

TEC/CCTEs and the Learning Gateway

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TEC/CCTEs and the Learning Gateway

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Quality and Financial Assurance Division
Quality and Performance Improvement Dissemination Unit
Level 3
Moorfoot
Sheffield
S1 4PQ

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Learning Gateway forms a vital component of the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) Connexions Strategy. The strategy brings together the range of measures the Government has introduced, or is planning, to improve the structure and range of qualifications, the quality of delivery of education and training and the financial support available to young people to stay on in learning.
- 1.2 The Learning Gateway, which was introduced in September 1999, is designed to provide individually tailored support to help vulnerable young people who are disengaged from learning or in danger of dropping out of the education and training system. It is one of several approaches designed to ensure that young people stay in education, training or in a job with a strong education/training component until they are at least 18.
- 1.3 The target group is those young people who have failed to make a successful transition from school to subsequent learning and have generally become disaffected with the education system or are disadvantaged by personal circumstances. The Social Exclusion Unit has identified that at any one time, some 161,000 young people or 9 per cent of this age group are outside education, training and work¹. They often have multiple problems and are likely to be members of one or more of the following groups:
- young people who have been excluded from school;
 - long term non-attenders;
 - teenage parents;
 - young offenders;
 - young people with low levels of school achievement and basic skills;
 - care leavers;
 - young people with special educational needs, in particular emotional and behavioural difficulties;
 - young people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds; and
 - young people with low self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 1.4 This study was commissioned to look at how TECs² are discharging their responsibilities for ensuring that a broad range of provision is available to deliver the Life Skills option, which is one of the main elements of the Learning Gateway.
- How are TECs working with other partners and organisations to plan and deliver provision?
 - How successful have they been in looking beyond their existing provider network?

1. Information taken from the Social Exclusion Unit report "**Bridging the Gap: New opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds not in Education, Employment or Training**", published in July 1999.

2. Throughout this summary the term TEC or TECs is used to represent both Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and/or Chambers of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTEs).

- What have been the difficulties/barriers to bringing in new suppliers?
- What arrangements are in place to monitor and review progress and to ensure a successful progression to mainstream options?

The study's findings should therefore help to promote good practice; highlight concerns and generate recommendations for future developments.

Background

- 1.5 Careers services and TECs undertook considerable preparation for the launch of the Learning Gateway, in September 1999. The policy was developed through a period of consultation that began at the end of 1998 and which also built upon the lessons learnt from New Start³ and other similar initiatives.
- 1.6 Whilst a multi-agency approach, which includes specialised agencies such as Youth Offending Teams, Young Offenders Institutions, social services, drugs agencies and organisations who specialise with personal problems, is vital to the success of the Gateway, key roles fall to:
- **Careers services**, which are responsible for the 'front end' of the Gateway, and Personal Advisers (PA). The 'front end' concentrates on identifying potential participants through outreach work, and finding ways in which to engage them in learning. The careers service does this by working in partnership with a range of other agencies, including schools and the youth service. During their time in the 'front end' young people receive assessment, guidance and support, leading to an Individual Development Plan (IDP)⁴;
 - **Personal Advisers** are a very important feature of the Learning Gateway as they provide a seamless support for individuals moving from the 'front end' into Life Skills or other options, including mainstream learning opportunities such as National Traineeships. Their main purpose is to diagnose individual needs and agree an IDP, arrange mentoring support (as appropriate), act as a broker to local agencies providing specialist support and monitoring and reviewing clients as they move through the Gateway;
 - **TECs**, which continue to fund vocational training, but also have responsibility for contracting for the delivery of the customised Life Skills option;
 - **Training providers** who need to ensure that they have the flexibility and resources to offer, where appropriate, individually tailored training and support to young people entering Life Skills.

3. New Start's aim is, through local partnership projects, to motivate and re-engage disaffected young people from age 14 upwards in learning, where they have dropped out or are in danger of doing so.

4. An Individual Development Plan is agreed with the young person following the initial assessment and it will set out the results of the assessment, planned action and the support to be provided.

The Life Skills Option

1.7 Life Skills is a new customised option allowing for a flexible, tailor-made package to be put together for individual young people. It is different from mainstream TEC provision because it deals with young people currently disengaged from learning, leaves progression routes open, has Personal Adviser continuing support, has basic skills training (if needed) and is not limited to 12 weeks (as with Preparatory Training). Innovative approaches and locations are required and learning should be delivered in ways that capitalise on the young person's interests. The main elements of Life Skills provision are:

- **Basic Skills** – with tuition arranged for those young people where a basic skill need has been identified through the assessment process;
- **Key Skills** – all learners within Life Skills should be given the opportunity to develop the key skills of working with others, problem solving and improving their own learning and performance;
- **Work-related and pre-vocational opportunities** – the development of work-related skills can be developed in a variety of ways for example using job tasters, work experience and linking to programmes offered by colleges and training suppliers. However individual learners should be able to move at their own pace and using the style of learning which is most appropriate to them;
- **Personal development** – young people should be given the opportunity to develop their interpersonal skills, and activities need to be available which help with problem solving, team building and leadership training;
- **The learning environment** – it has already been mentioned above that young people coming into the Gateway will have different learning preferences and this is also true of the place where learning takes place. A few may be happy in a more traditional learning environment – classroom or workshop – provided by a college or training supplier. Some may be better challenged by practical activities or an outdoor environment, whilst others will be more comfortable in small, community-based activity.

Policy Developments

1.8 This study took place before the publication of the Government's Connexions document⁵, and plans for a new Connexions Service, which will be a support service for all young people and their families, with particular attention being given to those who are most at risk. The Learning Gateway and the tailor-made Life Skills programmes will be an important element of the support arrangements offered by the Connexions Service to young people facing substantial, multiple problems, preventing them from engaging in learning.

5. The Connexions document was published on 3 February 2000 and sets out a strategy aimed at supporting young people in England as they move from adolescence to adulthood.

- 1.9 The findings and recommendations for future action contained in this report will therefore not only be relevant to TECs and careers services, but also to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Connexions Service as it develops over the next few years.

