THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
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COUNCIL

For information

Circular 00/23

Quality Improvement

Arrangements for Accreditation and Establishing Performance Data for Non-sector College Providers of Further Education

Summary

This circular sets out the Council's arrangements for non-sector college providers of further education, in relation to:

- accreditation
- establishing baseline rates of retention and achievement for target-setting
- the publication of national benchmarking data
- the publication of performance indicators.

The circular is of interest to: chief education officers of local education authorities; principals of local education authority-maintained external institutions; independent external institutions; independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; higher education institutions in receipt of Council funding; and dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards and inspected by the Council.

Copies of earlier Council circulars and documents related to quality improvement may be downloaded from the quality improvement area of the Council's website, or obtained from the Council's communications team.

Contents

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Arrangements for Accreditation and Establishing Performance Data for Non-sector College Providers of Further Education

Introduction

1   The Council is extending its arrangements for accreditation and for the collection and publication of performance data to non-sector college providers of further education. This circular covers: how to make an application for accredited status; the development of an accreditation plan; the Council's procedures for reaching decisions about applications; the format, content and style of applications; and the criteria for accreditation. This circular also sets out arrangements for the collection and publication of performance data.

Consultation

2   The Council Circular 00/12, *Proposed Arrangements for Accreditation and Performance Data for Non-sector College Providers of Further Education,* published in June 2000 set out proposals for:

- accreditation
- establishing baseline rates of retention and achievement for target-setting
- the publication of national benchmarking data
- the publication of performance indicators.

3   Responses to the consultative circular were invited by 28 June 2000. In summary, respondents strongly supported most proposals. Approximately 60% of responses were from non-sector college providers of further education. HOLEX also responded and so did NATSPE. The proposal to extend accreditation arrangements to other providers of further education was strongly supported by those institutions eligible to apply. Reservations were expressed by local education authority (LEA) maintained external institutions, because their lack of Council inspection evidence means they are not able to apply for FEFC accredited status. Respondents supported the three measures proposed relating to performance data: target-setting and recording baseline rates of retention and achievement; the publication of national benchmarking data; and the publication of performance indicators. Details of the responses to Council Circular 00/12 are provided at annex C.

Implementation

4   Annex A provides detailed guidance on procedures for implementation. It is set out in four parts:

1   guidance on applying for accredited status

2   establishing baseline rates of retention and achievement for target-setting

3   the publication of national benchmarking data

4   the publication of performance indicators.

Table 1 summarises the types of institution covered by the different arrangements included in annex A.

Table 1. Summary of which types of institution are covered by arrangements for accreditation and performance data

	1 Accreditation of Council-funded provision	*2 Recording baseline rates of retention and achievement for target-setting*	*3 Publication of benchmarking data*	*4 Publication of performance indicators*
Independent specialist colleges	✔	✔	✘	✘
Independent external institutions	✔	✔	✔	✔
Dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards	✔	✘	✘	✘
Higher education institutions	✔	✔	✔	✔
LEA-maintained external institutions	✘	✔	✔	✔

Next Steps

5   Providers that consider they are able to meet the criteria for accredited status should begin by preparing an accreditation plan. They should contact the principal accreditation officer in the Council's quality improvement unit to register their intention to apply, and for advice on timescales for completing their application.

6   Non-sector college providers of further education should establish baseline figures for rates of retention and achievement as a basis for setting targets for future performance. At this stage, dance and drama schools are not asked to return baseline rates of retention and achievement to the Council. Guidance on recording baseline rates of retention and achievement for target-setting are set out at annex B.

David Melville

Guidance on Procedures for Implementation

Part 1: Applying for Accredited Status

Background

1   The award of accredited status is one way in which the Council recognises excellence in sector colleges. The Council intends to extend this facility to all institutions that are inspected by the Council's inspectorate. These are:

- independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- independent external institutions which are not LEA maintained
- dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards and inspected by the Council
- higher education (HE) institutions with further education provision that has already been inspected by the Council.

2   Arrangements for accreditation are based upon those for sector colleges, adapted as appropriate, to take into account the scale and scope of other providers and their different relationship with the Council. Non-sector college providers of further education that achieve accredited status will become 'accredited by the FEFC to provide further education'. The institution as a whole will not be accredited, only its capacity to provide high-quality Council-funded provision.

