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century'. It is

also important that people are made aware of the significant recommendations of 'Valuing People' by furthering links which already exist in the unitary authority in which the research took place between education providers and the Valuing People Board.

One strong recommendation is that this research be replicated in other geographical locations and a comparison made with the results indicated in this study. For reasons of time and accessibility this research was inevitably a limited case study, intending to provide a snapshot of perceptions and attitudes and therefore inevitably gives a limited picture. Further research of this nature would perhaps elicit more information about how those with learning difficulties regard themselves and their adult status. A broader picture would emerge which could influence the design of educational provision for this student group.

A strength of this research was that the approaches used allowed all to participate regardless of cognitive ability. In any further research it would be useful to consider the addition of pictures of those with learning difficulties and disabilities within the picture sorting exercise and to consider what additional information, if any, this produced.

Further research to find out the extent to which those with learning difficulties are unfamiliar with common terms such as 'adult' would be useful, as would research to establish what measures and strategies are in place within Basic Skills provision to enable those with learning difficulties to extend their vocabulary and understanding of everyday issues.

It would also be useful to conduct longtitudinal research to try to establish precisely why the aspirations of the young people with learning difficulties are not realised when they are adults. In the context of the current research it is possible that this was a particular issue within the geographical area covered. This, however, seems unlikely as similar observations are made in 'Valuing People' (Department of Health 2001). A study which tracked young people from Year 10 in school for a period of five to ten years may be able to give reasons for this. It may also be useful to research factors which emerge in the transition from children to adult services for young people with learning difficulties.

For practitioners it is hoped that many of the issues raised in this thesis will encourage them to consider their own situations and whether any of these findings have resonance for them. The points made may also help them to understand a little more of the situation for many adults with learning

difficulties. In particular it is hoped that practitioners may be encouraged to discuss some of the points with their adult learners.

Hopefully the research findings, the analysis of the literature and the comments made above will provide a way forward to raise awareness about those with learning difficulties. Such awareness raising may help to enable adults with learning difficulties to have their adult status fully recognised and to have a curriculum which more adequately meets their needs.

There are many avenues for future research which have only been alluded to briefly within this thesis. It would be possible and fruitful to explore these areas further, for example the effect of a lack of significant life markers, the full impact of being unemployed possibly for life, the effects of not being able to choose where and with whom one lives and not having full control over daily activities could all be considered and the impact these have for adult status. In fact many of the points made by both the young people and the adults with learning difficulties would warrant further research. Throughout the thesis indications have been given of areas which would warrant further research but were outside the remit of the current study.

It must, however, be reiterated that this thesis merely provides a snapshot of a particular geographical area at a particular time. Its aim was simply to describe what was discovered against the background of the literature. The claims it makes are however valid in that it only seeks to describe the perceptions of those with learning difficulties of their adult status and what it means to them to be an adult.

It is important to celebrate diversity and to ensure that all people are included in our society. In the context of the findings of the research it is worth noting some points made in the Government White Paper: Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century'

> People with learning disabilities can lead full and rewarding lives as many already do. But others find themselves pushed to the margins of our society. And almost all encounter prejudice, bullying, insensitive treatment and discrimination at some time in their lives.

> Such prejudice and discrimination – no less hurtful for often being unintentional – has a very damaging impact. It leads to your world becoming smaller, opportunities more limited, a withdrawal from wider society so time is spent only with family, carers or other people with learning disabilities.

> ….We have to change this situation if we are to achieve our goal of a modern society in which everyone is valued and has their chance to play their full part. (Department of Health 2001:1)

