



The responsiveness of colleges to the needs of employers

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Executive summary

Half the general further education (GFE) colleges surveyed undertake a significant amount of work with and for employers. In most cases, this is relevant and well received. About 15% of the colleges surveyed do very little work in this area. Sixth form (SF) colleges rarely work directly with employers, although the new development-planning requirements introduced for the whole sector are resulting in all colleges, including SF colleges, reassessing the volume of their employer-related work. GFE colleges in particular offer an extensive range of vocational courses, which generally provides a satisfactory match to the needs of employers in their local area. For their full-time courses this may be largely by chance rather than design since colleges respond primarily to learner demand, which is not always closely aligned with employer need. Nevertheless, a large and growing number of learners, many of whom are already in employment and study part-time, as well as school leavers who study full-time, are enrolled on vocational courses in further education (FE) colleges, whether at the behest of their employers or to enhance their current or future employability. In addition, most colleges surveyed aim to develop, through a variety of programmes, skills to enhance the employability of their full-time learners.

Where work for employers is effective, it has developed from extensive assessment of need by the college itself, with provision carefully tailored to employers' specific requirements. Those colleges that undertake significant work with employers are managing to overcome the considerable barriers to flexibility caused by both institutional structures and by the bureaucracy associated with resourcing such activity. Aspects of the FE sector's infrastructure, such as the funding methodology and the qualifications framework, are often a hindrance to the development of this work.

Where GFE colleges are particularly successful in their work with employers they operate within a strategic framework that prioritises this work and adopts a whole-college approach to furthering it. Such colleges are currently in the minority, however. Even in those colleges that are actively engaged in employer training, an overarching strategy, including targets, quality assurance and staff development, which has a positive impact on the college itself as well as on external clients in specific curriculum areas, is largely missing. Although some colleges are now setting precise and demanding targets, the majority are unable to do so since few have a comprehensive system for collecting data about the volume of their current activity. Nor are there as yet agreed national measures against which they can judge their effectiveness. Quality assurance of both employer-related work and of the development of skills to enhance employability generally lacks rigorous analysis and evaluation. Although recent government and Learning and Skills Council (LSC) policy initiatives have increased the attention now being given to working with employers, and although the good practice identified in this report indicates that effective work is already in place, action is needed to ensure that there is consistency in the range and quality of what is available in all parts of the country, for employers and individual learners alike.

Main findings

Identifying need

- All colleges review and amend their course portfolio annually. They amend it in response to many factors, including government and awarding-body requirements and employer and labour market need, and react primarily to learner demand. This learner demand is not always closely aligned with employer or labour market need.
- GFE colleges draw on a wide range of labour market information (LMI) produced by others to inform their strategic direction. Much of this information is at too high a level to be useful in work with individual employers.
- Most, but not all, SF colleges use LMI as a general backdrop to their strategic plans, but the information does not impact significantly on their course portfolio. Few do much work to assess the needs of individual employers.
- About half the GFE colleges surveyed do a substantial amount of work of their own to assess employers' training needs. This work can be productive, but is expensive.
- About half the GFE colleges surveyed have weaknesses in the collection of LMI or in the way they summarise it or disseminate it across their institutions.

Reconfiguring provision to meet identified need

- GFE colleges provide an extensive range of courses that is generally at least satisfactorily matched to need, including general employer need, in an area.
- The sector provides for a large and growing number of learners who study for vocational qualifications, many by part-time modes of attendance.
- About half the GFE colleges surveyed provide significant training for individual employers.
- A significant number (15%) of GFE colleges and most, but not all, SF colleges surveyed undertake little training for individual employers.

Developing a responsive curriculum

- ❑ Those colleges that do a significant amount of work with individual employers often go to great lengths to tailor the training to the needs of the employer.
- ❑ In a significant number of colleges the provision of tailored training is restricted to a few departments or to the business unit. Many of these colleges have failed to overcome barriers to flexibility such as those posed by rigid timetabling and lack of cover, inflexible teacher contracts, operation in term time only and the availability of staff with the right skills.
- ❑ Most colleges surveyed provide at least a satisfactory range of activities that enhance students' general employability. In about 10% of GFE colleges surveyed, this work is underdeveloped.

Planning and managing the work

- ❑ About half the GFE colleges in this sample have established a strategic framework that supports the provision of training for employers. Most SF colleges, reflecting their mission, give this work little priority.
- ❑ Few colleges have established an overarching policy on the development of skills for employability.
- ❑ In response to new LSC development-planning requirements, all colleges, including SF colleges, are beginning to give work with employers increased attention.
- ❑ Some colleges are setting precise and demanding targets for this work. In many, partly because there are no agreed national measures and insufficient knowledge of what is presently being done, the targets they set are too general.
- ❑ A weakness in many colleges is the failure to collect accurate data on all the employer-related work taking place across their institutions.
- ❑ While a quarter of the GFE colleges surveyed promote their work with employers well, too many colleges are not doing enough.
- ❑ Bureaucratic and other barriers to engagement frustrate colleges and employers and limit the work undertaken.
- ❑ Special project funding and national pilots play an important part in covering the development costs of work with employers.
- ❑ Partnership arrangements are extensive in many colleges and can be very productive.
- ❑ Only a minority of colleges have well-developed quality assurance arrangements for this work. Self-assessment pays insufficient attention to a college's work with employers, how its general provision is matched to labour market need and what it is doing in relation to enhancing the skills for employability among its learners.

- A shortage of specialist staff limits responsiveness in half the colleges surveyed.
- Little professional development work that is undertaken enables staff to develop the particular skills needed for working with employers.
- Professional development programmes give insufficient support to working with employers and to the development of skills for employability.

