Basic Skills Summer Schools

REPORT FROM THE INSPECTORATE

1998-99

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

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The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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Summary

The basic skills summer schools, provided in colleges between June and September 1998, were part of an overall government strategy to increase the number of people engaged in basic skills programmes and to improve skills levels in literacy, numeracy and ESOL. The initiative of the summer schools was timely. The curriculum survey report *Basic Education* published recently by the FEFC indicated that more needed to be done to improve the quality of provision. In seeking to give special attention to this educational problem, the government recognised short programmes as a means of meeting the needs of specific groups of students. The summer schools demonstrated the sector's ability to respond quickly and creatively to government initiatives. The issues raised in this report should help inform colleges about summer schools and assist them in finding methods of improving the quality of short courses in basic skills.

Colleges provided different types of programme in the summer schools, most being in addition to existing provision, although in some colleges the summer schools were the first basic skills programmes to be provided. The summer schools attracted a wide range of students. They included students of all ages; 62% were aged 25 and over. A common characteristic of the summer school programmes was their short duration, often 30 hours or fewer. Many programmes were designed as two-week blocks and did not have sufficient guided learning hours to produce measurable gains in student learning. Some colleges collaborated successfully with partner organisations and agencies. Such collaborations resulted in the provision of programmes at centres in the community.

The standard of teaching and learning was slightly lower than that found by inspectors in the basic education programme area as a whole during 1997-98. In the lessons observed by inspectors, 52% were graded 1 and 2. Literacy lessons received the highest grades; 62% were graded 1 and 2. Lessons in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) were the weakest with only 38% graded 1 and 2. Initial assessment of students' learning needs was not effective. A high proportion of students had collective, rather than individual, learning plans. The strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning found in the summer schools were similar to those found during the inspections of other basic skills programmes during 1997-98.

The time available for planning programmes was short and this created some difficulties for the recruitment of students and the design of programmes. Some of the intended objectives, for example those of recruiting new students and of providing programmes predominantly during the summer period when students are usually unable to attend courses, were not fully achieved.

The proportion of programmes offered which did not provide students with an opportunity to gain a qualification was higher than is usually found in

basic skills programmes offered by colleges. Colleges attributed this to the generally short duration of the programmes. Where national awards were offered, there were some instances of students achieving high pass rates. Overall, 38% of students who completed their courses achieved some form of qualification. Students were rarely given the opportunity to choose their qualification or learning goal. Students also made significant gains in confidence and many were encouraged to progress to other courses in the same college. The assessment and recording of students' progress was weak on most programmes.

Most colleges did not meet their initial recruitment targets. Despite this, colleges provided programmes resulting in more than 17,000 enrolments. The quality of management information was often poor and the monitoring of students' learning and progress on programmes was often inadequate. Arrangements to assure the quality of programmes were often adapted from existing procedures and were most effective where they involved evaluative reports at the end of programmes. Many colleges did not make a clear distinction between basic skills, key skills and other subjects. A wide range of other subjects were included in the summer school provision. Such courses demonstrated the potential of summer schools to stimulate students' interest in general education and vocational training outside the usual college timetabled programmes. A common feature of programmes was the emphasis placed by teachers on developing the confidence of students. Almost half of the lessons observed by inspectors, and funded under the summer school initiative, were not in basic skills as it is defined by the FEFC.

Notwithstanding these conclusions, it is evident that the concept of summer school provision is well founded and can make a positive contribution to raising levels of basic skills and widening participation in further education.

Basic Skills
Summer Schools

Context

The Initiative

1 At the annual conference for college principals held in Birmingham on 12 February 1998, the minister for education, Baroness Blackstone, announced that the government was making £5.5 million available to support the provision of basic skills summer schools in further education colleges. The FEFC then invited colleges to apply for funds to provide programmes. Applications were received from 252 colleges and the FEFC allocated funds on a *pro rata* basis within three funding bands. Colleges that had previously been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for basic skills programmes during inspections were excluded from applying.

2 The government has given basic skills provision a high priority and it is a key part of its agenda for quality improvement. One in five adults have poor basic skills and seven million adults have no qualifications at all. In a first step to draw additional funds into this area, the government found additional funds for further education colleges to begin the summer schools work. Some significant action has been taken. For example, literacy and numeracy taskforces have been set up in schools, family literacy programmes established, and the national advisory group, chaired by Sir Claus Moser, has been asked to consider a strategy for tackling basic skills. A target has been set of including 500,000 adults in basic skills provision by 2002. The basic skills summer school provision was part of a long-term strategy for increasing provision.