Study Objectives

- 1.10 The study's objectives were to:

- investigate what provision TECs have established;
- examine how TECs are identifying need, arranging suitable provision and ensuring continuity and progression from the front end, including linkages with other activities/initiatives aimed at disadvantaged young people;
- examine the TEC contracting models and the ways in which the Learning Gateway Delivery Plan⁶ and partnership arrangements are being used to support delivery;
- assess whether there are any barriers to the delivery of innovative and flexible provision, particularly in relation to pricing policy, quality, Health and Safety (H&S) and Financial Appraisal and Monitoring (FAM) arrangements;
- assess to what extent DfEE guidance contained in "A Guide to Relevant Practice in The Learning Gateway for 16 & 17 year olds" and "Guidance on Assessment in the Learning Gateway for 16 & 17 year olds" have been used by TECs and careers services; and
- identify and document good practice and make recommendations to overcome any problems found, promote good practice and address gaps.

Methodology

- 1.11 The fieldwork for the study was undertaken during the first three weeks of January 2000 and involved fifteen TECs and fourteen careers services covering seven regions (see Annex 1 for further details of those who took part in the study). The TEC and careers services were selected to include a mixture of different types of labour markets, areas that had some experience of New Start pilots and a mix of urban and rural locations. Face to face interviews were conducted with key personnel in each TEC and careers service, including PAs. In addition two training providers, who were delivering Life Skills provision (in one or two areas TECs had contracted with only a single provider) in each area were seen along with a number of young people involved in Life Skills at the time the study work was being undertaken.

- 1.12 The interviews with TECs and careers services were designed to gain an understanding of and gather information on the strategy being adopted in relation to the delivery and management of the Learning Gateway and more specifically focusing on the arrangements to deliver Life Skills. The interviews with training providers looked at issues facing deliverers of training, as they seek to put in place provision which is centred around individual needs. Finally the young people interviews were designed to get an end user perspective on the options on offer.

6. All TECs/Careers services were required to submit a Learning Gateway Delivery Plan to their Government Offices setting out how they would raise the participation in learning of those 16/17 year olds who for a variety of reasons were unable to immediately enter mainstream learning.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Overview

- 2.1 The introduction of the Learning Gateway is believed, by many of the people we spoke to as part of this study, to be a positive step forward in dealing with the hardest to help young people, although in some areas TECs are not seen by careers services as giving Life Skills a very high priority and in a few areas Life Skills provision has yet to be contracted, although alternative provision was available.
- 2.2 Genuinely flexible Life Skills provision, which is trainee focused, is only patchily available, with opportunities often being built around existing provision. However there are several examples of TECs making use of a range of suppliers to deliver a more innovative programme.
- 2.3 There is concern, particularly amongst training providers, that the level of funding available is inadequate to deal effectively with this particular client group. This is not helped by the present formula based funding models being used; and levels of funding applied by TECs.
- 2.4 The level of partnership working is very varied, ranging from partnerships, which are all inclusive with all the key agencies and organisations involved, to partnerships that consist only of the careers service and the TEC.

Development and Delivery of the Learning Gateway

- 2.5 Although in most areas Steering Groups are in place to oversee the Learning Gateway the membership of the groups varied considerably ranging from those with just the TEC, careers service and the training provider/s delivering Life Skills, to Steering Groups with the full range of local organisations involved. The most significant bodies missing from several partnerships are schools and employers.
- 2.6 Partnerships in some areas still need a considerable amount of development, particularly at practitioner level where there is often a lack of awareness in some organisations of the initiatives in place to address social exclusion.
- 2.7 Most partnerships have still to tackle the issue of information and data sharing, with a only a few having progressed to having formal arrangements in place through the development of protocols.
- 2.8 Although roles and responsibilities within the Partnership are generally understood by the different partners, several activities such as assessment, exit from Life Skills and tracking have not yet been clearly defined.
- 2.9 The depth to which assessment of need had been undertaken varied considerably and whilst all areas have been able to identify the numbers of potential Gateway clients, not all have undertaken an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of the group. The response of TECs to the assessment has also varied, with many contracting purely on the basis of numbers and not using the characteristic information at the time of contracting.

- 2.10 Generally TECs have been reluctant to look beyond their existing supplier network to deliver Life Skills, as this has often been the easier and less risky option. However several TECs have actively sought new and more appropriate suppliers to bring a different approach to provision for this particular client group. Where this has happened the TECs are often devoting considerable resource to help develop and support new providers.
- 2.11 Quality assurance arrangements and standards covering the whole of the Learning Gateway are largely undeveloped.

Development of Life Skills

- 2.12 Not all areas have Life Skills provision in place. Some TECs are relying on existing arrangements such as work preparation courses, New Start, European Social Fund(ESF)/Single Regeneration Budget(SRB) funded training or opportunities, funded from TEC reserves and which were in place prior to the Gateway.
- 2.13 Almost all the areas reported gaps in their geographical coverage of Life Skills. Providing innovative opportunities, with the back up of more specialist organisations, in rural locations is proving both costly and very difficult.
- 2.14 TECs are using several different contracting models including lead provider arrangements and individual contracts with providers. The lead provider approach can offer a number of advantages, although it is probably too early in the development of Life Skills to determine which particular model works best. The model favoured by a number of practitioners were centres in the community, offering informal, interesting and valuable options.
- 2.15 The level of funding available to deliver Life Skills was regarded by most training providers as inadequate given the present occupancy levels. The different funding models adopted by TECs do not help this situation. A fresh look at the approach to funding flexible and bespoke provision is needed.
- 2.16 Several TECs are supporting their providers of Life Skills in capacity building through specific training events aimed at the Gateway client group, regular briefing days, encouraging networks and providing dedicated development support.

Delivery of Life Skills

- 2.17 Generally the Life Skills provision available at present consists of some core elements and where possible some vocational tasters built around the young person's interests. There are some exceptions to this with a few good examples of more innovative approaches using outdoor activity and sport, arts/media and environmental projects. Due to the length of time the majority of the young people entering the Gateway have been out of formal learning and the personal difficulties many of them face, community centres and other less formal learning/training areas appears to offer a better environment in which to deliver Life Skills.