Approach

3   Providers wishing to apply for accredited status must have had a full inspection by the Council during the four-year inspection cycle starting in September 1997. Providers may only forward an application after the publication of their inspection report.

4   A provider intending to apply for accredited status should prepare an accreditation plan. This should be an internal document which will assist the provider to manage progress towards accreditation. The Council does not wish to prescribe the format of an accreditation plan. However, as a minimum, the plan should set out:

- those criteria, or elements of criteria, already met and those where further development is needed
- any actions the provider intends to make in order to bring the standard of its work up to the requirements for accreditation, including associated targets, staff responsibilities, timescales and indicators of success
- the timetable for drawing up the provider's application for accredited status and forwarding it to the Council.

5   When a provider considers that it can demonstrate that it fulfils the criteria for accredited status it should contact the principal accreditation officer in the Council's quality improvement unit to register its intention to apply and for advice on timescales for making an application.

Three stages of the application process

6   The process of accreditation has three stages, closely mirroring those for sector colleges. These are:

- stage 1: the provider compares its performance against each of the criteria for accreditation, prepares an accreditation action plan and puts together an application and the evidence to support it
- stage 2: the application is considered by the Council's regional committee unless this is inappropriate. In such exceptional cases, suitable alternative arrangements will be made. This stage allows consideration of applications by the Council with reference to the context in which the provider operates

- stage 3: the application is considered by the Council's national accreditation panel. This allows for national consistency and maintenance of standards in the awarding of accredited status.

7   Providers should forward two copies of their application for accreditation a minimum of four working weeks before the relevant meeting. The date of the meeting will be provided by the principal accreditation officer. This timescale will enable Council staff to ensure that all aspects of the accreditation criteria have been covered in the application, and, if necessary, to seek clarification from the provider. The Council may need to check evidence supplied by an institution, in order to be assured that it supports the application for accreditation.

8   The Council's regional committee will consider whether a provider has satisfactorily met the criteria for accreditation and whether the context of the provider's work has been accurately conveyed. They will make a recommendation to the national panel for each provider's application.

9   In the event that a regional committee concludes that it cannot forward a provider's application without qualification it will consider whether:

- with additional information supplied by the provider, the application should proceed to the national panel without further consideration by the regional committee or national Council group
- with additional information supplied by the provider, the regional committee or national Council group should consider the application a second time before it is forwarded to the national accreditation panel.

Consideration by the national accreditation panel

10   The national accreditation panel has been charged with making decisions on the award of accredited status on behalf of the Council. The panel normally meets three times a year to consider applications for accredited status.

Providers will be notified of the date when their application is to be considered by the national panel.

11   The outcome of the panel's deliberations will be conveyed in writing to the provider. If the panel has agreed to the award of accredited status, a memorandum of undertaking will be drawn up, setting out the Council's expectations in making the award. The Council may vary the agreement according to the particular recommendations made by the national panel.

Application format

12   A provider's formal application for accreditation should have two sections:

a.   Section 1 A declaration signed on behalf of the provider by the principal/chief executive, and where appropriate the chair of the governing body or management committee, confirming that:

- the provider believes all five criteria for accredited status have been met
- information intended to support the application has been checked by the provider and found to be reliable
- a commitment to maintain standards required for accredited status is reflected in the provider's strategic and operational plans;

b.   Section 2 A section addressing each of the five criteria agreed by the Council against which the provider's application will be judged.

13   The application should also include three annexes:

a.   Annex 1 A list of main sources of evidence to support the application;

b.   Annex 2 An analysis of student retention and achievement data for Council-funded provision. Those institutions using the individualised student record (ISR) should calculate these according to the method set out in the national benchmarking data published by the Council. Other providers should present robust data on retention and achievement explaining the methodology

they have used. Data should demonstrate consistency in performance across the Council-funded curriculum provision;

c. Annex 3 A copy of the provider's accreditation plan, including confirmation that each action listed has been completed.

14 Providers are asked to keep their applications concise. A target length of no more than 3,000 words is suggested for the main part of the application, excluding annexes.

Criteria for accreditation

Criterion 1: the existence of formal and effective control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements

15 The Council needs to be assured that the institution has adopted a robust, systematic and rigorous approach to managing its Council-funded provision. Arrangements should cover academic, financial and strategic matters. In general terms, institutions seeking accreditation are asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- arrangements meet the Council's requirements and their own needs

- arrangements are sufficient to manage development and change

- management and quality assurance, and where applicable governance, have been judged as good by inspectors and that their effectiveness appears to the Council to be sustainable

- support for students and general resources are judged to be at least satisfactory by inspectors.

