

Post-16 Collaboration School Sixth Forms and the Further Education Sector

**A joint report by OFSTED
and the FEFC inspectorate**



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Post-16 Collaboration

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Introduction

Purpose and scope of the survey

1 This study of partnership arrangements in 16 to 19 education was commissioned by the minister of state for education and employment in February 1998. It was requested that the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) and the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspectorate carry out a joint survey of the nature, range and effectiveness of such arrangements and the quality of education they provide, in order to inform the development of policy. The minister stated that 'collaboration within and between the school sixth form and college sectors is potentially an important way of achieving greater efficiency and value for money throughout post-16 education'.

2 Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from OFSTED and inspectors from the FEFC inspectorate have responded to this request by carrying out a programme of visits, including joint visits to schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges involved in various forms of collaborative activity. Between May and December 1998, 68 institutions were visited, providing information on 27 partnership arrangements. The schools and colleges inspected are listed, by area, in annex B. Inspectors spoke to headteachers, college principals, managers, consortium co-ordinators, teachers, students and, in some cases, local education authority (LEA) officers. They analysed information about rates of progression to post-16 education and training, and data on retention and achievement. They also considered aspects of provision such as management, quality assurance and support for students. Preparation for the exercise was informed by earlier research conducted by the National Federation for Educational Research, the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), and by joint research involving the Local Government Association (LGA) and the

FEFC, and by findings from previous inspection activity carried out by the two inspectorates.

3 This study focuses mainly on the collaborative arrangements between schools, and between schools and colleges, involving a joint curriculum for 16 to 18 year olds. Other types of collaboration are also considered, but in less detail.

Main Findings

4 The main findings were as follows:

- all of the collaborative arrangements serve to broaden the curriculum on offer to post-16 students, to a greater or lesser degree. In most cases, they do this in an economical way
- consortia of institutions which jointly provide all their post-16 examination courses operate effectively and serve their students well. The strengths of the arrangements considerably outweigh any weaknesses
- in consortia where institutions jointly provide only a part of the curriculum, arrangements vary in their effectiveness, although in most cases the benefits are clear
- the effects of bilateral partnerships, involving a limited range of courses, tend to be marginal, but the partnerships are important to the small numbers of students who are able to take courses which otherwise they would not.

Strengths and advantages of collaboration

- post-16 consortia offer a significantly broader curriculum than institutions, particularly schools, could provide individually. A greater number of courses and more subject combinations are available to students and there is a wider range of routes for progression

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- highly valued courses, such as general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) modern languages and music, can be protected
- collaboration can reduce unnecessary duplication of provision in an area, and clarify the choices open to students post-16
- courses can be provided more economically
- there is increased stability in planning the provision because of the larger numbers of students
- students usually receive more balanced and comprehensive information about courses and progression routes
- collaborative provision provides a bridge between schools and higher education, as students gain confidence and experience of moving between different sites and adjusting to different environments and styles of teaching
- opportunities are created for staff to teach advanced level work in a wide range of subjects
- joint working provides professional development for staff
- joint production of teaching materials and shared use of teaching resources lead to greater efficiency
- in some cases, collaborative provision has raised levels of retention post-16
- students benefit from a wider range of social contacts.
- there is some loss of autonomy for individual institutions, for example in timetabling
- there are increased demands on staff time; for example, in attending meetings and in administration
- there is the cost and inconvenience of travel between sites
- there is little joint consideration of equal opportunities issues, particularly in respect of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Factors encouraging collaboration

- strong commitment from senior management
 - the appointment of an independent consortium director or co-ordinator at a senior level
 - a transparent and equitable system of financing the arrangements, which makes the economic benefits clear to all participating institutions
 - a regular and efficient system of contacts between institutions
 - good working relationships between staff at subject and course level; for example, through subject panels
 - a common timetable
 - a common system for assessing and reporting on students' progress
 - a common approach to post-16 guidance and recruitment
 - marketing by means of a joint prospectus
 - effective arrangements to assure the quality of teaching
 - the location of participating institutions within a relatively compact geographical area
 - efficient transport arrangements.
- Weaknesses and disadvantages of collaboration**
- there is often a lack of clear joint strategic planning
 - quality assurance measures are often inadequate
 - there is insufficient joint analysis of progression, retention and achievement
 - communication between institutions is sometimes slow or ineffective

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Factors discouraging collaboration

- the distance between institutions
- a lack of understanding between schools and colleges of different approaches to teaching, and a suspicion about the quality of collaborative teaching in the other sector
- the vested interests of staff who wish to retain their personal hold over sixth form teaching
- an unwillingness to compromise over timetabling and organisational arrangements.

Key Issues for Action

5 To encourage greater collaboration post-16, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the emerging local lifelong learning partnerships should consider:

- the inclusion of consortium arrangements in local learning plans
- external support for consortium transport costs
- convergence of the funding arrangements for schools and further education
- some allowance in any formula funding for the additional costs arising from essential liaison between institutions
- staff development initiatives which would allow staff from different institutions and sectors to work alongside one another in the classroom
- the publication of practical guidance on setting up simple but effective quality assurance measures for collaborative arrangements, focusing particularly on:
 - a. the quality of teaching;
 - b. the communication of information between centres;
 - c. the development of common performance indicators;
 - d. joint development planning;
 - e. target-setting;

- the option to publish consortium examination results in performance tables rather than separate school and college results
- the development of a system of central registration of collaborative arrangements to provide a national picture of the scope of this work and its contribution to regional planning.

Context of Collaboration

6 There is a long history of partnership within post-16 education, between schools, between colleges, and between schools and colleges. The nature and continuity of these partnerships have been dependent largely on the wider context in which the institutions operate. During the 1980s and early 1990s, much successful collaboration was generated through the technical and vocational education initiative. Once the funding for this initiative ended, new funding had to be found for the continuation of these partnerships, or they had to be maintained using the institutions' own resources. Some of them continued because of the goodwill which had been generated through joint activities, and came to form the basis of flourishing new initiatives. Others have ceased to operate, largely because of the competition between institutions that previous education policies have encouraged.

7 The nature and complexity of post-16 provision varies considerably between geographical areas, often within the same LEA. In some places, all students transfer at age 16 from schools to one or more colleges. In a few, fairly remote, rural areas the local school's sixth form is the only realistic post-16 option within easy reach. Some areas have well-established school sixth forms, but in others there has been a growth recently of new small sixth forms, often associated with grant maintained status. In most areas, students have a choice of school sixth forms or further education sector colleges,

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sometimes including sixth form colleges, for their post-16 education. In such situations, there is often fierce competition to recruit or retain students. Some colleges find it difficult to ensure that school pupils receive information and unbiased guidance about college courses, and some schools feel that the colleges employ unfair incentives to attract students. However, consortia or bilateral arrangements for the joint provision of GCE A levels and other courses can flourish in these areas, especially where schools have small sixth forms. Sometimes, in areas where progression rates at 16 are low, schools which take pupils from 11 to 16 years lease buildings to a college, so that post-16 education can take place on their own site.

8 Ongoing debates within some LEAs about the future of post-16 education can fuel anxieties in schools about their long-term viability. This can increase the attractiveness of collaborative arrangements. A number of college principals express frustration at the lack of coherent plans for 16 to 19 education within their local authorities. The paramount needs of young people for clear, well-publicised progression routes into appropriate programmes of good-quality education and training are not always sufficiently prominent in local policy and decision-making.

9 Colleges within the further education sector were pitched into competition with each other following incorporation, which was introduced through the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. The sector's objective of raising student numbers by 25% over three years significantly increased the pressure on colleges to compete. The pressure was increased further in some areas of the country by the high number of colleges in close proximity. Such factors made collaboration difficult for the first few years after incorporation. More recently, the pressures of the funding arrangements, and a desire to widen participation by recruiting from groups which do not normally participate in further education, have led to an upsurge of

collaborative projects. These have been encouraged by several initiatives sponsored by the FEFC, such as the investigations of the widening participation committee, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, and of the learning difficulties and/or disabilities committee, chaired by Professor John Tomlinson.

10 For several reasons, it is difficult to obtain a clear picture of the scope of collaboration in post-16 education. These include: the many different permutations of partnership, which often co-exist; the difference in terminology used to describe them; and the overlap between pre-16 and post-16 projects. There is also no official method for registering collaborative projects. A recent joint study by the LGA and the FEFC, *Effective Collaboration in Post-16 Education*, included a postal survey of LEAs and further education colleges to find out how many were engaged in collaborative activities. There were responses from 271 colleges and 94 LEAs, which suggested a relatively high level of collaborative activity. However, the situation is patchy. For example, 60% of the LEA schools, as well as several grant maintained schools, in one shire county currently operate in some form of partnership for post-16 provision, but in other LEAs collaboration is minimal.

