

Accessing Funding in Further Education:

**A college perspective
on Access Funds and
student financial
support**

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful for the assistance and encouragement received from the FEFC throughout this project. In particular, the input of Tony Holloway and Caroline Kempner proved invaluable. We are also grateful to Martin Camillin at the DfEE for his support. Annette Zera, Principal of Tower Hamlets College provided both valuable background information and detailed feedback on the questionnaire.

Above all else, our thanks go to the 110 respondents who gave of their time and without whom this survey would not have been possible.

Contents

	Page
1 INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study	2
1.2.1 Student financial support in Further Education	2
1.2.2 Access Funds	3
1.3 Research aims and objectives	4
1.4 Research methods	4
1.5 Outline of report	4
2 ACCESS FUNDS	
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 How much Access Funds do colleges receive?	5
2.3 How are Access Funds organised in colleges?	6
2.3.1 Who in the college has overall responsibility for Access Funds?	6
2.3.2 What are the application procedures?	6
2.4 How are Access Funds distributed and to whom?	7
2.4.1 How much is spent on Access Funds and on what?	7
2.4.2 How many students receive Access Funds and for what?	9
2.4.3 How much money do students get and for what?	11
2.4.4 Which students get Access Funds and how is this decided?	12
2.4.5 How is it decided which students get Access Funds and the amount to award?	15
2.4.6 What payment methods are used by colleges?	17
2.4.7 Do colleges experience any difficulties in distributing Access Funds?	18
2.5 What is the impact of Access Funds on students?	20
2.5.1 Do colleges monitor the impact of Access Funds on student behaviour?	20
2.5.2 What are the benefits of Access Funds for students?	21

2.6	What are the costs and benefits of Access Funds to colleges?	23
	2.6.1 What are the costs of Access Funds to colleges?	23
	2.6.2 What are the benefits of Access Funds to colleges?	24
	2.6.3 What are the limitations of Access Funds to colleges?	24
2.7	What of the future?	26
2.8	Summary	27
3	OTHER INTERNAL SOURCES OF STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT	
3.1	Introduction	31
3.2	What types of financial support do colleges provide?	32
3.3	How much is spent on student support?	32
3.4	How many students receive financial support and from what source?	34
3.5	How much do students receive from each source?	36
3.6	Which students get student support and what are the eligibility criteria?	37
	3.6.1 Which students get student support?	37
	3.6.2 What eligibility criteria are used?	38
3.7	What sort of help is provided and how do students use their student support?	40
	3.7.1 Hardship Funds	40
	3.7.2 Travel	44
	3.7.3 Child care	45
	3.7.4 Other college help	45
3.8	Who pays for financial support?	46
3.9	How will the role of internal sources change in the future?	47
3.10	Summary	48
4	EXTERNAL SOURCES OF STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT	
4.1	Introduction	51
4.2	What types of financial support do students receive?	51
4.3	How much is received by students?	52
4.4	How many students receive financial support?	53
4.5	How much do students receive from each source?	54

4.6	Which students get support and what are the eligibility criteria?	55
4.6.1	Which students get student support?	55
4.6.2	What eligibility criteria are used?	56
4.7	What sort of help is provided and how do students use their student support?	57
4.7.1	Charities and trusts	57
4.7.2	Local Education Authorities	58
4.7.3	European Social Fund	58
4.8	How will the role of external sources change in the future?	58
4.9	Summary	59
5	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	
5.1	Introduction	61
5.2	Access Funds	61
5.2.1	The scale of Access Funds and how they are used	61
5.2.2	Application procedures	62
5.2.3	Targeting Access Funds	63
5.2.4	The impact of Access Funds and monitoring	63
5.2.5	The limitations of Access Funds	64
5.3	Other sources of financial support for students	64
5.3.1	The sources of financial support	64
5.3.2	The scale of financial support	64
5.3.3	The adequacy of financial support	65
5.3.4	Which students received support	65
5.3.5	Type of help provided	66
5.4	The way forward	66
6	TECHNICAL ANNEX	
6.1	Sample and fieldwork details	69
6.2	Questionnaire	69
6.3	Analytic variables	70
6.4	Imputation of missing values for expenditure and student numbers data	71

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This report is based on research, conducted by the Policy Studies Institute and South Bank University, commissioned by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). It is part of a larger study on Access Funds and student income and expenditure. The larger study consisted of:

- case studies of further education colleges to learn about how they organised and distributed Access Funds and other sources of student financial support;
- a telephone survey of 110 further education institutions to quantify how they organised and distributed Access Funds and other sources of student financial support; and
- face to face interviews with about 1,000 students in further education to gather information on their income and expenditure, including the costs of participation.

This document reports on the case studies of colleges and the survey of colleges. Another report entitled *'The Hardship of Learning: Students' income and expenditure and their impact on participation in Further Education'* focuses on students' financial circumstances.

Although the two surveys clearly had a different focus, there was overlap in some of the data collected, namely that on the amount of financial help received by students and the number of recipients. However, there were a number of significant differences between the two surveys which meant that the resultant data were not directly comparable. These included:

- the fact that the data were sought from two sides of the same coin, namely students and the colleges — the former should have been able to provide more accurate details on their income;
- some of the sources of help asked about in the student survey were not asked about in the college survey as it was felt colleges would simply not know the details: for example, income from employers, training allowances, Career Development Loans and tax relief;
- even for the sources of help asked about, some colleges were unable to provide the required information, gaps which were filled by imputation: this in itself will have led to some error in the data;
- help received from Access Funds and Hardship Funds was combined in the student survey as interviewees found it difficult to separate the two; and
- the data in the student survey have been averaged out on the basis of the whole student body, the data in this report have been averaged on the basis of those that received help.

The above comments should not lead to the conclusion that the data provided by colleges on the amount and extent of help are erroneous, rather they need to be treated with caution. Some of the analyses, for example on the share of help from the various sources (rather than the absolute amounts) should be reliable.

1.2 Background to the Study

1.2.1 Student financial support in Further Education

Currently there is no comprehensive or universal system of financial support for students in further education, unlike full-time students in higher education. Indeed, access to financial support for further education students has been described as a 'lottery'. Their key sources of support include:

- Access Funds
- College hardship funds
- Local Authority discretionary grants
- Fee remission
- Government training programmes
- European Social Fund
- Training allowances
- Career Development Loans
- Tax concessions
- Social security benefits
- Employers
- Charities.

A recent review of these different sources of support¹ showed how funds are not distributed in accordance to notions of equity or need. The receipt of funds is often discretionary, influenced by the decisions and policies of a range of gatekeepers. Consequently students in financial need, facing similar circumstances, are treated very differently depending on their age, where they live or what and where they study. Rarely can the financial support be guaranteed or relied upon.

Similarly, the Kennedy Report² (p 65) concluded that:

- *Financial and practical support for learners is crucial for widening participation...*
- *The present system is neither fair nor transparent: a root and branch review is needed...*
- *Some changes must be made immediately...*

Kennedy's ideas were strongly supported by the Fryer Report³. Fryer advocated that part-time students should get similar types of financial support to full time students and that new types of support may be required as participation widened.

In November 1997 the Teaching and Higher Education Bill was published.⁴ It sought to remove Local Education Authorities' powers to make discretionary awards for both further and higher education students. As a result of the Bill, the findings of the Kennedy and Fryer Reports, and the government's commitment to widening participation, the Further Education Student Support Advisory Group was set up in 1998. The Group, chaired by Graham Lane, advised on new student support arrangements in further education. It focused on ways of replacing discretionary awards made in England and Wales under section 2 of the Education Act 1962.⁵

¹ Herbert A and Callender C (1997) *The Funding Lottery: Student financial support in further education and its impact on participation* Policy Studies Institute, London.

² Kennedy H (1997) *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* Further Education Funding Council, Coventry.

³ *Learning for the 21st Century* (1998) DfEE, London.

⁴ The Bill received Royal Assent in the Summer of 1998.

⁵ *New Arrangements for Effective Student Support in Further Education* (1998) Report to the Further Education Student Support Advisory Group, DfEE, London, June.

The Lane Report suggests that there should be a new system of national minimum entitlements to financial support to help meet expenditure on items such as transport, books and equipment, and child care. It proposed that most of these payments should be means-tested, depending on the students' own or their parents' income. All eligible students would receive some payment.

The Select Committee on Education and Employment re-inforced the need for some form of support for students in further education. Its report⁶ recognised the difficulties young people face, particularly those from low income families, since the gradual withdrawal of Local Authority support for further education students. It commented (p 89)

We believe that the decline in financial support for further education students in recent years runs wholly counter to the aim of increasing participation in FE for all parts of our society.

Following the Government's Spending Review on 14 July 1998, the government announced it would pilot a means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance for 16–18 year olds. The allowance will be financed by using money currently spent on post-16 Child Benefit payments. So parents will no longer receive Child Benefit for their 16–18 year old children in education. Instead, a larger means-tested allowance will be paid to the young person directly. The allowance is expected to be between £30–£40 a week. Both the means of funding the allowance and its amount were recommended by the Select Committee on Education and Employment. No further details on the allowance, or where it will be piloted, were available at the time of writing this report.

1.2.2 Access Funds

In 1990 the government introduced Access Funds which are provided to further education institutions through the FEFC. These funds aim to help students with financial difficulties or those whose access to full-time further or higher education might be jeopardised for financial reasons. When this study was conducted, only full-time students aged 19 and over who were UK nationals were eligible for Access Funds.

In 1997/98 FE was allocated £6.02 million in Access Funds and similar amounts in the previous two years. In 1995/96 this represented about 20% of the total government budget on Access Funds with the remainder going to the HE. In 1995/96 46,872 students in the FE sector in England received Access Funds of which 42,249 were students pursuing further education courses — about 1.5% of all students in the sector.

Access Funds are administered by the individual educational institution. The sum each college receives is based on a simple formula — the number of potentially eligible students multiplied by a fixed sum per student which was £26.70 when the study was conducted. It is left to the discretion of each college to decide how they distribute their Access Funds and to whom, although recipients, at a minimum, must meet the national eligibility criteria.

Herbert and Callender⁷ in a recent review of student funding commented:

Access Funds, like Local Education Authority awards, are a lottery. They too are highly discretionary... they are an unreliable source of funding. There are no guarantees that a student will receive such financial support. As important, the level of support received by students on average, is very low and does not meet the full costs of participation.

In the Summer of 1998 the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced that Access Funds will be extended to part-time students for the first time. In addition, the Comprehensive Spending Review of July 1998 included an unknown extra amount for Access Funds.

⁶ Select Committee on Education and Employment Sixth Report (1998) House of Commons, 19 May.

⁷ A Herbert and C Callender (1997) op cit

The FEFC collects basic information directly from colleges on the numbers of Access Fund recipients and on what the funds were spent. However, there has been no systematic research on the way in which colleges distribute Access Funds. For example, we do not know if colleges use additional criteria, over and above the national minima, to allocate their funds and what these additional criteria may be. Consequently, we do not know exactly which students receive the funds. Nor do we know what the perceived costs and benefits or impact of Access Funds are. Furthermore, there is an absence of data on what additional sources of funding colleges may have to help students in financial need. This study aims to fill some of these gaps in our knowledge.

It is against this background that the FEFC and DfEE commissioned research on Access Funds and the costs of participation.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

The aims of the study were to collect information on:

- how and to whom colleges distribute Access Funds;
- the perceived benefits of Access Funds and their impact on recruitment, retention, and achievement;
- how Access Funds should be changed including the eligibility criteria and how they are administered and distributed; and
- colleges other sources of financial support for students, the amounts of money involved, and how and to whom these funds are disbursed.

1.4 Research Methods

As a pre-cursor to this survey, 10 FE colleges were visited by the research team and in-depth interviews conducted with those responsible for student support. The findings from these case studies helped inform the design of the questionnaire used in this project. There are references to some of the points raised by these colleges at various places throughout this report where appropriate.

Telephone interviews were conducted with a representative sample of 110 further education institutions in receipt of Access Funds. These included Agricultural and Horticultural Colleges, Sixth Form Colleges, and General Further Education Colleges across England. They were interviewed, on the researchers' behalf, by The Research Partnership between June and August 1998.

152 further education institutions were approached to take part in the study and 120 responded positively and 110 were interviewed, producing a response rate of 72%.

Full details of the methodology and the response rate are in the Technical Annex (section 6).

1.5 Outline of Report

The report is divided into four main sections. Following this introduction is a section concerned with Access Funds. Section 3 provides the findings relating to all other internal sources of financial help provided to students and section 4 looks at external sources of help for students. At the end of each section is a summary which is used to inform the conclusions contained in section 5 of this report. Those reading the report who do not want the detail are referred to the section summaries and to section 5 in the first instance.

2 Access Funds

2.1 Introduction

This section of the report considers the following topics:

- responsibility for Access Funds within the college;
- distribution of Access Funds, including the amounts paid out and the numbers of students that received them by type of help they received;
- eligibility criteria used to distribute Access Funds;
- decision making process with regard to which students received Access Funds, how much they got, and the amounts paid out;
- monitoring and evaluation of Access Funds; and
- opinions of Access Funds.

2.2 How much Access Funds do Colleges Receive?

Across the sample of colleges participating in the survey, FEFC data showed that it had allocated a total amount of £1,808,828 in Access Funds for the academic year 1997/98. This total was based on a formula which allows £26.70 for each potentially eligible student. This resulted in an average allocation per college of £17,098, an average which disguised a wide range from £507 to £82,086.

Given this formula, it is not surprising that the average allocation was greatest in colleges with a higher proportion of eligible students. A description of the derivation of this variable can be found in the Technical Annex to this report. Briefly, colleges were divided into three bands based on their number of eligible students for Access Funds/total number of students. The denominator included full-time and part-time students of all ages, and Council and non-Council funded. This variable provided a measure of the extent of the importance of Access Funds to the college as a whole. Those in the lowest banding (i.e with the lowest proportion of eligible students) had an average allocation of £11,450 compared with an average of £17,795 for those in the middle band and £25,133 for colleges in the highest band.

The average allocation was also greater in colleges with a higher Widening Participation factor. This is a measure of the extent to which colleges have broadened access to disadvantaged groups in their region. Each College has a Widening Participation 'score', computed by the FEFC: the higher the score, the better the mix of students. In this study, three bandings were used as suggested by the FEFC. In colleges with a low Widening Participation factor the average allocation was £15,165. Colleges with a medium Widening Participation factor had an average allocation of £16,022 and colleges with a high Widening Participation factor, £25,916. In other words, colleges with more socially disadvantaged students received larger sums of Access Funds.

It is also noteworthy that the average allocation varied inversely to the proportion of eligible students getting Access Funds. Again, a full description of the derivation of this variable can be found in the Technical Annex. Briefly, the formula used was the number of eligible students getting Access Funds divided by the number of potentially eligible students. This provided a measure of the degree of targeting that colleges were achieving. Specifically, the lower the proportion of eligible students receiving Access Funds, the greater the degree of targeting that colleges were achieving, and vice versa. Three bands were thus derived: in colleges with a low proportion of eligible students getting Access Funds the average allocation was £19,958. Colleges with a medium proportion, £16,844 and colleges with a high proportion, £13,684.

Therefore, colleges with a larger allocation of Access Funds were more likely to target distribution. With more funds to spend, it was worth their while to build in mechanisms to distribute the funds, unlike those colleges with less funds that were more likely to scatter them.

2.3 How are Access Funds Organised in Colleges?

2.3.1 Who in the college has overall responsibility for Access Funds?

At the beginning of the interview respondents were asked:

- their job title;
- who had responsibility for financial support for students; and
- who had responsibility for Access Funds.

Most colleges (61%) had a support/guidance/welfare person who was responsible for Access Funds (hereafter referred to as a student services manager). The next largest group was an accountant/financial controller/resource manager (15%), followed by someone in the personnel/administrative role (11%).

Colleges with a high proportion of eligible students were slightly (but not markedly) more likely to have a student services manager involved (65%). Colleges with a low proportion of eligible students tended to have a mix of staff from different areas managing Access Funds as dedicated staff were not warranted.

Colleges with a low proportion of eligible students getting Access Funds were more likely to have a student services manager involved. Of these, 71% employed a student services manager or similar. By contrast, colleges with a high proportion of eligible students getting Access Funds were less likely to use a student services manager (47%). Nearly a quarter (23%) of these colleges had financial/resource staff managing Access Funds, compared with 12% of high targeting colleges.

Colleges in the highest Widening Participation band were also more likely to have a student support manager (67%, as opposed to 54% in the low Widening Participation band). Colleges in the lowest band showed a mix of staff managing Access Funds.

So, the more that Access Funds became an issue, with higher targeting and better Widening Participation factor achieved, the more likely it was that a student services manager or a welfare/guidance person was responsible for managing Access Funds.

2.3.2 What are the application procedures?

The **case studies** revealed that most students applying for Access Funds had an interview with a student advisor as part of the application process. The interview was also felt to be a useful mechanism for informing students about other financial help, and screening for ineligible/non-needy cases. The student advisor also often made the decision about the award, either individually, or as part of a panel. Because of this screening procedure a high proportion of Access Fund applicants received awards. Therefore, the unmet need for Access Funds cannot necessarily be measured by examining the number of applications.

In the **present survey**, respondents were asked whether students applying for Access Funds:

- completed an application form;
- had an interview to discuss their financial needs;
- submitted documentary evidence with the application form; and
- had the documentary evidence verified by the college.

Nearly all colleges (96%) said that 'all' students completed an application form.

Half the colleges (49%) required 'all' students to have an interview. One in ten (9%) interviewed 'none'. The rest interviewed varying proportions of students from 'most' (9%), 'about half' (5%), to 'some' (26%). Colleges with a higher proportion of eligible students were less likely to interview. Of those with a high proportion of eligible students, 39% interview 'all' students, compared with 54% of colleges with a low proportion of eligible students. They were more likely to interview 'some' students, 35% compared with 20%. This was possibly to reduce the workload that the larger number of interviews imposed.

Of those colleges that required an application form, roughly equal proportions required some form of documentary evidence with the application form 'always' (39%) and 'sometimes' (42%). Of the remainder, 15% never required documentary evidence and 3% didn't know. Colleges with a higher proportion of eligible students were more likely to require documentary evidence. Of those with a high proportion of eligible students, 42% always required evidence and 8% never. In colleges with a low proportion of eligible students, 31% 'always' required evidence and 23% 'never' did so. Again, this would seem to be out of expediency in the light of the additional effort involved.