- 2.18 The length of time young people are able to remain on Life Skills varied considerably ranging from 13 weeks to as long as is necessary. Equally there were considerable differences in attendance requirements, with some TECs expecting only 16 hours attendance a week for the whole time on Life Skills; others looking for a gradual increase in hours; and others expecting 30 hours from day one.
- 2.19 There is potential for young people in the Learning Gateway to experience “assessment overload”; for example initial assessment is undertaken in the ‘front end’, again when they join Life Skills and more than likely a third time when they move onto mainstream provision.
- 2.20 There is a lack of clarity as to the purpose of the Individual Development Plan and how it should be used as the young person progresses through the Gateway.
- 2.21 In many parts of the country finding meaningful work experience opportunities and work tasters for participants are proving very difficult. Some TECs and training providers argue that work experience is not appropriate for this target group, because if they are ready for work experience then they shouldn’t be in the Gateway.
- 2.22 The majority of young people interviewed felt they were receiving the necessary support and help and were content with their training programme. In one TEC additional support via a trained Support Counsellor is available and in another area the TEC is funding Community Workers to make contact with those young people not attending interviews previously arranged by PAs.
- 2.23 Bonus payments, which are paid to young people when they start Life Skills and then again when moving to a positive outcome, are not seen as an incentive. Most were unaware of the payments when they joined and there was some uncertainty as to why they had received the money. TECs are operating different practices in relation to the payment of bonuses.

Monitoring and Review Arrangements

- 2.24 The training providers regularly monitor young people’s progress against their IDP. The PA in many cases is not involved in this process and in a number of areas is reported to have little contact with the young person while they are in Life Skills.
- 2.25 It was generally agreed amongst all the organisations involved in the study that measuring outcomes or assessing distance travelled was extremely difficult and is clearly an area where considerable research is needed.
- 2.26 Although at the time the study was carried out very few young people had moved through the Life Skills option, discussions with the organisations involved showed there was a often a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities post Life Skills. Finding and securing suitable progression routes for young people at the end of their programme was also a concern.
- 2.27 Arrangements to keep track of young people as they progress post 16 are generally in need of further development with only a few examples where partnerships are actively tackling this issue.

Further Views

- 2.28 Many of the organisations interviewed expressed concern at the way the Learning Gateway was becoming target driven, as this was likely to work against the hardest to help in the long run.
- 2.29 A number of careers services were concerned that the amount of time young people needed in the 'front end' had been underestimated and as numbers increase this will have serious consequences on the resources available.
- 2.30 Providers were concerned that low occupancy levels, linked with low levels of funding restricted their ability to deliver the more personalised programme that this particular client group needed.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The **DfEE** recognises that building and sustaining successful partnerships, particularly at practitioner level, takes time and resource. As the new arrangements for the LSC and the Connexions Service are developed it will be necessary to continue to build on the lessons learnt from both the New Start initiative and the emerging Learning Gateway Partnerships. In particular how key messages in relation to the social exclusion agenda reach the many organisations involved in the partnership.
- 3.2 Sharing and exchange of information and data is seen as crucial if young people are to have a seamless transition through the Gateway and beyond. The **DfEE** should, therefore, consider providing some case studies showing how this can be tackled and encourage TECs and careers services to be proactive in the development of protocols to facilitate information sharing/exchange at practitioner level.
- 3.3 **GOs** should work with their TECs and careers services to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the main partners involved in the planning and delivery of the Learning Gateway are clearly defined.
- 3.4 There are concerns amongst TECs and training providers that the Department's requirements in respect of quality, FAM, H&S and the documentation required for audit/inspection are impeding the development of Life Skills, particularly with new providers. A **risk assessment approach** which typically involves; the identification of potential problems and risks in contracting with suppliers; an evaluation of the probability of these risks occurring; determination of the measures needed to be taken to minimise risk and the identification of resources required⁷ should be considered by the **DfEE**. Any new arrangements developed can be passed over to the **LSC** and the new **Adult Learning Inspectorate**.
- 3.5 The **DfEE** should consider what further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that appropriate quality standards are developed for the Learning Gateway and which also takes account of the very different nature of Life Skills provision.
- 3.6 As this study was undertaken in the early development of Life Skills it was difficult to reach conclusions on the most effective contracting model. It is, therefore, recommended that **DfEE** should undertake further work later in the year to develop some case studies, which show the pros and cons of the different models currently being used and which take into account the need to keep the contracting chain as short as possible.
- 3.7 The different funding models used by TECs are a cause for concern, and in particular the formula funding of starts, retention and achievement clearly works against the delivery of flexible and innovative provision. It is recommended that the **DfEE** consider, under the **LSC**, funding for the Learning Gateway is treated as non-formula funding as outlined in paragraph 2.13 of the Post 16 Funding and Allocations: First Technical Consultation Paper⁸.

7. Full details of the framework and the approach to risk assessment for a range of TEC suppliers are contained in the QPID publication "**Risk Assessment of TEC Supplier Contracts: A Guide for TECs**". Published in 1995.

8. "**Post 16 Funding and Allocations: First Technical Consultation Paper**" issued by the DfEE in January 2000 setting out the initial thinking on the type of funding arrangements the LSC will need.

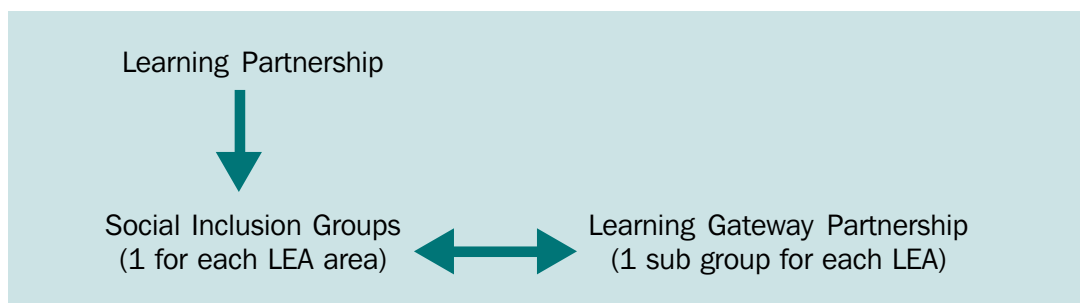
- 3.8 There is considerable variation in both the attendance requirements and the length of time young people are being allowed to stay in Life Skills. The **DfEE** should work with **GOs** to ensure that **TECs** have a common understanding and are applying a congruent approach to length of stay and attendance.
- 3.9 The **DfEE** should undertake further work to look at assessment processes presently in place, how IDPs are used and how the transfer of information from the 'front end' to Life Skills and beyond is being managed.
- 3.10 The **DfEE** should undertake some further work to determine the extent of the difficulty providers are facing in finding suitable work experience opportunities in some parts of the country.
- 3.11 Bonus payments to young people need to be re-assessed by **DfEE** and other approaches to providing incentives explored.
- 3.12 The role of the Personal Adviser is seen as crucial to everyone involved in the Gateway, therefore **GOs** working with their **careers services** should ensure that PAs are more closely involved with young people during their time in Life Skills and in particular are directly involved in the review process.
- 3.13 Measuring outcomes and distance travelled by young people in the Gateway is an area which most organisations are finding difficult. The **DfEE** should give greater thought to establishing measures, which could be used by TECs and providers.
- 3.14 Working with **GOs** and **TECs**, the **DfEE** should explore the extent to which young people at the end of their time in Life Skills fail to progress to mainstream learning, the reason for such failure, and the implications for current provision.
- 3.15 This study identified a number of activities and practices that appear to work well and would be useful to share with a wider audience. It is therefore proposed that **DfEE** commission further work to produce some case study material for publication as part of QFAD Good Practice series.