Inspection Methodology

3 In the letter to college principals dated 1 May 1998 inviting them to supply plans for programmes, the chief executive of the FEFC stated that 'the inspectorate will undertake a sample of monitoring visits'. The inspection programme was organised as a national exercise. A team of four full-time and six part-time inspectors undertook inspection visits to colleges between 16 July and 28 September 1998. The visits took the form of one-day curriculum inspections, including the observation of lessons wherever possible, discussions with teachers and students, meetings with programme managers, examination of students' work and scrutiny of relevant programme documentation.

4 Inspectors graded lessons that they observed, but not programmes. Oral feedback was given to teachers and brief feedback was also provided to programme managers and, where they were available, to college principals or their deputies. Inspectors completed summary reports and other inspection documentation and these formed the basis of the evidence for the judgements in this report.

Sample and Evidence Base

5 The sample of colleges to be included in the inspection programme was set at about 15% of the colleges providing summer schools. A sample was designed using criteria that included the planned size of provision; a balance between regions; a mix of types of college; and a balance between colleges awarded grades 2 and 3 for basic skills in previous inspections and colleges where basic skills had not previously been inspected. A total of 50 colleges were initially contacted and 39 were included in the inspection sample. A list of the colleges forming the inspection sample is shown in the annex.

6 Of the 39 colleges, 38 were visited and one college provided comprehensive documentation about the programme when a suitable date for a visit could not be found. Inspectors observed lessons in 35 of the 38 colleges visited. In spite of the short lead-time for some of the inspection visits, college managers were generally helpful in preparing documentation and making suitable arrangements for inspectors. In a few instances, annual leave and other previous commitments of college staff prevented a satisfactory completion of the documentation

that had been requested. Teachers and managers said that they valued the opportunity to discuss basic skills provision with inspectors.

7 In addition to the inspection activity, information about the summer school programmes was collected also by the education and institutions directorate of the Council. Alongside this, the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) collected data from a questionnaire sampling of some colleges together with some visits by BSA development officers. The judgements included in this report relate only to inspection evidence.

Size and Scope of Programmes

8 More than 200 summer school programmes were provided. The plans for programmes developed by colleges included some to provide courses for more than 400 students, but most plans were for fewer than 200. Many colleges failed to meet their targets for student numbers, and some planned programmes were not implemented. The FEFC funded a total of 17,109 enrolments on summer school programmes. For the purposes of funding, 'summer' was defined as 1 June to 30 September. This meant that some colleges provided programmes within their normal term times, avoiding the need to organise provision during July and August. For example, some programmes in June were added to the end of vocational and academic courses, providing an opportunity for students to complete assignments and assessments. Others were arranged as extended inductions to, mainly, vocational courses starting in September. These provided an opportunity for the development of key skills for those courses. Programmes arranged during July and August generally attracted a higher proportion of students new to further education, many of whom had not engaged in formal education since leaving school. These programmes were found mostly in colleges with established basic skills provision on offer during normal term times. Few colleges in the inspection sample had previously provided basic skills during the summer.

Types of Programmes

9 A wide range of programmes were provided. Many were organised as short courses lasting around two weeks, although some lasted up to six weeks or more. The number of guided learning hours for individual students in the colleges inspected ranged from 12 to over 60. Programmes included attendance in a wide variety of modes including, for example, attendance for four or five full days each week and attendance for one half day each week for the duration of course programmes. Most lessons were two or three hours long. Colleges provided courses in more than one mode. For example, a college in the Yorkshire and Humberside region offered some courses for one day a week for six weeks in addition to courses of two weeks full time. Some students were attending more than one course within an overall programme, and a few were repeating the same course completed earlier in the summer. Most colleges provided courses during the day, and a small proportion were timetabled for the evening.

10 Some colleges were providing basic skills programmes for adults for the first time. These were implemented with varying degrees of success, although the best programmes equalled the success of more established providers of basic skills. For example, a sixth form college in the North West region provided courses in computer literacy, English and mathematics through a 'drop-in' provision lasting from June to September with a recommended 60-hour programme for each student. Students had flexible attendance opportunities, with sessions organised between 09.00 and 16.00 hours each day. One further education college in the Eastern Region organised a 'learning shop' which offered free courses for adults in two-hour sessions at any time between 09.00 and 21.00 hours. In general, colleges did not provide courses of sufficient duration to have a significant impact on students' levels of skills. The main reason given by colleges for the small

number of guided learning hours was that students were difficult to retain for longer than two weeks during the summer, given constraints of family commitments, seasonal employment and traditional holiday arrangements.