Criterion 2: regular and rigorous self-assessment validated during the course of the inspection

16 The Council considers that a key indicator in accrediting provision is the institution's ability to demonstrate that it objectively and rigorously assesses its own performance on a regular basis. This applies to all aspects of its operations in relation to Council-funded provision.

17 In general terms, institutions seeking accreditation are asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- self-assessment is integral to quality assurance and the management of Council-funded provision and is linked to strategic and operational planning, including action to remedy weaknesses in provision

- comprehensive self-assessment is carried out annually and takes into account evidence from both internal and external sources

- at least two cycles of self-assessment have been completed with outcomes which have led to improvements.

Criterion 3: the setting and consistent achievement of appropriate targets for institutional performance

18 The Council needs to be assured that a provider is able to predict its performance accurately and that targets for institutional performance reflect high standards within the context of the institution's strategic development and day-to-day operations.

19 In general terms, institutions seeking accreditation are asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- targets set for institutional performance are well informed, taking adequate account of the local or wider communities and their needs, as well as the groups of learners for which provision is made

- the institution has a good record of providing timely and accurate information to the Council and other bodies

- most institutional targets are consistently met and the reasons for not meeting any of them are fully investigated with the aim of improving performance.

Criterion 4: demonstration that standards of students' achievements are being improved and/or maintained at a high level over a three-year period

20   Levels of student retention and the achievement of qualifications and/or other achievements are important indicators of institutional performance. In order to assist providers, the Council has published a range of benchmarking data for student retention and achievement. These are derived from the ISR provided by sector colleges. The Council also intends to publish benchmarking data for non-sector college providers of further education in late autumn 2000. National benchmarking data will be used to establish appropriate performance levels that should be met in order to gain accreditation. In the absence of such data, national benchmarking data for sector colleges will be used as an indicator where appropriate.

21   The Council recognises that measuring achievement can be a complex matter and that many students' achievements are not directly associated with obtaining qualifications. It also recognises that many institutions are pursuing policies to widen participation and working in communities with no strong culture of valuing education. Providers may wish to provide supplementary information, for example relating to value added, which sets the achievements of their students in context. Nevertheless, the Council needs to be assured that a provider gives a high priority to students' learning and achievement, and this is reflected in measurable achievements of an appropriate standard, relating to the Council's own benchmarks wherever possible.

22   In general terms, providers seeking accreditation are asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- the quality of the majority of the curriculum provision inspected during the most recent inspection was judged as good or excellent, and that no curriculum provision was assessed as unsatisfactory

- appropriate targets are set for student retention and achievement and that performance is regularly monitored by managers and, where applicable, governors
- that levels of retention and achievement in most of the provision exceeds appropriate national benchmarks for three successive years leading up to the institution's application for accredited status
- there is a clear trend of improvement in both retention and achievement or that high levels of retention and achievement have been sustained
- the institution's performance is generally consistent across all areas of the curriculum offered to students funded by Council.

Criterion 5: effective action is taken to address weaknesses and demonstrate the institution's accountability

23   The link between self-assessment and effective action to address weaknesses is a key factor in ensuring that the standards associated with accredited status are maintained. The Council needs to be assured that a provider has a good record of improving quality and standards through fulfilling action plans arising out of self-assessment and that it takes into consideration a wide range of views in setting its priorities. It also needs to be assured that the provider communicates openly and accurately with the community it serves and others interested in its work.

24   In general terms, providers seeking accreditation are asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- a rigorous and comprehensive approach is adopted to action planning as a result of self-assessment
- actions are regularly monitored and lead to measurable and timely improvements in quality and standards
- in determining how best to improve provision, the views of staff, students, the community and other stakeholders are regularly taken into account

- information provided about the institution, its operations and achievements is accurate and of high quality.

25   To help providers demonstrate they meet accreditation criteria, additional guidance will be posted on the quality improvement area of the Council's website in relation to:

- interpreting requirements for students' achievements
- sources of evidence to support applications
- presenting evidence of meeting criteria, with a case study illustration of meeting criterion two – regular and rigorous self-assessment, validated during the course of inspection.