11 In some areas, vigorous partnerships of key players in education and training have been formed to overcome potential barriers created by the political context and fragmented arrangements for supplementary funding. An example of this is the Manchester Education Training Partnership, founded in 1996 to increase participation and improve achievements among 14 to 19 year olds. The partners are: Manchester, Salford, Tameside and Trafford LEAs and their schools; Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC); all 12 further education sector colleges within the TEC boundary; and the local careers company. In 1996, the partnership secured approximately £2.5 million over seven years from the single regeneration budget to support its activities.

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Partnership terms allow for funds to be given to schools or groups of schools, or groups which include colleges and schools, but not to individual colleges or groups of colleges. This is to ensure that activities are designed to have a positive impact on the staying-on rates and achievements of 16 year olds.

12 In November 1998, the secretary of state announced plans to establish lifelong learning partnerships in all areas of the country during 1999. These partnerships, building where possible on existing good practice, will include LEAs and schools, further education colleges, careers services and TECs, as well as other local organisations. Their role is to help bring greater coherence to local provision for learning, including that for 16 to 19 year olds, concentrating immediately on establishing and monitoring local learning targets. These partnerships will clearly have a significant interest in collaborative arrangements.

13 The introduction of the further education collaboration fund in 1998-99 has encouraged the development of many new projects to investigate the rationalisation of post-16 provision. The eagerness with which the various providers of post-16 education have responded to the initiative shows that there is a keen awareness of the benefits to be derived from increased collaboration. The fund is mainly supporting feasibility studies costing up to £10,000, although in some areas, several inter-related applications have generated larger sums for a partnership to use on complementary projects. In 1998-99, the first year of the fund, over 400 applications have been supported. Of these, 30% provided funds for projects which are run jointly by one or more further education sector colleges with local schools and/or LEAs to investigate ways of rationalising provision for 16 to 19 year olds. Other applications have focused on collaboration between groups of colleges, and between colleges, LEAs and other interested parties, such as careers companies, external institutions and TECs, in order to widen

participation or provide improved opportunities for lifelong learning.

Types of Collaboration

14 Between schools, collaborative activities for post-16 students range from bilateral arrangements, which may simply enable a handful of students to study an additional GCE A level in another sixth form, to large-scale consortia, which, for examination courses, operate in effect as single sixth forms based on several sites.

15 Between schools and colleges, there are many types of collaboration, much of which is pre-16, and therefore outside the scope of this study. For example, further education colleges work with primary schools on family literacy or with younger pupils in secondary schools to stimulate interest in vocational education. Some forms of collaboration start with 14 year olds and continue through to work with 16 to 19 year olds; for instance, in providing support for general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses or for units pre-16 leading to higher level GNVQs in the sixth form. An important, and growing, area of work in further education involving the under-16s is with disaffected young people, many of whom have been persistent truants. Collaboration between special schools and colleges is well established. It may take the form of link courses to prepare under-16s for transfer to the college at 16, or vocational or life-skills training in college for school-based students.

16 Post-16 collaboration between schools and colleges usually involves the provision of GCE A levels and/or GNVQs to sixth formers. Sometimes the school, or a group of schools, purchases either a complete course or infills places on existing courses at a college which has expertise not available in the schools. Alternatively, bilateral arrangements may allow college students to go to schools for some GCE subjects, as well as allowing school students to

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go to the college for other courses. Consortia of schools with one or more further education colleges form some of the best-established collaborative arrangements in post-16 education.

17 Collaboration between colleges in the further education sector takes many forms. Some of the relationships which existed before the incorporation of colleges fell by the wayside. For instance, in some parts of the country, the LEA had created 'centres of excellence' for particular subjects within its various colleges, which limited the range of provision that individual colleges could offer. After incorporation, many colleges ignored these constraints and started up new work in competition with other local colleges. A combination of funding pressures and government incentives is now encouraging a return to joint planning and rationalisation. Collective approaches to issues such as quality assurance and a desire to exploit economies of scale are starting to flourish.

Sixth Form Consortia

Background

18 The survey involved visits to 14 areas in which sixth form examination courses are provided wholly, or in part, through consortium arrangements. Urban, suburban and rural areas and neighbourhoods ranging from affluent to deprived are all represented in the survey. Most consortia serve fairly distinct and compact catchment areas and involve all the post-16 educational providers in those areas. The number of schools involved in each of the consortia ranges from two to 14, but most commonly three or four. One or more further education colleges are actively involved in just over half of the consortia, and in a number of others there are informal links with the local college. In some cases, the distance between schools and the nearest further education

college makes any extensive collaboration impractical.

19 The consortia are generally well established; the one operating longest was set up 20 years ago, the most recent one four years ago. In most cases, the membership of consortia has remained relatively stable. It has been unusual for schools to opt out, though a few consortia have been affected by school closures over time. During 1998, two new schools have applied to join one of the most successful of the consortia as associate members, even though geographically they are some considerable distance away from the other institutions. Some further education colleges, initially involved in consortia, withdrew at the time of incorporation. In the last year or two, however, several of these colleges have started to re-establish links. Co-operation is growing again between the two sectors.

20 The consortia visited fit into two broad categories. The first group can best be described as full consortia, in that provision of all GCE A level and GNVQ courses is jointly planned and provided; the centres operate a common system of options, with co-ordinated timetables, and students move freely between sites as and when required. Eight of the consortia are of this first type.

21 The second group of consortia co-operate only in providing part of the curriculum. Two of them collaborate specifically on GNVQ courses. Three more share just one out of four or two out of five GCE A level option blocks, so that it is possible for students to take courses in other institutions only at certain times in the week. The schools in one consortium offer their options to a broadly common timetable, but with only limited joint planning; they each decide, largely independently, the courses they will provide.

22 The consortia were originally set up for a number of related reasons. In most cases, a need was identified to broaden the curriculum,

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particularly the number of GCE A levels being offered, and to protect minority subjects such as music and foreign languages. For schools with relatively small sixth forms, this could not be done economically from their own resources, so there were good financial reasons for considering a co-operative approach. Several of the consortia set up most recently were put in place specifically to provide GNVQ courses, with further education colleges taking the lead and providing the necessary vocational expertise. In some areas, the desire to raise post-16 participation rates also encouraged co-ordination and rationalisation of sixth form provision. Most colleges in the further education sector now have mission statements expressing their intention to meet the needs of their local community and to widen participation in post-16 education and training. Consortia arrangements clearly offer a vehicle for fulfilling these intentions.

23 Most of the consortia were established with LEA involvement and support. In several cases, the LEA took the initiative in setting up co-operative arrangements as part of its general post-16 strategy, though not all of the collaborations survived. Having helped to set up the consortia, however, most LEAs withdrew from direct involvement, simply maintaining some form of contact, for example, through observing management meetings. In a few areas, the LEA continued to provide significant support, in one notable instance by financing all the consortium transport arrangements as well as providing accommodation and some secretarial support for the consortium's director. The local TEC is directly involved in only one of the consortia.

24 Numbers of students involved in the consortia at the time of the visits ranged from 180 to 1,000, but most consortia involved between 300 and 600 students, making them comparable in size with small sixth form colleges. The definition of student numbers can vary when further education colleges are

involved in the consortia. In some cases, only the students from school sixth forms are counted towards consortia numbers; in others, full-time college students on GCE A level or GNVQ courses are also included. The latter approach gives institutions a stronger sense of being equal partners in a joint venture.

25 The individual sixth forms making up a consortium are, generally, similar in size, though there are a few exceptions to this. The greatest variation observed was in a city where participating sixth forms had initially been of roughly comparable size, but one had grown substantially to over 350 students and others had dropped to less than 100; the large school, though it could comfortably operate by itself, still finds it advantageous to maintain the collaboration. The majority of sixth forms in the survey have student numbers in the range from 80 to 200. A few are very small with fewer than 50 students; a handful have more than 200 students. In terms of student numbers, therefore, the schools are fairly representative of sixth forms nationally.

Management

26 In all of the full consortia, well-established management groups meet regularly, sometimes termly, in other cases more frequently, to determine policy and make decisions about major issues such as curriculum and finance. The management groups are usually composed of the headteachers of the schools involved, the principal or vice-principal of the college, where there is further education involvement, and, where relevant, the consortium director. In one of the consortia, the LEA is also represented by a district education officer. The success of the consortia owes a good deal to the commitment of these managers to the notion of post-16 collaboration, and to the trust and good working relationships between them.

27 Several of the consortia have recently set up joint groups, or committees, of governors from the different institutions. Most are not yet

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actively involved in the life of the consortia, but they represent an important additional level of commitment to the consortia, as well as providing a sense of local community interest in the arrangements.

28 Most of the full consortia have appointed a director or co-ordinator, usually at deputy head level, to manage the day-to-day arrangements and to take the lead in matters such as curriculum development, recruitment and the marketing of the consortium. The role of consortium director has been important in successfully setting up and developing co-operative arrangements, and the individuals appointed provide strong, well-informed leadership. In those consortia without an overall director, an administrative officer or secretary undertakes some routine work; other duties have to be tackled by senior managers from the individual institutions. In one area, for example, curriculum deputy heads from each school meet for one afternoon a week to deal with liaison issues. Post-16 initiatives are also more likely to be driven forward speedily by a single, independent consortium director than by a group of senior staff from schools and colleges who have to agree collectively the different stages of each development. The appointment of a consortium director is relatively expensive. However, there are other costs, some evident, others not, which have to be met when such an appointment is not made.