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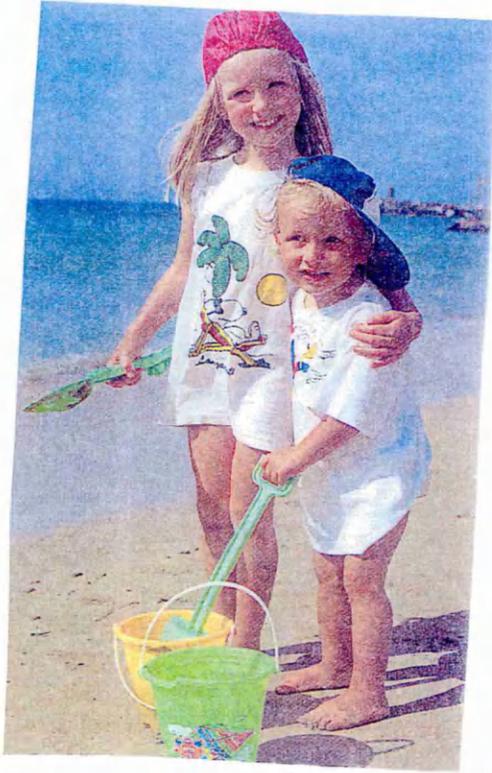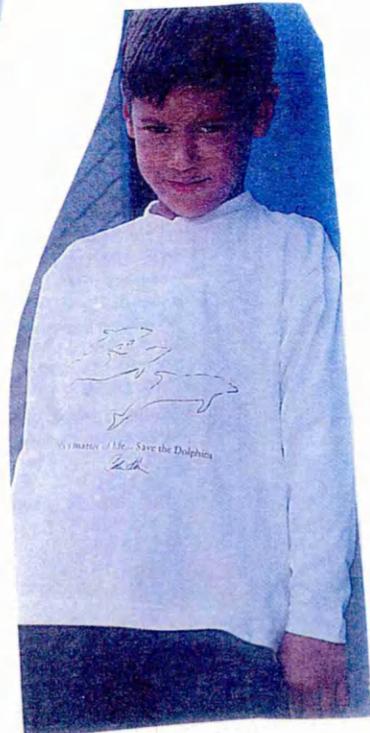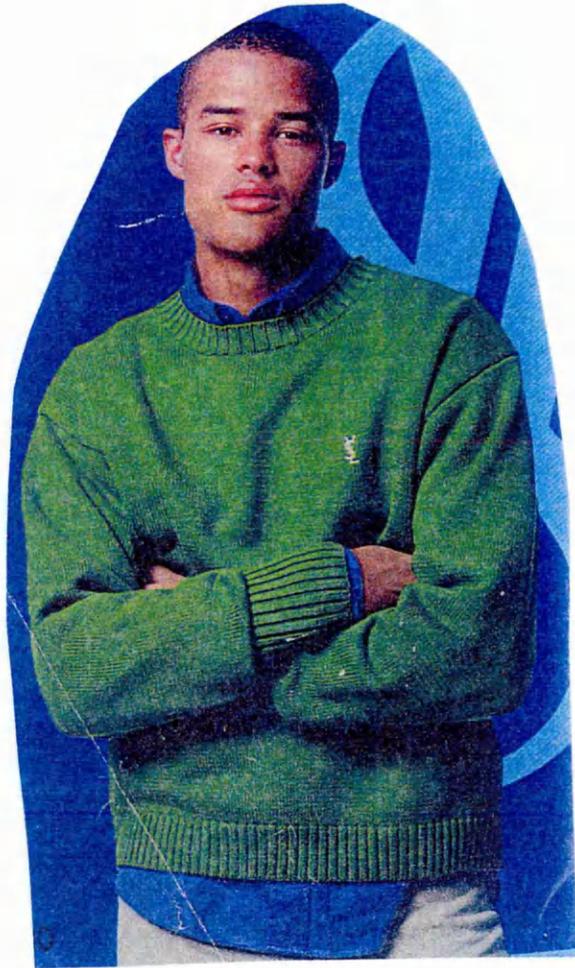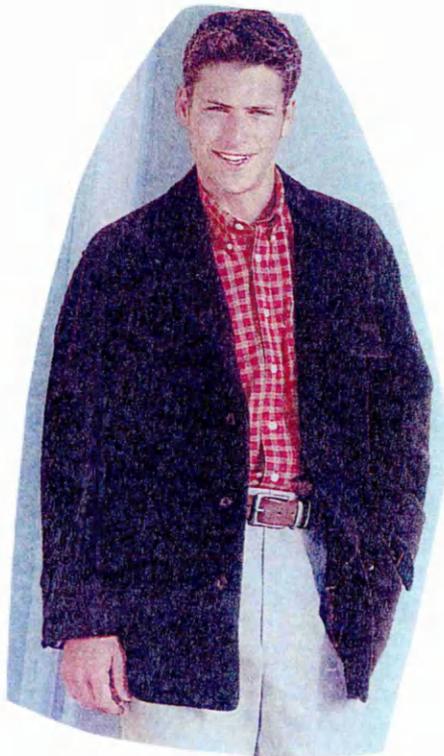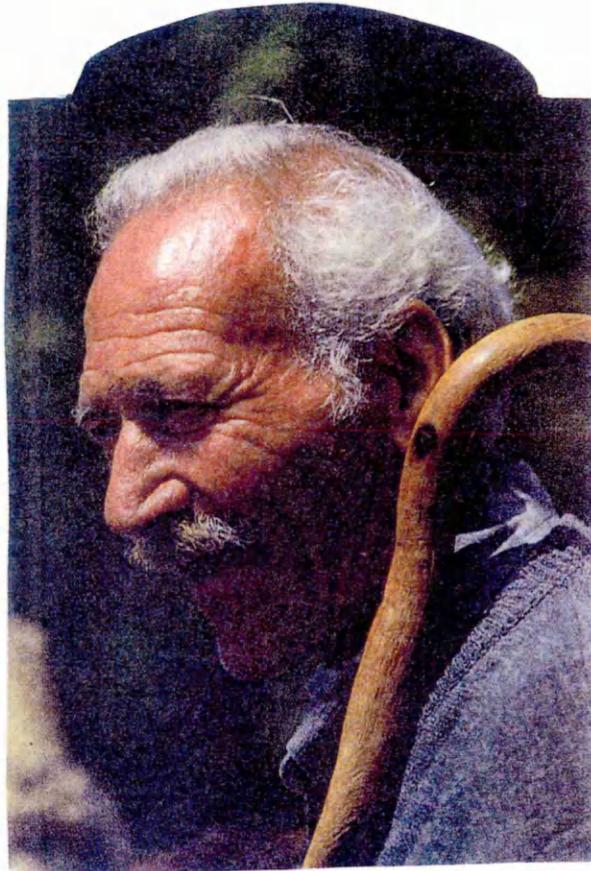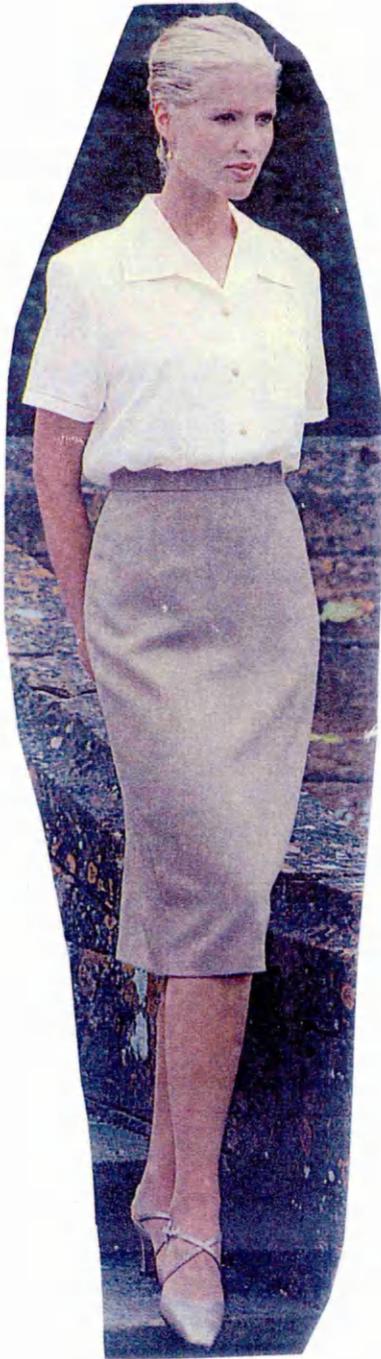
Appendix 2

