

Circular 00/15

Quality Improvement

Use of the Standards Fund 2000-01

Summary

This circular sets out the Council's use of the standards fund for 2000-01 to help colleges improve the quality of their work. It provides an analysis of the responses received to Council Circular 00/05, *Standards Fund 2000-01*. The circular indicates the initiatives that are being funded within the six categories of funding. These are: college improvement; improving teaching and learning; training and development for principals and senior management teams; the good governance programme; dissemination of good practice; and the achievement fund. The circular sets out the administrative arrangements, those for application and for allocation of funds.

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Further information

Emer Clarke
Head of quality improvement unit
Tel 024 7686 3208
Fax 024 7686 3100
E-mail emer.clarke@fetc.ac.uk

or write to:

The Further Education
Funding Council
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT.

Website www.fetc.ac.uk

Use of the Standards Fund 2000-01

Introduction

1 This circular provides an analysis of the responses received to Council Circular 00/05, *Standards Fund 2000-01*, and sets out arrangements for using the standards fund in financial year 2000-01 to help colleges to improve the quality of their work.

2 The standards fund was introduced in 1999-2000 to underpin the drive to raise standards in the sector. In 1999-2000, it comprised £35 million rising to £80 million in the financial year 2000-01. In addition, on 30 March 2000 the secretary of state announced a further £18 million in 2000-01 to support colleges in their drive to improve the examination performance of full-time 16-18 year old students. The government has confirmed its intention to extend the standards fund to 2001-02, and has currently allocated £160 million for this purpose.

Consultation

3 Council Circular 00/05, was published by the Council in February 2000. This contained proposals that funding for 2000-01 should be distributed within six categories:

- college improvement
- improving teaching and learning
- training and development for principals and senior management teams
- the good governance programme
- dissemination of good practice
- the achievement fund.

4 Responses to the circular were requested by 31 March 2000. The Council asked respondents to indicate whether they broadly supported the proposals and invited comments.

5 In summary, 243 responses were received, of which 96% were from sector colleges. The majority of respondents supported all proposals. There was support from 91% or more of the respondents to 16 of the 18 proposals outlined in Circular 00/05. The proposals to enable up to two teachers or senior managers per college to retire early, and the introduction of the achievement fund attracted support but also received the most comment. The Council has considered the responses to the consultation and has decided not to proceed with the proposal to provide a small financial contribution to enable up to two teachers or senior managers to retire early. Details of the responses to Council Circular 00/05 are provided at annex H.

Implementation

6 Using the standards fund to implement the Council's quality improvement strategy and to meet government priorities will continue to be a significant feature of the Council's work. In using the standards fund, the Council intends to recognise and reward excellence and enable colleges to have access to funds to help them to secure improvement. The standards fund will be allocated under the six categories which are described in more detail at annex A.

7 The majority of funding for 2000-01 will be allocated by formula or made available on application. However, financial assistance for colleges causing concern, for post-inspection support and for dissemination of good practice will continue to be allocated on the basis of the Council's agreement with colleges' costed action plans. To help colleges, the Council has posted guidance on action planning and a suggested template for costed action plans on the Council's website.

8 Colleges need to be mindful of the lifetime of the standards fund. Allocations to the Council for financial years 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02 have already been made. Colleges that are not eligible for financial assistance for post-inspection support in financial year 2000-01 will become eligible when they have

been inspected. Once inspected colleges may also be eligible for funding under category 5, dissemination of good practice. The Council envisages a smooth transition to the new arrangements put in place as a result of the Learning and Skills Bill.

9 Information about the application process for 2000-01 and the arrangements for administering funding are set out in annexes B and C, activities for which funding may be used are listed at annex D and application forms are set out at annexes E, F, and G. Colleges need to ensure that they complete the application form appropriate to the initiative for which they are seeking funding.

Timetable

10 The Council is keen to commence support for work on raising standards as soon as possible so that the sector can demonstrate its commitment to achieving measurable improvements.

11 The Council's first priority will be to ensure support for those colleges causing concern and therefore eligible for funding under category 1 of the standards fund. Financial assistance will be made available as soon as a college is identified as causing concern. The chief executive will have discretion to ensure that these colleges receive sufficient financial support to secure necessary improvements. Colleges causing concern will be asked to prepare costed action plans to address those weaknesses which have been identified by the Council.

12 Colleges eligible for post-inspection support will be notified about their funding after their inspection report is published. Funding will be provided when the Council approves colleges' costed action plans. Colleges should submit their applications as soon as they have developed a costed action plan and within two months after notification that the college has been awarded funding.

13 Initiatives under category 2, improving teaching and learning, are a key priority for the Council. During summer 2000, colleges will be informed about the number of facilitator days they have been awarded to take forward the basic skills quality initiative. They will also receive information about arrangements for training of basic skills staff. Details about other initiatives for which colleges will receive an allocation will be sent to college principals during June 2000. Applications for financial assistance for new teaching posts should be made to regional directors and may be made immediately and no later than the end of 29 September 2000. The Council will work with the Association of Colleges on the scheme for mentoring staff referred to in paragraphs 39 and 40.

14 Some initiatives under categories 3 and 4 of the standards fund are already under way. The training and development programme for principals will continue in 2000-01. Training materials for governors will be sent to governing bodies in May. A contract to train trainers has been awarded to a group of organisations involved in the development of governor training materials. Governing bodies will be informed about training based on the training materials during the summer. Consultative groups will shortly be set up to help develop priorities for the senior management training programme, governor health checks and training for corporation clerks.

15 The timetable for allocating funds under category 5 to colleges achieving FEFC-accredited status or recognised by ministers as beacon colleges will inevitably be determined by the timing of announcements. In general terms, however, these colleges will be expected to inform the Council about how they intend to use their funding to disseminate good practice within two months of the announcement of their awards. Colleges wishing to disseminate outstanding provision should submit their applications as soon as they have developed a costed action plan or within two months after notification that the college is eligible for funding.

16 In summer 2000, the Council will issue a circular to colleges setting out the requirements for 1999-2000 data submission so that awards from the achievement fund can be made towards the end of financial year 2000-01.

Support for Colleges

17 In 1999-2000 the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) received funding from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) to develop and implement a range of support services for colleges seeking funding from the standards fund. The FEDA/AoC initiative will continue in 2000-01. Colleges were, for example, able to call on help and advice when developing action plans and evaluating the progress they made.