29 Management structures and systems are more varied in those consortia which provide only part of the post-16 curriculum. In some consortia there are fairly formal meetings of headteachers and principals; in others, there are less structured contacts between senior managers. Commitment to co-operative provision is less strong in some areas than in others. Post-16 decisions, which could have an impact on other partner institutions, are sometimes being taken unilaterally by individual institutions. For example, a school in one consortium decided to introduce its own GCE

A level theatre studies course, despite the fact that there were already other courses in the subject, taught by experienced staff, elsewhere in the consortium.

30 In most of the consortia, management and oversight of the curriculum is in the hands of the senior management group, or is delegated to deputy heads or vice-principals. To maintain stability in the curriculum, curriculum decisions are partly historical and partly based on likely student demand. In some cases, responsibility for delivery of different parts of the curriculum is the same every year; an example of this is where vocational elements of GNVQ courses are provided by the further education college and the schools have the responsibility for key skills and pastoral support. In other cases, some negotiation is required to allocate staff to courses. Such decisions are usually made on the basis of the number of students who come from the different institutions. In a few areas, senior managers are beginning to consider teaching quality as a criterion for deciding where in the consortium particular subjects should be taught. This is an important development in that it highlights a potential strength of consortium arrangements, as well as indicating the extent of co-operation and confidence between institutions.

31 Most consortia have well established, agreed procedures for financing the collaborative arrangements, which can be dealt with largely by administrative staff. Consortium directors have oversight of financial matters; where this post does not exist, financial matters are handled by senior managers in the separate institutions. The absence of centralised financial management can sometimes be a disadvantage; for example, in one case the consortium bus is nearing the end of its useful life, but no action has yet been taken on how a new one should be financed.

32 In a number of the consortia, responsibility for day-to-day matters is in the joint hands of the director, the heads of sixth form from each

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school and designated staff from the college, all of whom meet regularly. Good liaison within these groups is the key to the smooth and effective operation of the consortia. Information is usually passed efficiently between institutions, though in a few cases there is scope for greater use of information technology (IT) to speed up the process. Most of the consortia have some dedicated administrative support, usually based in one of the schools, or in a few cases in a separate consortium office. The scale of co-operative work makes such support essential in full consortia.

33 Approximately one-third of the consortia have subject panels which meet regularly. These perform an important function in enabling staff teaching the same subject from different institutions, and sometimes jointly teaching the same course, to co-ordinate planning and teaching, and ensure a common approach across the consortium. Though some teachers and lecturers find the meetings time-consuming, others recognise an additional benefit in the staff development resulting from this shared work. Some teachers in schools have benefited considerably from working with further education colleagues on the introduction of GNVQ courses. In the absence of subject liaison, where courses are taught jointly by staff from two or more institutions, students can experience quite different approaches, and connections between the various parts of the course are not always made. There is little other staff development involving collaborative partners.

34 Although the consortia visited are generally well managed, development planning needs greater attention from senior staff. In most cases, medium- and long-term development planning on a consortium-wide basis has been either tentative or non-existent. Institutions have concentrated on producing their own individual development plans and the need for similar planning for the post-16 collaborative arrangements has been largely overlooked.

The need for consortium development planning becomes clear when it is recognised that, in terms of budget and student numbers, the consortium is often as large a unit as the main 11 to 16, or 13 to 16, part of each individual school. Lifelong learning partnerships and local learning plans will increase the importance of development planning for consortia.

35 Although the individual institutions involved in consortia arrangements have their own equal opportunities policies, it is unusual for there to be a common policy across the institutions. For instance, there is little evidence of thinking about how the consortium might encourage participation by post-16 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and support them on their courses. Several consortia have helpful student charters, or similar statements of what the student and the consortium can each expect of the other. Most school-based students doing some of their courses in further education colleges receive a college diary setting out the college's equal opportunities policy. Student consortium councils also exist in some areas to enable the views of students to be represented, as well as providing a means of organising social events.

Quality assurance

36 There is considerable variation across the consortia in the range and effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms for collaborative provision. At the time of inspectors' visits, quality assurance arrangements were satisfactory or better in just under half the consortia. Two of the consortia provide examples of good practice. One, located in an urban area, has a number of useful initiatives under way, based on models common in further education. Means have been devised for evaluating lessons, performance indicators are in place and quality statements have been agreed for teaching and learning. The other consortium, involving schools only, and located in a rural area, has clear procedures for quality

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assurance at different levels of management.

These include:

- headteachers interviewing subject convenors about GCE A level results
- interviewing five students each term to monitor their general progress and experiences within the consortium
- deputy heads carrying out lesson observations within their own schools
- the consortium director tracking individual students' progress
- heads of sixth form monitoring students' written work by sampling students' folders, planners and lesson notes.

Helpful measures in other consortia include the systematic collection of the views of students by means of questionnaires, individual senior managers taking responsibility for monitoring the work in particular subjects or courses across the consortium and the use of value-added analysis of examination results. Good communication between centres is an important ingredient of effective quality assurance.

37 Individual institutions within consortia may have effective quality assurance procedures, but what is lacking is a coherent overall strategy. In general, there is inadequate analysis of progression rates and of achievement on a collaborative basis, to highlight strengths and weaknesses. In one case, joint courses, for which overall responsibility was unclear, were not being taught well, and there were inadequate mechanisms to pick this up. In most cases, problems encountered by students away from their own site are dealt with in a satisfactory way by informal contact between the director and senior staff in the school or college. Where issues arise, between what are autonomous institutions, these are dealt with sensitively. More formal and systematic quality assurance measures, however, would bring a helpful measure of detachment for those involved.

Funding

38 Funding arrangements vary quite considerably between consortia, even when their management and operation are otherwise similar. However, in most of the consortia visited, the institutions themselves appear content with the systems devised, and the financial arrangements seem generally equitable. The different funding models are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Model A

Each institution's contribution in teacher periods is expected to be in proportion to its student numbers. Funds are payable for any net movement of students between institutions exceeding these proportions. Transfer of funds is based on a concept of the value of a GCE A level course for each student. This is usually calculated as a quarter or a fifth of the funds paid to the school by the LEA for each pupil. This figure varied between £360 and £500 in the consortia visited.

39 The principle of matching teacher periods to student numbers usually leads to a suitable distribution of courses. However, in one consortium it has occasionally resulted in a successful, well-established course being switched to less experienced and less interested teachers at another centre, to balance numbers.

Model B

Funds are transferred on the basis of net student numbers moving between different institutions, but with different rates for school-school and school-college transactions. This reflects different methods of costing students' activities in the school and further education sectors.

40 This model can result in big differences in costs, depending on where students are following their courses. In one consortium, inter-school GCE A level charges are based solely on the costs of books and materials,

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because headteachers do not want the movement of students between schools to be finance-driven. As a result, it costs only £18 for each student taking a GCE A level subject in another school. By contrast, the college charges approximately £500 a head for school students to take a similar course. This has not acted as a disincentive to collaboration, since schools would retain £1,000 a year to cover pastoral and enrichment provision even if students were to take three GCE A levels at the college. Where there has not been a tradition of cross-sector collaboration, schools can be reluctant to pay for further education provision, even though rates are reasonable and realistic. As a result, further education sector colleges have little incentive to become involved.

Model C

A standard annual cost is determined for the provision of a GCE A level course. For example, in one consortium this is regarded as £6,000 for each course group, with some adjustment for practical subjects. Each school has to contribute a fraction of this amount, which represents the proportion of its students in the group.

41 Popular subjects are much cheaper for each student than those which are less popular. Schools are therefore reluctant to send their students to a minority subject in another school. This discourages the development of courses which are educationally worthwhile, but which initially are likely to recruit only small numbers.

Model D

Where a further education college provides vocational teaching for GNVQ courses, payments by the schools are based on the amount of teaching time in the college.

42 Different methods of calculating the costs of GNVQ teaching result in very different charges to schools for essentially the same provision. In the consortia visited, one college charged schools £900 for each GNVQ student, and another charged £1,250.

Model E

Each institutions pays £3,500 to be a member of the consortium, regardless of its level of involvement. GCE A level courses provided jointly by the consortium are charged at £540 for each student, with the income being divided between the institutions in proportion to the staffing contributed. Where students attend courses in other institutions on an infill basis, their home institutions are charged at only a tenth of the cost of jointly-provided courses. Costs for jointly-provided GNVQ courses are dependent on the numbers of students recruited. There are often substantial subsidies from the single regeneration budget and city challenge funds.

43 The result of this model is that, although the small sixth forms gain the most in terms of the extended curriculum offer, the largest sixth form gains the greatest financial benefit.