How the Council will reach decisions about accreditation

26   The Council's decisions will be based on information sent by providers and consideration of data and inspection evidence already held by the Council about providers. Every effort will be made to minimise the amount of work involved for providers in preparing applications for accreditation. As far as possible, the Council wishes to use the documents which an institution routinely prepares for managing, monitoring and self-assessing its provision.

Monitoring accredited provision

27   The achievement of accredited status will signal a confidence, shared by the Council and the provider with accredited Council-funded provision, that standards will be maintained over the long term.

28   The provider will be asked to share with the Council its annual self-assessment, showing the outcomes of any actions it has undertaken to maintain or improve provision.

29   The Council recognises that the circumstances of an accredited provider may change, for example through merger, and that standards may decline for a variety of reasons. In such circumstances, the Council will work with the provider to support initiatives it takes

to maintain the standards required for accreditation. If the Council has concerns that standards are declining it may request that specific actions are taken to remedy matters. The Council reserves the right to withdraw accredited status.

Dissemination of good practice

30   As indicated in Council Circular 00/19 *Standards Fund 2000-01 for Non-sector Colleges*, institutions awarded accreditation in 2000-01 for their Council-funded provision will be able to apply for standards funding of up to £50,000 to disseminate their good practice. The amount of funding awarded will depend on the approval of an appropriately costed action plan.

Part 2: Establishing Baseline Rates of Retention and Achievement for Target-setting

Background

31   The government has made plain its commitment to improving the quality of further education and to raising levels of student retention and achievement. The process of setting annual targets for student retention and the achievement of qualifications should be central to each provider's strategy for raising standards. Targets should be set in the context of the provider's mission, including commitments to widen participation. There should be no narrowing of recruitment or neglect of initiatives to widen participation.

32   Since 1999, sector colleges have returned their targets for retention and achievement to the Council. In setting targets, colleges aim to improve performance in relation to previous years and take into account their existing position, typical improvements and national benchmarking data. For those colleges which improved their performance between 1995-96 and 1996-97, the average was an improvement of 3% in retention and 7% in achievement. Between 1996-97 and 1997-98, in colleges making improvements, there was an average of 4% increase in retention and 9% in achievements.

Approach

33   Other providers of further education can benefit from the process of target-setting to help monitor and raise rates of retention and achievement in the same way as sector colleges. Target-setting for retention and achievement should result in plans to sustain performance at the same high levels or to remedy weaknesses in provision in order to bring about lasting improvements in performance.

34   As a first step, non-sector college providers are asked to prepare baseline figures for retention and achievement rates for 1999-2000 and forward these to the Council by the beginning of December 2000. These baseline data will enable providers to identify areas that need most improvement, to set targets for performance in 2000-01 and also to use them for comparisons in future years.

35   LEA-maintained external institutions and independent external institutions are asked to record baseline figures for retention and achievement using data derived from their ISR. Guidance notes on how to do this will be issued in autumn 2000 by the Council, following consultation with the Council's external institutions' consultative group. At this stage, providers do not need to use kitemarked software to calculate baseline figures, although this may be necessary in future.

36   In order to help set targets, external institutions will wish to compare their performance with national benchmarking data for sector colleges published by the Council and other relevant benchmarking data, as well as the national benchmarking data for external institutions that are due to be published by the Council in late autumn 2000.

37   HE institutions are asked to record baseline figures for retention and achievement using their ISR-type data derived from Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data returns. Guidance notes, similar to those proposed for external institutions, will be provided in autumn 2000 to assist institutions in calculating their baseline figures.

38   Independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will be asked to record broad 'one-line' figures based on the learning goals and progression plans set out in each student's funding agreement with the Council. They are also asked to provide figures for the number of students who achieve their progression goal, as set out in their learning plan. The Council recognises that institutions will need to identify a clear progression goal for each student. Progression goals may vary widely and include progressing to study in further education or to living and managing support arrangements in long-term residential care. The Council recognises that overall retention rates are usually very high for residential students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in independent specialist colleges, and that where students do leave before completing their studies, this is often due to ill health.

39   At this stage, it is not appropriate for dance and drama schools to be asked to send baseline figures on retention and achievement to the Council, as they are only just beginning to be inspected and make returns to the Council.

40   The guidance at annex C sets out the guiding principles and the frameworks for recording student retention and achievement rates and setting targets. Information about baseline retention and achievement data should be forwarded to the Council's quality improvement unit by the 1st December 2000.