11 In applying for the allocated funds, colleges were encouraged to collaborate with other partners. Some colleges worked closely with others to provide programmes across a defined area. For example, a tertiary college in the North West region collaborated with a neighbouring sixth form college to provide a comprehensive programme for potential students in their joint catchment area. A significant number of colleges collaborated with local authority adult education and community services to provide programmes over wide geographical areas. These benefited from joint planning and implementation and were often successful in recruiting adults who might otherwise not have attended courses in colleges. One college in the South West region worked with the county council to provide programmes at nine centres across the county. A few colleges collaborated with voluntary organisations to provide courses for specific groups of students. Links were made between colleges and schools, sometimes involving local authorities, by encouraging the parents of children engaged in 'literacy hours' to attend to improve their own literacy.

12 A very wide range of students enrolled in the summer schools. These included: school-leavers intending to progress to vocational courses; young adults wishing to develop skills for employability; adults and younger students with learning difficulties; adults returning to education; and students from minority ethnic communities wishing to improve their English. A few students had refugee status. One college integrated students excluded from school into a class with some older students. Another recruited 15 and 16 year olds who had been identified as underachieving at school. Students in observed lessons ranged from 14 to over 84 years of age. The profile of students on summer schools was similar to that found on other FEFC-funded basic skills programmes. Overall, 62% were aged 25 and over; 32% were from minority ethnic groups; and 56% of students were female.

13 Most of the programmes were located on main college sites. Others were provided in college centres in the community, for example, in inner city areas or in more remote rural areas. A number of programmes were located on school premises. Some programmes were linked to playschemes for parents and children organised during the summer. Others were organised in nurseries where parents had placed their children. Other locations included community centres and a range of other venues based in the community. There was one example of teaching provided at home for ESOL students. Few colleges made basic skills provision for the employees of local companies, but six did this successfully, including a college in the Eastern Region. A college in the Northern Region collaborated with the Royal Navy to design a course.

Basic Skills Summer Schools

Teaching and Learning

Standards in Observed Lessons

14 Inspectors observed 90 lessons in 35 colleges. All the lessons were identified by the colleges as basic skills summer school provision. Table 1 gives the grades awarded during the inspection visits.

Table 1. Lessons: inspection grades by subject

	Grade					
Subject	1	2	3	4	5	**Total**
Literacy	2	8	6	0	0	16
Numeracy	1	3	4	1	0	9
Literacy & numeracy (combined)	0	4	5	0	0	9
ESOL	2	3	6	2	0	13
IT	4	7	9	1	0	21
Other*	3	10	6	3	0	22
Total	12	35	36	7	0	90

**includes study skills, personal development, art, horticulture, animal care, cookery and a range of other subjects*

15 Of the lessons observed, 52% were graded 1 or 2; outstanding or good respectively. This is lower than the proportion of lessons, at 56%, judged to be outstanding or good in the basic education programme area during 1997-98. It is significantly lower than the 65% of lessons judged to be outstanding or good across all 10 of the FEFC programme areas in 1997-98.

16 College data show that enrolments were most numerous on literacy courses. In total, about half of the enrolments were for literacy, followed by numeracy and then ESOL. More than 5,000 enrolments were for other types of courses, including information technology (IT). Some of the courses and lessons were multidisciplinary. For example, 10% of lessons combined literacy with numeracy. Others integrated literacy, numeracy or ESOL with a vocational subject, and concentrated on the development of the non-vocational skills identified during initial assessments of students' needs.

17 Inspectors found that a high proportion of programmes funded were not basic skills as defined by the FEFC in Council Circular 95/02, *College Strategic Plans 1995-96 and Beyond*. Of the lessons observed, 48% had a primary focus that was a subject other than literacy, numeracy or ESOL. For example, 23% of lessons had the main purpose of developing IT skills. Colleges found a high demand for courses in IT and provided these within a basic skills curriculum framework since many college managers regard computer literacy as a basic skill. Many such activities were presented to students as an integrated course of study; for example, 'English through IT' or 'ESOL and computing'. Few of these courses, however, had clear learning objectives other than those for IT. Teachers missed opportunities in many instances to assess and accredit the language and number skills that students were developing during IT lessons. Students attending these courses did so mainly because of the IT content.

18 A wide range of other subjects were provided by colleges in the summer school programmes. These included study skills and personal development, which were often taught in addition to basic skills as part of an overall course. Teachers used vocational subjects as a context for basic and key skills development, but learning goals for these non-vocational skills were often not specified. The vocational subjects included art, horticulture, animal care and cookery, and were mainly taught by vocational teachers. Such courses demonstrated the potential of summer schools to stimulate interest in general education and vocational training outside the usual college timetabled programmes.

Initial Assessment

19 Initial assessment of students on basic skills courses is increasingly well established. In some colleges, the summer school took the form of an extended initial assessment for students preparing for other courses. In a college in the Greater London region, the students completed an initial assessment questionnaire. This led to the development of an agreed learning plan. Students' progress was then monitored against this plan. Teachers of courses in summer school programmes, however, did not always undertake such assessments of students' learning needs.