18 The Council is also providing additional support for colleges seeking to benefit from the good practice which exists in the sector. There is now a searchable database on the Council's website which includes information about dissemination activities for which colleges have been funded under the standards fund. The colleges concerned have provided information on their activities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

19 The Council will need to ensure that it has adequate information about colleges' use of standards fund allocations. This will enable the Council to assess the impact of the standards fund, both at a local and national level. In general, colleges should always ensure that they have adequate information about their use of funding from the standards fund to allow them to monitor their expenditure and to evaluate the impact of their activities on college improvement. The Council will pay particular attention to colleges causing concern and the progress of these colleges will be considered during the thrice-yearly regional review meetings. Progress made by other colleges receiving support from the standards fund will normally be monitored through routine visits by college inspectors. For some initiatives, colleges

will be expected to provide brief reports on their use of funds. These should be completed and shared with college inspectors by the 31 January 2001. Reports should be no longer than two pages for each funded initiative.

Non-sector college providers of further education

20 During 1999-2000, the Council's standards fund was made available only to sector colleges. A new aspect of the fund for 2000-01 is access to the fund for non-sector college providers of further education funded by the Council. These are:

- LEA-maintained external institutions
- independent external institutions
- independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- higher education institutions
- dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards.

21 Consultation with these providers is the subject of Circular 00/09. Guidance on how these institutions will receive financial assistance from the standards fund will be published shortly.



The Six Categories of the Standards Fund

1 In the 2000-01 financial year, the Council will fund activities under six categories. These will support measures outlined in the Council's quality improvement strategy and the government's priority to raise standards. The Council will not provide support under the standards fund where it is deemed that a more appropriate course of action is merger or dissolution. The chief executive will have discretion to ensure that colleges causing concern receive sufficient financial support to secure necessary improvements. The following paragraphs detail, for each category of available funding, colleges' eligibility for funding and funding arrangements.

Category 1: College Improvement

2 The purpose of this category of the fund is to help colleges to improve their performance. As in 1999-2000, financial assistance will be given to colleges causing concern and for post-inspection support. Whilst the Council wishes to encourage collaborative work to achieve improvements in quality, colleges should ensure that double funding does not occur. This possibility could arise when one college has received funding to buy in support under category 1 whilst another has been funded to provide support under category 5. In this instance, the colleges concerned should make sure that activities are not funded through both categories of the fund.

Colleges causing concern – 1(a)

3 Colleges will be identified as causing concern through a range of qualitative and quantitative measures arising out of the Council's regional review process, inspection and data monitoring activities. These are set out in Council Circular 99/24, *Use of the Standards Fund*, on which the sector has already been consulted.

Funding will be targeted at major areas of weakness. The amount of funding and arrangements for payment will vary according to the nature of the weaknesses to be addressed. Each allocation will be made in response to a costed action plan provided by a college and agreed by the Council. Progress in remedying weaknesses will be monitored through the regional review process.

Eligibility

4 A college will be deemed to be causing concern and therefore eligible for funding if it is identified as needing additional or exceptional support primarily through the Council's regular regional review process. This brings together a wide range of information held by the Council about college performance and results in an assessment of the level of practical support needed by each college in the sector. The outcomes of regional reviews are communicated to colleges and the process is described in Council Circular 98/12. The Council's decision to include colleges designated as needing additional support within category 1 of the standards fund reflects its wish to reverse at the earliest opportunity any trend of deteriorating performance.

Funding arrangements

5 The Council recognises that the amount of funding needed by colleges to remedy weaknesses in their performance will vary significantly according to each college's circumstances. The Council will make available up to £700,000 to those colleges most in need. Costed action plans may indicate that colleges do not need the maximum funding to address areas of concern identified by the Council.

6 Within this context, the Council wishes to adopt an approach to funding which will enable it to meet its responsibilities for the consistent use of funds yet reflect local needs. It therefore proposes to identify colleges within indicative funding bands according to two factors:

- the extent to which their performance is identified as causing concern according to the test for eligibility set out in Circular 99/24, with those colleges assessed as needing exceptional support through the regional review process allocated to the highest band
- college size, as indicated in table 1.

7 Table 1 below indicates the method to be adopted for assigning colleges to funding bands. This provides the maximum funding available to the college to address issues identified by the Council.

Post-inspection support – 1(b)

8 The purpose of this initiative is to provide post-inspection support, following inspections in the current round (beginning September 1997), so that all colleges are able to achieve improvements in the quality of their work more quickly than would otherwise be possible.

Eligibility

9 Colleges will be entitled to receive funding on receipt of a costed post-inspection action plan agreed by the Council. Those colleges inspected since September 1999, and which have not already received funding for post-inspection support will be eligible for funding during the 2000-01 financial year. Those colleges due for inspection during the teaching year 2000-01 should be eligible for support in the financial year 2001-02, following their inspection.

Funding arrangements

10 The Council wants colleges to be able to predict the level of funding available to them so that actions can be planned and costed at the earliest opportunity after inspection has taken place. It has therefore developed a simple and transparent method of allocating funds based on college size and inspection outcomes. This provides a basic level of funding according to size (determined by funded units) with an enhancement to enable colleges to tackle weaknesses in provision as identified by inspection grades. Table 2 shows how funding will be allocated.

Table 1. Allocation of funds available for colleges causing concern

<i>College size*</i>	<i>Band 1</i>	<i>Band 2</i>	<i>Band 3</i>
Up to 150,000	Up to £50,000	Up to £100,000	Up to £300,000
150,001-600,000	Up to £100,000	Up to £150,000	Up to £500,000
More than 600,000	Up to £150,000	Up to £200,000	Up to £700,000

**measured in units funded by the Council in 1999-2000*

Table 2. Distribution of funds for colleges applying for funding for post-inspection support

<i>College size*</i>	<i>All provision graded 1 or 2</i>	<i>Some provision graded 3 but no provision graded 4 or 5</i>	<i>Some provision graded 4 or 5</i>
Up to 150,000	Up to £12,000	Up to £19,000	Up to £26,000
150,001 - 600,000	Up to £19,000	Up to £26,000	Up to £33,000
More than 600,000	Up to £26,000	Up to £33,000	Up to £40,000

**measured in units funded by the Council in 1999-2000*

11 This distribution results in the great majority of colleges receiving between £19,000 and £33,000 to fund post-inspection action plans.

12 Colleges causing concern will also be eligible for funding for post-inspection support when they have been inspected. Annex B describes procedures for notifying colleges about the funding available to them and for administering applications for funding.

Category 2: Improving Teaching and Learning

13 The purpose of this category of the standards fund is to provide targeted funding for colleges to tackle matters of continuing concern in the quality of teaching and learning – the area of college life which impinges most directly on the students' experience. Successive chief inspectors' annual reports have indicated that though the quality of teaching has generally improved since inspection commenced in 1993, there are still weaknesses which need to be addressed.

14 The Council will fund a range of initiatives which are described in the following paragraphs. They are:

- the second phase of the basic skills quality initiative
- support for part-time teachers
- support for information and learning technology (ILT) skills for teachers
- support for curriculum 2000 reforms

- a contribution towards the cost of two new teaching posts for each college for two years
- support for staff retraining
- support for professional updating
- support for staff mentoring.

