
21 May 1999

CIRCULAR

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**Extending the Widening
Participation Factor for
1999-2000**

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

To

Principals of colleges
Heads of external institutions
Heads of higher education
institutions receiving Council funds
Chief education officers

Circular type

Consultation

Summary

Consults on proposals to extend the widening participation factor to additional specific groups of students, to those taking basic skills courses and to students receiving European social fund funding

Responses are requested by
25 June 1999

Reference number: 99/22

Enquiries:
Regional directors
Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>

99/22

Extending the Widening Participation Factor for 1999-2000

Introduction

1 This circular consults on proposals to extend the widening participation factor in the funding arrangements for 1999-2000 to additional specific groups of students and to those taking basic skills courses. Responses are requested by 25 June 1999.

Background

2 The Council introduced a widening participation factor into the funding methodology for 1998-99 following the recommendations of the report of the widening participation committee, *Learning Works*. The factor uses the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) index of local deprivation as a proxy measure for educational disadvantage. Students living in the 15% most deprived local authority wards attract additional funding. The place that a student lives is defined according to their home postcode. The average uplift factor is 6%. In addition, a widening participation uplift of 9% may be claimed for people living in supported accommodation, irrespective of their postcode. These arrangements are set out in full in paragraphs 134 to 145 of Circular 99/01, *Tariff 1999-2000. Technical Discussion Document 17*, published in January 1998, describes how widening participation is recorded in the individualised student record (ISR).

3 In the December 1998 letter of guidance to the Council the secretary of state identified widening participation as one of the three key objectives for the sector on the basis of the comprehensive spending review settlement. The secretary of state set out the government's expectation that a growing proportion of additional adult students would be drawn from those groups whose background had disadvantaged them. In 1999-2000 he expects 60% of additional adult students would come from these groups, rising to 65% in 2000-01. The secretary of state expressed the hope that the Council would continue to refine the postcode-based method of identifying students and invited the Council to move towards funding the factor by 2001-02 on the basis

of an average 10% premium for each relevant student.

4 In paragraphs 37 to 41 of Circular 99/07, *Funding Guidance 1999-2000*, the Council set out its intention to consult on a proposal to extend, in 2000-01, the coverage of the widening participation element of the funding methodology, to include groups where there is clear evidence of low participation in learning but where the students are not necessarily identified by the current widening participation method.

5 At the conference for principals held on 17 February 1999, the Council announced that, subject to consultation, it proposed to bring forward the introduction of the proposed new arrangements to 1999-2000. The acceleration of the new arrangements will enable all institutions to make a contribution to the widening participation agenda in their areas and to build up a baseline incorporating a higher widening participation factor at institution level on which future growth funding will be based. The additional groups to be covered by the new arrangements are consistent with the target groups for the non-schedule 2 pilot projects (see Circular 99/16).

6 It is also considered timely to consult on ideas to extend the widening participation principle to embrace students in areas designated for special measures such as the European social fund (ESF) support, and education action zones.

7 This circular deals with the proposals for introduction in 1999-2000. As stated in paragraph 40 of Circular 99/07, *Funding Guidance 1999-2000*, the Council will consult later in the year on the proposal to replace the current widening participation method for 16-19 year olds with a system for determining eligibility based on previous educational achievement. This would be implemented from 2000-01. The Council will also publish further analysis of how widening participation works in rural areas.

Proposed Changes to the Funding Arrangements for 1999-2000

Specific groups

8 There is clear research evidence that, for some groups of people, participation and achievement in learning of all kinds is low. While some of these

students will live in areas which qualify for the widening participation uplift, others will not. It is proposed that from 1999-2000, local provision for students from the following groups will qualify for a widening participation uplift:

- the homeless
- those living in hostels and residential centres
- those with mental health problems
- travellers
- those whose statutory education has been interrupted, for example by pregnancy or parenthood
- those in or who have recently left care
- asylum-seekers
- refugees.

9 It is proposed to give an uplift of 6% for such students in 1999-2000, the average for students from deprived areas in 1997-98.

10 Institutions would need to retain audit evidence to support claims for funding uplift for students from these groups. The Council recognises that some students in these groups may have concerns about sharing information. This should be balanced with the requirement for funding claims to be properly supported by evidence. Institutions are asked to exercise their judgement in deciding how much information to retain. In cases of doubt, institutions should consult their regional office.

11 The Council proposes to review the practices adopted by institutions in 1999-2000 and issue further guidance for 2000-01. If necessary, the Council will provide interim guidance during 1999-2000, based on the cases raised.

12 The Council will review the evidence held by institutions which make considerable use of the new categories.

Basic Skills Students

13 For adult students, a clear indication of lack of prior educational achievement is the need to acquire basic skills. Although the relatively high costs of basic skills work are already recognised in the tariff, there is a strong case for including such students as eligible for widening participation uplift. It is likely that the qualifying courses would principally be taken from programme area 10 (basic education).

14 It is proposed that the level of uplift for these students should be 6%.

15 Table 1 shows the distribution of courses contained in programme area 10 on version 12.1 of the qualifications database.

Table 1. Distribution of courses in programme area 10

| <i>Subprogramme area</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Number of qualifications</i> |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| 10A | Numeracy | 238 |
| 10B | ESOL | 400 |
| 10C | Literacy | 410 |
| 10E | Access to FE | 78 |
| 10F | Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities | 180 |
| 100 | Other | 250 |
| | Not assigned | 466 |
| | Total | 2,022 |

16 It is proposed that the qualifications in subprogramme areas 10A, 10B, 10C and 10F will be eligible for a widening participation uplift as basic skills courses. Conversely, courses in subprogramme areas 10E and 100 will not be eligible for extra units. Institutions are invited to comment on this proposal.