Reports of interviews – People with learning difficulties.

School A.

Year 11 Six boys and one girl were interviewed in two sub groups, one of four boys and the other of two boys and one girl.

Legal factors.

The group of four boys stressed that adults were old and that they were older than children. There was some disagreement as to the age they would become adults with one respondent definitely believing it to be at eighteen years of age whilst another stated twenty years of age. When asked what they would be able to do at eighteen, once it had been agreed that this was the age at which one became an adult, they stated that they could drink in a pub and they would be able to 'buy booze'. Driving a car was cited as an adult activity but one respondent said a car could be driven by someone who was sixteen and maintained this even when told it was actually seventeen.

Biological factors.

The only reference made to biological factors relating to adulthood was when asked how they saw life after college one respondent stated he would get a girlfriend and settle down.

<u>Social factors.</u>

A key point made was the importance of college and work. The respondents believed that children were able to learn more than adults. Whilst they did not expand on this it was possible they felt that this was because children/young people attend school unlike adults. They believed it would be reasonable to be an adult and that when they left school they might get a job or at least some interviews. One respondent saw college attendance as a progression route after leaving school. Others agreed that they would also attend one of two local colleges. When asked if they felt it would be difficult to get a job, all agreed that it would. The group members were asked what sort of job each would like to do. One replied that he would like to be a DJ and another that he would like to enter the army or, failing that, the police force. One respondent suggested that the boy who wanted to enter the army only wanted to shoot people but this was denied by the boy who wanted to enter the army who said, 'No. (I want to go into the army) To look after our country'. When asked whether he saw any difficulties with getting into the army or the police force he believed that the police force would be difficult because 'you have to work hard and I need to be a bit taller'. The other two boys did not state a preference for employment. Working (i.e. paid employment) was seen to be an adult activity. They agreed that although adults worked and they did not, nevertheless in Year 11 they experienced the world of work through work

experience. Whilst employment was seen as predominantly an adult activity they also participated through the work experience organised for them by the school. Asked how they saw life after college one replied that then he would get a girlfriend and settle down. At this stage no further comments were made about employment.

It was stated that adults get money although it was unclear from what source they believed adults obtained money.

When asked the supplementary question of what they thought it would be like to be an adult they responded that they felt adults 'got out more'. They further stated that adults could drink in a pub and added that, as adults, they would be able to 'buy booze'. Group members further stated that they could buy some videos. When asked what sort of videos one respondent said 'porno videos'. Driving a car was also cited as an adult activity.

Psychological factors.

Little reference was made to psychological factors of adulthood with the exception of 'settling down with a girlfriend'. Such a remark would indicate a measure of independence.

The second Year 11 group consisted of two boys and one girl. When asked the question what makes adults different from children the following responses were given.

Legal factors.

There was much discussion regarding the National Lottery and the purchase of scratchcards. The legal ages given for taking part in these activities ranged from fifteen to eighteen. Whilst there was very little agreement on the age for taking part in the National Lottery and for the purchase of scratchcards, both were viewed as either a teenage or adult activity in which children could not participate.

Voting was referred to by the respondents but the responses regarding this were somewhat confusing. A respondent pointed out that adults can vote and the group agreed that only people over eighteen were entitled to vote. However, one member of the group then said s/he had already voted, helped by mum. No further explanation was given but possibly s/he had accompanied her/his mother to vote. The respondents stated that adults, unlike children, could go to the pub and that a person must be eighteen to go into a pub (to buy alcohol) but that they themselves were able to enter a pub now, at fifteen or sixteen years of age, provided that they were accompanied by an adult.

Biological factors.

The group observed that boys' voices change but took the point no further. The group then suggested that adults get 'wider'. It was unclear whether this referred to the fact that as people get older some increase in weight or linked to the next point that adults 'get pregnant'. The point regarding

pregnancy was not developed further. They moved on to say that they believed that teenagers 'were prettier' than adults. Again this seemed to be linked to the next point made by a female which was that 'adults don't get fellers but teenagers do'.