Basic skills quality initiative – 2(a)

15 The inspectorate's survey of basic education, published in April 1998, identified the need to improve the quality of basic skills teaching. This is now a key government priority. The report of the Moser group, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start*, highlighted the fact that 7 million adults in the country have real problems with literacy and numeracy. Phase 1 of the basic skills quality initiative, funded from the standards fund in 1999-2000, provided financial assistance for colleges to develop materials. In 2000-01, the Council will fund a second phase to help colleges to improve the quality of their basic skills provision. The Council's work in this field is intended to complement the work of other agencies to improve the provision of basic skills.

16 Phase 2, which started in April 2000, will involve the recruitment and training of basic skills facilitators who will help colleges to review the process for improving quality and examine how the materials developed during phase 1 of the initiative can support implementation of colleges' action plans. Colleges will be allocated a number of days paid for directly from the standards fund. The number of days allocated to each college will vary according to college size. Colleges will be informed about their allocation in summer 2000.

17 In addition, the Council will make funding available for up to 1,000 basic skills staff each to attend a development course. Before attendance on the course, institutions will be invited to undertake an audit of the scope and quality of their basic skills provision, and to develop an action plan which will help them improve provision. The course programme will cover the organisation, management, and quality assurance of basic skills provision, as well as aspects of teaching and learning. The training programme is likely to be continued in 2001-02.

Part-time teachers – 2(b)

18 In the 104 further education colleges inspected in 1998-99, 24% of all teaching staff, when expressed in full-time equivalents, were on non-permanent contracts. In some curriculum areas, the figure was significantly higher. Part-time staff make a valuable contribution to the education provided by colleges. However, inspection of lessons taught by staff on fractional or other part-time contracts suggests that, in general, such teachers need more help to bring their work up to the standard achieved by their full-time colleagues. The Council will provide financial assistance to put in place arrangements to support part-time teachers including those employed by third party providers. In 2000-01, funding will be provided for:

- mentoring arrangements
- better access to staff development opportunities.

19 The funding that the Council makes available for this initiative will contribute to the cost of putting in place mentoring arrangements for new or inexperienced part-time staff. Such arrangements are likely to include:

- induction
- observation of teaching
- advice on marking work
- moderation of assessments.

20 Funding may also be used towards the cost of providing better access to staff development opportunities for part-time staff.

Funding arrangements

21 The Council intends that its approach to funding these initiatives will enable it to meet its responsibilities for consistent use of funds, yet reflect local needs. Colleges will, therefore, receive funds according to college size represented by full-time equivalent student numbers.

Monitoring and evaluation

22 Colleges will be expected to provide a brief report on their use of funds by 31 January 2001 indicating the number of days of mentoring support provided and the staff development undertaken by part-time teachers.

Information and learning technology skills for teachers – 2(c)

23 Inspection reports highlight frequently the need to improve the use of ILT skills for teachers in curriculum areas. For some teachers, their own lack of skills is a drawback to their understanding of how ILT can enhance teaching and learning in their subject areas. Funding for ILT staff training and development will continue during 2000-01. Colleges will be expected to demonstrate that the funds are used to enhance teaching skills in ILT in areas where the need is greatest. Circular 99/45, *ILT Implementation Plan* outlines the implementation plan for ILT development with the sector from 1999 to 2002. In line with this, colleges will be expected to use funds available under the standards fund in a manner consistent with their ILT strategy, which is to be submitted to the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency by 30 June 2000.

24 The Council is working with the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) to develop standards in ILT. It is anticipated that the draft standards will inform training programmes which are to be developed from autumn 2000.

Funding arrangements

25 The Council intends that its approach to funding this initiative will enable it to meet its responsibilities for consistent use of funds, yet reflect local needs. Colleges will, therefore, receive funds according to college size represented by full-time equivalent student numbers.

Monitoring and evaluation

26 Colleges will be expected to provide a brief report on their use of funds by 31 January 2001 which includes details of the number of teachers who have undertaken ILT training.

Curriculum 2000 – 2(d)

27 The current funding arrangements for supporting staff training and development for curriculum 2000 reforms will continue during 2000-01. The key tasks to which funds might be allocated continue to be:

- support and guidance for those planning the curriculum
- updating and guidance for those whose role is to provide guidance to students
- the support of partnerships for delivery of the 16-18 curriculum, for example school/FE, FE/FE, FE/HE.

28 The tasks identified as essential preparation for the reforms are set out in annex C of Council Circular 99/44, *Standards Fund: Strand 3*.

29 Colleges will wish to plan their use of the funds to complement other monies available for related purposes, such as the DfEE key skills support programme. It is also envisaged that colleges may work in partnership with other local providers to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from the funds allocated.

Funding arrangements

30 The Council will allocate funds on a similar basis to the method it used in 1999-2000. Colleges will be identified within funding bands according to college size as measured by 16-18 year-old student numbers in 1999-2000.

Monitoring and evaluation

31 College inspectors will monitor the response of colleges to the reforms. Colleges will be asked to prepare a brief report on their use of funds by 31 January 2001.

New teaching posts – 2(e)

32 The Council will contribute 50% of the total costs of up to two new teaching posts in each college for two years up to a maximum of £20,000 for each year, for the years 2000-01 and 2001-02. The maximum contribution for one post will be £10,000. In their application, colleges will need to demonstrate the likely benefits to teaching and learning from the choice of new teaching posts. The Council would wish colleges to give special consideration to appointments of teachers in computing and information systems, basic skills, mathematics, engineering and construction.

Retraining – 2(f)

33 Teachers are facing considerable curriculum changes, and some may need to develop new skills to cope with these changes. Funds will be made available to allow teachers to retrain or develop new skills. For example, a teacher in a vocational area may need to undertake an element of retraining so that they are better able to teach elements of key skills; other teachers may need to develop their skills in ILT.

Funding arrangements

34 The Council intends that its approach to funding this initiative will enable it to meet its responsibilities for consistent use of funds, yet reflect local needs. In responses to the consultation Circular 00/05 relating to this initiative, the most frequently identified concern (by 4% of respondents) was that funding by college size might not be the most appropriate mechanism for allocating these funds. The Council has considered other methods of funding but believes that funding on the basis of FTE student is the fairest method of funding. Colleges will, therefore, receive funds according to college size represented by full-time equivalent student numbers.

Monitoring and evaluation

35 Colleges will be expected to demonstrate that the retraining provided enables teachers to meet the demands of curriculum change and provide a brief report on their use of funds by 31 January 2001. This report should include details of the number of teachers undertaking retraining and the number of training days.

Professional updating – 2(g)

36 Teachers in some vocational areas lack recent and relevant industrial or commercial experience that they can draw on to enhance the teaching of their subject. The purpose of this initiative is to provide a financial contribution to the costs of short-term secondments to industry or commerce for full-time teachers.