17 Table 1 shows that there are 466 qualifications within programme area 10 which have not been assigned to a specific subprogramme area. These will need to be examined individually to determine whether or not they may be classed as basic skills.

18 Institutions are asked to comment on the proposal to define basic skills, for the purposes of widening participation, using certain subprogramme areas of programme area 10 as set out in paragraph 16. They are also asked to indicate which of the 250 other and 466 unassigned qualifications they judge should be included. To assist institutions, a file of these qualifications has been put on the Council's website (<http://www.fefc.ac.uk>).

19 Institutions are also asked to indicate any qualifications outside programme area 10 which they judge should be included in basic skills, for the purposes of widening participation.

Students from Designated Areas

20 The government and the European Union have from time to time designated areas which are eligible to receive additional support and funding. Examples are European social fund (ESF) objective areas and single regeneration budget (SRB) areas. Additionally the government may target particular groups through, for example, the social exclusion unit.

21 It is proposed that all students whose provision is part-funded by the ESF are regarded as widening participation students. The proposed uplift is 6%.

22 The Council would welcome suggestions for other ways of including students from designated areas in widening participation. Proposals should focus on identifying specific students who are benefited directly from government or European Union initiatives in designated areas.

23 Applying a widening participation uplift to all students from a relatively large area such as the ESF objective 1 area of Liverpool, would go against the recommendations of the widening participation committee to link funding to the characteristics of the student.

Students Qualifying for more than one Uplift Factor

24 Some students will qualify for a widening participation funding uplift for two or even three reasons. Nearly half of basic skills students are already eligible for an uplift. In these circumstances, the institution may claim the highest uplift factor.

Exemption from Franchising Discount

25 Circular 99/09, *Franchising, Fees and Related Matters*, proposes in paragraph 17 that funding units for franchised provision should be discounted using a multiplier of 0.67, subject to certain exemptions.

26 As proposed in Circular 99/09, a student would be exempt from the funding discount if they were eligible for a widening participation uplift, irrespective of the reason. Accordingly, basic skills students and students who meet the criteria in this circular would be exempt.

Final Allocation for Funding 1999-2000

27 Final funding allocations will be amended by the Council to reflect the uplift for basic skills based on the institution's latest ISR return. It is not possible to reflect the uplift for specific groups identified in paragraph 8 since the Council does not have any information on which to base an amendment. Nor will it be possible to anticipate the level of ESF funding that colleges may attract in 2000, but the Council will review the position with individual colleges if the amount of ESF funding they attract for 2000 is greater than anticipated. Institutions would be able to count all widening participation students towards the achievement of the widening participation growth in their 1999-2000 allocation.

Consultation

28 Views are invited on the following issues:

- is the concept supported of attaching a widening participation uplift to specific groups of students where there is clear evidence of low participation and achievement?
- are the groups identified in paragraph 8 appropriate?
- are there other groups which can be clearly identified where there is similar evidence of low participation and achievement which should also qualify for an uplift?
- is the concept supported of attaching a widening participation uplift to students undertaking basic skills work?
- are the qualifying programmes specified in paragraph 15 appropriate?
- is the concept supported of extending widening participation funding to government or European Union designated areas?
- are there circumstances in which an uplift of more than 6%, the average for students from deprived areas in 1997-98, could be justified? Institutions should provide evidence to support proposals for a factor higher than 6%.

Responses to Consultation

29 Responses to consultation on the attached form at the annex to this circular should be returned to Angela Jones at the Council's Coventry office by 25 June 1999.

David Melville

Consultation

(Reference Circular 99/22)

Please photocopy and complete this form and return it to Angela Jones at the Council's Coventry office by 25 June 1999.

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

Institution name

Contact (please print)

Signature of principal/head of institution

Telephone no.

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Telephone 01203 863000
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| Proposal | <i>(please tick)</i> | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-----------|
| | Yes | No |

Specific groups

Is the concept supported of attaching a widening participation uplift to specific groups of students where there is clear evidence of low participation and achievement (paragraph 8)? Yes No

Are the groups identified in paragraph 8 appropriate? Yes No

Are there other groups which can be clearly identified where there is similar evidence of low participation and achievement which should also qualify for an uplift? If so, please tick the 'yes' box and provide details on a separate sheet. Yes No

Basic skills students

Is the concept supported of attaching a widening participation uplift to students undertaking basic skills work (paragraph 13)? Yes No

Are the qualifying programmes specified in paragraph 16 appropriate? Yes No

Designated areas

Is the concept supported of extending widening participation to students benefiting directly from additional funding in government or European Union designated areas? Please indicate any designated areas that you would propose for inclusion and how students benefiting directly from funding in these areas might be identified. Yes No

Are there circumstances in which an uplift of more than 6%, the average for students from deprived areas, could be justified? If so, please tick the 'yes' box and provide details on a separate sheet. Institutions are asked to provide evidence to support proposals for a factor higher than 6%. Yes No

Other comments

(Continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

Basic skills qualifications not in programme area 10

| <i>Qualification database reference code</i> | <i>Name</i> | <i>Reason for proposed inclusion</i> |
|--|-------------|--------------------------------------|
|--|-------------|--------------------------------------|

Please note that comments on programme area 10 qualifications can be made using the Council website (<http://www.fefc.ac.uk>)