20 Where students received an initial assessment, many teachers did not use the outcome effectively. For example, many courses were planned in advance of the recruitment and assessment of the students with little scope for modification to suit individual needs. Programme managers were therefore unable to respond to learning needs that differed from those that had been anticipated. This resulted, in a few colleges, in students following inappropriate courses. In many colleges, teachers set learning objectives which were collective rather than individual, partly because of the short duration of the courses. In general, the initial assessments would have been more useful in planning courses and identifying individual learning objectives if they had been undertaken before students began the courses.

Literacy

21 The quality of teaching and learning in literacy lessons was higher than the other subjects inspected; 62% of these lessons were graded 1 or 2. The most effective teaching included:

- the use of a good range of appropriate teaching methods which took account of students' needs
- clear learning objectives for lessons that were shared with students and met
- learning based on a relevant and appropriate curriculum
- careful planning of lessons to enable students to progress at their own pace
- good-quality learning materials linked to students' interests and experience
- effective encouragement of learning by confident and experienced literacy teachers.

22 The less effective literacy lessons had some of the following weaknesses:

- small class sizes that inhibited methods of learning which rely on learning in groups
- classes with too wide a range of students with differing abilities so that not all students made sufficient progress
- vague learning goals and insufficiently detailed learning plans for students
- inadequate records of students' progress
- insufficient use made of the outcomes from initial assessments in designing the curriculum.

23 Inspectors found examples of effective teaching and learning in lessons they observed. In a college in the Greater London region, the students worked together to write a 'rap' which they then recorded on tape. All of the students had contributed to the writing and all were involved in the recording. At the end of the course, each student had a high-quality recording to take away. In a college in the East Midlands region, the teachers designed stimulating practical learning activities that matched those used in the 'literacy hour' in schools. Teachers worked intensively with small groups of students while other students worked independently in small groups using task sheets and drawing on a variety of learning resources. The students enjoyed the parts of the course concerned with literary criticism and as a result were keen to read more poetry, novels and short stories.

Numeracy

24 The quality of teaching and learning in numeracy lessons was lower than that in literacy lessons; 44% of these lessons were graded 1 or 2. In the more effective lessons, some common characteristics included:

- good classroom management by skilled teachers
- the use of effective learning materials relevant to students' learning objectives
- the assessment of students' progress to ensure the development of skills
- the use of practical activities to improve students' learning.

25 The less effective numeracy lessons had some of the following weaknesses:

- failure to use a variety of appropriate teaching methods
- a curriculum that was not sufficiently linked to students' experience or future aspirations
- little use made of IT to assist learning
- few planned opportunities for work in small groups or pairs.

26 Inspectors found examples of effective teaching and learning in lessons that they observed. In a college in the Eastern Region, all of the students had individual learning plans and were working in a well-equipped numeracy workshop. The students had access to a good collection of clear and unambiguous worksheets on numeracy concepts. The worksheets incorporated local references and were original in content and of good quality in appearance. Progress was being made by all students, many of whom commented favourably about 'enjoying mathematics' in a way that they had not at school. A college in the Northern Region used an integrated approach to teaching IT, numeracy and literacy which helped to recruit new students. Teachers planned lessons to develop skills in more than one subject and provided a high level of support for individual students.

ESOL

27 The quality of teaching and learning in ESOL lessons was lower than in the other subjects inspected. Only 38% of ESOL lessons were graded 1 or 2, compared with 52% overall. The more effective lessons included:

- lesson content and learning objectives linked to initial assessments
- development of specific language skills appropriate for students' learning needs
- an appropriate range of teaching methods and variety of learning activities
- effective strategies for integrating language development into other subjects.

28 The less effective ESOL lessons had some of the following weaknesses:

- lack of, or unclear, learning objectives for language development
- inadequate support for students learning ESOL as a part of other courses
- lack of, or insufficient, assessment of progress
- low expectations of students' potential learning gains.

29 Inspectors found examples of effective teaching and learning in lessons that they observed. One college provided courses in the West End of London that attracted students visiting England who were speakers of other languages. Teachers had developed a consistent and imaginative style that involved the use of various methods. For example, an audio and/or visual presentation was followed by a group discussion, individual work based on clearly presented task sheets and then a teacher-led summary of what had been learned and how this would link with the next lesson. A college in the North West region effectively integrated ESOL language development into a childcare course. This involved joint planning and teaching, and the course was organised to provide a good mix of theoretical learning and practical activities. Students had clear learning objectives for both the childcare and language elements of the course.