Funding arrangements

37 The Council intends that its approach to funding this initiative will enable it to meet its responsibilities for consistent use of funds, yet reflect local needs. Colleges will, therefore, receive funds according to college size represented by full-time equivalent student numbers.

Monitoring and evaluation

38 Colleges will need to show how the secondments have provided relevant opportunities for teachers from vocational areas within the college, where teachers lack recent and relevant industrial or commercial experience. Colleges will be expected to provide a brief report on their use of funds by 31 January 2001 indicating the number of secondment days arranged and used.

Staff mentoring – 2(h)

39 The Council recognises that there are experienced and excellent practitioners in all aspects of college life. It also recognises that they could use their knowledge and skills to improve the performance of others. The Council will provide financial assistance to the Association of Colleges (AoC) to enable it to work with others to develop arrangements to enhance professional performance. The funding will support the development of methods to identify

staff who demonstrate excellence in their work and have the ability or potential to mentor other staff. The purpose of such mentoring would be to:

- support new staff
- assist part-time staff to improve their performance
- support under-performing staff
- develop staff for promotion.

40 The funding will enable up to 10% of colleges to assess the models developed for recognising and making use of mentors. The work of colleges involved in the assessment projects will be evaluated and AoC will disseminate models of good practice.

Category 3: Training and Development for Principals and Senior Management Teams

41 There is a continuing need to enhance management skills within the further education sector. In 1999-2000, funding was made available from the standards fund for a training and development programme for 100 principals. During 2000-01, the Council will provide funding for a further 200 principals to take part in this training and development programme. In addition, the Council will provide funds for the design, development and a contribution towards the cost of a training and development programme for college senior management teams. In the light of the low levels of representation of black staff at principal and senior management level, the Council will also provide funding for a number of black staff to undertake management training.

Programme for principals – 3(a)

42 In 1999, a contract for the development and delivery of a training programme for principals was awarded to a consortium managed by FEDA. Although participation in the programme, which has been developed, does not automatically lead to a qualification, opportunities for gaining credit are available to successful candidates. The programme aims to meet individuals' needs and to recognise their existing ability and expertise. It consists of three modules:

- personal development
- leadership
- strategic management.

43 The personal development module is an essential precursor to participation in the modules on leadership and strategic management. It provides principals with the opportunity to prepare an individual development plan, which should address ongoing professional needs as well as matters related to college improvement. The modules in leadership and strategic management are delivered on a taught basis in a residential setting. The study period for each module is three days.

Application and funding arrangements – 3(b)

44 Invitations to apply for a place on the principals' programme will be issued by FEDA and applications should be made directly to them. Principals attending a course will have their fees paid directly from the standards fund.

Programme for senior management teams

45 The Council recognises that most colleges will wish to provide high-quality training and development for their senior management teams. Such a training and development programme will need to help teams to meet the strategic objectives of the college as well as provide professional development for individual managers. The content of the programme will be based on the draft further education management standards developed by the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO). The programme will also help those with executive responsibilities to increase their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of college corporations. Although participation in the programme will not automatically lead to a qualification, opportunities for credit will be available to successful candidates.

Tendering and funding arrangements

46 A small consultative group will be set up to help to develop the priorities for a training programme. Once an outline course specification

is agreed, the Council will invite organisations to tender for a contract to design and develop a training and development programme for senior management teams in colleges. Each college will be eligible to receive a contribution of up to £5,000 towards the cost of participation in the programme. Further details of the programme and how to apply for funding will be sent to colleges in autumn 2000.

Category 4: The Good Governance Programme

47 During 1999-2000, the Council awarded a contract to a FEDA-managed consortium for the development of training materials, and associated supporting material for trainers, in a range of modules reflecting governors' roles and responsibilities. The training materials will be available in May 2000 and copies will be sent to each governing body.

48 The Council is particularly concerned to continue to help governors to carry out their duties with confidence and understanding. To do this it will give a financial contribution to three aspects of governor support. They are:

- a training programme for governors
- a 'health check' programme
- a training programme for corporation clerks.

Training programme for governors – 4(a)

49 The Council invited those organisations involved in developing the governor training materials to tender for a contract to design and develop a training programme for trainers. A contract has been awarded to a group of some of the organisations involved in developing the governors' materials. A list of trainers will be circulated to colleges by mid-July 2000 to deliver training to governors based on the governor training materials.

Funding arrangements

50 Further details of the programme and how to apply for funding will be sent to colleges in summer 2000. Each college will be eligible to receive a financial contribution of up to £2,000 towards the cost of using these trainers to deliver training to their governing body.

Governance ‘health checks’ – 4(b)

51 In 1998-99, the chief inspector’s annual report noted that many colleges overestimated significantly the quality of their governance. Governors are increasingly aware of the need to monitor their own performance. However, many governing bodies have yet to determine suitable indicators to help them in this work, or to set targets for improved performance. This initiative will build upon the work of the Council’s good governance working group and complement other initiatives for good governance with the introduction of a ‘health check’ scheme.

52 The new scheme will help all colleges’ governing bodies carry out a health check on the quality, rigour and comprehensiveness of their governance. It will be based on a standard framework against which performance can be assessed. It will complement governors’ own self-assessment process and assist them in developing action plans and training programmes. It will include statements of good governance practice and, where possible, benchmarking data, against which performance can be compared.

53 The health check should not only help governors assess their own performance, but also highlight the extent to which they are aware of key performance indicators for the college as a whole.

Tendering and funding arrangements

54 A small consultative group will be set up to help to develop the priorities for the programme. Once an outline specification is agreed, the Council will invite organisations to tender for a contract to develop a health check framework. The development of the framework will be informed by and will inform FENTO’s developing work on standards for governance. Each college will receive up to £2,000 towards the cost of engaging a facilitator or consultant who will guide the corporation through the assessment process.

Training for corporation clerks – 4(c)

55 Corporation clerks play a critical role in helping to ensure that governors are able to discharge their responsibilities effectively. The Council wishes to help clerks play their part in supporting governors. During 2000-01, it will fund the design, development and delivery of a training programme for corporation clerks. The Council will also fund FENTO to develop draft national standards for clerkship. These will be used to inform the development of the training programme. Although participation in the training programme will not lead to a qualification, it is hoped that the design of the programme will provide opportunities for successful candidates to gain credit for their learning.

Tendering and funding arrangements

56 The Council will invite organisations to tender for a contract to design, develop and deliver a training programme for corporation clerks. The successful contractor will be expected to build on other work which has been undertaken to develop good governance in the sector. The design of the training programme will enable participants to complete the programme mostly through self-study with minimum attendance at training events. A consultative group will be set up to help to develop priorities for the training programme.

57 The Council will make available funds for the development and delivery of the programme. Clerks participating in the programme will have their fees paid directly from the standards fund.