4. ARRANGEMENTS TO SUPPORT THE LEARNING GATEWAY

- 4.1 This section looks at the way the key organisations have come together in an area to develop a strategy for the development and delivery of the Learning Gateway. It particularly focuses on partnership arrangements, both at the strategic level and at practitioner level, as well as on how issues such as data sharing and clarification of roles and responsibilities have been tackled.

Partnerships

- 4.2 Almost all areas have in place strategic partnerships to oversee the development, and to provide support for the Learning Gateway. However the membership of these partnerships vary considerably from area to area. In some instances there are well-developed partnerships, built and developed from existing New Start partnership arrangements, and with a broad range of local organisations involved. Membership in these areas is drawn from the Local Education Authority (LEA), police, youth offending teams, voluntary groups, social services, FE colleges and the youth service, as well as the TEC and the careers service. Elsewhere partnerships are very embryonic and still need to engage the full range of organisations with an interest in social exclusion. The following diagram shows the partnership structure in one large TEC area, which although bringing together a wide range of interested organisations, is proving very time consuming to manage and because of the complexity of the structure, makes it difficult to move things forward quickly.



- 4.3 In areas where the partnership is at an early stage of development the major partners are aware of the need to engage a wider membership, but they are also conscious of the time and resource needed to build successful partnership working. In those areas where partnerships have a wider membership, it has proved difficult to maintain a regular attendance at meetings by those organisations not directly involved in delivery, for example the police and some voluntary organisations. Whilst most bodies with an interest in Learning Gateway client group are represented on Steering Groups, significant omissions often include schools and employers, although the former is generally represented by the LEA.
- 4.4 Learning Partnerships have not, at this stage, been involved in the development of the Learning Gateway, although most have been kept informed of progress. Having an overlap of membership between the Learning Gateway Steering Group and the Learning Partnership has helped in this respect. In one area the Learning Partnership provided £30K in development funding to the Gateway.

- 4.5 Despite the efforts to establish effective partnerships at a strategic level, there is still a considerable amount of work to be done at practitioner level. For example there is often a lack of awareness at the grass root level in some organisations, with whom TECs and careers services work, of the recommendations and messages coming out of reports such as ‘Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities For 16-18 Year Olds’⁹ or the White Paper ‘Learning to Succeed’¹⁰. Therefore when it comes to operating and delivering the Learning Gateway on the ground, Personal Advisers in particular, are spending a considerable amount of time building trust and explaining policy to other partner organisations which is using up valuable time which could be better spent working with clients.

Data Sharing

- 4.6 The development of an efficient system of sharing data and personal information about the client group is very important for partners involved in the Learning Gateway. The information, which will generally be aggregated data looking at issues such as school exclusions and attendance, as well as information on individual young people, is needed to inform strategic planning, avoid duplication of effort and help ensure the young person gets the best possible help.
- 4.7 However, most partnerships have still to tackle the issue, particularly the information which relates to individual clients. Only in a few areas have partnerships progressed to the stage of having formal arrangements in place through the development of data sharing protocols, although these are generally embryonic and not all partners have signed up to them. In one or two areas it is felt that the trust and understanding that has been nurtured over several years enables them to take a more pragmatic approach to data sharing and to operate on an informal basis, which works well for them, without the need for formalised systems. Typically the following issues will be included in any data sharing protocol:

- **the management and use of data** – this will include data needed to assist strategic planning for example statistics on school attendance, destinations at 16, retention rates etc., as well as individual client data which will be of help to the PA;
- **the role of the partners in sharing data** – this section will set out what each of the partners will take responsibility for and should cover all the main organisations involved in delivery, including schools, colleges, suppliers, the LEA(s), social services, youth service, youth offending teams as well as the careers service and the TEC;
- **who has responsibility for processing the data;**
- **access to the data and data protection;**
- **arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the procedures and processes.**

9. The Social Exclusion report ‘**Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities For 16-18 Year Olds Not In Education, Employment or Training**’ was published in July 1999 and explains why many young people are outside education, training and work after leaving school at 16.

10. ‘**Learning to Succeed a new framework for post-16 learning**’ Cm 4392 - a White Paper published in June 1999 which sets out a new structure for education and training across all routes.

Roles and Responsibilities

- 4.8 There are a number of issues to be considered when developing partnerships but one of the more crucial elements is ensuring that there is a clarity and purpose to the various roles and responsibilities which exist within the partnership. Organisations and individuals involved need to know what part they are expected to play.
- 4.9 Generally individuals are clear as to their role within the Gateway and organisations understand what they and others are “bringing to the table”, although very few have gone as far as documenting this information. However there are several activities – assessment, in all its various forms, and exit from Life Skills – where there is a lack of clarity and/or understanding as to where the responsibility lies. This lack of clarity could lead at best to duplication and overlap of some activities, particularly assessment, or at worst result in no one taking responsibility. (see paragraphs 7.6 and 8.5 for further details).

5. DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF THE LEARNING GATEWAY

- 5.1 This section sets out how TECs and careers services are working together to develop and deliver the Learning Gateway with particular emphasis on arrangements for planning and identifying potential deliverers of Life Skills provision.

Planning

- 5.2 In most areas the development and delivery of the ‘front end’ is very much the careers service domain with little, if any involvement of the TEC. However there are some examples where the TEC is providing additional resources to help with the development of the Gateway. Examples of the type of help provided include funding Life Skills co-ordinators, part funding Gateway workers who help to draw young people into the programme and part funding a secondee from the careers service to help troubleshoot issues associated with information, documentation and programme capacity. TECs hold the contracts for the Life Skills provision, although in one area it was planned to contract some of the provision through the careers service.
- 5.3 Some careers services commented on the increasing administration burden with which they have had to deal since the introduction of the Learning Gateway. The need to establish systems and processes in relation to participants in the ‘front end’ as well as arranging bonus payments for young people progressing to options other than Life Skills has required additional staff development and training. This has resulted in additional pressures on careers service’s already stretched resources.

Assessment of Need

- 5.4 In nearly all areas the assessment of need was undertaken by the careers service, and usually included a detailed breakdown of the characteristics of the potential client group. Typically information on the following groups was obtained, those excluded from school, long term non-attenders, young offenders, care leavers, young people with special educational needs and others who by particular circumstances or attitude need intensive additional support to enter learning. This information is made available to TECs, but only in a few areas was it apparent that this intelligence has been used to inform the development of Life Skills.

In the Leeds area as a result of research, undertaken by the careers service, on the potential audience for the Learning Gateway it was recognised that in order to attract this potential client group into the programme it would be necessary to offer something very much different from what had traditionally been available. New provision was therefore contracted which uses interests and hobbies to address the cause of disengagement.

Identifying Suppliers

- 5.5 Generally TECs have been reluctant to look beyond their existing supplier network to deliver Life Skills. Their suppliers are familiar with the systems and processes that are in place and for most TECs this was seen as the easier and less risky option. Providers need to satisfy “Raising the Standard”¹¹, which includes preparing a self-assessment in readiness for a Training Standards Inspectorate (TSC) inspection, satisfying FAM requirements, including the submission of audited accounts and fulfilling necessary H&S obligations. This is not a problem for existing suppliers, but a number of the smaller specialist organisations, particularly, although not exclusively, those in the voluntary sector are put off by what they see as bureaucracy, which will bring very few benefits to their business.
- 5.6 However, several TECs have contracted with a range of new organisations and have put in place arrangements to support both them and their existing suppliers, who need to adopt different approaches to training when delivering the Life Skills option. One TEC has seconded five members of staff, to work as project managers for a new supplier, who has been brought into the area to deliver Life Skills. As the staff members have been involved in working with disaffected young people through other initiatives it has been possible to “hit the ground running” with the development of Life Skills. Another has a contract manager, whose role is to work with providers to assist them with issues, such as claims procedures and liaison with referral agencies. This has helped to take some of the pressure off new providers. A further example is a TEC which is providing set up development costs for new organisations, with the funding coming from the TEC’s own reserves.

Quality Assurance

- 5.7 The majority of Gateway partnerships have not yet developed quality assurance arrangements, which cover all aspects of the Learning Gateway. Most TECs are making use of their existing arrangements to quality assure providers delivering Life Skills with careers services taking responsibility for the quality assurance of the ‘front end’. However the Learning Gateway, and the Life Skills option within it, is very different from other learning opportunities available to young people in that it offers bespoke training and support delivered in a flexible, and in some instances, innovative way. Therefore what is required is the development of a range of additional quality criteria and standards. Some criteria and standards that might be considered include:
- working arrangements between different agencies, as for the first time in TEC delivered programmes a multi-agency approach is needed if the Gateway is to be a success;
 - arrangements for delivering accessible and flexible programmes which stimulate and support the learner;
 - continuing one-to-one support throughout the programme;
 - the overall management of the process; and
 - arrangements for ensuring that the young person’s views are considered.

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive but rather a flavour of the areas which need to be considered by Partnerships.

11. “Raising the Standard” published in April 1998 by the Training Standards Council sets out guidelines for self-assessment and inspection of work-based training .

6. DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS

- 6.1 The ways in which TECs are contracting with, funding and building the capacity of providers to deliver Life Skills are explored in this section of the report.

Life Skills Coverage

- 6.2 At the time of the study several TECs had not contracted for specific Life Skills opportunities. In those areas existing arrangements such as work preparation courses, New Start, ESF/SRB funded training or provision, funded from TEC reserves and in place prior to the Gateway have been utilised. The TECs in these areas had decided not to rush in new Life Skills provision, but to give themselves and potential delivers, more time to develop the appropriate opportunities. In one of these TECs a comprehensive handbook is available for potential suppliers, which builds upon the local careers service experiences in the delivery of a range of material to disadvantaged groups of young people. The handbook can be used as a whole or as a 'pick and mix' and contains modules on topics such as confidence building, jobsearch, interview techniques and career action planning as well as signposting to useful training and reading material.
- 6.3 Full geographical coverage, which would enable all eligible Learning Gateway clients to have easy access to Life Skills, has yet to be achieved in almost all areas covered by the study. This applies in both rural and urban TECs. A variety of reasons were put forward as to why it has not been possible to achieve full coverage and these include:
- a lack of suitable training providers in some areas, particularly where the training supplier infrastructure has been pruned back in recent years;
 - the high costs involved in providing flexible and innovative provision, when only small numbers of young people are in need of help; and
 - poor public transport in some of the more rural areas.

The absence of readily available specialist help in rural areas, providing counselling for problems such as drug, solvent and alcohol abuse, is also proving to be a difficult obstacle to overcome.

Contracting

- 6.4 Several different TEC contracting models are being used to deliver Life Skills. These broadly break down into three distinct approaches to contracting.

Model 1: The TEC contracts with a training provider who delivers all elements of the IDP.

Model 2: The TEC contracts all funding with a lead provider(s) who then sub-contract elements to other organisations who might be existing TEC contractors or could be organisations new to TEC funding.

Model 3: The TEC contracts all funding to training providers who deliver some elements of the IDP, and sub-contract those they cannot deliver.