Other Subjects (Including IT)

30 The standard of teaching and learning in other subjects inspected was similar to that seen overall. Inspectors awarded 52% of IT lessons grade 1 or 2 and awarded 59% of lessons for other subjects outside the usual scope of basic skills grade 1 or 2.

31 While it would be misleading to draw together common features of practice from such a diverse range of subjects, many examples of interesting practice were found. A college in the Northern Region provided a course, in liaison with a local charity for disabled people, which had a main focus on the care of horses. Students had opportunities to develop communication, personal and problem-solving skills, in addition to animal care. A college in the Eastern Region arranged for students to meet in a community centre. The lesson was imaginatively designed around a health and safety theme and the course led to a hygiene qualification which was useful for students in an area of high seasonal employment. The lesson was planned to develop communication skills alongside the work on health and safety.

32 Many IT lessons used relevant contexts for learning to encourage students to develop their skills. Students often had well-produced task sheets with clear instructions planned as a step-by-step approach for beginners to IT. The teaching of individuals was often good. In the best IT lessons, students were encouraged to reflect on their progress and assessment was constructive. In most of the lessons, however, students worked in isolation at computers. There were few opportunities to work in small groups or for students to learn from each other.

Student Achievements

Assessment and Recording of Progress

33 In the most effective colleges the assessment and recording of students' progress was rigorous. However, it was a significant weakness in many of the programmes. Teachers stated that the main reason for this was the short duration of programmes. For example, where teachers had only 30 hours, or fewer, of contact with students they considered it to be inappropriate to assess students' work or make a record of their progress. A common misunderstanding was that assessment was linked only to accreditation rather than an integral part of teaching and learning. As a result of the lack of sufficient assessment, many students were unclear about what they had learned and which skills they had developed. Teachers were unable to show how much progress students had made during their time on a course. In some colleges, inspectors found that no records had been kept of students' progress. In others, the records were only of class activities or topics covered by the class.

34 Some colleges did not provide opportunities for students to have their learning accredited by awarding bodies. Again, this was usually attributed to the short duration of programmes where the guided learning hours would have been insufficient to enable students to gain accreditation. In some instances, where the hours were sufficient, a decision was made that accreditation was inappropriate for other reasons such as the unsuitability of schemes of accreditation for the planned courses or the difficulty of arranging for verification of students' work at short notice. Teachers missed opportunities to provide credit for achievements, even on very short courses, and for students to carry these credits forward to future courses.

Qualifications and Accreditation of Learning

35 In colleges where opportunities to gain qualifications were provided there was a wide range of qualifications and schemes of accreditation. These included:

- City and Guilds (C&G) Wordpower and Numberpower

- Associated Examination Board (AEB) Achievement Tests in literacy and numeracy
- Pitmans Examination Board, University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES), English Speaking Board (ESB) and RSA Examination Board (RSA) certificates for ESOL
- Open College Network (OCN) credits in a range of subjects.

36 Students welcomed the opportunity to have their achievements recognised but were generally not well informed about the requirements of assessment or accreditation, and were unable to say what they needed to do in order to gain the qualification. Few colleges gave students a choice of qualifications or an opportunity to negotiate assessment modes. In some colleges, all the students on a course had the same learning goal although they had a range of experience and abilities, so that some students were working at a level above that of the qualification for which they were studying. Most accreditation was provided at either entry level or level 1. In the best practice, learning goals were broken down into small achievable objectives for the students, and one college provided students with opportunities to gain accreditation at more than one level during the course. Most teachers regarded accreditation as 'free-standing' and few made connections between the summer schools and students' likely destinations.

37 The standard of most students' work that was available was good and students' files were well presented. Reviews of students' opinions showed that students were often pleased with their progress. In some colleges where students were on accredited courses, there were high pass rates. A college in the Yorkshire and Humberside region organised the programme as a two-week intensive induction and students achieved pass rates of over 95%, subject to external verification, for AEB achievement tests in numeracy at level 1 and for C&G Wordpower at entry level. In a college in the South East region, students were all encouraged to take an AEB literacy and/or numeracy test during the last lesson even though it was not appropriate for all. More than half of the students already had basic skills qualifications and some students, for example a retired architect, had no need to achieve the qualification. Overall, a small number of students achieved whole qualifications from their time on summer schools. More students achieved partial accreditation; for example, an OCN credit. Overall, 38% of students who completed their courses achieved some form of accreditation.

Attendance, Retention and Progression

38 The attendance rate at the lessons inspected ranged from zero to 100% and the average was 75%. This compares with the average of 77% in colleges inspected in 1997-98. In two colleges, no students attended the lessons timetabled on the inspection days, but in eight colleges the attendance rate in all observed lessons was 100%. The actual numbers of students attending ranged from one to 26; the average class size was nine. This compares with the average of 10.4 for the sector overall in 1997-98. As would be expected on short courses, most students (85% overall) completed their courses.