Category 5: Dissemination of Good Practice

58 The Council wishes to build on experience gained during 1999-2000 and encourage colleges demonstrating good practice to share this for the benefit of others. Whilst the Council wishes to encourage collaborative work to achieve improvements in quality, colleges should ensure that double funding does not occur. This possibility could arise when one college has received funding to buy in support under

category 1 whilst another has been funded to provide support under category 5. In this instance, the colleges concerned should make sure that activities are not funded through both categories of the fund.

Eligibility

59 The following colleges will be eligible for funding under strand 4:

- FEFC-accredited colleges and those designated by ministers as beacon colleges
- colleges with outstanding practice identified during inspection in cross-college or curriculum areas by the award of a grade 1 since September 1997 which are not identified as needing exceptional support as a result of the regional review process. Funding will only be made available for dissemination of good practice for provision which has been awarded an outstanding grade.

60 Colleges should aim to use a wide range of methods in disseminating good practice and to avoid duplication. They should indicate clearly whether their activities in disseminating good practice promote, for example:

- awareness – which might include: the distribution of materials; publicity; publications; conferences; websites; demonstration workshops
- understanding – which is more likely to include: consultancy; workshops or secondments which actively engage participants and provide specific activities which can be replicated elsewhere.

61 The key consideration for each college in applying for funding should be whether:

- a. the dissemination of its experience and skills will be helpful to other colleges and lead to the achievement of higher standards of work;
- b. it has the skills to manage an effective dissemination programme.

Priorities for action

62 The Council is keen to support colleges with outstanding practice in areas where inspection has identified a general development need within the sector. These include:

- tutorial support and careers advice and guidance
- basic skills provision
- improving equality of opportunity for staff and/or students
- curriculum areas with a small percentage of outstanding grades such as business studies, engineering or construction
- self-assessment
- support for part-time teachers
- use of management information
- improving student attendance
- raising retention and achievement whilst widening participation.

63 The above list should not be considered as exhaustive. The Council recognises that colleges demonstrate a variety of strengths which make them effective institutions in supporting learning and the achievements of students.

64 The Council is particularly concerned to encourage the sector to share good practice in basic skills, construction and engineering. Since September 1997, inspectors have awarded only three colleges an outstanding grade for provision in basic skills and only three have received an outstanding grade in engineering. In addition, no college has been awarded an outstanding grade for construction provision. The Council will, therefore, set up consultative groups to help it to identify good practice in construction and engineering and to develop ways of sharing this practice with colleges and other providers in the sector. In the case of basic skills, the Council is supporting phase 2 of the basic skills quality initiative to help colleges to improve provision.

65 The Council is keen to improve the quality of provision for students involved in New Deal and will set up a consultative group to help it to identify good practice and how it might be shared, before it funds dissemination of good practice in this area.

66 The Council is concerned to improve equality of opportunity for students and staff. It particularly wishes to encourage dissemination of good practice by colleges which have demonstrated:

- effective equal opportunities practice for students and staff, including improvement strategies, target-setting, and evaluation
- that they have increased the numbers of black staff, particularly in full time teaching and management.

67 Those receiving funding will be expected to demonstrate that they are sharing their good practice with colleges with weaknesses in provision similar to that which is being disseminated. Funding will be allocated after agreement by the Council of colleges' costed action plans.

Funding arrangements

68 Colleges awarded accredited status by the FEFC will be eligible for £50,000 to support the dissemination of their good practice. Similar funding will be allocated to those colleges designated as beacon colleges by ministers. Colleges designated as both accredited and beacon will be eligible for a maximum of £50,000. Funding will be made available on the receipt by the Council of a costed action plan.

69 Colleges which have received a grade 1 for any aspect of provision inspected since September 1997 will be eligible to apply for up to £200,000 funding to disseminate good practice. This may be additional to any other funding received under the standards fund. The level of funding available for each project will depend on the activity proposed. Colleges which received funding to disseminate good practice in 1999-2000 will be eligible for funding in 2000-01. This will be up to an additional £100,000 to the funding they were eligible for in 1999-2000. Should this funding strand become over-subscribed, the Council will give preference to those initiatives which reflect the priorities listed in paragraph 62.

70 The Council wishes in particular to encourage colleges to collaborate with other sector colleges, but does not wish to receive multiple applications to fund the same project. Colleges wishing to collaborate are therefore asked to nominate a lead college to make the application for funding and receive payments from the Council. The lead college will be responsible for ensuring that funding is used appropriately by collaborating colleges and that funded activities lead to the projected outcomes. Colleges may wish to consider using lifelong learning partnerships, local learning and skills council boundaries or other existing initiatives as the basis for collaborative working arrangements.

71 Annex B describes procedures for notifying colleges about the funding available to them and administering applications for funding.

Category 6: Achievement Fund

72 In Circular 99/24, *Use of the Standards Fund*, the Council indicated its intention to introduce an achievement fund for 2000-01. The purpose of the fund will be to reward colleges which have improved their achievement rate without any deterioration in their rate of retention.

73 The following principles will underpin the allocation of the achievement fund for 2000-01:

- awards from the fund will be based on benchmarking data for 1998-99 and 1999-2000 for all qualifications other than short courses
- the educational character of the college does not change significantly
- separate awards to colleges will be made for the achievements of students aged 16 to 18 and for adults
- within each age-group, colleges will qualify for an award for an improvement in the rate of achievement between 1998-99 and 1999-2000 of at least two percentage points. Awards made on this basis will be directly proportional to the size of the improvement

- colleges which were in the bottom quartile for achievement in 1998-99 will receive double the award they would otherwise have received
- colleges will not receive an award if there is a decline in their rate of retention between 1998-99 and 1999-2000
- the size of any award will be directly proportional to the number of full-time equivalent students in the relevant age-group in 1999-2000
- colleges for which the Council does not have benchmarking data or where there are concerns about the quality of data will be excluded from receiving awards from the achievement fund.

Data and funding arrangements

74 Colleges will be expected to provide the Council with their achievement and retention data for 1999-2000 in December 2000. The Council will reserve the right to use its own estimates if the colleges' figures do not appear credible. Where the outturn data for 1999-2000 differ from the figures initially provided, an adjustment will be made. The Council will issue a brief Circular to colleges setting out the requirements for 1999-2000 data submission in summer 2000. Awards from the achievement fund will be made during the financial year 2000-01 and will be paid to colleges before 31 March 2001.

Administration Procedures for Categories 1 and 5

1 The following paragraphs describe notification procedures, the format of action plans, how action plans will be assessed and how colleges' progress in completing their action plans will be monitored.

Notifying Colleges

2 Each college eligible for funding under category 1 will be notified of the maximum funding available in a letter to the principal and the chair of the college corporation from the relevant regional director. Where appropriate, colleges will also be notified of their eligibility to apply for funding under category 5.