Part 3: Publication of National Benchmarking Data

Introduction

41   The Council publishes national benchmarking data for sector colleges based on data derived from the ISR. These are an important source of data against which institutions can compare their performance. Some non-sector college providers of further education already make good use of these national benchmarking data, but the Council

recognises that it would be valuable to have more precise comparators for their type of further education institution.

Approach

42   The Council plans to publish national benchmarking data for LEA-maintained and independent external institutions using data derived from the ISR in late autumn 2000. Both types of external institutions will be grouped together and benchmarking data will be given for:

- all external institutions
- those with a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas (as defined in the index of local deprivation by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions).

43   The Council also plans to publish national benchmarking data for further education provision in HE institutions. These will be based on data relating to further education provision, derived from institutions' HESA returns.

44   The Council's plans to publish national benchmarking data for external institutions and HE institutions are subject to the availability of appropriate data from a sufficient number of institutions. It will not be possible to calculate benchmarking data where the number of providers in a particular category is too small. In this instance, institutions concerned will wish to use other benchmarking data to make comparisons with other providers' achievements. These other data may include the benchmarking data for sector colleges published by the Council, as well as those provided by other organisations.

45   At this stage, the Council will not publish national benchmarking data for independent specialist colleges or dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards. Dance and drama schools are being inspected by the Council and making returns to the Council for the first time this year.

Part 4: Publication of Performance Indicators

Introduction

46   Performance indicators have been published by the Council for sector colleges since 1995-96. They enable providers to compare their performance with other institutions and for the Council and others to monitor changes in performance in each provider and on a national basis over time.

Approach

47   In response to the final report of the Council's external institutions review group *(External Institutions: Final report of the review group)*, the Council plans to publish performance indicators based on 1998-99 data for external institutions in late autumn 2000. The same five performance indicators will be used as for sector colleges. These are:

- achievement of funding target
- change in student numbers
- in-year retention rates
- student achievement rates
- contribution to the national targets.

48   Performance indicators will also be published for HE institutions for 1999-2000 using the same categories.

49   At this stage, it is not appropriate to publish performance indicators for other non-sector college providers of further education.

Guidance on Recording Baseline Rates of Retention and Achievement for Target-setting

Introduction

1   This guidance applies to all non-sector college providers of further education, with the exception of dance and drama schools.

2   Figures for retention and achievement for the 1999-2000 teaching year should be forwarded to the quality improvement unit at the Council by 1 December 2000. There will be a facility to update returns until 1 March 2001. The forms at tables 1 and 2 will be posted on the quality improvement area of the Council's website in autumn 2000. Providers can make returns in hard copy or electronically using the Council's website.

Principles

3   Broadly, the same principles apply as those for sector colleges. These are:

- that baseline figures recorded should be used to achieve the objective of raising levels of student retention and achievement each year, or maintaining them at a very high level
- that arrangements apply to all Council-funded students
- that retention and achievement figures should be recorded for each course or curriculum area, and then aggregated to form the overall figures for the institution
- that figures should specify levels of retention and achievement
- that for those institutions using ISR-derived data, the format of figures should match that of the national benchmarking data published by the Council. See *Benchmarking Data*

1995-96 to 1997-98: Retention and achievement rates in further education colleges in England, September 1999

- collecting the figures and reporting on performance both within the institution and to the Council, should fit in with the normal cycles of management and quality assurance and internal reporting arrangements
- recording and analysis of baseline figures for student retention and achievement should involve teachers and relevant support staff, as well as managers
- baseline figures for student retention and achievement rates and arrangements for monitoring future performance against these are approved by senior managers and, where institutions have arrangements in place, by governors or management committees
- the Council will analyse individual providers' targets and aggregate these for different types of non-sector college institution
- although the Council will not require providers to inform it of the detail of course or programme-level data, providers are expected to keep full records of these in order to use them for setting targets in future years at course or programme level, and to use as evidence for self-assessment and inspection
- providers are encouraged to set targets for student retention and achievement at course or programme level for the 2000-01 teaching year based upon baseline figures for 1999-2000
- senior managers, and, where these are in place, governing bodies or management committees, should satisfy themselves that appropriate attention has been paid to setting targets for areas of poor performance and that adequate resources have been assigned to support their achievement.