Only in a minority of areas is the TEC contracting/or proposing to contract directly with specialist support organisations, such as theatre groups or organisations offering outdoor activities.

- 6.5 In one area the use of Model 2, which has been developed from New Start, was able to offer a very flexible approach to delivery giving wide geographical coverage, established training infrastructure, vocational advice, basic skills, experienced youth workers, premises availability and capacity for outreach work. It is probably too early in the development of Life Skills to determine which particular model is most effective and in any event it is likely all the different approaches will work in particular circumstances and allow local flexibility for local situations. Whichever model is used, it was felt by a number of people to whom we spoke that ideally access to opportunities and support should be through 'drop in centres'; easily accessible to the majority of the community; open every day, completely informal, funded adequately and offering interesting, valuable interventions that meet the needs of individuals.

Funding

- 6.6 The level of funding available to deliver Life Skills was regarded by most training providers as inadequate, as often without funding from other activities with which the provider was involved, they were unable to cover their costs. However some were more satisfied than others, and this often resulted from the different ways TECs were applying the formula funding system. Approaches adopted by TECs include:

- some paying for all travel costs, others only paying for costs over £3;
- different levels of 'on training fees', most paying this monthly but one or two examples where the TEC is paying this fee weekly, which helps providers with cash flow;
- a few TECs were using outcome payments, contrary to DfEE guidance, as part of the funding formula which, given the nature of the client group, are not easy to achieve;
- most, but not all paying a start fee; and
- several TECs had put aside additional funding which could be accessed on request to pay for specialist help and/or training.

In one of the areas covered by the study the TEC has taken an approach which differs from most other TECs. The funding package available to suppliers offers two levels of 'on programme' payment depending upon the severity of need of the individual, with travel costs met separately. A start fee is also payable, which helps the suppliers' participation in the 'front end' and their brokerage activities around the transition from the 'front end' to Life Skills. A separate contingency fund which suppliers can draw on is also available from the TEC if higher costs are experienced with some trainees.

- 6.7 Low occupancy levels, experienced by the majority of training providers, are also contributing to their dissatisfaction with the level of funding, as most funding packages require a certain occupancy level to enable providers to remain viable. A move away from the present formula funding approach needs to be considered in order to accommodate the flexible and bespoke nature of Life Skills provision. The use of non-formula funding for those people who have the greatest difficulty in accessing learning opportunities is addressed in the LSC funding consultation document, therefore using this approach for Life Skills provision would seem to offer a way forward.

Building Capacity

- 6.8 A little over half the TECs in the study sample were supporting their providers in building capacity. The support takes various forms, but often consists of dedicated training days which might tackle a particular characteristic of the client group, regular briefing events and encouraging networking amongst the Life Skills deliverers within the TEC area. In one TEC area a separate Development Team is in place to support providers, particularly those that are new to the network. In another area a Handbook has been produced, which can be added to as Life Skills develops, and which builds upon experiences of New Start. The areas presently covered by the handbook include, the use of mentors within the programme, resources available and updates on effective practice.
- 6.9 Although in many of the TECs visited Life Skills is being delivered by existing training providers, several TECs are planning major changes to the way the programme will be delivered from April 2000 as they recognise that the present arrangements are not always offering the range of opportunities needed by the Gateway client group. The changes involve bringing in new organisations and in one of the areas the TEC will be contracting with a range of support agencies to ensure specialist provision is available when needed.

7. DELIVERY OF LIFE SKILLS

- 7.1 This section of the report looks at the different approaches being taken to deliver Life Skills and the arrangements in place to support young people as they move through the options.

Content, Location and Time Spent on Life Skills

- 7.2 Life Skills is generally delivered on the premises of existing providers, although in a few areas use is being made of youth centres and careers offices to deliver some of the elements. Typically Life Skills consists of some core features such as literacy and numeracy, team building, interview techniques and confidence building. Where possible some vocational tasters are built around the young person's interests. Work experience, whereby young people spend a proportion of their time in the work place, is not a major feature of the programme. Work tasters, where a trainee samples different types of work, is used in a few areas, and generally takes place on other training provider premises.
- 7.3 Some of the Life Skills provision available offers some different and innovative options; making use of outdoor activity, sport, arts/media and environmental projects to attract and maintain the interest of young people. Most of these opportunities are modular based allowing flexible delivery and attendance as well as giving participants the chance to gain community sports leader awards and certificates in H&S and food hygiene.

Life Skills in the Leeds area offers 7 thematic options, which are:

- outdoor activity and sport, including canoeing, orienteering and climbing;
- arts/media with participants able to access dance, music and photography;
- environment - working with organisations such as National Trust and Groundwork;
- voluntary – an opportunity to work in the community with groups such as Age Concern and the volunteer bureau;
- hands on technology for those young people who want something more practical to do, projects could include renovating bicycles or building a website;
- work experience/work tasters – for those young people who have no idea what they want to do; and
- pick 'n' mix a range of short courses available for those not interested in the above themes.

- 7.4 The majority of the young people entering the Learning Gateway have been outside of formal learning for some time with most having a variety of additional personal difficulties. The following brief profiles demonstrate the difficulties some young people face.

Claire is 17 years old and has been in care since she was 8 years old: she has no contact with her father and almost none with her mother. She had a very disrupted education because of frequent moves and as a result took no GCSEs. She presently lives in her own flat supported by an After Care Social Services project.

Alex is a 16 year old who has had almost no attendance at school since the beginning of year 10. He is presently in a project which offers an alternative to a custodial sentence. His offence was mugging train passengers.

Traditional, more formal training environments, do not generally provide the best surroundings for young people like Claire and Alex. Therefore using centres based in the community and other less formal learning/training areas would appear to offer a better setting in which to deliver Life Skills.

- 7.5 The length of time young people are able to remain on Life Skills showed wide variations across the study sample, ranging from a fixed 13 weeks to programmes which allowed the time spent to be determined by the requirements of the trainee and the level of support required in terms of progression. Equally there were considerable differences in attendance requirements with some providers and TECs expecting only 16 hours per week attendance for the whole time on Life Skills; others looking for a gradual increase in hours; and others expecting 30 hours from day one. A further aspect of inconsistency in relation to attendance relates to the abatement of allowances for absences where some providers are paying pro rata if attendance drops below 30 hours whilst others pay the full amount providing clients attend for at least 16 hours.