Further clarification was sought and the respondent said she believed that teenage females have more choice of men than adult women. She argued that teenage girls go for 'a good looking chap and that....attractive lads'. She stated that adult women sometimes attracted a good looking man but 'not as many like' which seemed to indicate that she believed that teenage females were more likely to be attractive to men than older women. Questioned further she appeared to be saying that adult women only attract the boring men. It was believed that men were particularly attracted by tall, blonde, good looking girls and this was related to a male respondent's girlfriend. Asked whether they felt children had girlfriends and boyfriends in the same way as they, or adults, did the respondents believed that they did but they started off as friends and then let it 'build up'. They described 'building up' as that initially children don't like each other and then they start to be friends. They also indicated that until children reach sixteen years of age (the age of the respondents) they did not really understand about girlfriends and boyfriends but once they reached sixteen they did. When asked if there was anything else which made adults different from children they said that teenagers have 'little kids'. They added that this was

true of adults also but 'teenagers have them when they want them'. Clarification of this statement was sought but the speaker was not entirely clear about the point being made except that it was just when they wanted one (a child) and it was up to the teenage girl and her boyfriend if they wanted 'a kid'. The discussion then became more general about whether any respondents intended having children and about people they knew with children.

Social factors.

The first response was that adults, unlike children, do not go to school, a statement repeated later in the interview.

When asked what they thought life would be like after they left school they replied that they would move on to either college or training. One person wanted to train in caring and one wanted to study car mechanics but stated if they (presumably the college staff) would not teach him car mechanics they could teach him football. The point was not entirely clear but he may have been suggesting that car mechanics might prove too difficult for him or referring back to a discussion about football from earlier in the interview. The length of college courses was discussed, with one respondent stating 'You can quit college. My brother was there for a week and he didn't like it and he didn't have to go'. (This perhaps indicates a realisation that after school one has a choice about continuing in education.)

After college group members believed one could get a job but whereas the female in the group thought obtaining a job would be easy one of the males did not. He stated 'I think there isn't much in jobs going now'. One also believed that there was no point in going to college because on a training scheme a person was paid. He added that those who '…. go to college get a grant. I get my money straight in my hand', that is trainees are paid directly. Those who favoured attendance at college said a grant was quite a large sum of money but the one who favoured training still argued that training was better paid. The emphasis placed on money in adult life here was similar to the point made by the other Year 11 group. The respondent who wished to be a trainee hoped to train to be a welder mainly because a family member was a trained welder.

One respondent stated that 'Kids are a pain'. Clarification was sought and it emerged that the respondent was making the point that s/he believed that young children were difficult. Probably this was because s/he was much nearer to adulthood and therefore regarded younger people as a nuisance but the reasons for this were not completely apparent.

Playing football was discussed at some length because the respondents felt that teenagers and children played football unlike older adults. It was agreed that some adults played football but only younger adults. They also felt that teenagers had a favourite football team but when it was suggested to them that adults also have a favourite team this was agreed. One person

suggested that adults as old as a man in one of the pictures did not play football. Football was therefore regarded as an activity mainly for children, teenagers and younger adults, a remark indicating an awareness of life span development.

The group was asked what they thought life would be like for them in ten years' time. The girl replied that she would be 'an old granny' but one of the boys pointed out that she would actually be twenty six. They hoped that they would have jobs. One believed that s/he would have put on weight. There were no further responses.

The group believed that children differed from adults in terms of their attitudes. When questioned further respondents suggested that whilst adults can shout at children, children are not allowed to shout back. The statement was clarified by the fact that if children and teenagers shout back at adults 'they (i.e. children and teenagers) get a right old smack'.

Psychological factors.

Respondents in this group saw independence and self direction as features of adulthood by their references to work, to forming relationships and the ability to 'quit college' if they did not like it.

<u>Year 10</u>. The group comprised four boys.

<u>Legal factors</u>.

When asked what things adults could do which they could not the immediate response was that adults could go to the pub. All agreed that a person had to be eighteen years of age to drink (alcohol).

Some respondents indicated that adults could smoke but this was disputed by one respondent who pointed out that they (the group members) could also smoke. Whilst no specific legal age was given for smoking, most saw this as an adult activity.

Playing the Lottery and gambling were regarded by the group as a mark of adulthood. As with the Year 11 group there was discussion about the age a person had to be to participate in the Lottery and to buy scratchcards. Year 10 believed the age varied depending on where the cards were purchased, with one respondent adamantly stating that fifteen was the correct age because 'that's what it is down my local Spar shop.' No agreement was reached on the legal age for participation in gambling.

When asked at what age they believed people became adults, twenty, seventeen or eighteen, were suggested. One person then said it was eighteen and when asked why he replied 'Because my brother Andrew is eighteen and he's an adult, he is.' It was argued that some people grow up faster than others and another respondent suggested nineteen to twenty was the age at which one became an adult because his/her cousin would be

nineteen that year and would then be an adult. One respondent volunteered seventeen as the age but could not say why.

Biological factors.

The group stated that size makes adults different from children. The suggestion was that height made people adults and that 'they're (adults) bigger than us'.

The respondents observed that adults 'start puberty'. Puberty here was probably regarded as a mark of adulthood and not that the group believed puberty started when a person was an adult rather than a teenager. The correct terminology was, however, used.