Similarly, colleges divided roughly equally between those that verified the information in the application forms and those that did not. Two in five (41%) said they 'always' verified the information and a similar proportion (43%) did so 'sometimes'. The remainder (15%) 'never' verified the information. Of those colleges with a high proportion of eligible students, 54% 'always' verified, and 8% 'never'. Of the low proportion colleges 36% 'always', and 18% 'never' verified.

To summarise, colleges with higher proportions of eligible students were less likely to interview, but more likely to require documentary evidence and to verify that evidence.

The degree of rigour that colleges applied to the application process can be measured in terms of the number of procedures that they required in addition to the completion of an application form. At the lower end of the scale, these ranged from those that required only the application form (5% of all colleges) and those that combined the application form (only) with an interview for at least some applicants (7%). Far more common were colleges that relied upon an application form and an interview for at least some applicants, supported by documentary evidence at least sometimes (47%). Finally, almost as many (41%) carried out all three steps and verified the evidence at least sometimes.

Another way of looking at the various combinations is that 14 colleges (13% of the total) had very thorough procedures in that students had to complete an application form, all or most of whom were interviewed and who always had to provide documentary evidence which was always verified.

2.4 How are Access Funds Distributed and to Whom?

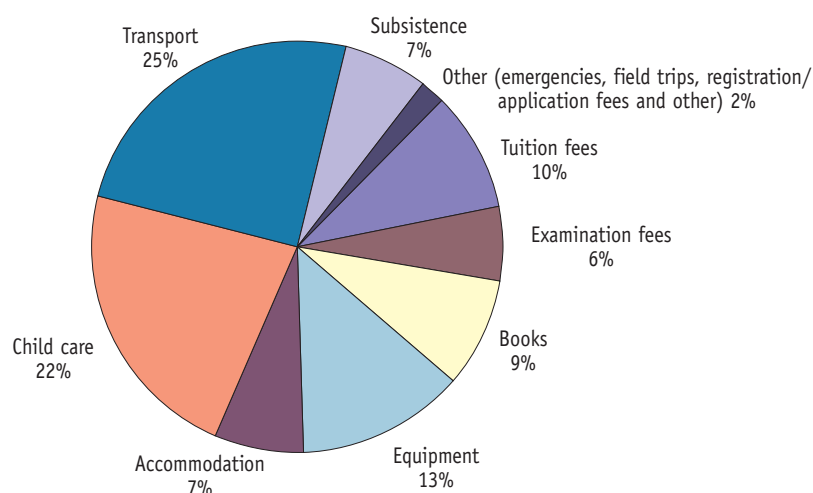
2.4.1 How much is spent on Access Funds and on what?

Each college participating in the survey was sent a form to complete in advance of the interview. This enabled them to collate data that might not have been readily available during the interview. In addition to collecting data on the total amount of Access Funds spent and the total number of students helped, the data collection sheet also sought a breakdown by category of expenditure in respect of amounts and numbers for the 1997/98 academic year.

The total spent on Access Funds by the 110 colleges interviewed amounted to £1,889,205. This was derived from the addition of the sums spent on each category (see bottom line of table overleaf). This compared with a total of £1,912,582 given in response to a separate question about the total amount of Access Funds received by the college. The difference between the two totals was due to amounts left un-spent, interest earned on the funds and other minor accounting procedures. FEFC data on the allocation of Access Funds to the 110 colleges showed a total of £1,880,828, further evidence of the reliability of the financial data provided by respondents.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the total expenditure across the categories used in the survey.

Figure 1 Distribution of total expenditure from Access Funds



Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Two categories accounted for nearly half of all spending on Access Funds: transport (25%) and child care (22%). These were followed by spending on equipment (13%), tuition fees (10%), books (9%), accommodation and subsistence (7% each) and examination fees (6%). The remaining categories each accounted for less than 1% of total spending.

Table 2.1 provides further detail on the expenditure by category — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges that made awards for each type of help;
- range of expenditure on each category;
- average expenditure among all colleges making such payments; and
- the total expenditure by category.

Table 2.1 Distribution of total expenditure by category

Category of expenditure	% colleges helping	Range of expenditure/(£)	Average expenditure/(£)	Total spent by all colleges/(£)
Tuition fees	45	12 - 22,469	3,679	180,264
Examination fees	51	5 - 9,550	1,920	107,493
Books	75	10 - 21,497	1,975	161,958
Equipment	80	50 - 18,459	2,842	250,095
Accommodation	57	20 - 14,545	2,069	130,360
Child care	75	# 46 - 48,210	# 5,158	422,975
Transport	# 88	75 - 23,500	4,886	# 473,951
Emergencies	5	131 - 3,131	1,048	5,242
Subsistence	34	50 - 31,238	3,423	126,654
Field trips	16	24 - 3,022	762	13,711
Registration/application fees	3	101 - 1,384	540	1,619
Other items	11	51 - 4,015	1,240	14,883
All colleges	100	577 - 82,000	17,387	1,889,205

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The most common forms of assistance were, transport (88% of colleges), equipment (80% of all colleges), and books and child care (each mentioned by 75%). Then came help with accommodation costs (57%), examination fees (51%) and tuition fees (45%). Less common was spending on subsistence (34%), field trips (16%), emergencies (5%) and registration and application fees (3%).

The variation in range of expenditure across the categories, as well as the range itself, reflected the difference in costs of the various types of help. This is more clearly demonstrated in the average expenditure column. The lowest average expenditures were on registration/application fees (£540 for each college spending on this) and field trips (£762), compared with the highest which were child care (£5,158) and transport (£4,886). Both of these two were provided by a large proportion of the colleges. One college spent £48,210 of Access Funds on child care alone.

2.4.2 How many students receive Access Funds and for what?

A total of 14,528 students received Access Funds across all the colleges surveyed.

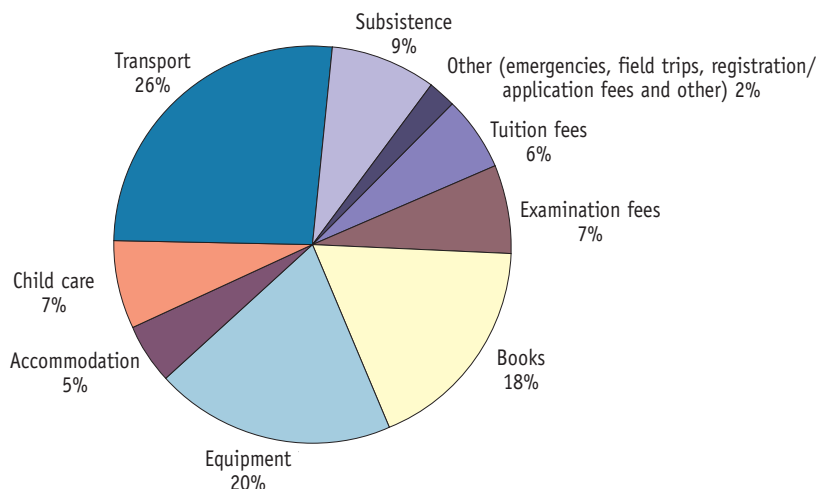
Data provided by the FEFC allow for penetration rates to be computed, that is the proportion of students helped by Access Funds. This calculation can be derived based on various population figures. At the broadest level, there were a total of 1,138,245 students of all types across the 110 colleges surveyed (in 1996/97) — this produces a penetration rate of 1.3%. Given that Access Funds can only be awarded to those in full-time education then an alternative would be to base the penetration rate on the 216,440 full-time students shown in the FEFC data for 1996/97. The resultant penetration rate is 6.7%. A third variant would be to base the penetration rate on the 68,624 eligible students shown in the FEFC data — 21.2% of whom received Access Funds.

The variety of approaches taken by colleges to distribute Access Funds was reflected in the differences in penetration between colleges and the most useful measure of this is the proportion of eligible students receiving help. Although the overall average was 21%, the average in different colleges ranged from 3% to 58%. Thus some colleges chose to target distribution of Access Funds heavily while others spread them between over half of the eligible students within their college.

It was also the case that colleges with higher Widening Participation factors tended to distribute Access Funds more widely. Among colleges in the lowest banding, 17% of all eligible students received help compared with 25% of eligible students across colleges in the highest factor banding. Thus, colleges with students that have potentially greater need tended to distribute their allocation more widely, to help as many students as possible.

As with the expenditure by category, so it is possible to chart the proportion of students that received help. The sum of the students helped across all categories (20,990) was larger than the actual number of students helped (14,528) because individuals received help in more than one category. In other words, they received more than one Access Fund award. Each student got, on average, 1.5 awards. Figure 2 is based on the total number of awards.

Figure 2 Distribution of total awards from Access Funds



Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

A quarter of all awards (26%) were allocated for transport. The next two most common categories were awards for equipment (20%), followed by books (18%). Combined, these three largest categories accounted for nearly two-thirds of all awards (64%). Less common, in terms of their volume, were awards to help with subsistence (9%), examination fees (7%), child care (7%), tuition fees (6%) and accommodation (5%). All of the remaining categories (field trips, other, emergencies and application/registration fees) each accounted for less than 2% of all awards. The fact that emergencies accounted for so few awards may be indicative of how unresponsive colleges can be to student needs.

Table 2.2 provides further detail on the numbers of students helped by category — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges that made awards for each type of help;
- range in the number of students helped in each category;
- average number of students helped by category; and
- the number of students helped by category.

Table 2.2 Number of students that received help by category

Category of expenditure	% colleges helping	Range of no. of students helped	Average no. of students helped	Total no. of students helped
Tuition fees	45	1 - 268	26	1,258
Examination fees	51	1 - 215	28	1,543
Books	75	1 - 972	45	3,709
Equipment	80	1 - 972	47	4,123
Accommodation	57	1 - 201	16	1,019
Child care	75	1 - 160	19	1,517
Transport	88	2 - 972	57	5,542
Emergencies	5	3 - 18	10	51
Subsistence	34	1 - 972	49	1,814
Field trips	16	1 - 42	11	189
Registration/application fees	3	1 - 25	12	35
Other items	11	3 - 50	16	190
All colleges	100	9 - 972	132	14,528

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Each college surveyed helped, on average, 132 students. However, there was a wide range in the numbers, from 9 to 972. Many of the individual categories also exhibited wide ranges: in several only one student was supported.

As might be expected, some of the larger categories, in terms of the proportion of awards made, corresponded with high average numbers of students helped. This was true of spending on transport (average of 57 students helped per college), equipment (47) and books (45). Conversely, although help with subsistence accounted for a smaller percentage of awards, the average number of students helped across colleges was also high, at 49.

While there was a broad relationship between the expenditure by category and the share of all awards made by category, there were exceptions. Table 2.3 shows the proportion of expenditure and awards, the data presented in Figures 1 and 2, and the resultant ratio.

Table 2.3 Share of expenditure and awards by category

Category of expenditure	% total expenditure (x)	% of total number of awards (y)	Ratio expenditure/awards (x/y)
Tuition fees	9.5	6.0	1.6
Examination fees	5.7	7.4	0.8
Books	8.6	17.7	0.5
Equipment	13.2	19.6	0.7
Accommodation	6.9	4.9	1.4
Child care	22.4	7.2	3.1
Transport	25.1	26.4	1.0
Emergencies	0.3	0.2	1.5
Subsistence	6.7	8.6	0.8
Field trips	0.7	0.9	0.8
Registration/application fees	0.1	0.2	0.5
Other items	0.8	0.9	0.9

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

A ratio of 1.1 or above indicates a category of help that accounted for a greater share of expenditure relative to its share of awards; ratios of 0.9 or less indicates a category that accounted for a smaller share of expenditure relative to awards. A ratio of 1.0 shows a match between expenditure and awards.

For example, the transport category accounted for 25% of total expenditure and 26% of all awards (ratio = 1.0). However, child care accounted for 22% of expenditure but only 7% of awards (ratio = 3.1). In comparison, help with books accounted for 9% of the expenditure and 18% of awards, the reverse relationship with a ratio of 0.5. These relationships are reflected in the average expenditure per student (table 2.4), the subject of the following section.

2.4.3 How much money do students get and for what?

Overall, each student that received Access Funds was given £130, a figure derived from the total spent (i.e. £1,889,205) divided by the total number of students that received help (i.e. 14,528). By contrast, each award to students amounted to an average of £90.

Table 2.4 shows the average amount received by each student in each category of expenditure, derived by dividing the expenditure in a category by the number of awards made. Also shown is the ratio of expenditure to awards, as per the last column in table 2.3.

Table 2.4 Average amount received by each student

Category of expenditure	Average amount per award/(£)	Ratio expenditure/awards (x/y)
Tuition fees	143	1.6
Examination fees	70	0.8
Books	44	0.5
Equipment	61	0.7
Accommodation	128	1.4
Child care	279	3.1
Transport	86	1.0
Emergencies	103	1.5
Subsistence	70	0.8
Field trips	73	0.8
Registration/application fees	46	0.5
Other items	78	0.9
Average award	90	

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

There was a wide range of expenditure by category — from £279 per award on child care down to £44 on books. Three other categories were above the average award level (£90): tuition fees (£143), accommodation (£128) and emergencies (£103). All remaining categories were below the average award. Such variation reflects the intrinsic cost of the items involved.

The relationship between these values and the ratio of expenditure/awards now becomes clear. Ratios of 1.0 or above correspond with average awards greater than the average i.e. expenditure concentrated on relatively few individuals (as in the case of help with child care). Lower ratios indicate a greater number of students benefiting from a relatively lower amount (as in the case of help with books).

2.4.4 Which students get Access Funds and how is this decided?

Colleges have considerable discretion as to how they allocate their Access Funds and to whom, although they must adhere to the national criteria. These stipulate that students must be in full-time education, 19 or over and normally resident in the UK for a minimum of 3 years (a home student). Since the study was undertaken Access Funds have been extended to part-time students. However, given the limited funds available, colleges can implement other mechanisms for rationing and targeting their funds. They can do this:

- at the application stage by introducing additional eligibility criteria or specifying preferences for particular types of students; and
- later in the process, once students have applied for funds, by being selective in their choice of applicants and by limiting the amount of money allocated to applicants.

We will now explore these issues and examine the extent to which colleges tried to ration and prioritise who received this scarce resource.

Nearly half of all colleges (46%) applied additional criteria in deciding which students were eligible for help with Access Funds, over and above the national guidelines. This proportion did not vary by any of the analytic variables either consistently or in a way that might be expected. For example, a high Widening Participation factor was not associated with a higher prevalence of additional criteria.

Table 2.5 shows the nature of additional criteria applied by the 50 colleges that did so. Respondents could give more than one response to this question: the sum of the percentages therefore adds to more than 100%. Multi-coded data of this type are indicated in the table title at this and all other similar tables.

Table 2.5 Additional criteria applied by colleges (multi-coded data)

Additional criteria	Column percentage
Financial hardship	50
Low income/pay	32
Receipt of other financial help	16
Attendance record	14
Family type	10
Non receipt of other financial help	8
Age	8
Mode of study	6
Location, distance from college	6
Tutor report/interview	6
Health	2
Hours of study	2
Course undertaken	2
Course funding	2
Stage of course reached	2
First time attendance	2
Paying own tuition fees	2
Other	4
Base: all colleges with additional criteria	50

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The predominant additional eligibility criteria were related to the student's financial situation which is in keeping with the original rationale for Access Funds. These were financial hardship, (50% of colleges with additional criteria) and low income (32%). Receipt of other help might qualify a student for Access Funds (16% of colleges) whereas non receipt of other help also counted (8%). 14% of colleges encouraged attendance as a criteria while 10% and 8% took family type and age of student, respectively, into consideration.

The use of a student's attendance record as a criteria for the receipt of Access Funds raises some interesting issues. While it is totally understandable why colleges should use this criteria, it overlooks the fact that financial hardship may lead to poor attendance. Indeed, the **student survey** showed that one in eight students over 19 had missed going to college because they could not afford the travel costs to college. In other words, the criteria may, unintentionally, penalise students experiencing financial hardship.

Across the 50 colleges, there was a total of 87 mentions of additional criteria and so some colleges were applying more than one. However, the overlap between criteria was as one would expect — 10 colleges cited low income/pay and financial hardship together as their additional criteria.

It might be expected that colleges with additional eligibility criteria would also have more rigorous application procedures. A comparison of colleges with and without additional criteria revealed that the former were no more likely to insist upon an interview with the applicant, but that they were more likely to require documentary evidence and to verify the information contained in the application form. This would fit with the predominance of financial criteria to target the distribution of Access Funds, proof of which could be obtained via documentary evidence.

A smaller proportion of colleges (36%) gave preference to certain groups of students when allocating Access Funds. Colleges with a high Widening Participation factor were more likely to give preference. Bases are low, but of the 15 colleges with a high Widening Participation factor, 8 (53%) gave preference to certain groups of students compared with 10 of the 35 colleges with a low Widening Participation factor (29%).

The groups of students given preference by colleges again focused on those in financial hardship, as shown in table 2.6.

Table 2.6 Groups of students given preference (multi-coded data)

Groups given preference	Column percentage
Student/family in receipt of benefit	44
Lone parents	31
Students on low income/pay	28
Students with children	21
Disabled	15
Mature students/returners	15
Other evidence of hardship	10
Student's income below threshold	8
Course with high cost materials	8
Studying particular subject	5
Not in receipt of LEA grant	5
Other	31
Base: all colleges giving preference	39

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Most common were those in receipt of benefit (44% of all colleges giving priority) and those on low income — either in general (28%) or with reference to a threshold (8%). Those with other evidence of financial hardship were mentioned by 10% of this group of colleges. Personal characteristics also came into play, including priority given to lone parents (31%), those with children (21%) and those with disabilities (15%).

If we examine the practices of all colleges, we see that of the 110:

- 28 (25%) applied additional criteria but didn't give preference
- 22 (20%) applied additional criteria and gave preference
- 17 (15%) gave preference but didn't apply additional criteria
- 43 (39%) did neither

Interestingly, nearly two out of five colleges (39%) had no additional criteria for allocating Access Funds nor did they give preference to particular groups of students. These colleges, therefore, appeared to give those involved in allocating Access Funds a lot of discretion in deciding to whom to give help.

2.4.5 How is it decided which students get Access Funds and the amount to award?

Having asked about eligibility criteria and application procedures, we went on to ask about the process used by colleges to decide which students should receive Access Funds and the amount to give them. We asked whether one, or more than one person decided, how they decided, and the process used. In deciding how much, we also asked whether there were limits on the amount of Access Funds given.

As shown in table 2.7, colleges used a combination of methods to decide which students got Access Funds.