3 Colleges will receive notification from regional directors if they are identified as causing concern or soon after their inspection report has been published. Each letter will identify the name of the Council's primary contact for the college who will provide any assistance the college needs in clarifying the issues to be addressed. The letter will also include the date by which a costed action plan should be forwarded to the Council.

4 Colleges awarded accredited status by the Council are notified by the Council's chief executive. Those recognised as beacon colleges are notified by the DfEE following the announcement of their achievement. In each case colleges should forward an action plan to the Council to show how they will use the funding awarded to them.

Action Plans

5 The Council wishes to receive a costed action plan covering all the activities for which funding is sought for categories 1 and 5. Action plans should be brief but clear, comprising no more than six pages. Action plans should identify:

- a. the standards fund category from which funding is sought;
- b. the actions proposed and, where appropriate, their priority;
- c. estimated costs for each action;
- d. measurable outcomes resulting from funded activities, including the number of those that will benefit from dissemination activities where appropriate;
- e. timescales for achieving the measurable outcomes;
- f. ways in which progress in making improvements will be monitored and evaluated by the college.

6 Colleges seeking funds under category 5 are asked to include a brief statement (no more than one page) about their experience to date in managing or participating in the dissemination of good practice. In this context, it should be noted that lack of experience will not preclude funding under category 5. The Council is keen to promote dissemination of good practice within the sector and to get more colleges involved in this kind of activity. Action plans covering collaborative initiatives should make the contribution of each participating college clear.

7 Some colleges may already have in place post-inspection and other action plans to address weakness which have been agreed by the Council. These colleges are advised to review their action plans after considering how funding from category 1 of the standards fund can be used to extend the range of issues being addressed or expedite action to raise standards.

Timetable

8 Action plans should be accompanied by a completed application form (see annexes E and G) and should be forwarded to the appropriate regional director for category 1 and to the quality improvement unit for category 5 by:

- two months after notification that the college has been awarded funding within categories 1 and 5

- two months after announcements of the achievement of accredited status or recognition by ministers of beacon college status.

9 In exceptional cases where urgent action is required to remedy poor provision, the Council may require action plans in a shorter timescale.

Assessment

10 The adequacy of costed action plans provided by colleges will be assessed by the Council before funding is agreed. The assessment will consider whether:

For activities under category 1

- the proposed actions effectively address weaknesses as identified to the college by the Council, for example in inspection reports or letters conveying the outcomes of regional reviews
- the priorities for action are clear
- the timescale for making improvements is realistic and achievable.

For activities under category 5

- the proposed actions are clearly founded on the strengths identified within the college and its expertise
- activities are in addition to other initiatives funded by the Council.

For all activities

- the plans have been costed in a prudent way and appear to offer good value for money
- the college has identified appropriate measurable factors to indicate success
- the proposed evaluation of progress appears suitable.

11 The Council undertakes to respond to all action plans received within five working weeks. Once an action plan is approved, a college will receive a letter outlining arrangements for payment, support and monitoring. If the plan is not approved, the college will be expected to resubmit its plan before it receives initial funding.

Monitoring Progress

12 Action plans accompanying applications for funding should indicate the intended measurable outcomes of funded activities and how progress will be monitored and evaluated by the college. This information will enable the Council to plan its own monitoring and reporting activities aimed at assessing the impact of the standards fund, both at a local and national level.

13 The Council will pay particular attention to progress made by colleges causing concern funded under category 1. These will be considered during regional review meetings held three times a year at which matters such as outstanding issues, progress against payments, and the achievement of milestones will be monitored. As always, the outcome of a regional review of a college's progress will be communicated to the college principal.

14 Progress made by other colleges receiving support from the standards fund will normally be monitored through routine visits by college inspectors.

15 In general, colleges should always ensure that they have adequate information about their use of funding from the standards fund to allow them to monitor their expenditure and to evaluate the impact of their activities on college improvement.

Reinspection

16 All areas of provision which have been awarded grade 4 or 5 during inspection will be reinspected within one year, in line with the Council's quality improvement strategy.

17 For colleges in receipt of funding under category 1, the Council will consider, within two years of the allocation of funds, what further monitoring or inspection is required.

18 The responsibility for improving quality lies primarily with colleges and the Council requires colleges to respond purposefully and constructively to the identified weaknesses. Colleges should note, however, that in order to fulfil its statutory duties, the Council will

consider what additional steps it requires to take if a college:

- is unwilling or unable to produce an acceptable action plan
- shows no improvement or seriously declines during the planned recovery period
- still causes concern after further inspection.

Administration of Funds

1 Whenever possible, funds will be allocated to colleges, rather than paying claims for expenditure from colleges in retrospect. Funding may be staged until sufficient progress has been made by a college. Funding will only be for additional expenditure incurred by colleges and must not be substituted for any expenditure already planned or normally incurred by a college. Funding should be used to ensure that improvements are made more quickly than would otherwise be possible.

Eligibility of expenditure

2 Annex D provides a list of those items of expenditure which are considered eligible for funding. Where an item of expenditure is not on this list, the Council's regional office should be consulted before incurring any costs.

Tendering and procurement

3 Colleges should comply with all statutory and other legal requirements as may apply to the implementation of their action plans and use of funding and apply good practice to any procurement and tendering. Colleges may find useful the joint FEFC/NAO good practice guides: *Estate Management in Further Education Colleges* (TSO, 1996); and *Procurement* (TSO, 1997).

Payment procedures

4 The application form for funding must be submitted and signed by the college principal.

5 Where action plans are not completed or funding is not used fully for the purposes for which it was allocated the Council reserves the right to reclaim funds.

VAT

6 Colleges should consult their financial advisers and, if necessary, their local HM Customs and Excise Office to ascertain what aspects of expenditure will incur VAT.

Capital assets

7 Colleges will be bound by the provisions of their financial memorandum with the Council in respect of capital assets purchased with assistance from the fund.

Health and safety and equal opportunities

8 Successful action plans must demonstrate proper consideration of relevant health and safety and equal opportunities statutory requirements.

Evidence for audit purposes and accounting procedures

9 Colleges will be expected to keep copies of all invoices and other appropriate costs records (correctly processed and certified) as evidence of expenditure for audit purposes. Colleges should show income from the standards fund as a specific line on note 2 of their financial statements in a similar fashion to the treatment of access funds. If the college has earmarked any part of the grant for capital purposes, where at the end of any financial year the college has not spent the full amount earmarked, the balance should be shown under current liabilities within 'payments received on account'.

Publication of outcomes

10 The Council will wish to publish and disseminate information supported under the fund.

Eligible Items of Expenditure

1 Before incurring costs, colleges are requested to refer to the following illustrative list of eligible items of expenditure. Should expenditure be planned for items not on this list, colleges should contact their regional offices for further guidance. Any expenditure incurred on items not on this list are at colleges' own risk without Council approval. Care should be taken to ensure that expenditure is in addition to that which would have been incurred had funding not been available and that appropriate procedures apply to the selection of consultants and contractors. All colleges receiving funding under the standards fund must ensure that their activities are not being double-funded. The guiding principle in determining eligibility of expenditure should, in all cases, be that of reasonableness.