Model F

No charges are made for students attending courses from other institutions, in order to avoid bureaucracy and to encourage the spirit of collaboration.

44 This approach simplifies administrative arrangements. It can work well where only schools are involved in the collaboration, and where numbers moving between schools are fairly similar over the long term. However, the system acts as a strong disincentive to any participation by further education sector colleges.

45 Operating as part of a sixth form consortium entails additional costs for the institutions involved, most notably the cost of a director's salary and the costs of administrative support. In most cases, the institutions also bear the cost of transport for students between sites. In the full consortia, the director or co-ordinator's salary and other costs are usually shared equally between the institutions involved, and transport costs are shared on the basis of

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student numbers. In one consortium, the LEA continues to pay for student transport between sites.

46 Despite incurring these additional costs, schools in full consortia consider that they are more than offset by savings in the teaching budget. Some schools are effectively breaking even on sixth form costs and income, and others are able to use economies in the sixth form to improve provision in the main school.

In contrast, several of the schools with small sixth forms operating in partial consortia are still subsidising the sixth form from income generated by main school students. Further education colleges in consortia do not gain significant financial benefits from consortia arrangements. However, there are hidden benefits for colleges, such as increased publicity and greater progression by consortia students to college courses.

47 The benefits to schools involved in consortia arrangements are most clearly illustrated by an analysis of the additional staffing which would be needed to provide the extended curriculum from a school's own resources. The largest school in one consortium visited would need to employ an additional 3.3 full-time equivalent staff to deliver the current collaborative curriculum, and one of the smaller schools would need an extra six staff.

In another consortium, one school was concerned about its net outlay of £23,000 for sixth form courses. In fact, this was a relatively modest expense for the places available for its students on other sites, which covered 11 extra GCE A level subjects.

Curriculum organisation

48 All but two of the consortia visited, and all of the full consortia, were set up originally to broaden the GCE A level curriculum available to students. Most now offer GNVQ courses as well. Two consortia were established specifically to provide GNVQ and other vocational provision.

49 The number of GCE A level subjects on offer in the full consortia ranges from 18 to 33, with most offering close to the average of 25. Students, therefore, have a wide range of subjects from which to choose, and the fact that the most popular subjects are made available in several different option blocks means that the number of possible subject combinations is also much increased. Within the partial consortia, the range and combinations of GCE A level subjects vary according to the extent of joint provision, and how that relates to a centre's individual provision.

50 Within the full consortia, the most popular GCE A level subjects are usually taught in all of the institutions, with minority subjects allocated to particular sites, or shared by teachers from different schools and colleges. In effect, the consortium operates as a single sixth form and students can be timetabled for subjects on any of the sites, though as far as possible they are allocated to their home base, to keep travel to a minimum. In some consortia, up to 75% of students travel to other sites for some of their courses.

51 Although the majority of consortia provide GNVQ courses, the number of levels and vocational areas vary quite considerably. Most offer some advanced and intermediate courses, and a few at foundation level. Some provide only intermediate level courses within the consortium, though students may be able to register separately at the further education college to do an advanced level course. The two consortia dedicated to GNVQ work involve the greatest number of schools, 11 and 14, and are able to offer the greatest number of GNVQ courses. One of them provides intermediate and foundation levels, with students from local schools being able to choose from 13 different vocational areas at the further education college; the other provides advanced and intermediate level courses in six vocational areas. Students in school sixth forms in these consortia therefore have a much greater choice of GNVQ courses than is normally the case.

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52 For GNVQ courses, it is commonly the pattern for school-based students to do their key skills work in their school, and, where there is further education involvement, their vocational work in the college. This represents a straightforward division of responsibilities, making effective use of relevant expertise, but there is sometimes a lack of co-ordination across the two areas.

53 Although, in all consortia, examination courses are provided collaboratively, pastoral support and the majority of enrichment and other additional courses are the responsibility of the individual institutions. In some consortia, pastoral support and enrichment courses are similar across all the institutions; in others, the pattern of this provision varies considerably. Such diversity is often to be welcomed since it reflects the individuality of the different partners, but several of the consortia are now helpfully beginning to consider a minimum agreed entitlement for students, to provide a common framework for the work. The majority of schools have appointed heads of sixth form to take responsibility for the management and co-ordination of pastoral work carried out by a team of form tutors. Further education colleges usually have a common framework for tutorial provision as well as other aspects of support, such as welfare advice and professional counselling. There is scope in some consortia for a more carefully designed induction for students with greater consistency across institutions to help students adjust to the collaborative arrangements.

54 The effective operation of a consortium is dependent on a large measure of common timetabling between institutions. Although timetables do not have to match exactly, there has to be sufficient commonality over blocks of time to allow for travel between sites, and to ensure, for example, that students also have sufficient time for lunch.

55 Although many further education teachers are used to being timetabled for two or three hours at a time, most teachers in school sixth forms prefer shorter lessons. Nevertheless, being forced into longer time allocations often results in more varied styles of teaching and organisation of work. The students generally adapt quite easily to longer lessons. What is more of an issue is students' access to teachers, where a course is divided between two staff; they may see a teacher only once a week, and if problems arise at other times, it is not always easy to make contact, particularly if the teacher is based on another site. Also, if it is necessary to catch a bus to another site immediately after a lesson, there may not be time for the informal individual discussion which is often helpful at the end of a lesson. Although important, these difficulties need to be set in the context of the widely acknowledged benefits of consortium arrangements.

56 GNVQ course timetables often entail students spending whole days in different institutions. Some students also benefit from programmed work experience for one day each week. Although there is normally regular liaison between staff on the different sites, work done in school is not always well integrated with vocational work at college. Some easing of the strict division of responsibilities between school and college, for key skills and vocational work, might improve this.

57 In consortia where only one or two GCE A level options are shared there is less incentive to agree timings of lessons, and a few students experience difficulties in getting to lessons on time because of overlapping lesson timings. Occasionally, informal arrangements, involving some juggling of the timetable for unusual combinations of subjects, are not always sustainable from one year to the next, causing considerable difficulties for students on two-year courses.

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58 Economies of scale allow most of the consortia to operate with average group sizes above the norm for school sixth forms. By knowing that they will have sufficient numbers to operate relatively large groups in popular subjects, the consortia are able also to subsidise minority subjects, such as music, which are important to sustain in the interests of a diverse curriculum.

59 Collaborative arrangements have resulted in the sharing and more efficient use of expensive equipment; for example, for geography field work. One consortium is currently developing the use of video-conferencing facilities in the joint teaching of GCE A level subjects such as modern languages, English and technology. French and German exchanges, field work and visits to art galleries and museums are all more efficiently organised collaboratively than would be possible by single institutions; indeed, for very small numbers of students, some of these activities would not be viable.

Information, advice and guidance

60 All of the full consortia have common entrance requirements for their advanced level courses. Entry qualifications for GNVQ intermediate courses are generally treated more flexibly. In the other consortia, entry requirements are normally left to the individual institutions.

61 Information about post-16 courses provided to students in year 11 is often produced in common across the consortium. Such collaboration has led to some high-quality publications including full colour brochures that describe courses and routes through 16 to 19 education for all centres in the consortium. The information about the courses offered includes details of physical location, consequences for students' travel and good descriptions of academic and assessment demands. Where consortia include a college, representatives from the college are usually present at relevant

information-giving meetings for students and parents. Most schools fairly represent alternative courses provided outside the school and consortium. In most cases, students have ample opportunities to talk to staff about possible courses. The advice students receive is, generally, impartial.

62 Careers guidance is in the hands of individual schools and colleges, though some consortia collaborate to arrange joint visits to universities. Within each school, the head of sixth form plays a key role and is a main source of advice for students. In many schools, there are careers staff who provide access to advice and resources for those seeking information about the world of work. Students clearly benefit from having access to their own school staff and to careers company advisers. The best advice seen was the result of collaboration between centre staff and the careers advisory service. The most effective preparation for choices post-16 involved students in interviews with senior staff and with careers advisers, and ensured that parents had full knowledge of, and access to, the process. College students also have access to careers education and guidance, through tutorials and from careers companies. It is important that careers advisers working in schools and colleges understand the nature and extent of the collaborative arrangements. The quality of advice overall was better in full consortia than in centres involved in partial consortia arrangements.

Student progression and achievement

63 Where consortia have been developed recently, there has been an increase in student recruitment, mainly because of the increased number of vocational courses available. The development of consortia has also led to an increase in applications to higher education, mainly from GNVQ students.

64 Where collaboration has broadened the choice of courses for school students, there has been a reduction in the numbers leaving school

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to study full-time at further education colleges or other institutions beyond the consortium arrangements. However, where there is further education involvement in the consortium, this can act as a bridge from school courses to specialist vocational courses, particularly for those who may, through lack of confidence or maturity, be reluctant to leave the security of the school environment.