Social factors.

The respondents felt that adults, unlike children, could get jobs although one argued that it was not only adults who could get jobs because teenagers could also obtain jobs such as paper rounds and gardening. One boy said that he was already being paid for doing notes for teachers and for 'stamping and letters'. He did not enlarge on this and it was not clear what point was being made other than he believed that he was doing some work for which he received payment. When asked about what types of work group members would like to do a respondent replied that he would like to be a to be a gardener. He was asked if he thought that a job as a gardener was a possibility for him but did not respond. When asked what jobs they would choose if they could do anything at all, one responded with

woodwork. Another respondent would have liked to do bricklaying but felt that this was quite a hard job, although another boy thought it was easy. The respondent who wished to be a bricklayer explained that he was doing bricklaying at college (a group from the school attend the local college to take part in vocational courses) and he liked it. He found it difficult because 'you have to get them (the bricks) straight and that'. When asked if he thought he could get a job as a bricklayer when he left school he said he would try. Later in the interview one respondent returned to the discussion about jobs saying that when he left school he would be a rally driver and race cars like his dad. When asked if he thought that would be possible he replied that he had got his own rally car and that he already went driving with his dad. One stated that as an adult he would go to kit car shows and rallies. Whether this followed on from the conversation about rally driving or was what he would do was difficult to tell. He then added that he would be a car manufacturer (at least this seemed to be the response but the boy concerned had a speech difficulty and was quite difficult to fully understand).

The group was asked how they saw their life as adults and initially this question was directed at group members individually. One suggested that another group member would spend his time 'slapping his kids' but then going out more to friends' houses and staying over and sleeping over were suggested. A second

respondent felt that as an adult it would be possible to go to a Rave

and a third suggested going to youth clubs until another person

pointed out that he would be too big for youth clubs. The

respondents then explain that they would 'have kids', a point which is also

a biological and psychological factor, and smack them when they needed

smacking. One said as an adult he would go to kit car shows and rallies.

This group seemed very aware of their rights because I had assured them

that no individual would be identified. During the interview I had

addressed one boy by name and when the tape recorder was switched off

they pointed this out. I explained that the tape was only used to ensure that

all the information obtained was kept and that names would not be

mentioned. Though not related to adult status specifically, it was, however,

a valid point.

Year 9. The group comprised three boys and one girl. The respondents

were asked both what they believed made a person an adult and what things

they thought adults could do that children could not.

Legal factors.

In common with other year groups they stated that adults are allowed to

smoke. One respondent, however, believed that people of their age (i.e. 14)

could already both smoke and drink.

The group was asked at what age people became adults. There was a heated discussion about whether it was at nineteen or twenty years of age. One respondent stated that at nineteen people were still teenagers and were 'coming up to adult'. Finally they agreed it must be twenty although one then suggested eighteen. They were told it was eighteen.

It was agreed by the respondents that adults were permitted to drive a car with most believing that a person had to be eighteen to drive, although one said it was seventeen. A second respondent said he could already drive so we clarified that a person had to be seventeen to drive on the road.

Biological factors.

One respondent stated that adults can have intercourse and whilst this point was made seriously by the speaker others in the group giggled. A further biological factor referred to by one respondent was that 'ladies have to wear tampax whereas children cannot'. This statement was disputed with another respondent suggesting that children do wear tampax. The age at which children wore tampax was discussed and it was agreed that young children, pre-puberty, did not wear tampax. No comments about relationships were made.

Social factors.

The group suggested that adults could be teachers, a point reiterated later in the interview, and that adults went out to work. They were asked what sorts of things they thought adults did at work. The only suggestions were that

adults went to college and they were able to drive a car. When asked what they thought it would be like to be an adult one replied that it would be exciting. When this person was asked what job he would like to do like to do the reply was a fitness instructor. When asked what he would have to do to achieve this the response was 'Be fit of course'. When asked if he would have to do anything else he responded with 'I'd have to work the equipments'. Beyond this he did not seem clear about what was required to become a fitness instructor. Another person replied that he would like to work with his mum and dad who made caravan furniture. Another stated he would like to go into the army. Someone suggested he could also join the air force but he was adamant that he wanted to join the army. When asked why the army he replied 'I'm interested in soldiers and the army and guns and all that'. When asked whether he thought he would get into the army he did not know. The girls seemed unsure of choice of jobs although one suggested she might work in a café. She said she had already worked in a café but this was unclear. Another boy said he wanted to be a soldier because he wanted 'to shoot with guns'. This respondent was aware he would have to pass exams to get into the army and that such exams were difficult but he could possibly pass them.

Most of the discussion in this group was with the boys. The two girls were extremely shy and quiet, only responding to direct questions. Both girls had Down's Syndrome and often did not seem to understand the questions, or possibly the way they were formulated, despite attempts both by myself and the boys to put questions in a variety of ways to assist their comprehension.

Psychological factors.

The notions of independence and self direction were implicit in many of the responses, for example in the awareness shown regarding the choice of employment.

Year 8 Two boys and one girl were interviewed. Initially they were asked what makes adults different from children.

Legal factors.

As with other groups, the respondents believed that driving cars was a mark of adulthood but no specific age was given for this.

Biological factors.

The first point made was that adults are bigger. Later this point was stressed by one respondent who suggested that pupils in Years 10 and 11 were 'adults like' because 'they're tall'. Reference was also made to the fact that adults get married.