Table 2.7 Basis for deciding which students got Access Funds (multi-coded data)

Basis for deciding	Column percentage
Information from application form	89
Personal experience of assessing applications	68
Information gained from interview	68
Information given by tutor	66
General knowledge about student	26
According to individual circumstances	2
Other	2
Base: all colleges	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The selection process appeared to be quite thorough. Virtually all colleges (89%), required an application form and two-thirds called upon the selectors' personal experience (68%) and information from an interview (68%) and information from the student's tutor (66%). One in four (26%) cited general knowledge about the student.

Good practice would suggest that colleges which involved more than one person in deciding who should get Access Funds and the amount to award are less prone to subjective decisions made by one individual. In three-quarters of all colleges (76%) more than one person was involved in deciding which students got Access Funds; virtually all of the rest (23%) relied upon one person. The majority of colleges (66%) also involved more than one person in deciding the amount to give. 30% of colleges relied on one person and 4% didn't know the details.

We can look across these two aspects together: in only one in five of all colleges (19%) was one person responsible for deciding which students received Access Funds and how much, probably the same individual. The majority of colleges (63%) involved more than one person to decide both which students received Access Funds and the amount paid. The rest divided between those that relied upon one person to decide who was to get Access Funds but who then gave authority to one individual to decide the amount (11%) or vice versa (4%).

Having decided which students were to receive Access Funds, the process of allocating an amount appeared more straightforward. There were fewer factors taken into account and colleges were more reliant upon just one or two methods as shown in table 2.8.

Table 2.8 Basis for deciding how much students received (multi-coded data)

Basis for deciding how much	Column percentage
In accordance with college guidelines	60
Personal experience of assessing applications	46
Based on amount left in budget	38
Usually give whatever is requested	10
According to individual circumstances	5
Other	5
Base: all colleges	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The most commonly cited method was the use of college guidelines (60% of all colleges) and personal experience of assessing applications was also important (46%), i.e. a mix of subjective and objective mechanisms. Of interest is the 38% of colleges which took the amount left in the fund into account, a factor that would dis-advantage students joining a course mid-year. And, as we will see later, many colleges ran out of Access Funds before the end of the year.

There was considerable overlap between the various approaches. Thus colleges divided into those that used a mix of two or three approaches and those that used only one. Nearly half of all colleges (47%) used only one of the methods above, predominantly college guidelines (30% of all colleges) or their personal experience (11%).

Unlike the process for deciding which students should receive Access Funds, the involvement of more than one person in the decision as to the amount was not associated with any greater range of approaches.

Feedback from the **case studies** with colleges showed a wide diversity of approaches with regard to the use of ceilings or limits on the amount of Access Funds awarded. Some colleges had no limits at all, some had a ceiling on the total amount paid and some had a ceiling on the amount for a specific category, while others used a combination, or all of the above.

Asked about this in the **present survey**, three quarters of colleges (74%) claimed to have ceilings of one form or another, as shown in table 2.9.

Table 2.9 Types of ceilings or limits imposed by colleges (multi-coded data)

Ceiling or limit on	Column percentage
Total amount each student can receive	44
Amount given for all items/categories	27
Amount given for some items/categories	23
No limits	26
Base: all colleges	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Most commonly cited was a limit on the total amount each student could receive (44% of all colleges) and one in four had limits on all (27%) or some (23%) categories. There was overlap between these approaches whereby 15 colleges (14% of all) had a limit on the total amount each student could receive combined with limits on all categories. 7 colleges (6%) had a limit on the total amount combined with limits on some categories. However, the majority simply had one form of ceiling in place — 26 colleges (24%) only had an overall ceiling, 17 (15%) only used limits applicable to some categories and 14 (13%) only used limits across all categories of help.

We saw earlier that over half of all colleges (55%) had no additional eligibility criteria other than those imposed nationally (section 2.4.4). These colleges were also more likely than those with additional criteria to have no limits on the amount of Access Funds awarded (35% compared with 16%). Thus one in five colleges (19%) had neither additional eligibility criteria nor limits on the amount awarded. However, it was not the case that such colleges simply gave whatever was requested. Those with no additional eligibility criteria were no more likely to give whatever was requested, when asked about the methods used to decide amounts, compared with colleges that had additional eligibility criteria.

2.4.6 What payment methods are used by colleges?

Having decided who will receive an award and the amounts involved, the issue of how to pay the student comes into play. Colleges have a number of options — payment by cheque, cash, in kind or directly to a third party.

The **case study** interviews highlighted a number of issues about the type of payment. Payment directly to a third party was perceived as being clearly accountable, but it conflicted with the important principle of giving students freedom to manage their own resources. Payment by cheque was considered to be more accountable than simply handing over cash in that it does need to be paid into an account, but could still be spent inappropriately. Some colleges linked on-going payments of Access Funds to attendance records, in order to increase accountability.

Also relevant in this context are findings from the **student survey**, particularly those relating to differential access to banking facilities. The survey revealed that 82% of 16–18 year olds and 86% of students over 19 had no bank or building society account. More generally, the student survey demonstrated students' preference for financial support at the beginning of the term, paid by cheque.

Returning to the **present survey**, colleges were asked which was the primary method of payment for each type of help they gave via Access Funds, the results of which are shown in table 2.10:

Table 2.10 Primary method of payment

Method	Base: Number of colleges giving this type of help	Row percentage			
		Cheque	Cash	In kind/ directly	Other
Tuition fees	49	18	0	53	27
Exam fees	56	18	2	54	21
Books	82	66	5	22	7
Equipment	88	59	7	26	7
Accommodation	63	65	6	25	3
Child care	82	46	1	46	5
Transport	97	66	10	19	4
Emergencies	5	60	0	20	0
Subsistence	37	41	8	27	3
Field trips	18	22	0	33	11
Registration/application fees	3	67	0	33	0
Other	12	58	0	17	0

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Cash payments were used sparingly, by no more than 10% of all the awarding colleges for any category. The main options were therefore payment in kind or direct payment and cheque, although the mix varied by category. As expected, remission of tuition and exam fees were paid mainly in kind or by 'other' means which probably equated to much the same, such as an internal transfer. Some colleges claimed to pay tuition fees by cheque (18% in each case) which seems an unlikely arrangement. Items that tended to be purchased by the student from a source outside the college were more likely to be paid by cheque, such as books (66%), transport (66%), accommodation (65%) and subsistence (41%). It is perhaps a little surprising that nearly two-thirds of colleges (59%) paid for equipment by cheque rather than a direct transfer as this suggests that students bought equipment from sources outside the college. Yet the case studies revealed that one way of reducing the costs to students of their equipment was through the colleges purchasing it on their behalf and thus reaping the benefits of bulk purchases. Child care showed an even split between cheque and payment in kind.

Having made an award, the majority of colleges (85%) said that payment of Access Funds was dependent upon aspects of student performance. All colleges in the high Widening Participation factor band took this approach. All but two of the colleges that linked student performance to payment did so on the basis of the student's attendance record (84% of all colleges). 19% took academic performance into account and a few also took note of tutor feedback (6%).

While it is understandable that colleges should take attendance into account so as to ensure payment to those still on a course, findings from the **student survey** showed drawbacks in this approach. For some students, hardship meant that they could not fully participate in the course. For example, a third of students over 19 studying part-time found travel costs to and from college hard to meet. As a result, one in eight had missed going to college because they could not afford these travel costs. So, and somewhat perversely, linking payment with attendance could adversely affect those most in need.

2.4.7 Do colleges experience any difficulties in distributing Access Funds?

The majority of colleges experienced no difficulty at all in allocating and administering Access Funds. Just under a third of all colleges (32%) experienced difficulties but those with a higher Widening Participation factor were less likely to experience problems (27% among those in the highest banding) as were colleges that distributed payments more widely (23% of those in the band equating to the lowest level of targeting). These variations presumably reflected the fact that the greater expenditure and/or greater numbers of students involved, resulted in the tasks of allocating and paying becoming more systematic.

Of the 35 colleges who experienced difficulties, the majority (71% of this group, or 23% of all colleges) only experienced 'some' difficulties and a further 23% (or 7% of all) had 'not many' and only 6% (or 2%) experienced a 'lot' of difficulties. Table 2.11 shows the nature of the difficulties experienced.

Table 2.11 Nature of difficulties experienced (multi-coded data)

Nature of difficulty	Column percentage
Difficulty allocating/being fair	29
Time-consuming to administer	29
Difficulty means-testing	26
Need to process quickly	17
FEFC Allocation not known early enough	14
Difficulty with payment	11
Resentment created by small award	11
Criteria too narrow/exclusive	9
Insufficient amount overall	9
Lack of national guidelines	6
Other difficulty	6
Don't know	3
Base: all colleges experiencing difficulties	35

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The range of factors above can be categorised into three groups. At the broadest level are those that can be thought of as 'structural' in that they are part and parcel of the system laid down by the DfEE. Then come 'FEFC related' difficulties, namely those that related to the implementation of the system by the Council. Finally, there are 'college factors', which relate to the administrative systems in place in the college.

The first group of comments comprised the following difficulties: resentment caused by the small amounts available (11%), the general lack of money available (9%) and the fact that the criteria were too narrow/exclusive (9%).

There was little comment related to the FEFC role: 14% cited the late notification of their Access Funds allocation and 6% who perceived a lack of national guidelines.

Difficulties within the college dominated the replies: 29% of those with difficulties felt the system was time-consuming to administer and the same proportion complained about the difficulties allocating Access Funds and being fair. Slightly fewer (26%) thought the means-testing was difficult and 17% faced problems caused by the need to process applications quickly; 11% had difficulties making payment.

It should be remembered that the percentage figures quoted above are based on only 35 colleges that had difficulties. The overall picture is of a system that caused no problems to the majority of colleges and only a few to a minority.

2.5 What is the Impact of Access Funds on Students?

2.5.1 Do colleges monitor the impact of Access Funds on student behaviour?

Feedback from the **case studies** demonstrated the perceived importance of monitoring the impact of Access Funds on students. However, the only data systematically collected were those required by the FEFC. Apart from this, there was little evidence of any rigorous and systematic evaluation. In the few colleges where some monitoring or evaluation did take place, the scientific validity of the evaluation was open to question in part, because the colleges did not have access to resources to conduct systematic evaluations. As a result, the methods used to assess the impact of Access Funds tended to be rudimentary and it is unlikely that they would stand up to academic scrutiny. For example, often colleges examined the retention rates of those receiving funds but these were rarely compared with a matching control group of students not receiving such funds. In other words, they were not comparing like with like. Consequently, the findings of some of the colleges' 'evaluations' need to be treated with caution.

Colleges were asked in the **present survey** whether or not they 'routinely monitored or evaluated' Access Funds in respect of various factors. Half of all colleges (51%) claimed to monitor the type of students that applied for Access Funds and exactly the same proportion claimed to do so in respect of the type who received help. Almost as many (46%) said they monitored student knowledge and awareness of the help available. Again, there was overlap between the various aspects that were monitored. Thus 33 colleges (30% of all) claimed to monitor all three factors and a further 16 monitored both the type of student that applied for and received Access Funds. There were some that only monitored one aspect, for example, 13 (12%) said they evaluated just student awareness and knowledge of Access Funds.

However, 30% of colleges did not monitor or evaluate Access Funds in any way. This proportion dropped among colleges with a high Widening Participation factor (20%).

Taken together the above would seem to imply widespread monitoring of the impact of Access Funds. However, anecdotal feedback from the interviewees suggested the monitoring was done on an informal basis. So, although the respondent had a clear opinion of the value of Access Funds, this was not necessarily grounded on a scientific assessment. More often, it was gleaned from discussion among colleagues and those involved in student support at other colleges. This sentiment is in line with that found in the **case study** interviews.

All respondents were also asked the extent to which they monitored or evaluated the impact of Access Funds, on recruitment and enrolment, retention, achievement and progression. The results, shown in table 2.12, revealed a somewhat lower level of activity than implied by the earlier question.

Table 2.12 Extent to which Access Funds were monitored or evaluated

Factor	Row percentage				
	Base	Regularly	Occasionally	Never	Don't know
The impact of Access Funds on recruitment and enrolment	110	10	20	65	6
The impact of Access Funds on retention	110	22	45	32	2
The impact of Access Funds on achievement	110	10	19	69	2
The impact of Access Funds on progression	110	7	20	68	5

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Two-thirds of colleges (between 65%–69%) did not evaluate the impact of Access Funds in terms of recruitment and enrolment, achievement or progression. In addition, those that did were more likely to do so ‘occasionally’ rather than ‘regularly’. It was only in respect of student retention that there was any widespread monitoring of the impact of Access Funds. One in five colleges (22%) claimed to do so ‘regularly’ and a further 45% did so ‘occasionally’; only a third claimed ‘never’ to do so. It seems likely that the link between student retention and capitation lies behind these findings. Across all four aspects, there was a tendency for colleges in the highest Widening Participation factor banding to evaluate the impact of Access Funds.

The lack of widespread evaluation is clear when one looks at the combinations of the factors monitored. One in four colleges (27%) never evaluated any of the four factors and only 11% either regularly or occasionally evaluated all four. Of these latter 12 respondents, only two regularly evaluated all four. In between these two extremes lay one in four colleges (25%) that either regularly or occasionally evaluated just one factor, a further 22% that did so in respect of two factors and only 14% that did so in respect of three factors.

In many respects, these findings reflect feedback from the case studies referred to at the beginning of this section. For colleges to assess the real impact of Access Funds it is clear that more rigorous evaluation would be needed.

2.5.2 What are the benefits of Access Funds for students?

The perceived benefits of Access Funds for students were addressed via both open and prompted questions. The former allowed the respondent to reply in their own words, responses that were later categorised for analysis (table 2.13). The latter sought the perceived degree of impact of Access Funds on student recruitment, retention, achievement and progression (table 2.14).

Table 2.13 Perceived benefits of Access Funds for students (multi-coded data)

Perceived benefits	Column percentage
Enables some to complete/stay on course	69
Enables some to do course	58
Reduces financial burden	22
Encourages returners	20
Financial safety net	16
Helps with high cost material course	7
Prevents some getting into debt	5
Less need for part-time job	4
Helps students manage money	1
Other benefit	10
No particular benefit	1
Base: all colleges	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The benefits most commonly cited related to student retention and recruitment: 69% of respondents thought Access Funds helped students complete the course, and slightly fewer (58%) thought it enabled some to do the course (who might otherwise not have done so). Other benefits less frequently given, focused on the financial aspect of Access Funds, although one in five thought Access Funds particularly helped those returning to education.

Notwithstanding the lack of widespread evaluation of the impact of Access Funds on students, all respondents were asked for their views (albeit perceptions for many) on the impact of Access Funds on: recruitment, retention, achievement and progression. This form of question enabled an opinion to be gathered from all colleges on the same factors (table 2.14).

Table 2.14 Perceived impact of Access Funds

Impact	Column percentage			
	Recruitment and enrolment	Retention	Achievement	Progression
A great deal	6	19	12	11
Quite a lot	30	58	47	37
Not a great amount	48	17	31	26
Not at all	12	4	1	1
Don't know	4	2	9	20
Base: all colleges	110	110	110	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

In essence, the primary impact of Access Funds was felt to be in respect of the retention of students. 77% of colleges thought Access Funds helped either 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' in this respect. This was followed by achievement (59%) and progression (48%). Only a third (36%) felt that Access Funds had any impact on student recruitment.

The fact that student retention was the most widely evaluated aspect of Access Funds may well have influenced perceptions as to their importance in this respect. This relationship can be examined more closely by looking at the opinions on the impact of Access Funds among those colleges that evaluated each factor. Table 2.15 shows the (measured) impact for each factor based on those who either 'regularly' or 'occasionally' monitored each one.

Table 2.15 Impact of Access Funds among colleges evaluating

Impact	Column percentage			
	Recruitment and enrolment	Retention	Achievement	Progression
A great deal	9	23	9	31
Quite a lot	42	52	53	13
Not a great amount	46	21	32	32
Not at all	3	3	0	3
Don't know	0	1	0	0
Base: all evaluating each factor	33	73	34	31

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Apart from the impact on retention, the impact of Access Funds in all other respects was felt more strongly by those who evaluated the impact, arguably the most informed sub-sample. Whereas 36% of all colleges felt Access Funds had an impact on student recruitment, the proportion increased to 51% among those that had evaluated their impact. However, even among those who evaluated, Access Funds were felt to have least impact in respect of student recruitment.

In order for Access Funds to have any impact on recruitment, potential students need to know about them before they enrol. However, the **student survey** found that two-thirds of students had received no information about student support and about half were unaware of the sources of support. A sizeable minority incorrectly thought they were ineligible for support. The **case studies** also showed that few colleges integrated information about Access Funds into their admissions/enrolment process. Indeed, some were concerned that doing so might result in too much demand for the limited resources available.

Findings from the **present survey** are consistent: only 58% of colleges first informed students about Access Funds prior to enrolment. Although virtually all the remainder informed them at enrolment (35%), the scope for Access Funds to have influenced their decision was compromised. Perhaps contrary to expectations, colleges with a low proportion of eligible students were more likely to inform students before enrolment (61%) as were those with low targeting (high proportion of eligibles getting, 66%) and those with a low Widening Participation factor (67%). The explanation behind these findings may well be that the colleges that were more selective and aware of the limited resources available did not want to raise student expectations.

2.6 What are the Costs and Benefits of Access Funds to Colleges?

2.6.1 What are the costs of Access Funds to colleges?

Very few colleges (only 13%) claimed to monitor or evaluate the costs of administering Access Funds. This meant that they had limited information on the real costs involved. Any findings in this respect can therefore only be based on respondent perception.

Having said this, the lack of any systematic monitoring did not stop 30% of colleges expressing the view that the cost of administering Access Funds was high in relation to the amount involved (section 2.6.3 refers). Colleges with a high Widening Participation factor were as likely to complain about this, despite the larger sums distributed by these colleges. Among those with the highest Widening Participation factor, 40% commented on the high administrative cost involved. So, although on the one hand it might be assumed that the costs of administering a larger amount of money would be proportionately less, it may well be that such colleges have more expensive procedures for distributing Access Funds.

2.6.2 What are the benefits of Access Funds to colleges?

Asked for the benefits of Access Funds to the college (rather than to the student), many of the same areas were identified, as shown in table 2.16.

Table 2.16 Benefits of Access Funds to college (multi-coded data)

Benefits to college	Column percentage
Help with student retention	63
Help with student recruitment and enrolment	36
Shows that college cares/part of contract	34
Help with student achievement	14
Widens student participation	12
Additional funds for college	10
Shift financial burden from college to student	6
Improves attendance	5
Help with student progression	2
Other benefit	5
Base: all colleges	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Help with student retention was given as a benefit by 63% of colleges. Impact on recruitment and enrolment was felt beneficial by 36%, and 12% saw a benefit in terms of widening participation. Fewer colleges cited the impact of Access Funds on student achievement (14%) or progression (2%). A third (34%) felt that Access Funds demonstrated that the college cared or allowed it to help fulfil its side of the contract.