65 In the main, there is little evidence of a difference in students' achievements as a result of the introduction of consortium arrangements. Where value-added achievement data are available, they show that the overall performance of most consortium sixth forms is satisfactory. However, there are many schools in which value-added analysis is carried out in insufficient detail to determine the effects of collaboration.

66 Figures collected by one consortium over several years show very little difference between GCE A level success rates for in-house courses and those taught off-site. However, value-added analysis of examination results in some schools has shown that able students being taught for part of their courses on another site do rather better than those working only at their own school. There is limited evidence from a few centres that less able GCE A level students are not as successful if they move between sites for some of their courses.

67 Rates of progression to further education or higher education for students involved in consortium arrangements vary greatly. Some areas have traditionally had a low rate of progression to higher education. No consortium had analysed the progression data to show any differences between students involved in collaborative arrangements and students taught exclusively in the home school.

Monitoring and reporting student progress

68 There are good examples of institutions using faxes and other modern means of

communicating to review students' attendance or other concerns. In contrast, poor communications between some establishments occasionally lead to confusion over deadlines and important dates such as parents' evenings and Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) requirements.

69 Many schools and colleges in consortia have agreed the format of reporting on students and of monitoring progress. The commonest arrangement is for tutors to act as collators of information from teaching staff in the collaborating establishments. Staff use standardised documentation to record their assessments and judgements. In a few cases, reports are not completed consistently because individual members of staff fail to conform to, or do not understand, the reporting requirements. It was in partial consortium arrangements that most of these problems were identified. They have important consequences for students and need more careful attention.

70 Formal reporting to parents generally takes place twice a year. In the best practice, rapid reporting of concerns to the head of sixth form in the school in which the student is registered is followed quickly by student counselling and contact with parents to share issues of concern. One example of good practice involves a monthly assessment of the progress of students by their teachers. The subsequent report is sent home for parental signature before being returned. The common forms used in this consortium allow students and parents to add their comments to those of teachers.

Travel

71 The distance between collaborating centres varies considerably. In institutions situated close together, for example, on opposite sides of the same road, there can still be 10 minutes travelling time between lessons on different sites. In most cases students' timetables allow for time spent travelling. Staff move between sites for planning and review meetings, but, in most cases, they teach on their home sites.

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72 For the majority of students, travelling between consortia sites takes between 10 and 20 minutes. Full consortium sites are often within a mile of each other and students travel on foot or by bicycle. Beyond this range, students travel by car or bus.

73 Where sites are a substantial distance apart, the LEA sometimes provides travel passes for students, puts on a bus service or hires taxis. Alternatively, some consortia make their own arrangements. One consortium owns several buses, employs a full-time bus driver and provides a timetabled service which operates between the schools and the college at the start and end of the day, and at lunchtime. In a few consortia, the students describe travel arrangement as inadequate; taxi and bus services do not run on time and are unreliable. This situation is causing an unnecessary loss of teaching time. In one consortium, the teaching time lost through inadequate travelling arrangements is exacerbated by poorly matched timetables among the different institutions.

74 Most consortia centres have common timetables. Occasionally, staff do not adhere to these timetables, allowing lessons to overrun or starting lessons early by disregarding formal breaks. Timekeeping is not monitored effectively and a failure to follow timetables creates problems for students. Most schools where timetables remain unsynchronised are planning to introduce common timetables as soon as possible. In a few cases, lessons on other sites cannot be matched with the home base timetable. This problem is addressed by providing lessons after school and some lunchtime teaching.

75 The travel costs generated in some consortia are paid for by the LEA. Most frequently, where costs are incurred they are shared equally by collaborating centres even if the service is organised by one centre. In one consortium, this results in each centre making a payment of £6,400 for a minibus service

provided by the local further education college. In another consortium, three schools share the cost, £13,800, of maintaining a minibus and employing a driver. Where travel arrangements are unreliable and students resort to travelling independently they do so at their own expense.

Views of students and staff

76 The majority of students interviewed during the survey had a very positive attitude towards the collaborative arrangements. They all acknowledge the greater number of subjects and courses from which they could choose, and the increased viability of less popular subjects, such as music and Russian. They recognise also that having the same subject taught on different sites increases the number of ways in which GCE A level subjects can be combined. The students are clear that studying in another centre helps them to prepare for progression to higher education, because it helps improve their self-confidence and social skills, as well as providing variety in styles of teaching and learning.

77 School students had usually adapted well to the different cultures of collaborating centres and could accept the distinctiveness of different institutions. They enjoy what they perceive to be the less formal atmosphere of further education colleges but they also value the sense of security and the clear rules for behaviour within their own schools.

78 The majority of students interviewed by inspectors could think of few disadvantages in collaboration and some could identify none at all. Those problems which had arisen were largely a consequence of poor co-ordination. They relate typically to information not getting through in time about changes to, or cancellation of, lessons. On a few jointly taught courses, poor communications among teachers have led to fragmented teaching or imbalances in workloads, and problems with staff on another site are not always easy to resolve.

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79 Many students say they would prefer to stay at the school or college where they are enrolled to study the courses they have chosen. They are, however, reconciled to the need to move to obtain the courses or combination of courses they wish to study. It was clear that a significant number of students would not have moved completely to another institution to follow courses of study but that they were prepared to attend another centre for part of the time. Although an initial reluctance had often been expressed, the majority of students did not regret the move subsequently.

80 Most students feel that the quality of education they receive is similar across the partnership institutions. Where variations occur, these are attributed to the knowledge and skills of individual teachers. In one case, students described different centres having different entry requirements in terms of general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) performance, which they considered to be unfair. In the few consortia where timetables and teaching time allocated to subjects in different centres varied, students were well aware of this issue before making their choice of courses.

81 Improvements to collaborative arrangements, suggested by students, include: ensuring that induction at the end of year 11 fully covers the implications of collaborative arrangements and introduces students to the partner institutions; reducing the number of staff teaching a course, particularly in further education colleges; and better monitoring of teaching and administration across the consortium.

82 Senior staff are generally committed to the consortia arrangements, though they are realistic about some of the difficulties that can arise and the problems that need to be resolved. Heads of department and other teaching staff display more mixed views and varying degrees of enthusiasm for the collaborative

arrangements. Some welcome the opportunity to work with a wider range of colleagues, but others have concerns about their loss of autonomy. However, they largely support the consortia arrangements since they recognise that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

83 Staff recognise many of the advantages acknowledged by their students in terms of a broader curriculum, provided more economically. Other benefits that they highlight include: increased professional contacts, particularly for teachers of minority subjects; the fact that a greater pool of staff helps minimise the effects of the sudden departure of any individual teacher; and increased motivation where students are able to follow their course of first choice through the collaborative arrangements.

84 Perceived disadvantages include: having to teach for long blocks of time; the difficulty of following up issues arising in lessons when students are on another site; and the time taken in communicating and joint decision-making. Concerns are expressed in a number of cases about the quality of teaching and student support on other sites, most frequently where schools and colleges are involved. Particular concerns among further education staff are about the experience and qualifications of school teachers to teach vocational courses; school staff are often concerned about mid-course changes in personnel and cancellation of lessons in colleges. Senior managers and students confirm some of these problems, but in other cases, uncertainties arise from a lack of knowledge and understanding of practice in the other sector.

85 In the majority of consortia visited, there is no joint staff development and collaboration is confined to deciding which centre is to teach a particular subject or section of the syllabus, where teaching of the subject is shared. Where joint staff development does take place, it is often driven by the enthusiasm of staff. Staff wanting more contact with other centres

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sometimes express frustration that the necessary time is not allocated for such activity. Where moderation for examination courses has to be carried out jointly, it helps develop common views of requirements and standards and leads to a useful exchange of professional views. Where new curriculum content is being developed, for example, in GNVQ courses, staff collaborate more fully.

86 In considering how collaborative arrangements might be made more effective, suggestions from teachers are often similar to those raised by students. Additional priorities include: the need for a greater focus on the needs of students during recruitment, rather than on the need of the institution or department to maintain student numbers; better staff training specifically for consortium working; and consideration of whether there are some aspects of pre-16 activity where greater co-ordination might contribute to more effective collaboration post-16.

Bilateral Arrangements between Further Education Colleges and Schools

87 Many colleges have arrangements with individual schools that have approached them to provide GCE A level subjects or vocational courses that cannot be provided in the school. The teaching may be provided at the school or at the college. This commonly occurs in areas where there is stiff competition among 11 to 18 schools for sixth form pupils. A school with a small sixth form may struggle to offer a good range of courses; schools with stronger, more academic sixth forms sometimes collaborate with their local college to give students access to vocational programmes or to less common GCE A level subjects. In some arrangements, college students can attend the school for GCE A level subjects, such as music, which are not available in the college.

88 In one example, 20 students from a school attend an agriculture college to study intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses in business. They also have an option to study additionally for a national vocational qualification (NVQ) in agriculture, horticulture, equine or animal care. In another, a school sends students to the college to study for GCE A levels in media studies, law, history and sociology. In a third example, sixth formers are taking part in a pilot programme, in which they attend the college two days a week to take NVQ level 1 and 2 programmes in hairdressing and beauty therapy, business administration, retail and customer service, with a further two days a week in school and one on work placement.