Social factors.

Attendance at college was perceived as an adult activity, emphasised by saying 'big people go to college' and also 'like Year 10 and Year 11'. When asked whether they felt Year 10 and year 11 were adults the response was 'Yes. Well Year 10 and Year 11, they're not quite adults but they're getting to adults. They're not married yet. But they're adults like, they're tall'. One respondent stated that s/he would attend college and members of this group believed that attendance at college was compulsory in contrast to Year 11 pupils who realised that one could 'quit college'.

When asked if there was anything else which made adults different from children they said that adults spend some time working and repeated that adults 'go to work'. The respondents expressed fairly clear preferences about employment. One respondent replied that he would like to work in a garage or a chip shop. It was pointed out that his father owns a chip shop. He also said he would like to be a Formula One driver. A second respondent wanted to be a baker and a third stated that he would like to have a bike tyre shop. The person for whom one option was to work in chip shop then said 'Well you need an education to work in a chip shop, so you'd have to go to college, get a degree and then work all your life'. The point being made here was not entirely clear except the person appeared to feel that working in a chip shop was important. He was further aware that

to be a Formula One driver he would need to be educated and learn to drive and that such driving required care to avoid crashing. One suggested farming as a possibility but there was no absolute certainty about the types of employment the group members really wanted and whether or not they would be able to achieve those mentioned. They also believed that an adult could be a policeman but this point was not enlarged upon.

The respondents specified that adults have to get up early in the morning but one felt that this did not only apply to adults because they, as children, had to get up early for school. After much discussion this was agreed. The group believed that adults had to take children and toddlers to school or a toddlers' group. A definite distinction was made between children and toddlers.

In response to what they thought life would be like for them when they were adults, one respondent immediately suggested that it would be 'cool'. A second respondent said that he did not want to go to college but would prefer to stay at home or maybe get a job. The only other points added by the group was that adults do not go out much and that old people lose their teeth and cannot walk very well.

Psychological factors.

The respondents were aware of self direction in terms of choosing a job. They perceived that adults had responsibilities towards children.

<u>Year 7</u>. Year 7 pupils were interviewed in two groups, the first of which consisted of one boy and two girls. They were asked to suggest any things they thought adults could do which they, as children, could not. The discussion predominantly centred around work and relationships.

<u>Legal factors</u>.

The respondents suggested that adults can go to the pub and can smoke. One stated that s/he was looking forward to being grown up because 'I can go to the pub and get drunk'.

<u>Biological factors</u>.

The respondents suggested that when people are adults they can have babies, although stressed that she did not want babies. Another respondent explained that this girl 'liked them when they (babies) are out but not when they are inside'. It would appear therefore that the girl was apprehensive of pregnancy, rather than that she disliked children. They were also aware that adults could adopt children. One person stated that adults were allowed to get married but the group was generally opposed to the idea of marriage.

<u>Social factors</u>.

The respondents felt that adults, unlike them, were allowed to swear. They also stated that adults went to work but one felt this was unfair as they worked at school. They said that adults could work in a pencil factory (the group had recently visited such a factory on their residential visit). One

respondent replied that adults go to work and that he wanted to be a policeman because 'he liked arresting people and stopping and getting into fights'. His experience of the police relied heavily on watching 'The Bill'. One respondent wished to be a hairdresser because she liked cutting hair. Another wanted to be a nurse and thought this might be possible if s/he attended college and got the right education.

The respondents believed it would be 'weird' to be an adult because it would be different from when they were younger. They also believed it would be confusing because they would then be able to do things which they were not able to do when they were younger. When asked why they thought this would be confusing they said because they would wonder why they had not been allowed to do some of the things when they were younger. No other reasons were given.

<u>Psychological factors</u>.

There was an awareness of being able to choose a job as an adult, even if their choice might be somewhat restricted.

The second Year 7 group comprised two girls and one boy. They were asked what they thought made adults and children different.

Legal factors.

The respondents stated that adults could watch films intended for fifteen and eighteen year olds but they, as children, could not. There was some disagreement with one respondent stating that s/he was allowed to watch such films at home.

The respondents suggested that adults differed from children because they have cars. No specific age was given for driving, other than it was an adult activity. One said that adults had aeroplanes but this seemed to be linked to the fact that this pupil had recently been to Paris. The group knew that adults could go into pubs and children could not but no attempt was made to define the age for this.

Biological factors.

The respondents stated that adults were able to get married and divorced. No other comments were made about relationships other than a brief discussion about boyfriends and girlfriends. One of the male respondents stated he would like to be a godfather or a granddad and then said not a granddad but an uncle to someone.

Social factors.

The respondents stated that children attend school whereas adults have left school. They thought adults stayed at home and played with their children but they also went to work and some adults returned to school to help the

little children. One respondent stated that as an adult he would get a job. In response to a question regarding the type of job he replied 'where my dad works' (at the duck factory). Another person replied that s/he would go out and get a job, preferably as a gardener. One then suggested being a headmaster or a teacher but asked if this was possible said 'No not really because you have to take exams first'. Another suggested joining the army because 'in the army you visit different countries and would see what is different from…..(his home town)'. His home town was described as boring because there was nothing to do and no friends around much.

The respondents were aware that teenagers go to college but no other reference was made to college.