This latter point is interesting: the **case studies** showed that colleges felt Access Funds have a value in demonstrating that the college cared about the problems of student drop out and declining numbers of recruits. Both were perceived as very real problems by colleges and Access Funds were thought of as one way of tackling them. Indeed, part of colleges' rationale given for allocating resources to administering Access Funds was that they are 'seen to be' effective at dealing with student drop out.

As was found in the case of their impact on students, colleges that evaluated the impact of Access Funds were slightly more positive about their benefits to the college. For example, of the 27 colleges that evaluated 3 or 4 factors, 37% gave student recruitment as an advantage compared with 33% of those who did no evaluation. Likewise student retention, for which the equivalent figures were 74% and 53%.

2.6.3 What are the limitations of Access Funds to colleges?

The **case studies** revealed widespread criticisms of the overall lack of funds available for Access Funds. Consequently, payments were spread too thinly and funds could run out too early. Colleges also commented on the late allocation of Access Funds by the FEFC (August) and their payment (October), by which time students had already started college. This meant funds had to be borrowed from another area of the colleges' budget and planning was difficult.

Table 2.17 shows the responses of the colleges when asked in the **present survey** for the drawbacks of Access Funds.

Table 2.17 Drawbacks of Access Funds (multi-coded data)

Drawback	Column percentage
Insufficient amount	49
Insufficient amount to help all eligible students	30
Too much administrative cost for size of fund	30
Each award spread too thinly	28
Limited to those aged over 19	26
Limited to those in full-time study	23
Difficulties with allocation/to be fair	11
Some groups excluded	8
Difficulties with means-testing	6
Funds run out too soon in year	5
Limited to UK Nationals	5
Insufficient amount within particular category	5
Potential for misuse	5
Cannot carry forward un-spent monies	3
Existing criteria unclear	3
Allocation not known in advance	2
Can limit eligibility for other help	2
Other drawback	6
No particular drawback	6
Don't know	1
Base: all colleges	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

As with the comments made about the difficulties administering Access Funds (section 2.4.7 refers) the comments above can be grouped into the same three categories although in this case the division between them is not quite as clear cut. The most commonly cited criticisms were structural factors. There was again very little direct criticism of the FEFC's role in Access Funds. More commonly cited were problems or issues that were within the control of colleges in their administration of Access Funds

Half of all colleges (49%) thought that there was simply a lack of money for Access Funds, and just under a third (30%) felt there was insufficient money to help all eligible students. Just over a quarter (28%) felt that the amount of money available meant that each award was too small, so that the Access Fund allocation was spread too thinly to have any impact. To some extent, this comment could equally be laid at the door of the FEFC in terms of its guidelines and at the college for how it interprets them. For example, the FEFC could devise different formulae for allocating Access Funds to colleges. Next came criticism of the eligibility criteria, either that Access Funds are limited to those aged over 19 (26%), those in full-time study (23%) or UK nationals (5%).

Comment about the FEFC included the 3% of all colleges that complained about the fact that un-spent allocation of Access Funds cannot be carried forward, 3% that the current criteria for Access Funds were unclear and 2% that their Access Funds allocation was not known in advance.

Looking within the college, just under a third of all colleges (30%) thought the administrative costs were too high in relation to the amounts awarded. This sentiment may also have reflected the requirements of the FEFC for auditing of Access Fund expenditure. One in ten (11%) thought the allocation process made it difficult to be fair and 6% thought the means-testing was problematic. Others were worried about the potential for misuse of Access Funds (5%) and the fact that there were insufficient amounts within each category of expenditure.

The same proportion (5%) commented that Access Funds ran out too early in the year. As this was an issue raised by one or two colleges during the **case studies** the opportunity was taken to ask about this in the present survey. Although a third (32%) of all colleges said that their Access Funds did not run out until the end of the academic year, this still leaves the majority running out of Access Funds during the year. Almost as many (28%) ran out by the end of the first term, and a further 28% did so by the end of the second term. As we have seen earlier, as many as 38% of all colleges took the amount left in the budget into account when deciding how much Access Funds to award students (section 2.4.5 refers). The implications in terms of equity of provision for students that joined later on in the year are clear.

2.7 What of the Future?

The closing section of the questionnaire invited comments on, and suggestions for changes to, Access Funds. Table 2.18 shows the comments made in response to this open ended question.

Table 2.18 Comments and suggestions for the future (multi-coded data)

Comment	Column percentage
Insufficient amount	35
Age restriction	25
Mode of study restriction	19
Course restriction	19
Key areas not targeted	18
Lack of national guidelines	16
Criteria too narrow	12
Time-consuming administration	12
Criteria do not reflect regional differences	11
Allocation not known in advance	10
Student status	8
Criteria at odds with other funds	8
Difficulty means testing	7
Difficulty with allocation	5
Resentment created by small award	5
System works OK	6
Other difficulty	6
Base: all colleges	110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

As with the difficulties in allocation raised in section 2.4.7, and the limitations put forward in section 2.6.3, the comments above can be grouped into three categories.

Not surprisingly in the light of comments made earlier in the interview, structural factors tended to dominate. Just over a third of all colleges (35%) commented that the overall amount available for Access Funds was too small. The other most significant criticisms were to do with the eligibility criteria, specifically age (25%) and mode of study, and course restrictions (19% each). In addition, 12% made a general comment that the criteria were too narrow while 16% felt a lack of national guidelines to be an issue. Fewer (11%) felt that regional differences were not catered for, 8% mentioned student status as an issue and the same proportion thought the criteria were at odds with other funds. Finally in this category, 5% of colleges pointed out that resentment was created by small awards.

The only point raised in connection with the FEFC role was by 10% of respondents with regard to the late notification of the allocation.

Factors within the control of the college were more commonly mentioned: 18% of respondents felt that key areas were not targeted, for example, courses with high material costs such as design and technology. Although this could be viewed as a result of insufficient funds, as with some of the other issues raised, it overlaps with different areas but is still a factor over which the college could have some control. Administration, means-testing and allocation were also included in this group by 12%, 7% and 5% of respondents respectively.

2.8 Summary

The key findings from this section are listed below.

How much Access Funds do colleges receive?

- Across the sample of colleges participating in the survey, FEFC data showed that it had allocated a total amount of £1,808,828 in Access Funds for the academic year 1997/98.
- The average allocation per college was £17,098, an average which disguised a wide range from £507 to £82,086.
- Colleges with a larger allocation of Access Funds were more likely to target distribution. With more funds to spend, it was worth their while to build in mechanisms to distribute the funds, unlike those colleges with less funds that were more likely to scatter them.

How are Access Funds organised in colleges?

- The more that Access Funds became an issue, with higher targeting and better Widening Participation factor achieved, the more likely it was that a student services manager or a welfare/guidance person was responsible for managing Access Funds.
- Nearly all colleges (96%) required 'all' students to complete an application form for Access Funds and half (49%) interviewed 'all' applicants.
- The degree of rigour that colleges applied to the application process can be measured in terms of how many of the following procedures they required of students: an application form, an interview, documentary evidence and verification of the evidence.
- One in twenty colleges (5%) required only an application form and 7% combined the application form (only) with an interview for at least some applicants. Far more common were colleges that relied upon an application form and an interview for at least some applicants, supported by documentary evidence at least sometimes (47%). Finally, almost as many (41%) carried out all four steps.

What are Access Funds used for?

- Most money was spent on help with transport (25% of the total) and child care (22%), both accounting for nearly half of all spending on Access Funds.
- A total of 14,528 students received Access Funds across all the colleges surveyed.
- 1.3% of all students of all types received Access Funds, 7% of all full-time students and 21% of all potentially eligible students.
- This latter figure ranged between colleges from 3% to 58%. Thus some colleges chose to target distribution of Access Funds heavily while others spread them over half of the eligible students within their college.
- A quarter of all awards (26%) were allocated for transport. The next two most common categories were awards for equipment (20%), followed by books (18%). Combined, these three largest categories accounted for nearly two-thirds of all awards (64%).
- Some categories of help accounted for similar proportions of expenditure and numbers of students helped: 25% of all spending was directed on transport, a category which accounted for 26% of all awards. Others showed a variance — while help with child care amounted to 22% of expenditure, but only 7% of all awards.
- The average amount received by each student awarded Access Funds was £130.

How are Access Funds distributed and to whom?

- Nearly half of all colleges (46%) applied additional criteria in deciding which students were eligible for help with Access Funds, over and above the national guidelines.
- The predominant additional eligibility criteria related to the student's financial situation.
- Just over one in three colleges (36%) gave preference to certain groups of students when allocating Access Funds, typically those in financial hardship.
- Nearly two out of five colleges (39%) had no additional criteria for allocating Access Funds nor did they give preference to particular groups of students. These colleges, therefore, appeared to give those involved in allocating Access Funds a lot of discretion in deciding who to help.
- Cash payments of Access Funds were used sparingly, by no more than 10% of all the awarding colleges for any category. The main options were therefore payment in kind or direct payment and cheque, although the mix varied by category.
- Having made an award, the majority of colleges (85%) said that payment of Access Funds was dependent upon aspects of student performance.

Did colleges experience any difficulties with Access Funds?

- The majority of colleges experienced no difficulty at all in allocating and administering Access Funds.
- Just under a third of all colleges (32%) experienced difficulties but those with a higher Widening Participation factor were less likely to experience problems (27% among those in the highest banding) as were colleges that distributed payments more widely (23% of those in the band equating to the lowest level of targeting).
- The greater the expenditure and/or the greater the numbers of students involved, the more the tasks of allocating and paying became more systematic, and the fewer the problems experienced.

What is the impact of Access Funds on students?

- Half of all colleges (51%) claimed to monitor the type of students that applied for Access Funds and exactly the same proportion claimed to do so in respect of the type who received help. Almost as many (46%) said they monitored student knowledge and awareness of the help available.
- 30% did not monitor or evaluate Access Funds in any respect.
- There was only widespread monitoring of the impact of Access Funds in respect of student retention.
- There was a clear lack of systematic and widespread evaluation.
- The key benefits of Access Funds most commonly cited were student retention and recruitment: 69% of respondents thought Access Funds helped students complete the course, and slightly fewer (58%) thought it enabled some to do the course (who might otherwise not have done so).
- Only 58% of colleges first informed students about Access Funds prior to enrolment.

What are the costs and benefits of Access Funds to colleges?

- Few colleges (13%) monitored or evaluated the costs of administering Access Funds.
- 30% thought the cost of administering Access Funds was high in relation to the amounts involved.
- From the college perspective, help with student retention was given as a benefit by 63% of colleges.
- 36% felt the impact on recruitment and enrolment was beneficial.
- A third (34%) felt that Access Funds demonstrated that the college cared or allowed it to help fulfil its side of the contract.
- The primary limitation of Access Funds was felt to be the lack of money available — mentioned by 49% of colleges.
- Just under a third (30%) felt there was insufficient money to help all eligible students.
- Just over a quarter (28%) felt that the amount of money available meant that each award was too small, so that the Access Fund allocation was spread too thinly to have any impact.
- Next came criticism of the eligibility criteria, either that Access Funds are limited to those aged over 19 (26%), those in full-time study (23%) or UK nationals (5%).

3 Other Internal Sources of Student Financial Support

3.1 Introduction

Having collected the data relating to Access Funds, the questionnaire then addressed other types of financial help for students. These were divided into two categories: internal, or college funded help which included:

- Hardship Fund — as with Access Funds, a non-designated source of help;
- remission of tuition fees;
- remission of exam fees;
- travel costs;
- child care; and
- other college funding.

and help from external organisations which included:

- charities and trusts;
- Local Education Authority/Local Authority; and
- European Social Fund.

Each of the nine possible sources of financial help occupied one section of the questionnaire. At the beginning of each section, colleges were asked if they provided financial assistance (in respect of internal sources) or if students received help (in the case of external sources).

For those that replied positively, the questionnaire maintained a similar sequence of questions for each type of help:

- the amounts spent by colleges;
- the number of students who received help;
- the details about the help given (e.g. child care, on-site or off-site);
- the eligibility criteria used by the college to allocate help;
- the groups of students who received help (split by age and mode of study);
- whether internal college help was supplemented by external contributions, and if so by whom and how much?; and
- perceptions as to the likely change in funds available from the source over the next three years.

Given the distinction between internal and external sources, the former are considered in this section of the report. The next section is devoted to the three external sources, those over which the colleges have less, if any, control.

3.2 What Types of Financial Support do Colleges Provide?

Table 3.1 shows the number and proportion of colleges that offered each form of internal financial help.

Table 3.1 Number and proportion of colleges that gave each type of help

Source of expenditure	Number of colleges	% of colleges
Hardship Fund	78	71
Remission of tuition fees	79	72
Remission of exam fees	69	63
Travel costs	72	65
Child care	72	65
Other college funding	49	45
Base: all colleges		110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The majority of colleges (71%) had a Hardship Fund and a similar proportion (72%) gave help via the remission of tuition fees. Around two-thirds of colleges provided help with travel costs (65%), child care (65%) and remission of exam fees (63%). Just under a half helped in other ways (45%), the details of which can be found in section 3.7.4.

One in ten colleges (10%) provided their students with all six forms of internal help, and a further quarter (25%) provided five sources of help. Only one college provided none of the forms of help listed and only five colleges provided just two of them. Overall, there was an average of 3.74 forms of internal help offered to students across all colleges. This figure dropped to 2.89 in the case of the smaller colleges — those with fewer than 6,000 students. (Colleges were grouped into three size bands based on the number of full- and part-time students, of all ages, Council and non-Council funded; in other words the total student body.) The average number of other forms of help was not related to the Widening Participation factor.

The fact that a large number of colleges claimed that students received help from a wide range of these internal sources does not necessarily mean that they played a major role in the provision of financial help to students. To examine this, we can look at the amounts received from the various sources and how many students were helped.

3.3 How Much is Spent on Student Support?

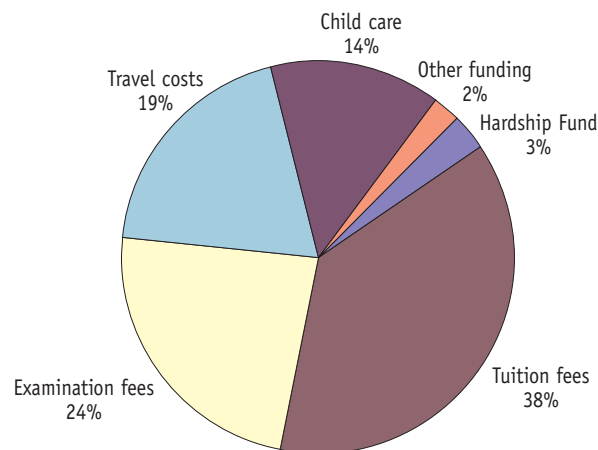
The data collection sheet asked for total amounts spent by the college and numbers of students helped. It also sought a breakdown by category in the case of Hardship Funds, as for Access Funds.

These data were analysed to provide the proportion of help from each source, the numbers of students that received help and the average amount received by each student from each source. In order to do this a complete set of responses was required. While all colleges provided both the total expenditure and number of students helped from their Hardship Fund, this was not the case with the other sources of help. In order to enable analysis of the data, missing values were estimated based on averages derived from those that did give a value. A full description of the method used to impute missing values can be found in the Technical Annex. It was more often the larger colleges that were unable to provide information on the amounts and numbers of students helped. Any estimated values are therefore likely to be less than the actual figure and thus can be regarded as 'conservative' estimates.

The fact that colleges could not easily access information on how much they spent on the various types of student support over which they had control, and on the number of beneficiaries, is a significant finding in itself. It means that it is very difficult to get a true and accurate picture of exactly what proportion of a college's budget is devoted to student financial support which in turn, has implications for policy development. Moreover, it means that our estimates must be treated with caution.

Across all 109 colleges that gave help from internal sources, an estimated total of £23,104,836 was spent. Figure 3 shows the distribution of this total across the various sources of help.

Figure 3 Distribution of total spending from internal sources



Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The remission of tuition fees accounted for the largest proportion of expenditure by colleges — 38% of the total. This was followed by spending on examination fees (24%), travel (19%) and child care (14%). Spending from Hardship Funds accounted for 3% of all internal college spending and the remaining 2% covered a variety of other minor areas.

We have already seen that the total amount of Access Funds spent by the sampled colleges was £1,889,205. The comparison with the amount spent by colleges from their Hardship Funds (£729,755) is interesting in that Access Funds contributed 2½ times as much. If the spending from Access Funds is added into the total of internal spending, then the contribution from them amounted to only 8% of all expenditure.

Table 3.2 provides further detail on the expenditure by source — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges that provided help from each source;
- range of expenditure from each source;
- average expenditure among all colleges making such payments; and
- the total expenditure by source.

Table 3.2 College expenditure from internal sources of financial help

Source of expenditure	% colleges helping	Range of expenditure/(£)	Average expenditure/(£)	Estimated total expenditure/(£)
Hardship Fund	71	100 - 53,874	9,356	729,755
Tuition fees	72	500 - 969,000	109,562	8,655,410
Examination fees	63	240 - 600,000	79,216	5,465,901
Travel costs	65	205 - 532,929	62,258	4,482,557
Child care	65	180 - 310,000	51,051	3,267,284
Other college funding	45	100 - 66,000	10,284	503,929
All colleges	99		211,971	23,104,836

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

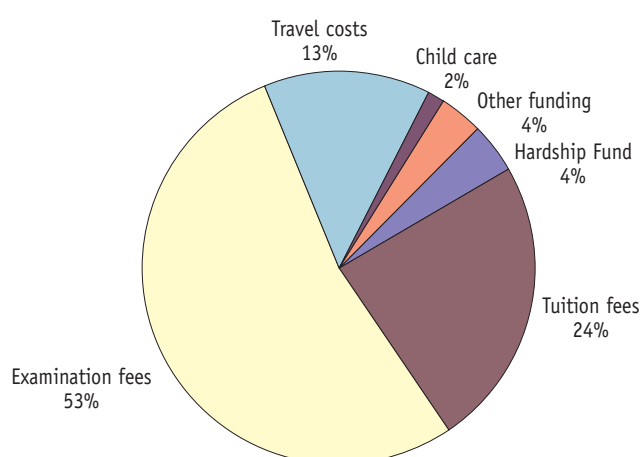
The 109 colleges with some form of student financial support spent an average of £211,971. However, the range of expenditure varied enormously between types of help. For example, the amount spent from the college Hardship Fund ranged from £100 to £53,874, and the amount spent helping with tuition fees ranged from £500 to £969,000. The corresponding average college expenditure from each source reflects this variation. Average spending from Hardship Funds was £9,356, while the average spent by colleges remitting tuition fees was £109,562.