89 Bilateral arrangements are usually small-scale and funded by the school, which pays the college for staffing and resource costs according to an agreed formula. There are sometimes uncertainties over funding. In one instance, the college expects the school to pay the full sum for students who withdraw, even when the students have progressed to other courses at the college. In another example, a school with a struggling sixth form clearly needs to develop alternative provision to GCE A levels for its pupils, but does not have the resources to do so. It is situated in an area where parents place great emphasis on GCE A levels, and competition between schools is intense. It is, therefore, concentrating on providing GCE A level programmes in conjunction with the local college, even though few of its pupils have the necessary qualifications. Thus opportunities to increase progression for less academic students are being overlooked. Quality assurance arrangements are not always well developed in these bilateral collaborations.

90 Bilateral arrangements have the advantage of allowing students to remain at their school and get the benefit of a wider curriculum and the experience of attending another institution. They are not improving the progression of students to post-16 education on a large scale.

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There are some examples of colleges working with special schools and projects for the homeless or disaffected to provide education and training opportunities for students aged 16 to 19 who would otherwise not have attended a college or school. One 11 to 16 school with a very low progression rate at the end of year 11 has worked with its local college to develop a customised short course of 15 weeks, designed to appeal to school-leavers who are not in employment three months after leaving school. This new course, which started in November 1998, is delivered in a community centre in collaboration with partners such as local employers and the youth service. A residential element, funded by the single regeneration budget, is included in the course. The course is intended to break down barriers to participation, such as alienation from education and training, lack of self-confidence in the ability to learn, poor basic and interpersonal skills, and unwillingness to travel. The funding for 12 students is being provided by the Manchester Education Training Partnership.

Bilateral Arrangements between Schools

91 Bilateral partnerships usually occur between schools which are geographically close, and the collaboration is normally on a relatively small scale. In some cases, collaboration takes place within a consortium which covers just part of the curriculum; for example, GNVQ courses. In addition, some of the institutions negotiate to provide particular GCE A level subjects.

92 A number of the arrangements are well established, enabling individual institutions to develop or maintain expertise in areas which their own sixth form numbers could not sustain, as well as increasing access to other minority subjects. For example, one school with a successful record in GCE A level French takes students from a neighbouring school for this subject, and its own students move in the

opposite direction for GCE A level music. The arrangements enable the curriculum to be broadened in an economic way. They require some limited matching of timetables, but otherwise little bureaucracy is entailed.

93 Other bilateral arrangements are developed as necessary to tackle particular timetabling or staffing difficulties. In some of these cases, differences between the timetables of the two schools are not always resolved before courses start and students face difficulties with travel and sometimes miss parts of lessons.

94 In one consortium, where the schools currently offer just one common GCE A level block, additional bilateral arrangements between different combinations of schools help to increase class sizes. However, their existence confuses the overall curriculum picture, and prevents the further development of the consortium. In contrast, additional bilateral arrangements between neighbouring schools in another consortium have not detracted from the overall effectiveness of the consortium.

Further Education Provision on School Sites

95 A less common type of collaboration is where post-16 education is provided by further education colleges on 11 to 16 school sites. It usually occurs where there is a history of poor progression from year 11 into further education, generally low GCSE attainment in the area, and an unwillingness by students to travel far from their home location. For some students, this reluctance to participate is a matter of family culture or the lack of a family history of education post-16. The colleges involved all have a commitment to widen participation among groups who do not normally enter further education, and to respond to the needs of the community. The schools concerned are also keen to improve their students' prospects, and to raise the expectations of pupils entering

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the school by providing a proxy 'sixth form' on the premises. The involvement of the LEA is usually marginal, for instance in allowing the college to lease school buildings at low cost.

96 In the six examples seen by inspectors, the college provides post-16 education in a building on the same site as the school. In most cases, teaching is provided jointly by school and college staff, and sometimes by college staff only. The college will also provide a manager or co-ordinator, occasionally partnered by a colleague from the school. Where the college has several post-16 centres, there may be a central co-ordinating group as well as separate management groups at each centre. Decisions about the curriculum are taken by the central management group, the local management group or the local co-ordinators. Senior managers have an influence on the overall direction of the curriculum in keeping with their institutions' missions. Memoranda of agreement have been drawn up between the college and the schools setting out the parameters of the collaboration. These have been closely based on the recommendations made by the FEFC to colleges with franchised provision.

97 Quality assurance arrangements are the same as those for the main college sites. These usually include lesson observation, and surveys of students' views and complaints procedures. However, in the centres visited by inspectors these arrangements were not always being implemented effectively. In some centres, there was an inadequate analysis of enrolments, retention and student achievement. In others, there was inadequate attention to the management of students' time while they were on the premises. Students are, generally, made aware of the *Charter for Further Education* and the procedure for making complaints. The college's equal opportunities policy is drawn to their attention during the induction programme.

98 Students at the centres are funded through the college's normal arrangements with the FEFC. The college pays the school for any

staffing costs incurred, as well as for accommodation, although the latter payment may be confined to the cost of cleaning, heating and lighting. These arrangements do not result in profits for the colleges. There are also hidden costs for the schools, such as the depreciation of buildings. However, the school headteachers and college principals are committed to the arrangements which they feel will pay off in the long term in improved opportunities for students and greater student numbers.

99 There is some evidence that the presence of the post-16 centres on school sites has increased progression from year 11 to further education. In one city, the participation rate rose by 7% in 1996-97, half of which has been attributed to the post-16 centres. The progression rate, however, is not always as great as college and school staff believe it to be. There is sometimes a lack of rigour in the analysis of data on enrolment, retention and achievement which leads to an overoptimistic view of the benefits of the provision. Retention rates are good or improving in some instances, but poor in others. Sometimes students take longer than usual to complete qualifications.

100 The post-16 centres usually provide a mix of GNVQs and other vocational courses, and a small range of GCE A levels. Students do not have the same choice as they would have in a further education or sixth form college, or a well-established school sixth form. Sometimes, the range of courses offered is unsuitable. In one centre, there was only one intermediate level GNVQ course, yet there was considerable drop-out from the four advanced level GNVQ courses. The curriculum may fluctuate depending on the availability of staff and the demand from students for particular courses. School staff working in some centres have benefited from training in the delivery and assessment of GNVQs from college staff, and through having the chance to teach post-16 students. Post-16 centres are, generally, under-resourced when compared with the main

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college, particularly in respect of the library and IT facilities, and general services such as canteens.

101 Students receive tutorial support and guidance in the same way as other college students. Careers advice is provided by appointment with careers advisers who visit the centre at certain times of the week or term. In some cases, there are weaknesses in marketing and pre-enrolment guidance stemming from the college's agreement to recruit only students who would not go elsewhere. Some students are following courses because they are available on the school site; they would not necessarily opt for the same courses if there were a wider choice available.

102 Students are pleased to have further education provided for them on their home ground. Many stated that they would not have travelled to another site. They valued being near their homes, and in particular having some teachers who had known them throughout their secondary school careers. They enjoyed being in a separate 'sixth form' building, with a more adult ethos and no school uniform. However, they were aware of the relatively poor resources and facilities provided in some centres. Staff are generally positive about the post-16 centres, as they are keen to improve progression rates for 16 year olds entering further education.

103 The chief advantage of these arrangements is that they provide local further education centres for students who lack the confidence to travel further afield. However, this can lead to a preponderance of students with little motivation or initiative. Combined with the social disadvantages of many of the students, this can have a detrimental effect on retention and achievement unless effective quality assurance systems are in operation. The chief factor supporting the collaborative arrangements is the commitment of headteachers and college principals. In the longer term, the factor likely to discourage collaboration is that most of these arrangements are running at a loss.

Collaboration between Colleges in the Further Education Sector

104 The pressures of competition induced by incorporation, government policy and the funding methodology have made it more difficult for colleges to collaborate as they had done previously. Nevertheless, some well-established collaborative arrangements have survived the new climate. These include joint planning groups, some joint provision for students and collaborative arrangements for the recruitment of students. In some areas, the LEA's policy before incorporation encouraged strong links between colleges and sometimes these links have continued. For example, colleges may collaborate on joint recruitment activities among school-leavers in an area which has 11 to 16 secondary schools.

105 There has been a recent surge of collaborative arrangements between groups of colleges intent upon generating economies of scale, mutual support and development activities. It is too soon to see how successful these partnerships will be. An example of one such collaboration is the Crescent Link, which connects nine colleges in the north of Manchester. It is the intention of this group to look at ways of jointly developing and improving many aspects of their work, including quality assurance and governance, curriculum development and bulk-purchasing. Another example is Birmingham Community College, which has recently been set up as a company limited by guarantee. The organisation is jointly developing: personnel procedures and a staffing agency; purchasing arrangements; applications for external funding; marketing initiatives; staff and governor development; an applications clearing house; and curriculum mapping.