This group, unlike the other groups, alluded to those things which children are able to do which adults are not by stating that adults cannot run and they cannot fight. I suggested that some adults can run, like footballers, and this seemed to be accepted.

One respondent suggested one difference between adults and children was that adults get paid whereas they, as children, only received pocket money. This was disputed within the group because at least one respondent had to earn pocket money. Another agreed that work such as cleaning a car, housework, gardening and helping with pets had to undertaken in order to obtain pocket money.

The group believed that adults were able to stay up later than children but conceded that on occasions children stayed up late as well.

When asked what they thought it would be like to be an adult the responses given included being able to get a house, being able to leave the family, although one did not want to leave his/her family, and getting a job.

Psychological factors.

The references made to employment, leaving the family and getting a house indicate that the respondents had some idea of choice, independence and self direction which are attributes of adulthood.

School B.

Older Seniors.   Years 10 and 11.

Two girls and one boy were interviewed and asked what made adults and children different. Replies were given in fairly concrete terms.

Legal factors.

Adults were perceived as being able to go to the pub but no specific age was given.

Biological factors.

It was stated that ladies wear bras and do their hair.

Social factors.

A female respondent stated that her mum 'goes to work in chippie'. It was stated that adults do not attend school. When asked what they would do when they left school one girl replied that she would have holidays and in particular go to Ireland (where she has relatives) and the seaside. The boy did not know what he wanted to do. One girl was aware of the possibility of attending college but there was no awareness of other options or of life after school.

One girl added that when she was big she would go to the pub and disco and do Irish dancing. Another added that grown ups go to the pub and they go out on their own.

Psychological factors.

The point was made that adults go out on their own and that they get washed on their own and wear make-up.

Younger Seniors. Years 7, 8 and 9. Four boys and two girls were interviewed. They were asked what makes adults different from children.

Legal factors.

Whilst no specific legal ages were identified, it was perceived that a person had to be an adult in order to work.

Biological factors.

The only factor stated was that adults were bigger. No reference was made to physical development or relationships.

Social factors.

The respondents stated that adults work at home. One respondent knew her mother works in a café. They stated that children work at school. Other roles ascribed to adults were shopping and getting the dinner. A second respondent was asked what made adults and children different and this pupil stated that men and ladies ('adult' or 'grown up' were not known) go to work. It was further stated that this pupil's mother met him off the bus, cooked tea and made the beds. When asked what he would like to do when he was grown up, the reply was very definite – 'I would like to be a lorry driver like my dad.' A third respondent was asked what he would do when he was grown up. Again the terms 'adult' or 'grown up' were not known so the teacher asked the pupil what would he do when he 'was a big man like daddy' (teacher's suggested wording). This was the only way the teacher felt he could relate to being an adult. He stated that he would work at Butlins. The question was written down and read as this was the only way the pupil, who was on the autistic spectrum, would communicate. Another respondent mentioned clothes and size as factors which made adults different from children. The fifth respondent was asked how adults were different from children and replied that adults dress differently and their

clothes are different. The teacher asked the pupil if she knew what her parents would be doing in an attempt to establish if there was any awareness of what adults do but the only response was that her mother would be watching television and washing up. The sixth respondent, when asked in what ways adults were different from children, pointed to a picture of a man and said he was a man because he looked nice.

<u>Psychological factors</u>.

There were no specific comments relating to psychological factors, other than some awareness of being able to choose a job.

One particular respondent appeared totally unaware of what adults do but the teacher suggested that this may have been an inability to communicate his thoughts.

<u>Adults with learning difficulties</u>.

<u>Group 1</u>. The group comprised two women and four men and was asked what made adults different from children.

<u>Legal factors</u>.

The respondents were aware that people have to be eighteen to drink although one admitted to 'having a beer when I was seventeen'. When asked at what age people become adults the ages of thirteen, seventeen,

eighteen and twenty one were suggested but no respondent was certain about this.

Biological factors.

The first response was that whereas children are little and are growing up, adults are already grown up. The fact that children are small was reiterated and linked to children attending school.

Social factors.

The respondents stated that children and adults dress differently, that is they wear different types of clothes. The group was asked what things they thought adults could do which children could not do. The initial response was that adults smoke and that whilst some children smoke they should not do so. It was suggested that adults can go to the pub and drink (alcohol) whereas children are not allowed to do this.

The respondents stated that adults have passes (a reference to the bus passes for free travel which many members of this group have and are available to persons over eighteen years of age).

Psychological factors.

It was stated that children have to stay with their parents, implying perhaps that adults do not have to do this. The respondents also said that whereas children have to be seen across the road, often by a lollipop lady, adults can cross the road on their own. Adults, it was felt, know how to use fires and cookers but children have to be careful with these items. They also pointed

out that children have to go shopping with their parents but adults are able to go shopping on their own.

Children should not talk to strangers (by implication this did not apply to adults).

Group 2. Four men were interviewed. They struggled with the question of what things they thought made adults and children different. It was re-phrased and they were asked to think about the sorts of places adults and children go to and the things they do. The group understood this more concrete question

Legal factors.

Whilst all the members of this group saw themselves as adults, they did not know at what age a person became an adult.

Biological factors.

Adults were regarded as bigger than children. They said adults can have babies but children cannot.

Social factors.

The respondents stated that children go to school (implying that adults do not). They said that adults, unlike children can smoke and go to the pub. whereas children cannot do these things.