Individual Assessment

- 7.6 In all areas the PA undertakes the initial assessment and the completion of an IDP, although this is often supplemented by a further initial assessment undertaken by the Life Skills provider. In one or two TEC areas providers were critical of the IDPs produced by PAs as they felt it failed to identify issues and problems associated with the young person and simply set out the next steps a young person should take e.g. “attend sessions on job search”. Quite frequently a further initial assessment is undertaken by the Life Skills provider when a young person starts on the programme, even though a great deal of this work has been done in the ‘front end’. This would appear to be a waste of resource and effort, as well as subjecting young people to ‘assessment overload’, particularly as they will probably be assessed further when they move into a mainstream opportunity.
- 7.7 The IDP is acknowledged as a key document but several of the partnerships have re-designed it, often more than once. The main issue seems to be that too many people want the IDP to do too many things. It is not clear whether it is intended to be a single, one time, summative document or to be a loose leaf handbook or workbook from which pages could be extracted for audit purposes. There is also a view that one single plan is not appropriate to most Learning Gateway clients and that what they need is a series of mini plans. If this were so, then there are considerable implications for the role of the PA in the Life Skills element, in particular the time involved with individual clients.
- 7.8 To ease the transition from the ‘front end’ into Life Skills some PAs have adopted a caseworking approach whereby the PA and the training provider meet with the young person to draw up a plan of action. This approach would seem to offer a number of benefits, not least in that it goes some way towards developing trust, breaking down barriers and generating acceptance of IDPs and assessments completed by the PA. (This approach has the potential to be duplicated as the young person moves into mainstream). However, whatever the approach, organisations undertaking inspections/audit perhaps need to take a flexible approach and recognise that the deliverer of the training may not always undertake the initial assessment.

Work Experience

- 7.9 In many parts of the country finding meaningful work experience opportunities and sometimes work tasters is proving very difficult, not only due to the make up of the client group, but also because of the economic conditions which exist in several areas. Some TECs and training providers argue that work experience is not appropriate for this particular client group, as they would expect that when a young person is ready for work experience then it is appropriate for them to progress into a mainstream opportunity.

Support Arrangements for the Young Person

- 7.10 The majority of young people interviewed felt they were receiving the necessary support and help from their training provider and felt they could approach them with any problems they may have. However a number of trainees said they didn't know their PA and some had infrequent contact with him/her whilst in Life Skills. In one TEC additional support via a trained Support Counsellor is available. The Counsellor is available to deal, confidentially, with a whole range of personal problems or difficulties a young person may be having. In another area the TEC is funding community workers to follow up those young people who are failing to respond to requests to attend interviews with PAs.
- 7.11 Bonus payments, which are paid to young people when they start Life Skills and then again when moving to a positive outcome, were seen to have little impact and were not regarded as an incentive to becoming involved - a view supported by the young people interviewed as part of the study. Most were unaware of the payments when they joined and only found out about the bonus some way into their Life Skills. As more young people become aware of the Learning Gateway and of the bonus payments available for participation, then this opinion may well change. TECs are operating different practices in relation to the payment of bonuses, with some paying at the start of Life Skills, others a week after starting and others a month after starting.
- 7.12 There were suggestions that alternative arrangements, other than cash payments, should be considered as cash in the hands of those young people coping with drug or alcohol dependency can be misused, rather than solve problems. Alternatives to cash bonuses could take the form of discount vouchers for clothes etc. or the 'air mile' approach, whereby individuals would gain points/merits for meeting certain milestones, which could then be exchanged for discounts on a range of goods/services.

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS

- 8.1 Monitoring and review arrangements are an important part of any activity and in this section arrangements for monitoring young people's progress and how they are helped to move on are examined.

Monitoring Progress

- 8.2 Young people's progress against their IDP is regularly monitored by their training provider once they are in Life Skills, usually weekly, although less frequently in some places. However, often the review process does not include the PA, although this is a DfEE requirement, which often leads to criticism from the provider that PAs do not understand what they are doing. Some young people and training providers report infrequent contact with their PA, the result of this is that young people may not be getting the level of support that some of them need. In one area Learning Mentors, who are employed by the training providers and have a range of backgrounds and qualifications, are linked with individual trainees and provide support to the PA on a day to day basis. One of the key roles for the mentor is to enable young people to reflect and identify their progress, which helps them overcome barriers caused by poor self-esteem. They will also help young people deal with more personal problems such as housing or financial difficulties.
- 8.3 Generally there are no formal arrangements in place, other than through the IDP review process, to allow young people to put forward their views on the activities, provision and support they are receiving as they move through the Learning Gateway.

Moving On?

- 8.4 Almost all of the organisations seen agreed that measuring outcomes or distance travelled was proving extremely difficult and clearly this is an area where considerable work still needs to be done. Where attempts are being made to assess progress, 'soft indicators' such as observable improvements in mixing with other young people or increased confidence are generally being used to measure distance travelled. Several providers are finding it difficult to get the trainees in Life Skills to "sign off" their progress as they are often wary of signing any documentation. Providers feel this may cause audit problems at some point in the future.
- 8.5 At the time the study was carried out very few young people had moved into other options after Life Skills, however discussions with the various local partners indicated there was often a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities amongst the organisations, post Life Skills. For example does the PA continue to support their client once they take up other options and if so, for how long? If not, to whom is the responsibility transferred?
- 8.6 Concerns were also expressed as to what would happen to young people at the end of their time in Life Skills if they did not have a suitable progression route available to them. Many of the clients providers are working with have failed in a variety of other environments and have often been thrown out of mainstream provision due to unsociable behaviour, with some of them bordering on (if not actually involved with) criminality. Would they at the end of, say a 16 hours, 15-week programme be ready to move on?

- 8.7 Those parts of the country with a buoyant labour market, particularly where there is an abundance of temporary and casual work, are finding that some young people are being “pushed” into unskilled work by employment agencies and the Employment Service. This means that young people going through the Gateway are not achieving a successful transition into learning and are likely to re-enter the Learning Gateway further down the line.
- 8.8 There are a few examples of tracking arrangements in place, but generally this is not an activity that has been tackled by many partnerships. In one area the TEC has used a system initially developed by the LEA, which has now been developed so that there is an interface between the databases held by four of the key partners (the LEA, social services, careers service and the TEC). All four databases are electronically linked and their information about all young people is updated every 24 hours. The system gives early warning of problems with individual young people and enables outreach workers to make prompt contact. There are still some issues relating to confidentiality to be resolved but it is felt these issues can be overcome.