39 Programme managers reported that a high proportion of the students were intending to progress to other courses in the same college. Some students had already been recruited to other courses and were attending the summer school to boost their skills in literacy and/or numeracy before their course started. Other students had been encouraged, as a consequence of attending the summer school, to consider spending more time developing their basic skills or to apply for a vocational course. A smaller proportion of the students were intending to progress in time, if possible, to general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses. Courses aimed at particular

groups of students were generally successful. For example, students on a specially designed, and jointly planned, summer school at a college in the Northern Region were mostly progressing to intended employment in the Royal Navy. In the North West region, a college collaborated with a branch of Tesco in an area of predominantly Bangladeshi population. A training course was organised to improve students' job search skills and Tesco agreed that those completing the course successfully would be guaranteed an interview. Several students were interviewed and are now employed.

40 In a few colleges, the students regarded the summer schools as a recreational activity. For example, in a college in the East Midlands, two students had previously completed a yoga course and intended to enrol in the next term for sugarcraft. In some colleges, insufficient attention had been given to considering the possible progression routes for students after the completion of their summer school programmes.

Other Achievements

41 A common feature of programmes was the emphasis placed by teachers on developing the confidence of students. Students described how, as a result of their attendance on a course, they were more confident about coming to colleges, interacting with teachers and other students, and making decisions about their future. The students in the lessons observed by inspectors were highly motivated and eager to make the most of their learning opportunities. In the best practice, teachers reinforced positive attitudes to further learning by encouraging students to complete self-evaluations at the end of courses. Some of these included an assessment of intended and unintended outcomes from the course. In a college in the Greater London region, the students were positive about their introduction to the college and spoke highly of the courses. They were able to talk about how much they had learned and how they demonstrated their learning through presentations and displays. On the most successful programmes, students said that they now understood more about how to learn and how to organise their own approach to learning.

Curriculum Content, Organisation and Management

Recruitment

42 Most colleges did not meet their own targets for the recruitment of students. The under-recruitment was attributed by colleges to the short planning time; there was a period of three months between invitations to apply for funding and the implementation of the first programmes. Recruitment was usually more successful in colleges where basic skills provision was well established. The principal of a sixth form college said: 'I did not realise how difficult it would be to recruit students to the summer schools'. Some principals acknowledged that lack of experience of basic skills provision was an issue but were confident that the summer schools had given them an opportunity to develop these programmes.

43 Recruitment to summer schools was often the result of word of mouth, leaflets in Jobcentres and libraries and some local press advertising. Publicity had to be organised quickly and was often not of the same quality as other college publicity materials. Some students were recruited from within colleges. For example, an existing course was extended by the addition of a summer school programme. A few colleges successfully collaborated with other colleges and agencies in making joint arrangements for recruitment. There were some examples of students receiving good-quality pre-enrolment advice but not all of the students were interviewed before enrolling on courses. Where students were interviewed, this was often an interview for a vocational course which resulted in a referral to the summer school programme to 'upskill' students in literacy or numeracy.

Programme Management

44 The involvement of senior managers in the organisation of the programmes was often minimal, although there were some examples of the personal involvement of principals in the arrangements. Programme managers were generally well informed and welcomed the opportunity to discuss basic skills issues with inspectors. Senior managers were critical of the short lead-time for both the planning of the summer schools and the inspections of them. The short lead-time meant that colleges were unable to make extensive preparations for inspection.

45 The quality of management information was generally poor and reflected the newness of the provision together with the need to add the programmes to college systems at a late stage in the teaching and financial years. One college in the Greater London region was unable to produce reliable information about the number of students enrolled on the summer school at the time of the inspection visit. Elsewhere, for example at a college in the North West region, monitoring of attendance was meticulous and records were reliable and complete. Most programme documentation was good and some was comprehensive and of high quality. Some college staff had spent considerable time in preparing documentation for inspectors which they said would be valuable for future planning purposes.

Quality Assurance

46 In some colleges, managers had prepared position statements describing the rationale for the programme, its aims and purpose; this was often prepared for the original application for funding and then extended as a briefing for the teaching team and partners in collaborative programmes. The best position statements were comprehensive and acknowledged deficiencies that often related to the short planning time for recruitment and curriculum preparation.

47 Most of the colleges applied existing quality assurance arrangements to the summer school programmes. This was effective in some colleges where students were asked for their views through the completion of questionnaires at the end of their courses, and where programme managers were planning to produce an evaluative report. Where feedback from students had been collected, students indicated a high degree of satisfaction with their courses. In some colleges, such feedback from students was not being collected and there were no arrangements to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes. Few managers had set targets for students' completion rates or for their achievements and so, in most colleges, an overall review of summer school performance was not possible.