3.4 How Many Students Receive Financial Support and from What Source?

The same estimation technique as above was used to derive a complete picture in respect of the number of students helped by each source. The resultant data produced an (estimated) total of 235,882 students helped from the various internal sources of support. Although impossible to ascertain during a telephone interview, it is likely that there would have been overlap between some of the sources with students receiving help from more than one. While the result of this will have been to (slightly) inflate the actual number of students helped in total, it would probably not have a significant impact on the division of the total between sources.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of students helped by source, based on the total number above.

Figure 4 Distribution of students helped by source



Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Over half (53%) of all students helped were assisted by the remission of their exam fees and a further quarter (24%) had their tuition fees remitted. The remaining minorities of students received assistance with their travel costs (13%) and only 4% received help from either college Hardship Funds or from other (minor) sources. 2% of students helped received assistance with child care.

Table 3.3 provides further detail on the numbers of students helped by category — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges that made awards for each type of help;
- range in the number of students helped from each source;
- average number of students helped by source; and
- the number of students helped by source.

Table 3.3 Number of students helped by internal sources

Source of expenditure	% colleges helping	Range of no. of students helped	Average no. of students helped	Estimated total no. of students helped
Hardship Fund	71	1 - 1,072	127	9,880
Tuition fees	72	2 - 5,526	710	56,123
Examination fees	63	8 - 12,000	1,829	126,195
Travel costs	65	8 - 2,000	439	31,580
Child care	65	1 - 190	58	3,709
Other college funding	45	2 - 3,500	171	8,395
All colleges	99		2,164	235,882

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Across all 109 colleges that provided student financial support, an average of 2,164 students were helped at each college. As with the expenditure data, there was a wide range in the number of students helped by each source across colleges. In the case of help from the Hardship Fund, the numbers helped ranged from just one student to 1,072; while with examination fees the range was far greater, from 8 to 12,000 students. The corresponding average number of students helped from each source reflected this variation. At the lower end there was an average of 58 students helped with child care, the average number helped via the remission of examination fees was 1,829.

As with Access Funds, penetration rates can be calculated for each source of help. Across all 110 colleges included in the survey there was a total of 1,138,245 students according to FEFC returns from the colleges in 1996/97. Although the survey data related to the following academic year, it is unlikely that the total number will have changed significantly, therefore we can derive penetration rates using the 1996/97 total population as the denominator, as shown in table 3.4.

Table 3.4 Penetration of other sources of help

Source of expenditure	Estimated total no. of students	Penetration: % of all receiving
Hardship Fund	9,880	0.9
Tuition fees	56,123	5.0
Examination fees	126,195	11.1
Travel costs	31,580	2.8
Child care	3,709	0.3
Other college funding	8,395	0.7

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Apart from help via remission of examination fees and, to a lesser extent, tuition fees, very low proportions of the total student body received help from the various sources. As we have seen, the same was also true in the case of Access Funds which showed a penetration rate of 1.2%.

As was the case with Access Funds, we can look at the relationship between the expenditure from each source and the number of students helped from each. Table 3.5 below shows the proportion of expenditure and awards, the data presented in Figures 3 and 4, and the resultant ratio.

Table 3.5 Share of expenditure and students helped by source

Source of expenditure	% total expenditure (x)	% of total number of awards (y)	Ratio expenditure/awards (x/y)
Hardship Fund	3.2	4.2	0.8
Tuition fees	37.5	23.8	1.6
Examination fees	23.7	53.5	0.4
Travel costs	19.4	13.4	1.4
Child care	14.1	1.6	8.8
Other college funding	2.2	3.6	0.6

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

A ratio of 1.1 or above indicates a source of help that accounted for a greater share of expenditure relative to its share of awards; ratios of 0.9 or less indicates a source that accounted for a smaller share of expenditure relative to awards. A ratio of 1.0 shows a match between expenditure and awards.

It can be seen that some areas of help accounted for a far higher proportion of those helped compared with the corresponding share of the expenditure. Thus nearly half of all the students that received help, did so in the form of examination fee remission, but this help only accounted for 24% of all expenditure (ratio = 0.4). Other areas of aid involved larger proportions of total expenditure but were allocated to fewer students. The most noticeable example of this was child care — this source accounted for 14% of all expenditure but only benefited 2% of all students (ratio = 8.8). Such divergent patterns were reflected in the average amount received per student by source, the subject of the following section.

3.5 How Much do Students Receive from Each Source?

Overall, the total amount spent from internal colleges sources was £23,104,836 and there were 235,882 students helped across all sources. Some of these students will have received help from more than one source so that the figure derived by dividing the amount by the number will understate the average actually received by individual students. Nonetheless, the resultant figure of £98 provides a comparison for individual sources.

Dividing the total amount spent or received, by the number of students helped, produces the following average payment per student from each source of help. Also shown is the ratio of expenditure to numbers, as per the last column of table 3.5.

Table 3.6 Average payment from each source of help

Source of expenditure	Average amount per student receiving/(£)	Ratio expenditure/awards (x/y)
Hardship Fund	74	0.8
Tuition fees	154	1.6
Examination fees	43	0.4
Travel costs	142	1.4
Child care	881	8.8
Other college funding	60	0.6
Overall average	98	

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The point made earlier about relatively few students receiving relatively higher proportions of the total expenditure is reflected in the above figures. There was a wide range of per capita spending across sources compared with this average. Child care had by far the highest per capita expenditure, at £881 per recipient, nearly nine times the average across all sources and more than five times the size of the next highest category. Still above the average, although closer to it, were: tuition fees (£154) and help with travel costs (£142). There were three categories of help with below average per capita expenditure: Hardship Funds (£74), other college funding (£60) and help with examination fees (£43).

The relationship between these values and the ratio of expenditure/awards now becomes clear. Ratios of 1.0 or above correspond with average awards greater than the average i.e. expenditure concentrated on relatively few individuals (as in the case of help with child care). Lower ratios indicate a greater number of students benefiting from a relatively lower amount (as in the case of examination fee remission). Such variation must, in part, reflect the actual costs of providing the different types of support. Needless to say, child care is far more expensive than examination fees.

3.6 Which Students get Student Support and What are the Eligibility Criteria?

3.6.1 Which students get student support?

Colleges were asked which types of students received most help from the various internal sources, in terms of their age and mode of study. Although relatively high proportions of respondents could not provide an answer, the results of this question provided a clear picture of which students benefited most from each of the sources of help, as shown in table 3.7.

Table 3.7 Groups of students that received most help

Group	Column percentage					
	Hardship fund	Remission of tuition fees	Remission of exam fees	Travel costs	Child care	Other (college) help
Full-time 16–18	50	N/A	29	53	3	46
Part-time 16–18	5	4	3	3	0	0
Full-time 19 or over	13	60	29	15	53	13
Part-time 19 or over	8	17	12	1	13	4
Don't know	30	20	28	28	31	39
Base: all colleges helping	78	79	69	72	64	49

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

A preference in favour of those studying full-time was clear: across all sources of help those studying full-time were more likely to be the primary recipients of help. Younger full-time students were the primary recipients of college Hardship Funds, help with travel costs and other (college) help. The opposite was the case with child care for which there was a clear tendency towards those aged 19 or over, reflecting the greater probability of this age group having children. In the case of exam fee remission, there was no difference between the two age bands in terms of priority. Given that tuition fees are not payable by 16–18 year olds in full-time education, the main thrust of help in this direction was in regard of those 19 or over on full-time courses.

So the general picture to emerge was one of priority accorded to those on full-time courses and, within this, to those in the younger age group. Yet the **student survey** showed that those who were most vulnerable financially were in fact older students, especially those with children, and full-time students. These students were not the major beneficiaries of assistance — full-time 16–18 year olds were. In other words, help was not targeting all groups of students most in need of financial support. Hence it can be assumed that students facing similar financial difficulties were being treated differently depending on their age.

As important, the findings highlight the fragmented nature of the provision and the way it favours particular groups of students demonstrating, yet again, the lack of a comprehensive system of student support. And the findings show that the amount of money students receive, on average, is inadequate. The monies received do not meet the average participation costs students incurred, estimated from the **student survey** to be £600 per academic year.

3.6.2 What eligibility criteria are used?

As we have seen, not all students most in need of help necessarily received it. Yet colleges did make stringent efforts to target their resources. The criteria used to allocate help showed a clear recognition of the significance of financial hardship across virtually all sources, as shown in table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Eligibility criteria used (multi-coded data)

Criteria	Column percentage					
	Hardship fund	Remission of tuition fees	Remission of exam fees	Travel costs	Child care	Other (college) help
Low income/pay	24	28	9	4	14	10
Financial hardship	51	42	45	18	45	43
Receipt of other help	1	8	13		3	2
Non-receipt of other help	31	15	13	7	2	6
Age	23	22	26	18	5	12
Health	4	9	1	8		
Family type	4	8	3	4	8	4
Mode of study	31	32	38	32	13	10
Hours of study	4	3	1	1	3	2
Course undertaken	3	5	6	1		6
Course funding	1				3	
Stage of course	1			1		2
Attendance record	9	1	4	4	5	6
Location, distance from college	4	3	3	33	2	4
First time attendance	1		3			
Paying tuition fees	1					
Country of residence	4	4			2	4
Employment status or category	1	5		1		
Course performance	1		1			18
Learning difficulties				1		2
Tutor report/interview	6	1	1		2	4
Other	10	8	6	6	3	20
No eligibility criteria	6	10	4	31	36	16
Varies according to specific requirements						
Base: all colleges helping	78	79	69	72	72	49

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

In addition to financial hardship and low income/pay, mode of study (full/part-time), age and non-receipt of other help were also important commonly used eligibility criteria. Taken together, the use of these criteria was consistent with the priority accorded to full-time students, and those aged between 16 and 18. Yet as we have seen, this was to the detriment of older students.

Some sources of help had specific eligibility criteria as one might expect. For example, to qualify for help with travel costs, students needed to live a certain distance from the college in 33% of cases where colleges made such awards. Interestingly, 31% of colleges applied no eligibility criteria for help with travel, allowing access to such help to all students. A slightly higher proportion of those helping with child care also said there were no criteria (36%), although 45% of this group used financial hardship to allocate help.

3.7 What Sort of Help is Provided and how do Students use their Student Support?

In the case of some internal sources of financial support for students, subsidiary questions sought more detail about the nature and type of help given.

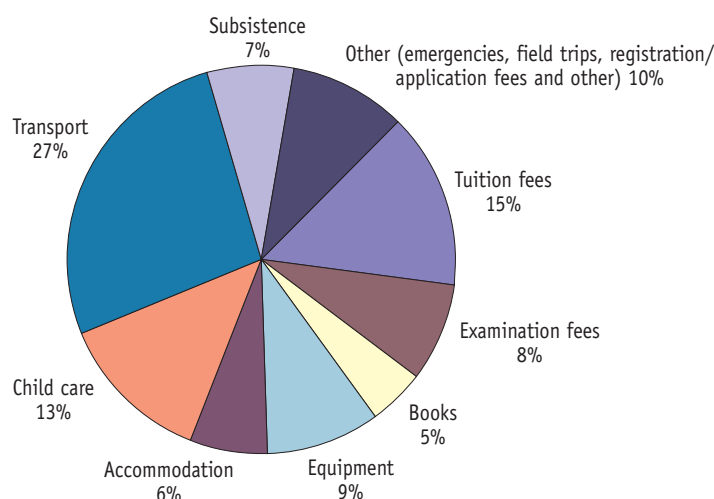
3.7.1 Hardship Funds

The **case studies** revealed that Hardship Funds were often used and administered in conjunction with Access Funds to deal with student financial hardship. They tended to be used for those students who did not meet the national criteria for Access Funds.

In the **present survey**, the 78 colleges that had Hardship Funds were asked for a breakdown of expenditure by category. There were only a few missing values in this data and these were imputed from averages within each category of help. Across all categories, the total amount spent was £729,755 as we have already seen and the average spent by each college was £9,356 (section 3.3 refers).

Figure 5 shows the distribution of the total expenditure across the categories used in the survey.

Figure 5 Distribution of total spending from Hardship Funds



Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Over a quarter of all spending from college Hardship Funds was on transport (26.9%), followed by help with tuition fees (14.7%) and then child care (12.9%). All other categories each accounted for less than 10% of the total expenditure. A comparison with the distribution of spending of Access Funds by category showed that larger proportions of Access Funds were spent on books, equipment, accommodation, and child care. All other categories of help (tuition fees, examinations fees, transport, emergencies, subsistence, field trips and registration/application fees) attracted higher proportions of the Hardship Funds than was the case with Access Funds.

Table 3.9 provides further detail on the expenditure by category — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges that made awards for each type of help;
- range of expenditure in each category;
- average expenditure among all colleges making such payments; and
- the total expenditure by category.

Table 3.9 Expenditure from Hardship Funds

Category of expenditure	% colleges helping	Range of expenditure/(£)	Average expenditure/(£)	Total spent by all colleges/(£)
Tuition fees	26	22 - 23,000	3,689	106,980
Examination fees	36	10 - 7,528	1,468	58,700
Books	42	16 - 4,970	771	35,471
Equipment	46	15 - 9,330	1,347	68,673
Accommodation	29	35 - 15,543	1,449	46,370
Child care	28	15 - 19,918	2,945	94,242
Transport	55	48 - 30,501	3,219	196,354
Emergencies	15	46 - 4,420	959	15,351
Subsistence	19	50 - 10,900	2,496	52,414
Field trips	15	29 - 3,434	1,107	18,817
Registration/application fees	3	102 - 1,700	663	1,988
Other items	19	33 - 18,500	1,638	34,395
All colleges	71	100 - 53,874	9,356	729,755

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

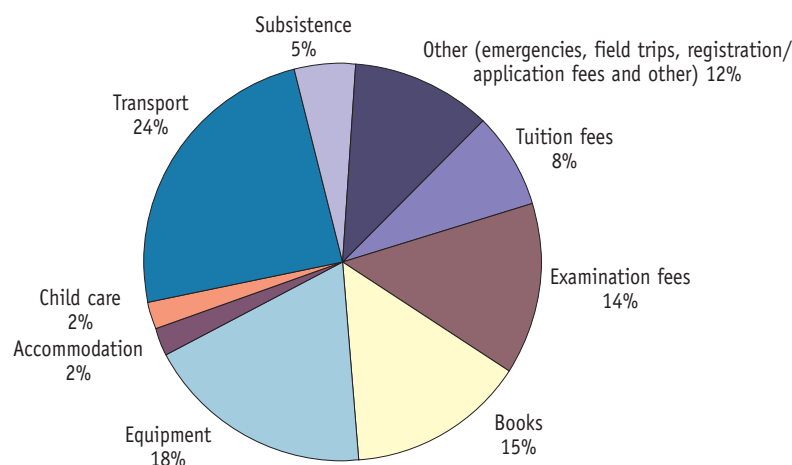
As was the case with Access Funds, the number of colleges helping with each category also varied widely. For example, only 3% of all colleges helped with registration/application fees, 15% used their Hardship Fund to help with emergencies and the same proportion provided help with field trips. A large proportion of colleges (55%), used their Hardship Fund to help with transport, the next most frequent form of help was with equipment (46%) and books (42%). This pattern of help was not dissimilar to that found in the case of Access Funds.

As with Access Funds, there was a large range in expenditure on individual categories of help. For example, one college spent £48 on transport and another £30,501; expenditure on field trips showed a narrower range, from £29–£3,434. The range of average college expenditure by category also varied enormously, from £663 on registration and application fees, to £3,689 in the case of tuition fees.

Across all colleges with Hardship Funds, a total of 9,880 students received help in one form or another from the Hardship Fund. These were spread across a total of 78 colleges, producing an average number of 127 students assisted at each college with a Hardship Fund. However, this figure disguised a wide range — the maximum number of students helped at one college was 1,072 and the minimum, 1. Access Funds were distributed to 14,528 students, roughly 1½ times as many as were helped by Hardship Funds.

The sum of the students helped by category (11,660) was greater than the total number of individual students helped because of multiple awards — individuals that received help in more than one category. There were, on average, 1.2 awards per student. Figure 6 is based on the total number of awards.

Figure 6 Distribution of total awards from Hardship Funds



Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

A quarter of all awards (24%) were made in respect of help with transport. The next three most common categories were awards for equipment (18%), books (15%) and examination fees (14%). Less common, in terms of their volume, were awards to help with tuition fees (8%), subsistence (5%), child care (2%) and accommodation (2%). All other remaining categories (field trips, other, emergencies and application/registration fees) accounted for the remaining 12% of all awards. This distribution was similar to that found for Access Funds in terms of the relative order of importance of the categories of help.

Table 3.10 provides further detail on the numbers of students helped by category — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges that made awards for each type of help;
- range in the number of students helped in each category;
- average number of students helped by category; and
- the number of students helped by category.

Table 3.10 Number of students that received help from Hardship Funds

Category of expenditure	% of colleges helping	Range of no. of students helped	Average no. of students helped	Total no. of students helped
Tuition fees	26	1 - 210	32	917
Examination fees	36	1 - 517	40	1606
Books	42	1 - 854	37	1699
Equipment	46	1 - 854	42	2143
Accommodation	29	1 - 33	8	259
Child care	28	1 - 27	8	261
Transport	55	2 - 601	47	2873
Emergencies	15	3 - 111	20	314
Subsistence	19	1 - 116	27	558
Field trips	15	1 - 40	16	278
Registration/application fees	3	2 - 34	15	44
Other items	19	1 - 213	34	708
All colleges	71	1 - 1072	127	9880

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

There was a wide range in the number of students helped across colleges by category — many showed only one student helped as the minimum. For some categories of help, the maximum number of students helped was as low as 27 (child care), whereas far greater numbers were assisted with books and equipment (maximum number helped of 854 in both cases).

While there was a broad relationship between the expenditure by category and the share of all awards made by category, there were exceptions. Table 3.11 shows the proportion of expenditure and awards, the data presented in Figures 5 and 6, and the resultant ratio.

