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Summary Survey on the Administrative Support Staff in Adult Education in Great Britain

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The research project targeted administrative staff working within adult learning establishments. In order to find out what is common practice in this area a questionnaire was sent to fifteen managers of adult learning organisations within Staffordshire.

Some of the most important findings of the survey are as follows:

Job descriptions vary according to the organisation and there is no generic job description. The description usually focuses on the administrative role rather than support for adult learners. The level of qualification of the target group is usually level three or below. They will have specific qualifications in IT and possibly vocational qualifications such as first aid or health and safety qualifications. In larger organisations corporate training is available which cuts across all areas of employment

All members of the target group have phone contact with adult learners, 50% have email contact and 80% deal with personal enquiries. These are crucial tasks which require highly developed skills in communication and experience of guidance.

There has not been any specific training identified for this group although some organisations have recognised training needs and encouraged people to undertake guidance qualifications. Examples of the types of courses available for administrators are listed below:

- Presentation skills
- Dealing with aggression and anger management
- Assertiveness
- Time Management
- Cultural awareness
- Initial advice and guidance

When training is provided it is usually internal (70%) and only 10% undertook externally accredited courses.

However it must be emphasised that these are not specifically for administrators working with adult learners but will be available across large organisations to all staff. Smaller organisations such as those within the voluntary sector have very limited access to training and will depend on the priorities and financial situation of the organisations. Larger

organisations which are likely to work towards attainment of the nationally recognised quality award “Investors in people” are more likely to offer training and support for administrators.

Organisations identified their main training needs in terms of disability awareness (50%), Health and Safety (50%), and the need to have more knowledge about Adult and Community Learning (40%). Only 20% identified Initial Advice and Guidance training as important. Given that administrators play a crucial role in supporting adult learning this appears to be an omission.

A problem was identified about the availability of time for administrators to undertake training and the absence of cover for their work if they did so.

Finally there does not appear to be recognition of the contribution that administrators make to supporting adult learners and neither is this identified in job descriptions. Progression routes for administrators within this field do not exist apart from administrative progression which is not specific to adult learners. Consequently there is a need for specific training which should be accredited to support professional development and progression.