48 Some teachers gave careful attention to reviewing the courses for which they were responsible. For example, at a college in Yorkshire and Humberside all of the students completed a statement of the learning outcomes they felt that they had achieved on the course. The feedback included the students' views on the course, with helpful suggestions about the particular aspects that had been successful. These were then analysed by the teacher along with her or his evaluation and consideration of relevant statistics, including retention rates. A college in the East Midlands had effective arrangements for review that included mid-course evaluations by teachers and end-of-course evaluations involving students' views. Course team meetings were held with teachers and the programme manager to consider the evidence and review strengths and weaknesses. Teachers then drew up practical action points for improvements which were incorporated into subsequent courses.

Programme Content

49 Most of the programmes were designed around existing provision and adapted for the shorter summer school duration. In some

colleges, careful thought had been given to setting realistic objectives for short courses. Programme managers stated that the provision of programmes during the summer had caused them to consider issues of curriculum planning and programme design, and a few said that innovations made for the summer schools may be used to improve existing programmes. These changes in programme design included the introduction of more short courses, the provision of alternative accreditation, more linking of basic skills to vocational programmes, more collaboration with partner organisations and more specific identification of groups of potential students.

50 Some programmes were planned to develop key skills in communication, application of number and IT, or as integrated key skills modules. College managers sometimes were unclear about the distinction between basic skills and key skills but, in other instances, they understood the difference and decided to blur the distinction to provide relevant courses for students. Many managers and teachers said that they found the distinction artificial and unhelpful. They generally perceived the development of skills in literacy and numeracy as a continuum from entry level to level 2, regardless of context or the intended application of the skills. In colleges providing courses in key skills, few made direct links between the key skills and the vocational courses to which students were intending to progress. Few of these courses provided the students with unit credits for their achievements, although some had free-standing qualifications in literacy and numeracy.

51 The content of many of the summer school programmes was insufficiently related to the development of basic skills. For example, courses were organised in IT and had no learning objectives other than those relevant to IT. These courses were popular with students and demonstrated a demand for short computer literacy courses during the summer. Other courses were planned to combine IT with basic skills, but inspectors usually found that these were unsuccessful in integrating the subjects. Where students were following courses with more than one subject, the links between the subjects were not made explicit to the students. There were few examples of teachers meeting in teams during the two-week courses to ensure common objectives and links between subjects. Colleges need to give further thought to the ways in which courses can be designed to develop skills in two or more subjects concurrently.

52 The summer schools included some examples of innovative college provision. For example, some colleges organised their summer schools to make links with the 'literacy hour' in schools. This often involved collaboration with a number of schools and the local education authority to recruit the parents of children who were engaged in 'literacy hours'. A college in the East Midlands region arranged meetings of teachers to plan the summer school and a staff development day for all teachers involved. The curriculum was carefully designed to take account of that provided by schools and has resulted in a review of the basic skills curriculum at the college.

53 A small amount of provision was franchised by colleges to other organisations. For example, a college in the East Midlands region has worked with a language school in central London for the last three years to provide courses in ESOL. The college summer school programme was organised in this way and recruited mainly students from other countries, including some refugees, for whom the short ESOL and basic skills courses were appropriate.

Support for Students

54 Colleges made variable levels of support available for students enrolled on summer school programmes. In some colleges, the usual facilities for students, including refectories, childcare provision and careers guidance, were

not available during the summer period. This was often because no other students were in the colleges at the time of these programmes. Elsewhere, colleges provided a high level of support that was valued by students. For example, a college in the East Midlands region provided free nursery places for most students who required them, charged no course fees, reimbursed travel expenses for all students and paid a cash bonus on completion of the course. One college in the Eastern Region gave summer school students 'college membership' so that they could use college resources free of charge for the following year. Students spoke positively about the opportunity to use the library and the computer workshops free during the year to build on what they had learned during the summer school courses. Teachers generally included tutorial advice as integral parts of the courses and so did not set aside other time for separate tutorial sessions.

55 Students with an unusually diverse range of needs were recruited to summer school programmes. These included students with learning difficulties, those with learning disabilities, some with mental health problems and many with very low levels of literacy and numeracy. Few colleges had identified individual support needs for students before they started their courses. For example, a student who was blind enrolled on an art course but did not have access to the appropriate resources and specialist support to enable her to participate in the group activities. Some, however, made good provision for students with learning disabilities. In a college in the South West region, support workers were used effectively in classrooms to help students learn. One student aged over 50 with cerebral palsy received individual learning support. At the end of the lesson observed he could identify his name and print it off on the computer for the first time.