2 The following list of items is not intended to be exhaustive, but gives colleges guidance on appropriate activities:

- staff time and/or replacement costs
- hire of equipment
- hire of facilities to undertake study
- independent consultants' fees and expenses
- purchase of materials
- purchase of equipment
- installation of and work associated with new management information systems and software
- staff training and development costs.

3 Institutions should not profit or make a loss from any exchange of staff resulting from work relating to the standards fund.

Application Form – Category 1: College Improvement

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

(Reference Circular 00/15)

Please return the completed form to your REGIONAL DIRECTOR,
together with a copy of your action plan.

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone 024 7686 3000
Fax 024 7686 3100

Section 1. College details

College name

College contact (*please print*)

Telephone no.

Fax no.

E-mail address

Section 2. Summary of funding applied for

Category of funding

Amount of funding applied for

1(a) – colleges causing concern

1(b) – post-inspection action plans

Section 3. Declaration

For completion by college principal

As principal of (name of college)

I confirm:

- a. that the funds will be subject to the college's accounting and auditing arrangements;
- b. that the funds will be repaid if so required by the Council;
- c. that the funds will be used for expenditure additional to that which would have been incurred had funding not been available;
- d. that the college will put in place arrangements for evaluating the use of the funding;
- e. that the Council may publish and disseminate information on the use by colleges of the standards fund.

Signature

Name (*please print*)

Date ___ / ___ / ___

Application Form – Category 2: New Teaching Posts – 2(e)

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

(Reference Circular 00/15)

Please return the completed form to your REGIONAL DIRECTOR.

Section 1. College details

College name

College contact (*please print*)

Telephone no.

Fax no.

E-mail address

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100

Section 2. Summary of funding applied for

Post 1

1 Title of post

2 Salary

3 On-costs

4 Total cost

Justification for recruitment in this area

Post 2

1 Title of post

2 Salary

3 On-costs

4 Total cost

Justification for recruitment in this area

Total amount of funding applied for (maximum for one post is £10,000) : £

Section 3. Declaration

For completion by college principal

As principal of (name of college)

I confirm:

- a. that the funds will be subject to the college’s accounting and auditing arrangements;
- b. that the funds will be repaid if so required by the Council;
- c. that the funds will be used for expenditure additional to that which would have been incurred had funding not been available;
- d. that the college will put in place arrangements for evaluating the use of the funding;
- e. that the Council may publish and disseminate information on the use by colleges of the standards fund.

Signature

Name (*please print*)

Date ____ / ____ / ____

Application Form – Category 5: Dissemination of Good Practice

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

(Reference Circular 00/15)

Please return the completed form to the **QUALITY
IMPROVEMENT UNIT, Cheylesmore House, Quinton Road,
Coventry, CV1 2WT** together with a copy of your action plan.

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone 024 7686 3000
Fax 024 7686 3100

Section 1. College details

College name

College contact (*please print*)

Telephone no.

Fax no.

E-mail address

Section 2. Summary of funding applied for

Category of funding

*Amount of funding
applied for*

Category 5 –
dissemination of good practice:

- as an accredited college
- as a beacon college
- as a college awarded grade 1 (please specify
which curriculum or cross-college areas)

Section 3. Declaration

For completion by college principal

As principal of (name of college)

I confirm:

- a. that the funds will be subject to the college’s accounting and auditing arrangements;
- b. that the funds will be repaid if so required by the Council;
- c. that the funds will be used for expenditure additional to that which would have been incurred had funding not been available;
- d. that the college will fulfil its responsibilities as a lead college for any collaborative project for which funding is sought;
- e. that the college will put in place arrangements for evaluating the use of the funding;
- f. that the Council may publish and disseminate information on the use by colleges of the standards fund.

Signature

Name (*please print*)

Date ____ / ____ / ____

For completion by other colleges involved in collaborative arrangements to disseminate good practice

College 1College

Name of principal (*please print*)

Signed

Date

College 2College

Name of principal (*please print*)

Signed

Date

College 3College

Name of principal (*please print*)

Signed

Date

College 4College

Name of principal (*please print*)

Signed

Date

College 5College

Name of principal (*please print*)

Signed

Date

College 6College

Name of principal (*please print*)

Signed

Date

Responses to Consultation

Introduction

1 There were 243 responses to Council Circular 00/05, 96% of which were from sector colleges, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Responses to Council Circular 00/05 by college type

<i>College type</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%*</i>
General further education	124	51
Sixth form	51	21
Tertiary	37	15
Specialist	19	8
Designated	3	1
External institutions	3	1
Higher education institutions	2	1
Other bodies	4	1
Total	243	100

**Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

2 Responses from other bodies and individuals included those from: the Association of Colleges and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education.

3 Respondents were asked to comment under 18 headings on the proposals contained in the circular and to indicate the extent to which they supported it.

Summary

4 As table 2 shows, 16 of the 18 proposals outlined in Council Circular 00/05 received support from 91% or more of the respondents. The proposal to enable teachers or senior managers to retire early and the principles underpinning the achievement fund were supported but evoked the most comment.

Table 2. Responses to Council Circular 00/05 by proposal

<i>Proposal</i>	<i>Responses No.</i>	<i>Support %*</i>	<i>Do not support %*</i>	<i>No preference %*</i>
Arrangements for colleges causing concern	239	93%	5%	2%
Post-inspection support	240	98%	1%	1%
Basic skills quality initiative	235	91%	4%	5%
Part-time teachers	239	93%	5%	2%
ILT skills for teachers	240	99%	0%	1%
Curriculum 2000	240	98%	1%	1%
Staff initiatives: early retirement	237	85%	12%	2%
Staff initiatives: new teaching posts	234	93%	3%	4%
Retraining	240	98%	1%	1%
Professional updating	239	97%	2%	1%
Staff mentoring	237	94%	4%	2%
Programme for principals	237	93%	2%	4%
Programme for senior management teams	240	96%	1%	3%
Training programme for governors	241	97%	1%	2%
Governance 'health checks'	240	94%	3%	2%
Training for corporation clerks	240	97%	1%	2%
Dissemination of good practice	240	92%	4%	5%
Achievement fund	239	73%	19%	8%

**Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.*

Detailed Responses

5 The following paragraphs provide further details of responses to each of the proposals in the circular.

The arrangements for colleges causing concern

6 Some 93% of respondents supported the proposal. Almost one quarter were concerned that financial assistance should not be viewed as reward for poor performance. A number were of the view that colleges causing concern should be set strict timescales for improvement.

The Council supports this view. The Council agrees costed action plans for colleges causing concern and these colleges are expected to make rapid improvement.