106 It is the government's intention to put in place local, lifelong learning partnerships for post-16 education and training throughout

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England. The FEFC is currently working with the LGA, the Training and Enterprise Council National Council and the Careers Service National Association to bring these partnerships into existence. The key objectives for the work are: to raise educational standards; to improve the quality of provision; to increase choice and to enhance the quality of guidance; to encourage suitable broadening of the curriculum; to improve cost-effectiveness; to ensure access to local provision; to encourage coherence of local planning; and to avoid wasteful duplication of provision.

107 The Sussex Sixth Form Colleges Consortium is an example of a consortium-style arrangement which has been in existence for five years. Seven colleges come together in this group to provide mutual support. It has been particularly active in the areas of curriculum and staff development. There are 22 curriculum groups which give staff from the colleges the opportunity to share good practice. Joint applications and the sharing of information are also important aspects of the consortium's activities. The consortium has contracted with the University of Brighton Centre for Training and Development to provide a secretariat to administer its activities.

108 Competition has been the traditional response of neighbouring colleges offering similar courses. However, there are examples of the rationalisation of course provision between nearby colleges. In one, a further education college has decided to abandon all its full-time GCSE and GCE A level provision for 16 to 19 year olds, and all its science courses, following discussions with the managers of a local sixth form college which achieves good results for its GCSE and GCE A level provision. Discussions have led to a clearer understanding of the strengths of the two institutions and to greater collaboration in the development of the curriculum offered in the town.

109 The rationalisation element of the further education collaboration fund has generated many successful applications for funding to investigate new collaborative arrangements between colleges, often with other partners such as LEAs, TECs and careers services. The range of projects being funded is wide. It includes curriculum-focused activities, designed to improve opportunities in particular curriculum areas. For example, one college was awarded funding to work with its local football club, metropolitan borough council and health and education action zones to rationalise sports and leisure training in the locality. Other areas and activities which have received funding include learning resources, information and communications technology, support services, administrative functions, widening participation and the exploration of mergers. In East Anglia, six sector colleges have obtained £40,000 for feasibility studies into: the use of community workers attached to colleges as a means of widening participation; joint marketing of further education services; the rationalisation of publicity activities; and a framework for the development of high-quality learning materials.

110 During 1997-98, the FEFC's inclusive learning initiative encouraged and funded co-operation between 96 colleges. The colleges worked in 10 groups on the preparation of materials for use in the development of inclusive approaches to learning. In the same period, the FEFC's widening participation initiative has funded 26 new strategic partnerships, through which over 160 colleges are working with external partners such as TECs and local authorities. The purpose of these partnerships is to identify the groups of people in their areas who are under-represented in post-16 education and training and to develop strategies for encouraging them to return to education.

Case Studies

1 Abingdon Consortium: Schools and Further Education

Four centres, three 11 to 18 schools and a college of further education collaborate in the Abingdon Consortium. Collaboration in the area began in 1978 when sixth formers were able to move from one school to another to take particular GCE A levels. A more structured system was put in place in 1988 in which all the schools provided a basic curriculum of the most popular GCE A levels and subjects in a 'second tier' were available by negotiation only in particular centres. Under the present consortium arrangements, which have been operating for about five years, a total of 27 GCE A level courses are offered within a common timetable. Some of these courses are offered at all institutions. Others are offered in combinations, either by sharing courses between two institutions, or by being taught wholly in one establishment but fully available to all students in the consortium.

Students choose which institution will be their home base. The majority choose the school they attended up to the end of their year 11. The home institution receives the funding for each student from the LEA, in the case of schools, or the FEFC, in the case of colleges. Subjects are offered in four option blocks agreed by the four centres. Subjects taught in more than one centre are offered in different option blocks to maximise the number of permutations of courses. On occasions, students' choices have been accommodated by changing the pattern of options to make it possible for them to follow a combination unavailable in the initial grid of options.

All major decisions affecting the consortium and its timetabling are made by the senior management group. This group comprises the headteachers and college principal, deputy

headteachers and college co-ordinators, the divisional educational officer and the consortium secretary. The consortium secretary is a member of staff from one of the centres, who holds the post for two years. Separate working groups of timetable organisers, heads of years, examination secretaries and a brochure group, responsible for publicity and documentation describing the collaboration, take responsibility for particular aspects of the collaboration. A governors' liaison committee, consisting of three representatives from each institution, supports the senior management group.

The amount of teaching undertaken by each school is determined in proportion to the number of its sixth form students, so no transfer of funds takes place between the schools. Charges are made by the college when school students attend the college, or vice versa, on the basis of £120 a term for each GCE A level subject.

There is a common reporting system across the consortium. Three times a year students co-operate with staff in generating an interim report, and once a year there is an opportunity for parents to attend an evening of consultation with teaching staff. Students receive an annual report which contains both the students' evaluation of their own performance and their teachers' responses. Teachers also give grades for effort and grades describing their GCE AS or A level examination potential. The reverse of the form allows students to develop an individual action plan in response to the report, which is countersigned by the subject teacher. Each report covers one subject area if taught wholly within an institution, or contains one report from each of the centres contributing to the teaching of the course.

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The strengths and benefits of these collaborative arrangements include:

- the development of a common approach to all 16 to 19 full-time provision in Abingdon, including vocational courses from September 2000
- a common assessment and reporting framework and documentation
- strong senior management and leadership
- good co-ordination, joint planning and sharing of ideas in departments that have forged good links between centres
- joint publication of examination performance tables in a common format
- common value-added analysis of examination results which is published in all collaborating centres, with a requirement for heads of department to produce action plans in response
- an increase in group size and hence improved efficiency
- a wider range of subjects and an increased number of possible combinations of courses
- retaining Abingdon students who would otherwise go elsewhere for post-16 education.

2 East Northamptonshire Consortium: Schools

Four schools currently work together in this consortium. Collaborative arrangements have been in operation for 12 years. Initially, the headteachers at two schools decided in 1985-86 that the most realistic way forward in securing post-16 provision was through a joint programme. This had the attraction of providing the schools with a broader range of courses and cost savings. Soon after the introduction of the programme, two more schools joined the consortium. The group of four schools has maintained the same pattern of sixth form provision over the last decade.

Currently, there are 23 GCE A level subjects, three GCE AS subjects and six GNVQ programmes on offer, which cover three vocational areas at intermediate and advanced level. Over time, new programmes have been introduced and others withdrawn. There has been a gradual expansion overall, particularly with the introduction and establishment of vocational programmes.

Headteachers appointed to consortium schools since its establishment have all been convinced of the advantages and benefits arising from membership of the consortium. The post of consortium assistant headteacher, who acts as the overall co-ordinator, has been redefined and made into a permanent position over the past two years. One of the four schools has applied for and been given grant-maintained status. This has not created any problems. In fact, the headteacher has reported a number of advantages such as dealing with ordering and funding issues.

There is a clearly defined management structure which operates at a number of different levels. The headteachers and the consortium assistant headteacher meet on a monthly basis to discuss long-term planning and other key issues relating to the management of the consortium. The deputy headteacher and head of sixth form from each school and the consortium assistant headteacher meet on a half-termly basis to discuss and plan curriculum change and major developmental issues. A major responsibility of this group is monitoring and evaluating the consortium arrangements. The heads of sixth form group meets on a monthly basis to discuss and manage the day-to-day running of the consortium. GNVQ co-ordinators attend these meetings each half-term. Subject teachers meet on a monthly basis and discuss students' progress and issues related to the teaching of their subject. Each team is led by a convenor for that subject who acts as the contact with the management system. The timetable group meets the consortium assistant headteacher as

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headteacher as do examinations officers. Other consortium groups meeting on a less regular basis include librarians and bursars. All of this ensures that issues are debated in appropriate forums and that decisions are well informed and effectively communicated.

A number of costs are shared equally among the four schools. These include: the salary and travel expenses of the assistant consortium headteacher; the salary of the consortium examination officer; and the costs of the consortium bursar who works for five hours each week on consortium matters. The costing of the teaching programme is based on an agreed formula. The intention is that the schools avoid, wherever possible, the transfer of money. Balance is achieved, for example, by schools which have a deficit taking on responsibility for additional teaching.

Each school takes responsibility for pastoral support and guidance relating to its home-based students. Certain time slots are designated for guidance or enrichment activities in the respective schools. The consortium has produced common guidelines for a tutorial programme, but schools have the freedom to interpret this as they choose, and practice varies quite considerably.

Transport between sites is centrally organised; it operates efficiently and matches timetable requirements. The schools divide the total transport bill on the basis of student numbers.

The main strengths and benefits of these collaborative arrangements include:

- the strong role of the consortium assistant headteacher who has the support of all four headteachers. The fact that she teaches across the sites is important for her credibility
- the effective partnership of both LEA and grant-maintained schools
- the sound funding arrangements. There is an agreed formula for teaching costs, which is operated with a sensible degree of flexibility

- the constant review and development of the programme over the years
- the detailed and effective arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the provision and the students' performance.