5   Arrangements for sending targets to the Council, or its successor the Learning and Skills Council, for retention and achievement by non-sector college providers will be reviewed during 2000-01.

Format for recording student retention and achievement rates and target-setting

6   The Council wishes to establish a standard format for institutions to record performance for the 1999-2000 teaching year. The forms below are designed so that they can be used at course or programme level by staff, and subsequently aggregated by managers to gain the overall record of performance for their Council-funded provision in 1999-2000. An additional column has been included so that institutions can use this for setting targets for student retention and achievement for 2000-01. At this stage, provisional targets set by institutions for their own quality improvement purposes for 2000-01 need not be sent to the Council.

GCSEs

7   Providers should record GCSE achievements for grades A*–C. The exception is where the qualification aim for a student is for a lower grade, for example a basic skills student may be aiming to achieve a grade D at GCSE in mathematics or English.

Level X qualifications

8   Some provision is recorded in the ISR on qualifications where the notional level is not available from the qualifications database. These are mainly qualifications which institutions have recorded using generic qualification codes. The majority are notional level 1 qualifications, but some are at higher levels. There are two ways of recording these qualifications on the return. Where the notional level of the qualification is known internally within the institution, then these qualifications should be included at the appropriate notional level with the number of starters identified separately in the 'of which level 'X' row' of the

form. Where the institution is not able to reassign these qualifications to an appropriate notional level, they should be included either in the 'level X' part of the form, or with all other short qualifications if they are of fewer than 24 weeks in length.

Table 1. Format for recording student retention and achievement rates for non-sector college providers of further education other than independent specialist colleges and dance and drama schools

Name of institution

Contact name *(please print)*

Tel no

E-mail

Qualification type	*Level*		16-18		19+	
			1999-2000 outcomes	*2000-01 targets (for institutions' own use)*	*1999-2000 outcomes*	*2000-01 targets (for institutions' own use)*
Long	1	No. of starters				
		(of which level X)				
		No. of students retained				
		Retention rate (%)				
		No. of students achieved				
		Achievement rate (%)				
	2	No. of starters				
		(of which level X)				
		No. of students retained				
		Retention rate (%)				
		No. of students achieved				
		Achievement rate (%)				
	3	No. of starters				
		(of which level X)				
		No. of students retained				
		Retention rate (%)				
		No. of students achieved				
		Achievement rate (%)				
	X	No. of starters				
		No. of students retained				
		Retention rate (%)				
		No. of students achieved				
		Achievement rate (%)				
Short	All levels	No. of starters				
		(of which level X)				
		No. of students retained				
		Retention rate (%)				
		No. of students achieved				
		Achievement rate (%)				

These figures are accurate for 1999-2000, and where a governing body or management committee exists, have been approved by them.

Signed by the principal

Date _____ / _____ / _____

Table 2. Format for recording student retention and achievement rates for independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Name of institution

Contact name *(please print)*

Tel no

E-mail

		Age of students	
		16-18	*19+*
1999-2000	No. of starters		
	No. retained		
	Retention rate (%)		
	No. achieved their primary learning goal		
	Achievement rate of primary learning goal (%)		
	No. achieved their progression goal		
	Progression goal (%)		
Targets for 2000-01 (for institutions' own use)	Planned no of starters		
	Planned no retained		
	Target retention rate (%)		
	Planned number achieving primary learning goal		
	Target achievement rate of primary learning goal (%)		
	Planned number moving to progression goal		
	Target rate for progression goal (%)		

These figures are accurate for 1999-2000, and where a governing body or management committee exists, have been approved by them.

Signed by the principal

Date _____ / _____ / _____

Guidance to be issued by the Council on extracting ISR-derived data

9   In response to Council Circular 00/12, concerns were expressed about the lack of access to kitemarked software. The Council has therefore decided that the use of kitemarked software will not be required. Guidance on extracting data from the ISR or data sent to HESA will be sent directly to HE institutions and external institutions in autumn 2000. The guidance will also be posted on the QI area of the Council's website.

Using benchmarking data

10   Providers which use the ISR are asked to refer to the definitions set out in the Council's annual benchmarking data publication, *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98: Retention and achievement rates in further education colleges in England* (September 1999). This will ensure that the approach to recording baseline figures for retention and achievement for 1999-2000 will be consistent. While the definitions in this publication are based on ISR data, they are also relevant for HE institutions providing data to HESA.