Post-inspection support

7 Some 98% of respondents supported the proposal to continue providing financial assistance to support colleges' post-inspection action plans. There was some concern that colleges had to wait until after their inspection for funds; some hoped to receive funding to support pre-inspection work. The Council does not intend to support this suggestion.

The basic skills quality initiative

8 A total of 91% of respondents supported the proposals for the basic skills quality initiative. However, 16% expressed some concern about the proposed use of facilitators. Some suggested that the funding allocated should be used not only to employ facilitators to help institutions to use the developed materials but also to enable them to implement their own improvement strategies. The Council has considered this request and decided that basic skills facilitators will help institutions to review processes for improving quality and examine how the materials developed during phase 1 of the initiative can support implementation of action plans. Respondents welcomed the opportunity for training and development for basic skills staff.

Part-time teachers

9 This was supported by 91% of respondents. Whilst the majority of respondents welcomed the proposals unreservedly, 9% expressed some concern about the appropriateness of the proposed allocation mechanism and considered that indicators such as proportion of part-time staff might more appropriate. In addition, 15 colleges referred to the use of agency staff and wondered whether the allocation of funds would cover only staff employed directly by the college. These responses have been considered. The Council is not able to fund colleges on the basis of the proportion of part-time staff in a college. Colleges may put in place arrangements to support part-time teachers including those employed by third party providers.

ILT skills for teachers

10 This received overwhelming support. Nearly all (99%) of those responding agreed in principle and the majority of comments made were supportive of the proposals. A small proportion (5%) referred to the need for staff to have appropriate access to hardware and software while 3 colleges made specific reference to the provision of hardware to school teachers.

Four colleges made reference to the fact that any standards fund allocation in support of ILT should be used in the context of other developments outlined in Circular 99/53. Colleges should ensure that this is the case.

Curriculum 2000

11 Again the need to provide funding in support of curriculum 2000 was widely agreed (98%). The comments made by respondents related to the amount of funding required (5%) and the need for any allocation to be made as soon as possible if developments are to take place within the necessary timescale (8%).

Staff initiatives: early retirement

12 Some 85% of respondents supported this proposal. However, 30% of respondents to the proposal were concerned that the level of financial assistance would not be sufficient to make the initiative attractive. Respondents gave many helpful examples to show the high cost to colleges of staff retiring early. A few colleges believed that the number of staff supported by the initiative should be related to college size; others expressed concern that the initiative cut across colleges' policies on granting early retirements. The Council has taken these comments into account in considering whether to take forward the early retirement initiative. It has taken the view that it will not proceed with the proposal. The Council is not in a position to provide for additional funding for this particular proposal.

Staff initiatives: new teaching posts

13 The proposal was supported widely by 93% of respondents. As with the early retirement initiative a small number of respondents would have liked the number of posts to be related to college size. Other comments from individual colleges included: the difficulty of taking on long-term salary commitments and the high pay levels of ILT staff. It would not be possible with this initiative to relate the number of posts to college size.

Retraining

14 This proposal was supported by 98% of respondents. The most frequently identified concern (by 4% of respondents) was that funding by college size might not be the most appropriate mechanism for allocating these funds. The Council has considered other methods of funding but believes that funding on the basis of FTE student is the fairest method of funding.

Professional updating

15 This proposal was again supported by 97% of respondents. The main concern identified was the appropriateness of the suggested basis for allocation with 5 colleges specifically referring to the need to link any allocation with the proportion of vocational students or staff teaching on vocational programmes. This would be difficult to achieve and therefore the funding method remains funding allocated on the basis of FTE student.

Staff mentoring

16 This was supported by 94% of respondents. Some colleges indicated that they would wish to be involved. Others suggested that the initiative should build on good practice which already exists. Clearly colleges need more information, and the Council would expect AoC to communicate progress directly with colleges as the scheme develops.

Programme for principals

17 Some 93% of respondents supported the proposal. The need to ensure high quality training was emphasised. There was some confusion and a need for greater clarity about whether the training led to a qualification and the relationship of the training to a qualification for principals. The training does not lead to a qualification but there is opportunity to gain higher education credits.

Programme for senior management teams

18 This was supported by 96% of respondents. Colleges indicated that they would welcome some flexibility in the way the programme

operated to take account of differing needs. The need for an accredited programme was stressed. The need for a high quality programme was also stressed.

Training programme for governors

19 This proposal was strongly supported by 97% of respondents. Comments were very supportive of the initiative and included the need to ensure that training took account of the limited time many governors have available to undertake training; the need for training to be high quality; and the need for training to be tailored to governors' individual needs.

Governance health checks

20 Some 94% of respondents supported this proposal. Several respondents suggested that the development and design of this initiative would need to complement and support existing good practice and arrangements for self-assessment. Whilst welcoming the proposal, respondents also indicated that care must be taken not too overload governing bodies with new initiatives.

Training for corporation clerks

21 This was widely supported by 97% of respondents. Many respondents welcomed the initiative and pointed to the support the Association of College Registrars and Administrators could provide. The need for clerks to have training and development opportunities was emphasised by most respondents. Other respondents supported the development of self-study materials.

Dissemination of good practice

22 The majority of respondents supported this proposal in principle (92%). A number of respondents expressed reservations about the appropriateness of existing dissemination activity (10%). Specific reference was made to the number of conferences proposed by colleges and their relevance to individual circumstances. Four colleges specifically referred to ways in which they had already benefited from support provided by other colleges.

23 A small proportion of respondents (4%) referred to the need for co-ordination, with 4 colleges specifically requesting a register or directory of support on offer. There is now a searchable database on the Council's website which includes information about dissemination activities for which colleges have been funded under the standards fund. The colleges concerned have provided information on their activities.

24 Only 3% of colleges commented that some colleges which are not eligible for funding will have good practice. For example, the college may not have been inspected yet, or areas with good practice were or may not be inspected or good practice may emerge after inspection has taken place. A small number of colleges (2%) were concerned that colleges involved in dissemination should not be over-stretched and that funding allocated should allow them to develop their good practice further as well as to disseminate it.

Achievement fund

25 A total of 73% of respondents supported this proposal. The proposal produced a large number of comments. Some 12% of respondents were concerned that the proposal appeared to preclude colleges currently with high levels of achievement and retention. A smaller number expressed concern that the initiative appeared to reward those colleges which had performed poorly in the past. Some respondents believed that insufficient account had been taken of colleges' local circumstances, the widening participation and social exclusion agendas in formulating the principles underpinning the initiative. A number of general further education colleges expressed dissatisfaction because the proposal did not recognise the place of value-added in measuring achievement. The Council recognises that colleges have strong views on this proposal but it intends to support the government's agenda to raise standards, and will therefore implement the achievement fund as outlined in the consultation circular.

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Council
Communications Team
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone 024 7686 3344
Fax 024 7686 3175
E-mail fehcpubs@fefc.ac.uk

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