3 West Nottinghamshire Consortium: Schools and Further Education, with Bilateral Arrangements

Fourteen schools collaborate with West Nottinghamshire College to provide intermediate and foundation GNVQ courses for their students. Some schools are fairly close to the college; others are up to 15 miles away. The present arrangements have been in place since 1993, although some of the schools had previously collaborated with the college in relation to the provision of some courses, such as the certificate in pre-vocational education programme. Two Derbyshire schools, which already had a bilateral collaborative arrangement, joined the consortium in 1996.

Students from the collaborating schools can choose from a menu of 12 foundation and intermediate GNVQ courses, provided at the college, in collaboration with each school. The courses cover art and design, built environment, distribution, engineering and technology, health and social care, hospitality and catering, IT, leisure and tourism, manufacturing, media and communications, retail, and science. In addition, a level 1 NVQ in motor vehicle engineering and valeting is available to students. By agreement within the consortium, the college alone provides advanced GNVQ courses. Of the foundation and intermediate GNVQ students, 60% progress to full-time advanced GNVQ courses at the college.

Students attend the college for GNVQ vocational units on Thursday and Friday of each week, and they study key skills and other courses such as personal and social education or repeat GCSEs

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at their home school from Monday to Wednesday. The college has given a commitment to run all the courses each year, however low student numbers are. This is a strong contribution to the stability and breadth of the curriculum available in the consortium schools. The college bills the schools on a termly basis for the 10 hours of teaching a week each of their students receives. The cost of travel is paid for by grants from the LEA. This is a positive encouragement for students to continue into 16 to 19 education, even though many of the students come from low-income families.

In all of the schools, there is an acknowledgement that it is more economical to collaborate with the college than to try to provide a full range of vocational courses from the school's own resources. Also, it would be impossible for any individual school to provide the wide range of vocational expertise that is made available to students through these arrangements. The co-operation between the further education and school sectors allows academically less successful students, who may also often lack self-confidence, to follow appropriate and motivating courses in a new environment for part of the week, while retaining the security of, and familiarity with, their home school.

Some of the schools also co-operate bilaterally in providing particular GCE A level courses, and one operates an exchange of students with the college for some GCE A level subjects. The bilateral provision takes a variety of forms. In one case, staff from the two schools jointly teach music and religious education, and French and German teaching alternates between the schools each year. One school takes sole responsibility for teaching business studies and economics, and the other has responsibility for sociology. In another case, one school provides GCE A level business studies, sociology and performing arts, and the other undertakes the teaching of GCE A level physical education and

computing. These arrangements require significant timetable co-ordination.

The main strengths and benefits of these collaborative arrangements include:

- a commitment from management teams to collaborate, which is supported by the LEA and managed through regular co-ordination meetings
- a broader curriculum, giving school students a wide choice of courses for the one-year vocational sixth form and an increased choice of GCE A level subjects
- shared teaching of courses, which allows reasonably sized groups to be formed in subjects that might otherwise be regarded as uneconomic
- the willingness of students, who are reluctant to attend the college full time, to take up courses at the college while retaining a home school base
- students' appreciation of being treated as adults at the college
- students' improved social development and increasing self-reliance in learning
- increased opportunities for the professional development of staff
- the systematic monitoring of attendance and progress, which has resulted in increased attendance rates
- the provision of free transport for students by the LEA, which contributes to the smooth running of the consortium.

4 Golden Hillock School Post-16 Centre: Further Education Provision on School Site

East Birmingham College, now part of City College, Birmingham, has established a post-16 centre at Golden Hillock School, an 11 to 16 mixed school situated in Small Heath, Birmingham. Some external funding was

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obtained from the single regeneration budget and from European sources. Before the centre was formed, there was no post-16 provision in the locality. The local population has a high proportion of residents of Pakistani origin and, for cultural reasons, many of the female pupils at the school were unable to travel out of the area to post-16 colleges. After it was approached by the school, the college leased one block of the school building from the LEA in 1995 and furnished it as a women-only post-16 centre with its own entrance and facilities, resources room, classrooms and specialist equipment. The college has five other such centres and a higher education centre, thus giving women students opportunities for progression from foundation to higher levels. The centre managers and teachers are all college staff.

The centre carries out research to identify the needs of potential students, working closely with Golden Hillock School and others in the locality, and with the local community. The curriculum is based on local employment opportunities. It is heavily biased towards childcare and business as these provide students with good employment prospects. In addition, many Pakistani pupils spend long periods abroad or come to this country as teenagers. The centre has established foundation courses to meet their needs. Courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are provided at a number of levels. Students are able to follow a range of supplementary qualifications in subjects including IT, wordprocessing, first aid and Urdu. There are good opportunities for students to develop key skills and develop their basic skills.

The majority of the centre's students come from the school. The number of new students at the centre increased by 68% between 1996-97 and 1998-99. Attendance and retention rates at the centre are good. In 1997, the in-year retention rate was 92%; in 1998, it was 98%. Pass rates are good on many courses, particularly childcare. The students value the familiar

location of the centre and the fact that it is for women only. Most students spoken to by inspectors said that they would not have travelled to a course at the college's main site, which is about 4 miles away.

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School and College Collaborative Arrangements Included in the Survey

Abingdon

Abingdon College*
Fitzharrys School*
John Mason School
Larkmead School*

Birmingham

City College, Birmingham*
Golden Hillock School
North Birmingham College*
Perry Beeches School

Bradford

(North Bradford Commonwealth)

Beckfoot Grammar School*
Nab Wood Grammar School*
Salt Grammar School
St Bede's RC Grammar School*
St Joseph's RC College*

East Northamptonshire

Huxlow School*
Manor School*
Rushden School*
The Ferrers School*

Lewisham

(Crossways Consortium)

Addey and Stanhope School*
Deptford Green School*
Hatcham Wood School*
Lewisham College*

Lewisham

(Hillsyde Consortium)

Forrest Hill School*
Sedgehill School*
Sydenham School*

Lincoln

North Kesteven School*
Robert Pattinson School*

Lowestoft

Benjamin Britten High School*
Kirkley High School*
Lowestoft College*
The Denes High School

Macclesfield

Macclesfield College*
Ryles Park High School*
Wilmslow High School*

Manchester

Loreto College*
Manchester College of Arts and Technology*
Moston Brook High School
Newall Green High School*
North Manchester High School for Boys
North Manchester High School for Girls*
Our Lady's RC High School
St Alban's RC High School
St Gregory's RC High School
St Matthew's RC High School
Wright Robinson Sports College*

Northampton

Moulton College*
Moulton School*
Northampton College*
Northampton School for Girls*
Thomas Beckett RC Upper School

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Oxford

Cheney School
Cherwell Upper School*
Milham Ford Girls' School*
Oxford College of Further Education*
Oxford Upper School
Peers School
St Augustine of Canterbury Upper School*

Sleaford

Carre's Grammar School*
Kesteven and Sleaford High School*
St George's Technology College*

South Gloucestershire

Downend School*
Hanham School
Kingsfield School
Mangotsfield School*
Sir Bernard Lovell School*
Soundwell College*
The Grange School

Stourbridge

Stourbridge College*
Thorns School and Community College

Tameside

Hattersley High School
Tameside College*

Tamworth

Queen Elizabeth Mercian High School*
Rawlett School
Tamworth and Lichfield College

Welwyn Garden City

Monks Walk School*
Oaklands College*
Sir Frederic Osborn School*
Stanborough School*

West Nottinghamshire

Ashfield School*
Bruns School*
Dukeries Community College
Manor School
Matthew Holland School
Meden School*
Mortimer Wilson School
Quarrydale School*
Queen Elizabeth's School
Rufford School
Sutton Centre
The Holgate School
The Kirkby Centre
Swanwick Hall School*
West Nottinghamshire College*

Inter-college collaborative arrangements

Cheshire

Cheshire Colleges Partnership
Macclesfield College*
Mid-Cheshire College of Further Education
Reaseheath College
Sir John Deane's College
South Cheshire College
West Cheshire College

Lancashire

The Crescent Link
Bolton College
Bury College
Eccles College
Hopwood Hall College
Oldham College*
Oldham Sixth Form College
Pendleton College
Salford College
Wigan and Leigh College

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Sussex

The Sussex Sixth Form Colleges Consortium

Bexhill College

Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form
College

Haywards Heath College

Park College, Eastbourne*

College of Richard Collyer in Horsham

Varndean College

Worthing Sixth Form College

South West

South West Colleges Benchmarking Group

Cirencester College

Cricklade College

Exeter College

Henley College

Strode College*

Truro College

Also includes:

The Henley College

Additional information provided by

Bradford and Ilkley Community College

City College, Manchester*

Derby Tertiary College, Wilmorton

Reaseheath College

Stroud College of Further Education*

Shipley College*

Wigan and Leigh College

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