Table 3.11 Share of expenditure and awards by category

Category of expenditure	% total expenditure (x)	% of total number of awards (y)	Ratio expenditure/awards (x/y)
Tuition fees	14.7	7.9	1.9
Examination fees	8.0	13.8	0.6
Books	4.9	14.6	0.3
Equipment	9.4	18.4	0.5
Accommodation	6.4	2.2	2.9
Child care	12.9	2.2	5.9
Transport	26.9	24.6	1.1
Emergencies	2.1	2.6	0.8
Subsistence	7.2	4.8	1.5
Field trips	2.6	2.4	1.1
Registration/application fees	0.3	0.4	0.8
Other items	4.7	6.1	0.8

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

A ratio of 1.1 or above indicates a category of help that accounted for a greater share of expenditure relative to its share of awards; ratios of 0.9 or less indicates a category that accounted for a smaller share of expenditure relative to awards. A ratio of 1.0 shows a match between expenditure and awards.

For example, the transport category accounted for 27% of expenditure and 25% of awards (ratio = 1.1). However, and in a now familiar pattern, child care accounted for 13% of expenditure but only 2% of awards (ratio = 5.9). In comparison, help with books accounted for 5% of the expenditure and 15% of awards, the reverse relationship with a ratio of 0.3.

Many of these relationships were found to apply in the case of Access Funds and the other sources of internal help. Once again, these figures highlight the very different costs associated with child care incurred by a minority of students and the smaller costs associated with, for example, transport incurred by many more students. They again illustrate the dilemma facing colleges regarding the most efficient and equitable means of distributing and rationing scarce resources.

Overall, each student that received help from college Hardship Funds was given an average of £74, a figure derived from the total spent (i.e. £729,755) divided by the total number of students that received help (i.e. 9,880), not the total number of 'awards'.

Table 3.12 shows the average amount received by each student in each category of expenditure, derived by dividing the expenditure in a category by the number of awards made. Also shown is the ratio of expenditure to awards, as per the last column in table 3.11.

Table 3.12 Average size of award from Hardship Funds

Area of expenditure	Average amount per award/(£)	Ratio expenditure/awards (x/y)
Tuition fees	117	1.9
Examination fees	37	0.6
Books	21	0.3
Equipment	32	0.5
Accommodation	179	2.9
Child care	361	5.9
Transport	68	1.1
Emergencies	49	0.8
Subsistence	94	1.5
Field trips	68	1.1
Registration/application fees	45	0.8
Other items	49	0.8
Average award	63	

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

There was a wide range of average expenditure per student, by category. The overall average per award was £63. Students that were helped with child care received an average of almost six times this amount (£361) and those helped with their accommodation costs received an average of £179. Conversely, the types of help spread more widely had lower per capita expenditure — books (£21), equipment (£32) and examination fees (£37).

3.7.2 Travel

The results of the **student survey** showed that one third of students over 19 studying part-time found travel costs hard to meet. As a result, one in eight missed going to college because they could not afford their travel costs. Generally, for most students, and particularly for those aged 16–18, travel was the biggest single category of expenditure. The **case study** interviews revealed that help with travel provided by colleges could take a variety of forms.

Two-thirds of colleges (65%) in the **present survey** helped with travel costs (over and above any help from Access or Hardship Funds) and they were asked what sort of assistance was given.

Half (50%) of all colleges that gave help did so via the provision of free bus passes and almost as many (43%) provided subsidised bus passes. Fewer (10%) made discounted tickets available. 8% supplied weekly travel allowances and 6% subsidised train tickets. 4% of colleges providing help with travel costs did so by using taxis for particular groups, and the same proportion did so in the case of emergencies. There was some overlap in provision, although the majority of colleges (50 out of the 72) provided just one form of help. 19 colleges offered two forms of help, of which the most common combination was free and subsidised bus passes (7 of this group).

Asked whether they provided a bus service to get students to college or to ferry them between sites, 48 of the colleges that provided help with travel did so (two-thirds of this group). The remaining 23 colleges did not provide a bus service and one respondent was unsure as to whether the college did or did not. There was no difference in the type of help offered by colleges that did and did not run a bus service. The free and subsidised bus passes offered by those that did not run a bus service were presumably for use on bus services operated by other providers.

Of the 48 colleges that provided transport, 20 ran their own buses and 28 sub-contracted the service. Larger colleges were more likely to sub-contract the bus service whereas smaller colleges tended to run their own fleet. This was probably a result of the size of bus required at larger colleges.

3.7.3 Child care

We have seen that child care was, on a per capita basis, the most expensive type of help given by colleges with relatively few students helped. This applied across Access Funds, Hardship Funds and other college spending.

As with spending on travel, colleges can either run child care facilities themselves or contribute towards the charges levied by another provider. Nearly 60% of all colleges (64 of the 110) offered help with child care (over and above Access Funds and Hardship Funds) of which the majority (70%) provided subsidised child care. Half (50%) supplied free child care and 17% covered the full cost of child care. There was overlap in the provision, in that 16 of the 64 colleges provided both free and subsidised child care, 7 supplied both free child care and covered the full cost of child care and 6 offered subsidised child care and covered the full cost.

Asked where the child care was provided, most (78% of those providing) had child care facilities on site, a quarter (28%) had off-site provision and one in seven (14%) provided child care at a college outreach centre. Again, respondents could give more than one answer, although only 12 of the 64 colleges did so. Five of these provided on- and off-site provision, 4 provided child care on-site and at outreach centres, two provided child care at all three types of location and one provided outreach centre and off-site child care.

Colleges were also asked whether the child care staff were employed directly by the college, came from the private sector, or were volunteers. Three-quarters (75%) of those providing child care employed college staff and 30% used private sector provision; only one college used voluntary staff. The vast majority of colleges used only one form of staff: 5 colleges used both their own staff and those provided by the private sector and one college used all three types of staff.

As one would expect, off-site child care was more likely to be staffed by the private sector whereas, on-site and college outreach centre child care was more likely to involve staff directly employed by the college.

There was a good level of provision for children of different ages. Over half (58%) of the colleges providing child care offered it for children aged under 2, all but one catered for 2–5 year olds and a quarter (23%) had provision for 5 year olds and over. The range of provision was wider at the larger colleges.

3.7.4 Other college help

The final section on internal college help covered any other forms of financial aid not already covered in the previous sections. As already seen, 49 of the 110 colleges (45%) provided some other form of help to the value of £503,929. This was divided between 8,395 students producing an overall average of £60 per student helped.

A variety of assistance was available. The most common was free meals, offered by 19 of the 49 colleges that gave this form of help (39%). Next came prizes to students (13 colleges, 27%), college awards or grants (10 colleges, 20%), loans (8 colleges, 16%), help with visits and field trips (3 colleges, 6%) and books and equipment (3 colleges, 6%). Seven colleges (14%) helped out in a variety of other, non-specified, ways.

3.8 Who Pays for Financial Support?

Recent years have witnessed some FE colleges seeking assistance to help students from external sources, such as private companies and various charitable foundations. In order to gauge the extent of this practice, colleges were asked if any of the money spent on student financial support from each internal source came from other than college funds.

The incidence of external help was very low across all areas, with Hardship Funds and child care spending making the greatest progress in this respect:

Hardship Fund	7 out of 78 awarding colleges received external help
Tuition fees	1 out of 79
Exam fees	0 out of 69
Travel	2 out of 72
Child care	8 out of 72
Other funding	4 out of 49

Another way of looking at the situation is that 20 of the 110 colleges (18%) had managed to access external help for one area of spending and one (1%) had done so in respect of two areas.

It is also possible to look at the proportion of college spending that came from outside and the net external contribution. In the case of Hardship Funds, four of the seven colleges concerned raised all their Hardship Fund spending from external sources, the other three raised between 34% to 50%. Across all seven colleges there was a total expenditure from their Hardship Funds of £105,178 of which £73,178 (i.e. 70%) was raised externally. This accounted for 10% of the total expenditure from college Hardship Funds.

With college expenditure on child care, the proportion of expenditure found externally ranged from 16% to 94%. Across all eight there was a total expenditure on child care of £994,640 of which £425,182 (i.e. 43%) was raised externally. This accounted for exactly 13% of the total expenditure on child care.

On other college funding, the proportion of expenditure found externally ranged from 25% to 74%. Across all four there was a total expenditure on other areas of £78,100 of which £34,500 (i.e. 44%) was raised externally. This accounted for 7% of the total expenditure on other items.

Turning to college expenditure on travel, one college received 14% of its spending from external sources and the other, 59%. Across these two there was a total expenditure on travel of £559,679 of which £316,679 (i.e. 57%) was raised externally. This accounted for 7% of the total expenditure on travel.

With regard to college expenditure on tuition fees, the one college concerned received 9% of its spending from external sources. This contribution accounted for 0.2% of the total expenditure on tuition fees.

Adding up external contributions across the various categories of help produced a total income from external sources of £864,657. This equated to just under 4% of all spending on student financial support from internal college sources.

Asked from where these external contributions came, a variety of responses was given. Most prevalent in the case of contributions to child care were mentions of FEFC child care units. Although not an 'external' source as such, it is widely recognised that not all colleges take advantage of these units. More generally private sector companies were cited as contributors, as were charities, the Local Education Authority (especially in the case of assistance with travel), college staff and student fund-raising and a variety of other sources.

3.9 How will the Role of Internal Sources Change in the Future?

In order to look at likely trends in the various sources of support available to students, colleges were asked whether or not they thought the amount spent by them on students would increase, stay the same or decrease over the next three years — table 3.13 shows the results.

Table 3.13 Likely future trends in expenditure from each source

Area of funding	Row percentage				
	Base: all helping	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease	Don't know
Hardship Fund	78	37	49	12	3
Remission of tuition fees	79	30	38	17	15
Remission of exam fees	69	41	41	9	10
Travel costs	72	63	24	7	7
Child care	64	31	42	16	11
Other (college) help	49	39	47	8	6

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

It is interesting to see a marked optimism in the case of travel costs. Nearly two-thirds of colleges that helped in this way (63%) thought they were likely to spend more on travel over the next three years. A clear opinion, as in the case of travel costs indicates a more grounded point of view. In many other areas respondents admitted they were guessing, and were often reluctant to even venture an opinion. All other sources of funding were thought, on balance, to be likely to stay roughly the same, with only remission of exam fees showing an even split between staying the same and increasing.

In table 3.14, the 'stay the same' responses are ignored and the percentage of respondents who expected a decrease in funding is subtracted from those anticipating an increase. The resulting figure provides an indication of the degree of optimism with which respondents regarded future funding in each area.

Table 3.14 Balance of opinion of future spending from each source

Area of funding	
Hardship Fund	25
Remission of tuition fees	13
Remission of exam fees	32
Travel costs	56
Child care	15
Other (college) help	31

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

3.10 Summary

The key findings from this section are listed below.

What types of financial support do colleges provide?

- The majority of colleges (71%) had a Hardship Fund and a similar proportion (72%) gave help via the remission of tuition fees. Around two-thirds of colleges provided help with travel costs (65%), child care (65%) and remission of exam fees (63%). Just under a half helped in other ways (45%).
- Overall, there was an average of 3.74 forms of internal help offered to students across all colleges.

How much is spent on student support?

- Across all 109 colleges that gave help from internal sources, an estimated total of £23,104,836 was spent. This produced an average of £211,971 per college.
- The remission of tuition fees accounted for the largest proportion of expenditure by colleges — 38% of the total. This was followed by spending on examination fees (24%), travel (19%) and child care (14%).
- The range of expenditure varied enormously between types of help. The smallest range was in respect of the amount spent from the college Hardship Fund, ranging from £100 to £53,874. The amount spent helping with tuition fees ranged from £500 to £969,000; this was the category with the greatest range.

How many students receive financial support and from what source?

- An estimated total of 235,882 students received help from internal sources.
- The most common forms of help were remission of exam fees (53% of all students helped) followed by tuition fees remission (24%).
- Only 11% of all students received help via the remission of examination fees and 5% did so via remission of tuition fees. Even lower proportions of the total student body received help from the other sources.
- Across all 109 colleges that provided student financial support, an average of 2,164 students were helped at each college.
- There was a wide range in the number of students helped by each source across colleges. In the case of help with child care, the numbers helped ranged from just one student to 190; at the other extreme the range was greatest in the case of examination fees, from 8 to 12,000 students.
- The average number of students helped from each source reflected this variation. At the lower end there was an average of 58 students helped with child care, the average number helped via the remission of examination fees was 1,829.
- Some areas of help accounted for a far higher proportion of those helped compared with the corresponding share of the expenditure. Thus nearly half of all the students that received help, did so in the form of exam fee remission, but this help only accounted for 24% of all expenditure. In contrast, spending on child care accounted for 14% of all expenditure but only benefited 2% of all students.

How much do students receive from each source?

- Across all forms of financial assistance, the average amount received per student was £98.
- Child care had by far the highest per capita expenditure, at £881 per recipient, nearly nine times the average across all sources and more than five times the size of the next highest category.
- There were three categories of help with below average per capita expenditure: Hardship Funds (£74), other (college) funding (£60) and help with examination fees (£43).

Which students get support and what are the eligibility criteria?

- Across all sources of help those studying full-time were more likely to be the primary recipients of help.
- Younger full-time students were the key recipients of college Hardship Funds, help with travel costs and other (college) help.
- The opposite was the case with child care for which there was a clear tendency towards those aged 19 or over, reflecting the greater probability of this age group having children.
- In the case of exam fee remission, there was no difference between the two age bands in terms of priority.
- The main eligibility criteria were financial hardship and low income/pay, followed by mode of study (full/part-time), age and non-receipt of other help were commonly used eligibility criteria.

What help is provided from college Hardship Funds?

- The total spending from the 78 colleges that had a Hardship Fund was £729,755, an average of £9,356 per college.
- Over a quarter of all spending from college Hardship Funds was on transport (26.9%), followed by help with tuition fees (14.7%) and then child care (12.9%).
- A total of 9,880 students received help in one form or another. These were spread across the 78 colleges, producing an average number of 127 students assisted at each college with a Hardship Fund.
- The maximum number of students helped at one college was 1,072 and the minimum, 1.
- A quarter of all awards (24%) were made in respect of help with transport. Then followed awards for equipment (18%), books (15%) and examination fees (14%).
- Each student that received help from the Hardship Funds was given an average of £74.

What help is provided with travel ?

- Two-thirds of colleges (65%) helped with travel costs (over and above any help from Access or Hardship Funds).
- The most usual form of help was free bus passes provided by half (50%) of all colleges that gave help and almost as many (43%) provided subsidised bus passes.

What help is provided with child care?

- Nearly 60% of all colleges provided help with child care (over and above that supported from Access Funds and Hardship Funds).
- The majority of this group (70%) provided subsidised child care, half (50%) supplied free child care and 17% covered the full cost of child care.
- Most (78% of those providing) had child care facilities on site, a quarter (28%) had off-site provision and one in seven (14%) provided child care at a college outreach centre.
- There was a good level of provision for children of different ages. Over half (58%) of the colleges providing child care offered it for children aged under 2, all but one catered for 2–5 year olds and a quarter (23%) had provision for 5 year olds and over.

Who pays for financial support?

- Very few colleges received external contributions towards the costs of their student support.
- 20 of the 110 colleges (18%) had managed to access external help for (at least) one area of spending, especially Hardship Funds.
- External contributions across the various categories of help amounted to £864,657 — just under 4% of all spending on student financial support from internal college sources.

How will the role of internal sources change in the future?

- Across all areas of internal college help, more colleges thought their importance would grow in the coming three years than thought they would decline.
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of those providing help with travel thought expenditure on it would increase over the next three years.

4 External Sources of Student Financial Support

4.1 Introduction

This section is concerned with student help received from three external organisations:

- charities and trusts;
- Local Education Authority/Local Authority; and
- European Social Fund.

As with the internal (college) sources of help, for those that were aware of their students receiving help from a source, the questionnaire maintained a similar sequence of questions for each type of help:

- the amounts received by students;
- the number of students who received help;
- the details about the help given;
- the eligibility criteria used by those awarding help to allocate it;
- the groups of student who received help (split by age and mode of study); and
- perceptions as to the likely change in funds available from the source over the next three years.

4.2 What Types of Financial Support do Students Receive?

Table 4.1 shows the number and proportion of colleges that thought their students received help from each of the three external sources.

Table 4.1 Number and proportion of colleges at which students received each type of help

Source	Number of colleges	% of colleges
Charities and trusts	73	66
Local (Education) Authorities	91	83
European Social Fund	43	39
Base: all colleges		110

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

The large majority of all colleges (83%) thought that students received help from the Local Education Authority, two-thirds (66%) thought they received from charities and trusts, and 39% from the European Social Fund.

Students at one in four colleges (25%) got help from all three sources, and those at a further 46% received help from two sources. At only six colleges (6% of all) did students not receive any assistance from any of the three external sources. Overall, there was an average of 1.90 forms of external help received by students across all colleges. This was not related to either the size of the college or to the Widening Participation factor.

4.3 How Much is Received by Students?

The data collection sheet asked for the total amounts received by students from each source and the numbers helped.

These data were analysed to provide the proportion of help from each source, the numbers of students that received help and the average amount received by each student from each source. In order to do this a complete set of responses was required. There were significant numbers of colleges that were unable to provide the required information. This reflects the fact that colleges have less (if any) involvement with regard to external sources of help and are therefore less aware of the details. In order to enable analysis of the data, missing values have been estimated based on averages derived from those that did give a value. A full description of the method used to impute missing values can be found in the Technical Annex. It was more often the larger colleges that were unable to provide information on the amounts and numbers of students helped. Any estimated values are therefore likely to be less than the actual figure and thus can be regarded as 'conservative' estimates. However, the estimates should still be treated with caution.

Across all 104 colleges in which students were assisted from external sources, there was a total of £8,780,704 received by students. By way of comparison, the total spent by colleges from the Access Fund and all other internal sources of help was £24,994,041. Thus, of the combined total, help received from external sources amounted to a quarter of the total (26%).

Table 4.2 provides the detail on the amounts received by source — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges in which students received help from each source;
- range of amounts received from each source;
- average amounts received;
- total received by source; and
- the share of the total received.

Table 4.2 Amounts received from external sources of financial help

Source	% colleges	Range of amount received/(£)	Average amount/(£)	Total received/(£)	% share of total
Charities and Trusts	73	200 - 50,000	5,646	412,181	5
Local Authorities	91	150 - 587,916	78,386	7,133,158	81
ESF	43	500 - 180,000	28,729	1,235,366	14
All colleges	95			8,780,704	

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Help from Local Authorities accounted for the majority of all external support received by students (81%) and the ESF contributed a further 14% of the total; charities and trusts accounted for only 5% of the total.