<u>Psychological factors</u>.

They stated that children cannot go out but they have to 'stay in places' and that children are not allowed to cross the road (on their own) because they might get run over but adults are allowed to cross the road (on their own). One respondent who keeps birds said that adults look after pets and so there was a sense in which adults were seen as taking on responsibility.

As with the picture sorting exercise, two students who wished to take part in the research but were not present for interviews were interviewed individually. Both were female. The points they made were very brief and so it was not possible to report comments under headings.

Student A. The respondent was only able to state that children are not grown up

Student B. The respondent, like student A was asked what the differences were between adults and children. She only stated that adults work and children do not.

<u>Group 3</u>. Two men and five women were interviewed. The group was asked what they thought were the differences between children and adults and how they saw themselves.

<u>Legal factors</u>.

The respondents indicated various ages for becoming an adult, with thirteen, fourteen or sixteen being specifically mentioned.

<u>Biological factors</u>.

The group stated that children are smaller than adults.

<u>Social factors</u>.

The respondents said that children have to go to school but adults do not. They also felt that adults are able to go to different places when compared with children, with pubs being given as an example. It was stated that children go into a crèche. The respondents suggested that adults could buy drinks but did not seem to be indicating alcoholic drinks, as opposed to other types of drinks, so the point being made was not entirely clear.

<u>Psychological factors</u>.

When asked how they saw themselves four respondents immediately said that they were adults whereas two were initially unsure but then agreed that they were adults. One person felt that he was 'in between being a child and an adult' (this respondent was thirty plus) but after thinking further stated that he was an adult.

Children were seen as not able to go shopping on their own. In order to explore the differences between adults and children further the group was asked what differences there were for them as adults compared with when they were children. The response to this question was that there were no

differences for them as adults. They then reverted to considering children saying they had to be protected from accidents and gave examples of this as having to have a stair gate, not 'leaving the iron flex' (presumably not leaving the iron flex hanging), and having to put a guard round the fire. They stated again that there were not many differences between children and adults and the only additional suggestions offered were that whilst children play adults do not. They stated that children have to go to the park with their mums and that 'you have to watch the roads for children' (that is children have to be helped to cross the road).

Group 4.

This group consisted of four men. As the group had found it difficult to say how they had selected adults and children in the sorting exercise, in this part of the interview they were first asked how they saw children.

Legal factors.

The respondents believed that a person becomes an adult at twenty one or twenty two.

Biological factors.

The respondents stated that children are short (suggesting height as a determining factor for adulthood).

<u>Social factors</u>.

The group felt that there are some things that adults can do that children cannot do but no attempt was made to define these things. It was thought that adults can be teachers and that they can help in schools. One respondent suggested that children sometimes use 'naughty words' but others pointed out that adults also do this. They stated that adults are able to read and write but that they (the respondents) could not do that when they were small. (Adults with learning difficulties frequently state that adults should be able to read and write.)

The respondents said that children go to school and that children are sometimes happy and sometimes not but the point was not entirely clear.

<u>Psychological factors</u>.

Independence in adulthood was referred to by the fact that one respondent thought adults were able to go to the seaside on a bus on their own whereas children have to have 'their mums and dads for safety'. It was felt that children have to be watched so that they are kept safe. They added that children 'fall over' presumably implying that adults did not as it was seen as a factor which distinguished children from adults. They stated that adults can dress themselves whereas children cannot. It was felt that adults 'help ' in the house. They believed that children learned from their brothers and sisters and that adults can explain to children things which they, the

children, do not understand. It was felt that parents teach their children the difference between right and wrong. Returning to safety issues the respondents stated that children cannot go to dangerous places and that children can get lost in big places.

Group 5. The group comprised three men and one woman. This group had not found any particular difficulty with the picture sorting exercise but found the interview questions more problematic.

Legal factors.

There was general agreement that a person became an adult at thirty five but no respondent could offer any suggestions about what a person could do at thirty five which they were not permitted to do before.

Biological factors.

The only reference made was that some adults have grandchildren. The respondent who mentioned grandchildren was a single lady without children who said she had grandchildren.

Social factors.

The only comments were that adults are able to go swimming and shopping and that they do not have to attend school.

<u>Psychological factors</u>.

One respondent suggested that children are not allowed to cross the road, implying that adults are permitted to do this. The only other comment was that adults are able to get dressed independently.

what is meant by 'adult' or in what way the term is being used before it is possible to say whether or not something is adult appropriate. Perhaps the most important point is whether adulthood is, or should be, the same for everyone within a given culture. If it is not, then presumably it is arguable that within education the curriculum, the learning materials and teaching strategies, should be varied in order to make them appropriate to people's needs. By this is not implied merely a simplified version of the same curriculum for those with learning difficulties, nor indeed a deficit model where attempts are made merely to plug obvious gaps in knowledge.

There is also the question of how adult status is conferred. Do people become adults at a given chronological point or is adulthood arrived at when people are able to take on defined roles and responsibilities as Knowles (1990) suggests and who decides when a person has reached that status? Is it the person him/herself who says that s/he is an adult or does society or family or someone else confer that status? These are questions to which I shall return later.

One further issue was raised as a result of my previous research. There was apparently no clear policy on why some students should be in discrete provision and others of the same, or less, academic ability should not. It seemed to be decided on whether the student was 'normal' i.e. had not been