9. FURTHER VIEWS AND CONCERNS

- 9.1 This section of the report offers a view from careers services and TECs on two of the DfEE's publications produced to help support the development of the Learning Gateway. It also covers several other issues raised by the organisations that could be of interest to the Department.

DfEE Publications

- 9.2 Staff in TECs and careers services were asked for their views on two recent DfEE publications "Guide to Relevant Practice in the Learning Gateway for 16 and 17 year olds" and "Guidance on Assessment in the Learning Gateway for 16 and 17 year olds".
- 9.3 The level of awareness of the documents by staff in the careers services was in the main high with several reporting extensive use being made of them. However staff in TECs were less aware of the documents and had generally not used them. The Guide to Relevant Practice had proved most useful because of the good case studies. The Guidance on Assessment came in for some criticism largely in relation to the way that it was launched in one particular region. However, there was some comment on the content, with one service describing it as too detailed and another service looking for a steer towards the most appropriate assessment tools. It was suggested by some services that the DfEE should consider supplying a set of comparative reviews of assessment tools with prices and packages, and perhaps demonstration/trial software.

'Front End' Considerations

- 9.4 A number of careers services felt that the amount of time many young people needed in the 'front end' of the Gateway had been underestimated. It can take a long time to bring a young person to accept a move to Life Skills, and sometimes the time spent turns out to be unproductive. The issues of homelessness and accommodation are generally barriers to advice at the 'front end'. Young people are often so pre-occupied with these problems they are unable to countenance discussion about other issues or to consider progression into further options. As numbers increase there is real concern that the necessary resource will not be available.
- 9.5 There is a view that funding is needed to provide simple one-off activities, which can be undertaken in the 'front end' for example parenting classes and social skills.

Occupancy and Funding

- 9.6 Many of the organisations interviewed argued that the Learning Gateway was beginning to become target driven by the DfEE and GOs with the emphasis being placed on numbers of participants, rather than ensuring that individuals in greatest need received the individual attention that they required.
- 9.7 The low levels of occupancy being experienced by some training providers means that they are not receiving sufficient funding to enable them to take on the additional staff needed to give young people the individually tailored programmes which most, if not all need.

- 9.8 In one or two areas colleges were providing outreach provision, aimed at the same client group as the Learning Gateway and funded by Further Education Funding Council. These courses are offering a more attractive funding package to individual young people and therefore pulling them away from Gateway offerings.

10. CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 The study has found that Life Skills provision, which is flexible, innovative and tailor-made to meet individual needs, is not generally available. However, there are several examples where TECs have put in place opportunities that are being delivered using new approaches and locations, which are designed to stimulate the young person's interests.
- 10.2 Funding continues to be an issue for organisations involved in the Learning Gateway with many feeling the present formula driven approach works against the need to provide learning and support geared to individual needs. One or two TECs have shown that it is possible to operate a flexible approach within the present DfEE FAM requirements.
- 10.3 Quality Assurance arrangements that cover all aspects of the Learning Gateway have not been developed. There is therefore, a need for partnerships to consider the range of quality criteria and standards required to deliver this very different provision.
- 10.4 Other issues in relation to the delivery of Life Skills are:
- a need to clarify individual roles and responsibilities in the delivery of initial and on-going assessment;
 - to ensure that there is a common understanding amongst the Gateway partners as to the purpose and the use of the Individual Development Plan;
 - a need to find, in some parts of the country, ways of generating more work experience opportunities;
 - to ensure that PAs are fully involved in the monitoring and review process; and
 - a need to undertake further work which will help providers and PAs measure 'distance travelled' by young people.
- 10.5 Some approaches used by TECs and/or partnerships that would appear to be effective include:
- development of data sharing protocols;
 - providing on-going support for new suppliers;
 - using 'lead supplier' arrangements;
 - offering through training suppliers a range of different and innovative options including outdoor activity, sport and the environment; and
 - contracting directly with support organisations which enables Life Skills providers to make use of them as and when required.

- 10.6 Clearly, this study identifies in several areas, activity that can be considered as effective practice in taking forward the development of the Learning Gateway and the Life Skills option within it. However it also suggests that in many parts of the country, there is still a considerable amount of work needed to ensure that the those young people identified as having the greatest need are able to readily access Life Skills and to receive the bespoke learning and support that they need and deserve.

PARTICIPATING TECS AND CAREERS SERVICES

REGION	TEC	CAREERS SERVICE
North East	Co. Durham Sunderland Tyneside	Co. Durham City of Sunderland Tyneside
Yorkshire and the Humber	Leeds North Yorkshire Sheffield	Leeds North Yorkshire Sheffield
North West	Merseyside	Careers Decisions
East Midlands	Leicestershire Greater Nottingham North Nottingham	Leicestershire Guidelines Careers
East of England	Hertfordshire	Hertfordshire
South West	Dorset Prospects (Devon & Cornwall) Wiltshire & Swindon	Dorset Cornwall & Devon Lifetime Careers
London	LETEC	Futures Careers

In addition 21 training providers, who were delivering Life Skills provision, were seen as part of the study.

THE STUDY TEAM

The study team included:

Study Lead: Stephen Beck Quality and Financial Assurance Division, DfEE

Consultants: Steve Brooking - Steve Brooking Consultancy
 Derek Craze - The Derek Craze Consultancy
 Heather Herrington - Scriven Associates
 Ian Popham
 David Vickers - Competence at Work Ltd.

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85	TEC/CCTE Activities to Promote National Vocational Qualifications	May 2000	QPID85
86	Implementation of TEC/CCTE Equal Opportunities Strategies ...	June 2000	QPID86

* Only available on the Internet - www.dfes.gov.uk/studynet. Studynet also provides information on forthcoming studies and studies produced in 1996 and 1997.

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Health and Safety on Work Experience	November 1999	GPGRS/2
Emerging Good Practice in Developing Trainer Training	March 2000	RS/3
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