The range of expenditure varied enormously within and between types of help. For example, all students at one college obtained a total of £50,000 from charities and trusts, whereas at another college the total was just £200. The contributions from Local Authorities directly to students ranged from £150 to £587,916. The corresponding average amounts received reflect this variation. Thus the average amount received by all students from charities and trusts was £5,646 per college, while the average from Local Authorities was 14 times greater at £78,386.

4.4 How Many Students Receive Financial Support?

The same estimation technique as above was used to derive a complete picture in respect of the number of students. The resultant data produced an (estimated) total of 27,474 students helped from the various external sources. Although it was impossible to ascertain during a telephone interview, it is likely that there would have been overlap between some of the sources with students receiving help from more than one. While the result of this will have been to (slightly) inflate the actual number of students helped in total, it would probably not have a significant impact on the division of the total between sources.

By way of comparison, the total number of students helped from college Access Funds and all other internal sources of help was 250,410. Thus, of the combined total, 10% of the total number of students helped received assistance from external sources. This proportion is far less than the share of expenditure from all sources (26%), a difference that resulted in high per capita sums received from the three external sources (section 4.5 refers).

Table 4.3 provides further detail on the numbers of students helped by category — it shows the:

- proportion of colleges in which students received help from each source;
- range in the number of students helped from each source;
- average number of students helped by source;
- the number of students helped by source; and
- the share of the total number of students helped.

Table 4.3 Number of students helped from external sources

Source	% colleges	Range of no. students helped	Average no. students helped	Estimated total no. of students helped	% share of total
Charities and Trusts	73	1 - 100	25	1,833	7
Local Authorities	91	2 - 2,000	201	18,301	67
ESF	43	6 - 1,557	171	7,341	27
All colleges	95			27,474	

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Of all students assisted by external sources, two-thirds (67%) received grants from Local Authorities and just over a quarter (27%) received aid from the ESF. Charities and trusts gave to 7% of all students helped from external sources.

As with the expenditure data, there was a wide range in the number of students helped by each source across colleges. In the case of help from Local Authorities, the numbers helped ranged from just two students to 2,000. There was a similar range in the case of the ESF, whereas that for charities and trusts was narrower — between 1 and 100 students. The corresponding average number of students helped from each source reflects this variation. At the lower end there was an average of 25 students assisted by charities and trusts, the average number that received assistance from the Local Authorities was 201.

The **case studies** showed that many charities and trusts have particular criteria governing the assistance they can offer. As such, only small proportions of the student body may be eligible for help.

Penetration rates can be calculated for each source of help based on data collected in the **present survey**. Across all 110 colleges included in the survey there was a total of 1,138,245 students according to FEFC returns from the colleges in 1996/97. Although the survey data related to the following academic year, it is unlikely that the total number will have changed significantly, therefore we can derive penetration rates using the 1996/97 total population as the denominator.

Table 4.4 Penetration of other sources of help

Source	Estimated total students	Penetration % of all receiving
Charities and Trusts	1,833	0.2
Local Authorities	18,301	1.6
ESF	7,341	0.6

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Very low proportions of the total student body were helped by the various sources. The figures above are not dissimilar to that found in the case of Access Funds which showed a penetration rate of 1.2%.

4.5 How Much do Students Receive from each Source?

Overall, the total amount received by students from external sources was £8,780,704 and there were 27,474 students helped. Some of these students will have received help from more than one source so that the figure derived by dividing the amount by the number will understate the average actually received by individual students. Nonetheless, the resultant figure of £320 provides a comparison for individual sources.

Dividing the total amount spent or received, by the number of students helped, produces the average payments per student from each source of help, shown in table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Average award for each source of help

Source	Average amount per student receiving/(£)
Charities and Trusts	225
Local Authorities	390
ESF	168
Overall average per award	320

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Of the three external sources, Local Authorities were the most generous, giving an average of £390 per student. Charities awarded more per capita than did the ESF — £225 compared with £168.

It is interesting that all the above figures are far higher than all other forms of internal help apart from that spent by colleges on child care. The average amount of Access Funds received by each student awarded them was £130 and the average received from all other internal sources was £98. Thus, although directed at relatively few students, the external sources of help gave reasonable sums to individual students.

4.6 Which Students get Support and what are the Eligibility Criteria?

4.6.1 Which students get student support?

Colleges were asked which types of students benefited via help from the various external sources, in terms of their age and mode of study. Given the lack of involvement of colleges in the types of help asked about, many were uncertain as to the main types of beneficiary. Despite this, the answers to this question provided a picture of which groups of students benefit most from each of the sources of help, as shown in table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Groups of students that received most help

Group	Column percentage		
	Charities and trusts	Local Authority	ESF
Full-time 16–18	26	64	0
Part-time 16–18	1	0	0
Full-time 19 or over	21	11	35
Part-time 19 or over	7	1	28
Don't know	45	24	37
Base: all colleges at which students received help from each source	73	91	43

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

As with the range of internal sources of help, a preference in favour of those studying full-time was clear with regard to help received from Local Authorities and charities. Assistance from Local Authorities was also most likely to be targeted at the younger age group. It would appear that the eligibility criteria for aid from the ESF are such that only students aged 19 or over can benefit; there was no clear preference by mode of study.

4.6.2 What eligibility criteria are used?

The criteria used by those administering the external sources of help to allocate help included a mix of factors, above and beyond financial hardship across virtually all sources, as shown in table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Eligibility criteria (multi-coded data)

Criteria	Column percentage		
	Charities and trusts	Local Authority	ESF
Low income/pay	16	21	9
Financial hardship	15	60	19
Receipt of other help		2	2
Non-receipt of other help	4	1	5
Age	10	28	16
Health	3	2	
Family type	4		7
Mode of study	6	21	7
Hours of study	6	1	
Course undertaken	7	10	9
Course funding	1	1	35
Stage of course			
Attendance record	1	1	
Location, distance from college	22	23	5
First time attendance		2	
Paying tuition fees			
Country of residence	1		2
Employment status or category	4		9
Course performance	4	1	
Learning difficulties			
Tutor report/interview	3		
Other	6	1	14
No eligibility criteria	4	1	
Varies according to specific requirements	43	34	26
Base: all colleges at which students received help from each source	73	91	43

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

Across all three sources there were also specific criteria for each, although their details were not known to respondents. A quarter of colleges (26%) gave this response in respect of help from the European Social Fund, 34% for Local Authority help and 43% in respect of charities and trusts.

However, there were also differences in the eligibility criteria used. Thus charities and trusts took a student's location into account along with financial hardship. Indeed, help from some charities can be focused on residents of individual Boroughs. Local Authorities also awarded help by reference to an individual's distance from college and their age, although there was more of an emphasis on financial hardship as such assistance is widely means-tested. Finally, assistance from the ESF was targeted at those on particular courses and those demonstrating hardship.

4.7 What Sort of Help is Provided and how do Students Use their Student Support?

There were a few subsidiary questions which sought more detail about the nature and type of help given by each of the three external sources of financial help for students.

4.7.1 Charities and trusts

73 colleges were aware of students receiving help from charities and trusts. The number of students that were thought to have received help was the lowest of all categories at only 1,833, although the average amount received was one of the highest at £225.

The great majority of colleges (88% of this group) actively helped students to get funding from charities and trusts. Just over a quarter (27%) claimed to administer funds on behalf of charities and trusts. Larger colleges were more likely to help students apply for assistance, but no more likely to administer funds. There was no appreciable difference between colleges with a low and high Widening Participation factor in either respect.

As to the type of help provided, a wide range of items was funded by money from charities and trusts including: equipment, books, transport, tuition fees and child care. Less common was help with living expenses and accommodation, exam fees and visits or field trips. There were also occasional references to emergencies, prizes and cash payments as shown in table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Type of help provided from charities and trusts (multi-coded data)

Type of help	Column percentage
Equipment	62
Books	45
Transport	45
Tuition fees	34
Child care	32
Living expenses	29
Accommodation	22
Exam fees	16
Visits, excursions	10
Emergencies	7
Prizes	4
Cash payment	4
Work experience	3
Other	3
Base: all colleges at which students received help from charities	73

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

4.7.2 Local Education Authorities

Of all the external sources of help, Local Authorities were the most commonly cited by colleges: 91 of the 110 colleges interviewed said that students received help from their Local Education Authority. The number of students helped was relatively low although the amounts received were high. This resulted in a high per capita award of £390, paid predominantly to 16–18 year olds in full-time study.

In the light of this, it is not surprising that the large majority of colleges felt the most common form of help provided from Local Authorities was in the form of discretionary maintenance awards (85% of the 91 colleges). Fewer (29%) mentioned free travel or subsidised travel (28%), 8% mentioned meals and 3%, books and equipment.

4.7.3 European Social Fund

Of the 43 colleges at which students received help from the European Social Fund, over half (58%) thought their students received help with travel and child care (58% for both categories) and a third (33%) with training allowances. Fewer (16%) cited help with books/equipment, 14% mentioned help towards course/exam fees and 2% thought the ESF helped with costs associated with job search.

4.8 How will the Role of External Sources Change in the Future?

In order to look at likely trends in the various sources of help available to students, colleges at which students were helped were asked whether or not they thought the amount received by students would increase, stay the same or decrease over the next three years — table 4.9 shows the results.

Table 4.9 Likely future trends in expenditure from each source

Area of funding	Row percentage				
	Base	Increase	Stay the same	Decrease	Don't know
Charities and trusts	73	16	38	12	33
Local Authority	91	7	20	56	18
European Social Fund	43	19	16	14	51

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

In contrast to all of the internal sources of student support, 56% of colleges whose students received help from their Local Authority thought such funding would decrease. This is not surprising given the fact that the 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act will phase out Schedule 2 discretionary grants. The balance of opinion with regard to the other two external sources was just positive among those who proffered an opinion, although many felt unable to do so. Overall, there was far more optimism in respect of the internal sources of help when compared to the three external sources.

4.9 Summary

The key findings from this section are listed below.

What types of financial support do students receive?

- The large majority of all colleges (83%) thought that students received help from the Local Education Authority, two-thirds (66%) thought this about charities and trusts, and 39% about the European Social Fund.
- Students at one in four colleges (25%) got help from all three sources, and those at a further 46% received help from two sources.
- Students do not receive any assistance from any of the three external sources at only six colleges (6% of all).

How much is received by students?

- Across all 104 colleges in which students were assisted from external sources, there was a total of £8,780,704 received by students which represented a quarter (26%) of all expenditure on student financial support.
- Help from Local Authorities accounted for the majority of all external support received by students (81%) and the ESF contributed a further 24% of the total; charities and trusts accounted for only 5% of the total.

How many students receive financial help?

- An estimated total of 27,474 students were helped from external sources, representing 10% of all students receiving financial support.
- Of all students assisted by external sources, two-thirds (67%) received grants from Local Authorities and just over a quarter (27%) received aid from the ESF. Charities and trusts gave to 7% of all students helped from external sources.
- Very low proportions of the total student body received help from the various sources. 1.6% received grants from local Authorities, 0.6% obtained help from the ESF and 0.2% were assisted by charities.

How much do students receive from each source?

- The average amount received by each student helped from the external sources was £320.
- Local Authorities were the most generous, giving an average of £390 per student. Charities awarded more per capita than did the ESF — £225 compared with £168.
- All these figures were far higher than all other forms of internal help apart from that spent by colleges on child care. Thus, although directed at relatively few students, the external sources of help gave reasonable sums to individual students.

Which students get support and what are the eligibility criteria?

- Full-time students were the key beneficiaries of Local Authority awards and help from charities. Assistance from Local Authorities focused on 16–18 year olds.
- The ESF benefited students aged 19 or over but there was no clear preference by mode of study.
- Charities and trusts took a student's location into account along with financial hardship when distributing funds.
- Local Authorities also awarded help by reference to where students lived, their age, and their financial circumstances.
- Assistance from the ESF was targeted at those on particular courses and those demonstrating hardship.

What sort of help is provided?

- The great majority of colleges (88% of those at which students received aid) actively helped students to get funding from charities and trusts.
- Just over a quarter (27%) administered funds on behalf of charities and trusts.
- Charities provided help with a wide range of items, especially equipment, books, transport, tuition fees and child care.
- The most common form of help provided by Local Authorities were discretionary maintenance awards (85% of the 91 colleges).
- The European Social Fund helped students primarily with travel and child care (58% of those helped, for both categories) and a third (33%) with training allowances. Fewer (16%) cited help with books/equipment, 14% mentioned help towards course/exam fees and 2% thought the ESF helped with costs associated with job search.

How will the role of external sources change in the future?

- 56% of colleges whose students received help from their Local Authority thought such funding would decrease.
- The balance of opinion with regard to the other two external sources was just positive among those who proffered an opinion, although many felt unable to do so.
- There was far more optimism in respect of the internal sources of help when compared to the three external sources.

5 Summary and Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

In 1990 the government introduced Access Funds which are provided to further education institutions through the Further Education Funding Council. These funds aim to help students with financial difficulties or those whose access to full-time higher education might be jeopardised for financial reasons. When this study was conducted, only full-time students aged 19 and over who met the criteria as a home student were eligible for Access Funds.

The FEFC collects basic information directly from colleges on the numbers of Access Fund recipients, and on what the funds are spent. Herbert and Callender⁸ (p xi) in their review of this FEFC data concluded:

Access Funds, like Local Education Authority awards, are a lottery. They too are highly discretionary. It is up to individual colleges to decide how, and to whom, to disburse these funds among eligible applicants. Like discretionary awards, they are an unreliable source of funding. There are no guarantees that a student will receive such financial support. As important, the level of support received by students on average, is very low and does not meet the full costs of participation, and the amount they receive has fallen in recent years.

However, no systematic research has been conducted on the way colleges distribute Access Funds, or to whom. For example, we do not know how colleges decide to disburse these funds and if they use additional eligibility criteria, over and above the national minima, and what these additional criteria may be. Consequently, we do not know exactly which types of students receive the funds. Nor do we know what are the perceived costs and benefits of Access Funds, nor what impact, if any, they have on student behaviour.

Furthermore, there is an absence of data on what other sources of funding, if any, colleges may have to help students in financial need, in addition to Access Funds.

This study has attempted to fill some of these gaps in our knowledge. It consisted of telephone interviews, conducted in the Summer of 1998, with a representative sample of 110 further education institutions in receipt of Access Funds.

5.2 Access Funds

5.2.1 The scale of Access Funds and how they are used

In 1997/98 1.3% of all students attending the 110 colleges surveyed received any Access Funds⁹ while one-fifth of all potentially eligible students (i.e. those meeting the national eligibility criteria) benefited directly from Access Funds. In 1997/98 the FEFC allocated £1,880,828 in Access Funds to the 110 colleges surveyed, so each college received an average of £17,098. A quarter of these funds were spent on transport, just under a further quarter on child care, and another eighth on equipment. Thus together these three categories of expenditure absorbed three-fifths of total expenditure while benefiting about half of all students in receipt of Access Funds.

⁸ A Herbert and C Callender (1997) op cit.
⁹ According to A Herbert and C Callender (1997) op cit the figure nationally is about 1.5%.

This variance suggests that most students were not necessarily getting Access Funds for these particular items. In fact, over a quarter of all students receiving Access Funds got assistance with transport, one in five with equipment, and a further one in five with books.

This discrepancy between the total share of expenditure on a particular category and the total proportion of students benefiting, can be explained by the different costs associated with these items of expenditure. For example although child care accounted for nearly a quarter of all Access Fund expenditure, only one in fourteen of all Access Fund recipients got help with child care. Indeed, per capita expenditure on child care was the highest (£279) followed by tuition fees (£143), both of which were well above the average Access Fund award of £90. So we can see that there was considerable variation in this average award depending on for what students received help.

Similarly, there were extremely wide variations between colleges in how much money they devoted to any one type of help ranging from nothing to £48,210. Also the number of students being helped varied considerably from 9 to 972 while overall the average number of students at each college receiving any Access Funds was 132.

These issues illustrate a very real dilemma for colleges. Given the limited Access Funds available, what are the most efficient methods for rationing their allocation? Should colleges minimise expenditure on costly items such as child care which benefits relatively few students, or should they maximise expenditure on cheaper items so that more students can benefit? How can colleges achieve an equitable mix between costly and cheaper items of expenditure?

There are no straightforward answers. Yet these issues must inform the development of any overall principles underpinning the distribution and allocation of funds. It demands placing some value on, or prioritising, the respective needs of students and categories of expenditure. However, how can this be done in a fair and equitable way?

It is possible to classify the different categories of expenditure. For example, fees, child care, and transport, could be classified as those which facilitate participation while equipment and books as those arising primarily from pursuing a course of study. However, many would argue that if we are going to widen participation, both types of expenditure are essential to participation in further education and thus neither can be compromised.

5.2.2 Application procedures

There were four components to the application procedures:

- application forms;
- supporting documentary evidence;
- verification by the college; and
- interviews.

Nearly all colleges required their students to complete an application form and the majority also demanded supporting documentary evidence which, in most cases, was verified by the college. Furthermore, half of all colleges interviewed students applying for Access Funds. However, only 13% of colleges had very thorough procedures which ensured that all or most of their students applying for funds fulfilled these four procedures. At the other end of the scale, one in twenty colleges had implemented just one of these four application procedures. Interestingly, those colleges with higher proportions of students eligible for Access Funds tended to have more rigorous application procedures.

These findings suggest that there is some scope for improving the application procedures in the majority of colleges so that they are more rigorous. However, this needs to be done without overburdening staff. Indeed, colleges with a high proportion of eligible students were less likely than colleges with a low proportion to interview students because of the work involved.

5.2.3 Targeting Access Funds

Colleges have considerable discretion over how they allocated their Access Funds and to whom although they must adhere to the national eligibility criteria. If colleges want to target their funds further, they can do this:

- at the application stage by introducing additional eligibility criteria or specifying preferences for particular types of students; and/or
- later in the process, once students have applied for funds, by being selective in their choice of applicants and/or by limiting the funds allocated to applicants.

Most colleges had implemented targeting mechanisms at the application stage and/or later in the application process that prioritised students in financial hardship or with low incomes but limited the sums allocated to them. Only one in five colleges had neither additional eligibility criteria nor limits on the amounts awarded. The more Access Funds a college received, the more likely it was to target the distribution of these funds and assign this responsibility to student services.

The devices colleges used to ration the limited Access Funds available highlight broader issues. In particular, can a funding mechanism be devised which is flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of individual students but also be equitable in the way it treats students and satisfies their needs? In other words, the challenge is how to juggle the payoffs between eligibility criteria, fairness, targeting and containing costs? How do we ensure that any eligibility criteria and targeting mechanisms do not become too restrictive, exclusive and inflexible?