Specialist Resources

Teachers

56 Most of the teachers involved in the summer school provision were experienced basic skills practitioners. In most colleges, the teachers formed the teams that provided the existing basic skills programmes during normal term-times. In colleges in which there had previously been little, or no, basic skills provision, teachers were recruited from neighbouring colleges, community education networks and agencies. Most teachers had appropriate teaching qualifications and some had additional specialist qualifications. Volunteer assistants were used in some colleges to support the work of the teachers. In a college in the Northern Region, the number of volunteers equalled the number of students. Some examples of effective support for teachers included a college in the East Midlands region where teachers met fortnightly for training sessions and had an established system of appraisal involving peer observations. The most effective provision was found where experienced basic skills teachers co-ordinated the summer schools.

Learning and Physical Resources

57 The standard of learning resources used by teachers was generally good. Some high-quality information and task sheets, assignments and other printed materials were used in observed lessons. Teachers made little use of other media, although there were some examples of effective use of video- and audio-tapes and practical project work. Students often had access to specialist resources in basic skills base rooms and learning centres. In some colleges, students had access to language laboratories for ESOL courses.

58 Computers were underused as a resource to assist learning in literacy and numeracy courses. On most IT and computer literacy courses, the standard of equipment was good.

There were some examples of students being recruited by word of mouth who were attracted by the quality of the hardware and software available for use in the college learning resource centres. The high standards of IT equipment extended, in some instances, to centres in the community where students who would not have travelled to main college sites were attending courses. One college provided good-quality laptop computers that teachers used in centres out in the community.

59 Most of the teaching accommodation was of a good standard. There were some examples of outstanding accommodation in refurbished premises with good access for people with restricted mobility. Most classrooms were well decorated and had appropriate furniture, although there were some colleges where courses were located in bare rooms that lacked visual stimulus. Some colleges provided summer schools away from main college sites in community locations and a few programmes were designed to provide courses across wide geographical areas. Colleges in urban areas often provided courses at five or more different locations.

Conclusions

60 The summer schools demonstrated the sector's ability to respond quickly and creatively to government initiatives. Despite falling short of initial recruitment targets, colleges provided programmes resulting in more than 17,000 enrolments. The summer schools provided a wide range of opportunities and benefits to students who, in general, were very appreciative of their experiences. Many of the weaknesses in individual summer schools were attributable, at least in part, to the short timescale colleges had in which to organise their programmes. Some shortcomings were, however, the result of too little emphasis on quality and measurable outcomes for students. More thought needs to be given to the development of short basic skills study programmes, moulded to suit students' individual needs, which nevertheless lead to accreditable achievements. More priority needs to be given to monitoring and assessing student progress. Notwithstanding these conclusions, it is evident that the concept of summer school provision is well founded and that they can make a positive contribution to raising levels of basic skills and widening participation in further education.

Characteristics of Successful Programmes

61 Basic skills summer schools are effective when:

- colleges consult and collaborate with partner organisations
- senior managers are involved in planning the programmes
- the target group(s) is clearly identified
- sufficient time is allowed to promote the programme and plan recruitment
- teachers are experienced and have specialist qualifications
- teachers are briefed and have time to prepare
- courses have a clear focus on literacy, numeracy and ESOL
- courses have schemes with clear learning objectives
- teachers design an appropriate curriculum for each course
- teachers prepare appropriate learning materials
- course duration is sufficient to develop and maintain new basic skills
- initial assessment is carried out before students start their courses
- students have learning plans with appropriate goals
- teaching takes account of students' different abilities and skill levels
- teachers review and record progress, and feed back frequently to students
- accreditation, where provided, effectively takes account of students' goals

- colleges provide childcare and other support facilities for students
- programmes are provided at times and locations to suit students' needs
- teachers provide advice and guidance
- progression opportunities are carefully mapped and explained to students
- colleges evaluate the programmes and take account of feedback from students.

Annex

Colleges Forming the Inspection Sample

Askham Bryan College

Basford Hall College

Blackburn College

Cardinal Newman College

Charles Keene College of Further Education

City of Bristol College

Colchester Institute

The College of North West London

The College of North East London

Craven College

Derby Tertiary College, Wilmorton

Evesham College

Franklin College

Furness College

Godalming College

Great Yarmouth College of Further Education

Josiah Mason Sixth Form College

Kidderminster College

Lowestoft College

Merrist Wood College

Middlesbrough College

Morley College

New College, Swindon

Newcastle College

Newham College of Further Education

North Trafford College of Further Education

Northampton College

Oldham College

Sandwell College

Southwark College

Stroud College of Further Education

Tamworth and Lichfield College

Thomas Danby College

Totton College

Truro College

Walsall College of Arts and Technology

West Cheshire College

Workers' Educational Association

Wulfrun College

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