11   In considering what targets for retention and achievement to set to help them improve performance, institutions will wish to take into account a number of different factors, including national data where they are available. National benchmarking data for further education sector colleges is published annually in September. Although these data will not be directly comparable for other providers, some, and in particular that for general further education colleges and those colleges with a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas, will provide useful comparators. Managers and course tutors will wish to use national benchmarking data for specific qualifications. These are available in spreadsheet format on the Council's website under 'data' then 'analysis and benchmarking'.

Summary of Responses to Circular 00/12

Introduction

1   There were 70 responses to Council Circular 00/12, *Proposed Arrangements for Accreditation and Performance Data for Non-sector College Providers of Further Education,* 60% of which were from non-sector college providers, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Responses to Circular 00/12 by college type

College type	Responses	
	Number	*%*
General further education colleges	13	19
Sixth form colleges	5	7
Tertiary colleges	5	7
Specialist colleges	5	7
LEA-maintained external institutions	27	39
Independent external institutions	3	4
Independent specialist colleges	4	6
HE institutions	8	11
Dance and drama schools	0	0
Total	70	100

Note: percentages rounded to the nearest whole number

2   Respondents were asked to comment under four headings on the proposals contained in Circular 00/12 and to indicate the extent to which they supported them.

Summary

3   As table 2 shows, three of the four proposals outlined in Circular 00/12 received support from 88% or more of the respondents. The remaining proposal received support from 69% of respondents.

Table 2. Responses to Circular 00/12 by proposal

Proposal	Responses (No)	Support (%)	Do not support (%)	No preference %
Accreditation	29	69	5	26
Target-setting and guidance on recording baseline rates of retention and achievement	37	88	4	8
Publication of national benchmarking data	38	90	5	5
Publication of performance indicators	38	90	2	8

Note: relates to non-sector college providers of further education

4   Table 3 provides details of the responses received from non-sector colleges. It shows the strong support of between 85% and 96% for three proposals. LEA-maintained external institutions are less supportive of one category, with 41% not supporting. These providers are not inspected by the Council inspectorate.

Table 3. Support for proposals in Circular 00/12 by percentage of provider type

Proposal	LEA external institutions	Independent externaL institutions*	Independent Specialist Colleges*	HE Institutions*
Accreditation	59	100	100	75
Target-setting and guidance on recording baseline rates of retention and achievement	85	100	100	88
Publication of national benchmarking data	96	100	75	75
Publication of performance indicators	96	100	75	75

* the number of returns for these institutions is small so percentages need to be treated with some caution

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

Accreditation

6   This proposal to extend the opportunity for excellence to be formally recognised to all institutions that are inspected by the Council's inspectorate was supported by 69% of all respondents. Some 29% specifically commented that the plans were very welcome. A few HE institutions commented that accreditation may be inappropriate as their primary relationship is with the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Other concerns raised by respondents included: the need to use consistent approaches to quality measurement (13%); that LEA-maintained external institutions are at a disadvantage because they are not inspected by the Council (23%); and that it would be useful for non-sector college providers to be able to access a 'college' inspector in the same way as sector colleges (13%).

Target-setting and guidance on recording baseline rates of retention and achievement

7   This proposal was supported by 88% of all respondents with 17% commenting specifically that the general principles of this initiative were fully supported. Additional comments from respondents included: costs associated with kitemarked software (29%); that it may be worth waiting for Learning and Skills Council requirements for all providers; greater clarity about the definitions of short and long courses; the appropriateness in relation to adult learners and the need for comparable progression goals for each establishment.

Publication of national benchmarking data

8   This was supported by 90% of all respondents with 32% commenting on how much they welcome this initiative. Some external institutions raised issues concerning: the need to take into account the nature of their client groups; that many of their courses are less than 12 weeks' duration; and that the groupings should be more sensitive than the proposed categories of 'those with a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas' and 'other external institutions'.   A few HE institutions commented on timing difficulties between publication of benchmarking data and the return of data to HESA. A few independent specialist colleges considered it would be useful to develop national benchmarking data for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Publication of performance indicators

9   Respondents were very supportive of this initiative, with 24% commenting that publications should be for 1998-99 and not for earlier years. Some 18% of respondents requested further clarification of this initiative including: which years are being referred to; how assessment against national targets will be reflected; and what sources of information will be used.