Should there be more national guidelines on how Access Funds are distributed to ensure that students with similar needs are treated in similar ways irrespective of the college they attend? Alternatively, should the system be totally discretionary so that colleges can meet local needs? How do we balance these competing distribution principles and which one should inform how monies are allocated? And how can these be translated into good practice?

5.2.4 The impact of Access Funds and monitoring

The majority of colleges believed that Access Funds aided retention, achievement, and progression by enabling students to undertake and complete their course. Most colleges monitored the impact of their funds on student retention but that was not the case for the other potential effects on student behaviour. As a result, colleges' assessment of the impact of the funds was essentially impressionistic and anecdotal. Nor did the majority of colleges systematically monitor the costs of administering the funds although a high proportion were concerned about these costs. The majority did, however, routinely monitor students' knowledge and awareness of the funds and the type of student applying and receiving funds.

These findings suggest that there is greater scope for colleges to assess and monitor the impact of the funds on student behaviour and in estimating the costs of administering the funds. Whatever mechanisms are put in place need to be realistic in terms of what they can achieve within the resources available. Monitoring is required for reasons of accountability and thus colleges should be encouraged to introduce this.

However, monitoring should not be confused with evaluation. There is a role for a proper external evaluation of the impact and effect of Access Funds which would stand up to academic scrutiny. Colleges do not have the resources or capacity to conduct such rigorous and systematic evaluation nor is it appropriate for them to undertake such a task.

5.2.5 The limitations of Access Funds

A third of colleges experienced some difficulties in allocating Access Funds but only 2% experienced a lot of difficulties. Moreover, as colleges' expenditure on Access Funds and/or the number of their eligible students increased, the fewer problems they experienced. So the task of allocating and paying Access Funds became more systematic and less problematic the greater a college's exposure to Access Funds.

Colleges valued the fact that Access Funds were ring-fenced and so could be devoted exclusively to helping students in financial need. However, they were frustrated by the insufficient funds available for Access Funds which resulted in inadequate payments to students. They felt hindered by the limitations imposed by the national eligibility criteria, especially those related to age and mode of study.¹⁰ They were similarly concerned about the costs of administering the Fund especially when they received no monies to cover these costs. It was these aspects of Access Funds they wanted to see changed. They wanted most of all:

- more funds to be devoted to Access Funds; and
- changes in the national eligibility criteria so that they are less restrictive and could be targeted at those most in need.

5.3 Other Sources of Financial Support for Students

5.3.1 The sources of financial support

Amongst the colleges surveyed, Access Funds represented only about one-twelfth of all colleges' total expenditure on financial support for students. Other 'internal' sources of student support included:

- Hardship Fund;
- remission of tuition fees;
- remission of exam fees;
- travel costs;
- child care;
- other college funding.

They also could receive help from external organisations which included:

- Charities and trusts;
- Local Education Authority/Local Authority;
- European Social Fund.

5.3.2 The scale of financial support

All but one of the 110 colleges surveyed provided all these different types of 'internal' financial aid and seven out of ten offered at least one type. The most common sorts were Hardship Funds and tuition fee remission, available at seven out of ten colleges. The larger the college, the wider the range of support offered to students.

In addition, students at the colleges surveyed gained assistance from external sources. Just over four in five colleges claimed that their students received grants from their Local Education Authority and two-thirds assistance from charities.

¹⁰ Since the study was undertaken, the government announced the extension of Access Funds to part-time students.

The total value of this 'internal' support was estimated to be over £23 million and over a third (38%) was spent on tuition fees and a further quarter on examination fees. So in essence, much of the financial help was foregone income and some was being recycled back into the colleges as tuition fees. The potential value of the external funding amounted to nearly £9 million, most of which came from Local Education Authorities.

However, not all colleges could easily access information on how much they spent on the various types of student support over which they had control nor on the number of beneficiaries. This is a significant finding in its own right. It means that it is very difficult to get a true and accurate picture of exactly what proportion of a college's budget is devoted to student financial support which in turn, has implications for policy development. Moreover, it means that our estimates must be treated with caution.

Although these funds benefited an estimated 263,356 students, penetration rates generally were very low. The highest rates were in relation to help with examination fees and tuition fees. Thus one in ten students at the 110 colleges surveyed received help with their exam fees and only one in twenty with their tuition fees.

There were, however, extremely wide variations between colleges in how much money they devoted to any one of these different types of help ranging from nothing to nearly a million pounds. Similarly, the number of students being helped varied considerably from none to 12,000.

Only a small minority of colleges had been able to raise external funds via, for instance, the private sector and charitable foundations to contribute towards student financial support. However, there were examples of colleges raising all their Hardship Funds in this way. So there is potential for other colleges to pursue such activities if they do not want to call on their existing budgets to help students.

5.3.3 The adequacy of financial support

In 1997/98 the average amount of financial help students received from 'internal' college sources was £98 and from external sources the average was £320. So these external sources were much more valuable to students than internal ones. However, as our survey of students shows, the average participation costs for all students were £600 per academic year. Consequently the amount of money students received, on average, was inadequate to meet all these costs. Even if we examine particular types of designated expenditure, the amount students received did not always cover the average or actual costs students incurred. For example, the student survey found that students spent an average of £231 on transport a year but they only received an average of £142 from college transport funds.

5.3.4 Which students received support

All the different sources of support gave most help to full-time students aged 16–18 years. The two exceptions were tuition fee remission and child care, neither of which were relevant to this age group of students. Yet the survey of students showed that those who were most vulnerable financially were in fact older students, especially those with children, and full-time students. In other words, help was not being targeted to all the students most in need of financial support.

As important, these findings highlight the fragmented nature of the provision and the way it favours particular groups of students demonstrating, yet again, the lack of a comprehensive system of student support.

Although older students were not the major beneficiaries of assistance, the colleges did make stringent efforts to target their resources at the most needy. The colleges prioritised students experiencing financial hardship or those with low pay or incomes. These were the predominant eligibility criteria when distributing funds from the various sources of support. The only exception was in relation to travel and charities where funds were prioritised in accordance to where students lived and how far that was from the college.

5.3.5 Type of help provided

Just under 10,000 students received money from their college's Hardship Funds which represented less than 1% of all students at the 110 colleges surveyed. And each student helped received on average £74 but there was considerable variation in this average depending on for what they received help. All the colleges with a Hardship Fund spent over half of it on transport, tuition fees and child care. Colleges were most likely to use this fund to help students with their costs of travel, equipment, books, and examination fees.

Only about 3% of all students attending the 110 colleges surveyed received assistance with their travel through a designated travel fund. This aid was valued at an average of £142 per student helped, was usually in the form of free or subsidised travel mostly provided through a sub-contracted out bus service, especially among the larger colleges.

The proportion of all students getting help with child care from a dedicated fund was minute — only 0.3% of all students at the 110 colleges. Those students who did benefit received £881, on average, which was the most generous of all payments to students from all the different sources of funding. So child care was on a per capita basis the most expensive type of help offered and, consequently, few students received this help. Colleges mostly provided subsidised child care on site staffed by college employees and predominantly catered for children aged 2–5 years. The FEFC's units for child care provision were a significant source of financial help in meeting colleges' child care costs.

5.4 The Way Forward

The majority of all colleges surveyed were optimistic about getting more funds in the short-term (3 years) for student travel, and this was the area most of them were optimistic about. The majority thought Local Education Authority funding would decline which is not surprising, given the planned abolition of Schedule 2 discretionary grants.

At the time of writing, no announcements had been made about what will replace these discretionary awards, except for the (re-)introduction of Education Maintenance Allowances. So what can we learn from the surveys of colleges and students to help inform future policy development?

The broad issues to emerge are as follows:

The study confirms the need to reform the student financial support system.

- The amount of money in the funds available are too small and as a result the penetration rates of all the funding sources are extremely low. Approximately one in five potentially eligible students receive Access Funds representing 1.3% of all FE students. The maximum penetration rate for the other dedicated funding sources relates to examination fees where one in nine of all students secure help, and the lowest is for child care where 0.3% of all students benefit from this type of assistance.

- The sums awarded from the various funds do not cover students' full costs of participation which are £600, on average, per academic year for all students in further education, according to our survey of students. It is estimated, from the survey of colleges, that the average Access Fund award for those students receiving them in the 110 colleges surveyed is £130, the average award from other internal sources of funding for those benefiting is £98, and from external sources it amounts to £320.
- When students' total participation costs are broken down into their different components the shortfalls between the sums awarded, according to the survey of colleges, and the costs incurred by students, as revealed in the survey of students, become apparent. Thus, the Access Funds granted do not adequately cover the tuition fees; transport; books; equipment; and child care. Similarly, the designated funds on travel and tuition do not meet the average actual costs incurred by students on these items.
- The low penetration rates of the various funding sources clearly demonstrate that students cannot rely on these sources of funding even if they meet the eligibility criteria. Furthermore, this is particularly a problem for students starting college late in the academic year. Two-thirds of colleges run out of Access Funds before the end of the academic year, with a third using up all their funds by the end of the first term.
- The way colleges deliver their Access Funds and other student financial support varies from one college to another. There is scope, especially with Access Funds, for tightening up the application procedures as only 13% of all colleges surveyed have very rigorous procedures. Similarly there is scope for some colleges to target their funds more on students with the greatest needs and to monitor the outcomes.
- Colleges and policy makers alike, need to consider the most efficient methods of rationing and allocating the limited resources for helping students in financial hardship by reviewing the principles underpinning the distribution and allocations of their funds. Similarly, they need to appraise how they juggle the payoff between eligibility criteria, fairness, targeting and containing costs and how to balance competing distribution principles.
- There is considerable duplication and overlap in the sources of student financial support for particular categories of expenditure. For example, despite existing policies concerning tuition fee remission, just under half of all the colleges spent Access Funds on tuition fees which absorbed just under a tenth of all colleges' total expenditure on Access Funds. Similarly over a third of colleges with a Hardship Fund spent money on tuition fees which absorbed a sixth of total Hardship Fund expenditure. These strategies are necessary because of the limitations of current policies and practices concerning tuition fee remission. This suggests that some of these policies need reviewing and student financial support may benefit from some streamlining.
- Access Funds currently play only a limited, but important, role in alleviating student hardship and if more funds were available the problems faced by some colleges in administering and distributing them, are likely to diminish.
- There is a strong belief amongst colleges that recruitment, retention and progression rates along with academic performance could improve if a comprehensive and more generous system of student support was introduced.

6 Technical Annex

6.1 Sample and Fieldwork Details

Only FE colleges that helped a minimum number of students via Access Funds were included within the remit of the study. In the case of sixth-form colleges it was agreed that those with 10 or more assisted students should be included. For all other types of FE colleges, the cut-off was set at 20. The data used to apply these criteria were based on that from 1996/97 as supplied by the FEFC. 324 of the 429 FE colleges were thus found to be within the scope for this study. These were sorted by type, region and size and an equal interval sample of 162 were duly selected at random.

10 of these were subsequently removed by the FEFC as they were either one of the case study colleges or for some other reason. This left 152, all of whom were sent a letter from the FEFC, inviting them to participate in the survey.

Of these, 120 responded positively, nominating a relevant contact who was then sent a form in advance (referred to hereafter as the 'data collection sheet'). This sought detailed financial data, including totals of amounts spent and numbers of students helped for all sources, plus a breakdown by category of expenditure for Access and Hardship Funds. The data collection sheet was introduced after three pilot interviews in which it became apparent that the information needed would probably not be readily available during the interview, for several reasons.

Fieldwork and data processing were carried out by The Research Partnership. Specialist interviewers were briefed on Access Funds in general and on the survey questionnaire in particular. Of the 120 colleges agreeing to participate, a further 10 subsequently withdrew for various reasons leaving a total achieved sample of 110 colleges. This represents a response rate of 72% (based on the 152 invited to take part).

Although interviewing commenced on 8th July, many respondents were already very elusive, with the number of attempts to make an appointment ranging from 1 to 22, due in part to the approaching end of the academic year. The final interviews were conducted by mid-August. The length of the interview ranged from 22–70 minutes, with an average duration of 41 minutes.

Prior to the production of the tabulations used to prepare this report, a check was made on the composition of the achieved sample. This was found to mirror closely the profile of the original 362 colleges within scope. Thus there had been no substantial response bias introduced in the move from the 162 sampled institutions to the 110 interviewed.

6.2 Questionnaire

The first half of the questionnaire concerned Access Funds, specifically:

- responsibility for Access Funds within the college;
- distribution of Access Funds, including the amounts paid out and the numbers of students that received them by type of help;
- eligibility criteria used to distribute Access Funds;
- decision making process with regard to which students received Access Funds, how much they got and the amounts paid out;
- monitoring and evaluation of Access Funds; and
- opinions of Access Funds.

Having collected the data relating to Access Funds, the questionnaire then addressed other types of financial help for students. These were divided into two categories: internal, or college funded help which included:

- Hardship Fund;
- remission of tuition fees;
- remission of exam fees;
- travel costs;
- child care; and
- other college funding.

and help from external organisations which included:

- Charities and trusts;
- Local Education Authority/Local Authority; and
- European Social Fund.

The data collection sheet asked for total amounts spent by the college and numbers of students helped (for each internal source) and for the total amounts received and number of students helped (from external sources). It also sought a breakdown by category in the case of Hardship Funds, as for Access Funds.

The data collection sheet and questionnaire were carefully designed to complement each other without any overlap between categories in order to be mutually exclusive. Inevitably, however, there emerged some confusion in identifying sources of funding and allocating them correctly in the context of the survey structure. For example, LEA funding caused some difficulties in this respect due to the potential for overlap between such help and that spent by the college on travel. Also, remission of exam fees and tuition fees caused problems for some who had difficulty equating unpaid tuition fees as equivalent to foregone income. Such problems were largely resolved during the interview.

6.3 Analytic Variables

In addition to looking at the overall picture across all 110 colleges that participated in the study, the responses to the questions on Access Funds were also analysed by:

- the proportion of students who were eligible for Access Funds;
- the proportion of students who were eligible and received Access Funds; and
- the Widening Participation factor.

The proportion of eligible students — was divided into 3 bands, based on FEFC data for the academic year 1996/97 for 106 colleges. For the remaining 4 colleges, 1995/96 data were used. In addition to this, reliable data were not available for two colleges. The base was therefore reduced to 108 for this variable. The formula used was the number of eligible students for Access Funds/total number of students. The denominator therefore included full-time and part-time students of all ages, and Council and non-Council funded. This provided a measure of the extent of the importance of Access Funds to the college as a whole. It might also have influenced the effort that the college expended in relation to Access Funds. The banding produced the following three groups based on resultant percentage:

Low (up to 4%)	41
Medium (5%–8%)	41
High (9% +)	26

The proportion of eligible students who actually received Access Funds — was also divided into 3 bands based on the same data from the FEFC. The formula used was the number of eligible students getting Access Funds/number of potentially eligible students. This provided a measure of the degree of targeting that colleges were achieving. Specifically, the lower the proportion of eligible students receiving Access Funds, the greater the degree of targeting that colleges were achieving, and vice versa. The banding produced the following three groups:

Low (up to 15%)	41
Medium (16%–29%)	37
High (30% +)	30

The Widening Participation Factor — acts as a measure of the extent of success that the college had, in broadening access to disadvantaged groups in the region. Each college had a Widening Participation ‘score’, computed by the FEFC. The higher the score, the better the college had achieved a mix of students from more relatively deprived backgrounds. The FEFC bands used for this analysis were:

Low (1.000–1.004)	35
Medium (1.005–1.024)	60
High (1.025 +)	15

In the case of the data relating to other sources of financial help, it was felt relevant to see if there was any variation by:

The Widening Participation Factor — same banding as Access Funds.

The college size — was divided into three bands, based on FEFC data for the academic year 1996/97 for 106 colleges. For the remaining 4 colleges 1995/96 data were used. This included full- and part-time students, of all ages, Council and non-Council funded; in other words the total student body. The college size may be related to the number of other types of help. The banding is in three roughly equal groups, based on population bands of 6000:

Small (up to 5999)	37
Medium (6000–11999)	39
High (12000 +)	34

6.4 Imputation of Missing Values for Expenditure and Student Numbers Data

As mentioned in section 3.3, it was necessary to impute missing data on the amount of help received by students and the numbers helped for all sources of help apart from Access Funds and Hardship Funds. In this section we have shown the approach that was taken to the estimation of the missing values.

The table below relates to expenditure spent/received from the various sources of help covered.

Source	Number of colleges awarding	Number giving amount	Total amount awarded/(£)	Average amount/(£)	Estimated missing amount/(£)	Estimated total/(£)
Hardship Fund	78	78	729,755	9,356	0	729,755
Tuition fees	79	58	6,354,605	109,562	2,300,805	8,655,410
Examination fees	69	48	3,802,366	79,216	1,663,535	5,465,901
Travel costs	72	66	4,109,011	62,258	373,546	4,482,557
Child care	64	52	2,654,668	51,051	612,616	3,267,284
Other college funding	49	46	473,076	10,284	30,853	503,929
Charities and Trusts	73	42	237,145	5,646	175,036	412,181
Local Authorities	91	51	3,997,704	78,386	3,135,454	7,133,158
ESF	43	30	861,883	28,729	373,483	1,235,366

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

By way of example, 21 colleges were unable to say how much they spent on remitting tuition fees for students — of the 79 that did remit tuition fees, 58 were able to give the amount spent. The average expenditure across these 58 colleges was £109,562. Multiplying this by 21 resulted in an estimated 'missing' expenditure of £2,300,805 which, when added to the known expenditure of £6,354,605, produced an estimated total expenditure on tuition fees across all 79 colleges of £8,655,410.

The following table shows the same approach taken with regard to missing data on the number of students that received help.

Source	Number of colleges awarding	Number giving amount	Total students	Average no. of students	Estimated missing students	Estimated total students
Hardship Fund	78	78	9,880	127	0	9,880
Tuition fees	79	68	48,308	710	7,815	56,123
Examination fees	69	50	91,446	1,829	34,749	126,195
Travel costs	72	62	27,194	439	4,386	31,580
Child care	64	59	3,419	58	290	3,709
Other college funding	49	46	7,881	171	514	8,395
Charities and Trusts	73	48	1,205	25	628	1,833
Local Authorities	91	65	13,072	201	5,229	18,301
ESF	43	31	5,292	171	2,049	7,341

Source: South Bank University survey of FE Colleges 1998

As stated at section 3.3, it was more often the larger colleges that were unable to give the financial amounts and the number of students helped. Any estimates are therefore likely to be less than the actual figures and can thus be regarded as conservative estimates. Even so, there were considerable numbers of colleges that could not provide the required data and our estimates should therefore be treated with caution.