Issues for action

□ Action is required at a national level to:

- improve the clarity and consistency in the funding of training for employers and ensure that funding reflects the costs of training undertaken in-company
- reduce and simplify the bureaucratic hurdles associated with the funding of qualifications, geographic boundaries, project funding and the requirements of the Individual Learner's Record (ILR)
- provide funding for units of a full qualification
- improve some employers' readiness to pay the cost of at least some of the training
- ensure that colleges and local LSCs adopt a co-ordinated approach to assessing individual employers' training needs, especially those of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- ensure that all employers develop training policies
- develop common methods of measuring the responsiveness of colleges to employers' needs and establish national benchmarks against which a college's responsiveness can be gauged
- tackle staff shortages in some curriculum areas.

□ Action is required by individual colleges to:

- develop a whole-college approach to working with employers that includes:
 - a coherent cross-college strategic steer and clear targets
 - improvements in the way LMI is collated and translated into development plans
 - the development of data systems which collect all the activity of a college and the relevant information held by each member of staff
 - improved promotion of the work and what the college can offer
 - professional development programmes for college staff which support the work appropriately
 - staffing contracts which enable a responsive approach to engagement with employers
 - rigorous quality assurance systems for all aspects of the work.

- establish an overarching policy on the development of skills for employability among existing learners and ensure that it is implemented appropriately in each curriculum area.

Introduction

1. In July 2003, the government published a White Paper, *21st Century Skills, Realising Our Potential*, which set out a national skills strategy. This strategy aims to ensure that employers have a workforce with the right skills to support the success of their businesses and that individuals have the skills they need to be both employable and personally fulfilled.

2. The White Paper points out that, in spite of real improvements, the country's economic productivity and competitiveness remain well below those of major competitor nations. While the country does well in respect of skills at the higher education level, the percentage of the workforce qualified to intermediate level (apprentices, technicians) is low when compared with, for example, France and Germany. According to the White Paper, employers have long been concerned that they are not getting recruits with the skills they require. The conclusion is that the current learning and skills sector, despite the strengths of certain aspects, needs to work much more effectively with local and regional businesses and employers in order to play its full part in developing relevant skills among their existing and future employees, thereby improving productivity in the long term.

3. The White Paper reiterates what was signalled previously in *Success for All* (2002): the need for colleges to give engagement with employers and the world of work, in all its aspects, a high priority. The LSC's development-planning requirements for 2003–06 reflect this focus. It is now stipulated that college development plans must specifically address employer engagement, set targets for the number of employers and the number of employees worked with for each year of the planning period, and set targets for success rates for work-based learning. These new requirements have increased the attention many colleges give to employer engagement. In some, they have been a catalyst for formalising arrangements that were already giving employer engagement strong attention. In addition, at national level, a number of strategies are now being implemented to help colleges to be more responsive to employers than many are at present, including:

- a reform of the qualifications framework
- changes in funding arrangements
- the establishment of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in selected colleges.

4. Employers' views of the responsiveness of colleges to their training and development needs give mixed messages. In its underlying evidence which informed the development of the national skills strategy, the DfES wrote that the CBI employment trends surveys of 2002 and 2001 revealed that CBI members who responded are much less satisfied with FE college provision than with private training providers. The views of several employer-based organisations were sought to inform the findings of this survey report. One that responded said that their members consistently raise issues such as the lack of availability and flexibility of training locally and college staff who lack up-to-date knowledge and skills. The LSC

national employer skills survey 2003, involving 72,000 employers, found that, where employers had had contact with FE colleges, a majority were satisfied; 48% were fairly satisfied and 33% very satisfied with the service provided and relatively few were very dissatisfied (2%) or fairly dissatisfied (5%).

5. The employers interviewed during the inspection visits which informed part 1 of this report (see para 7) often indicated that they liked the flexibility of the provision, the responsiveness and willingness to listen and work in partnership, and the value for money provided. They often thought that the college sector's image and marketing methods, the bureaucracy of registration and other processes, and communication with key college staff could be improved. In relation to, for example, apprenticeship training, they thought there should be more frequent work-based assessment and progress reviews, and that there was sometimes lax enforcement of discipline. There were mixed messages on the teaching; some liked its quality while others thought that some of the teaching methods were too inflexible.

Survey objectives and inspection methodology

6. The objectives of this survey are to inform the development of government, funding council and college policies by reporting on how effectively colleges currently identify and respond to the needs of employers and to highlight instances and characteristics of best practice. In particular, inspectors have sought to ascertain how, and to what effect, colleges are:

- identifying employers' needs
- reconfiguring their provision to meet these needs
- developing a curriculum in response to employers' requirements
- promoting the employment prospects and employability of their full-time students
- planning for and managing this activity.

7. The survey was conducted in three parts:

(i) Desk research was carried out on available evidence such as enrolment statistics, inspection reports and their underlying evidence bases, LSC documents, college strategic plans and self-assessment reports. Some of the good practice examples included in part 1 of this report have been drawn from this evidence.

(ii) Visits were made to 11 SF colleges, 34 GFE colleges and 2 agricultural colleges during the period September 2003 to January 2004. These colleges, listed in Annex A, provided evidence for the survey findings of the report and are referred to as the 'survey colleges' in part 1 of this report. Before each visit, the college was invited to complete a questionnaire and inspectors consulted the college inspection report, the self-assessment report, the strategic and development plans and an analysis of enrolments at the college

compared with national averages. During the visit, which generally lasted one day, inspectors met with college managers and students, held discussions with employers who had been invited by the college to speak to inspectors and a representative of the local LSC, viewed facilities, read college documentation and sometimes visited employer sites.

(iii) In the period January 2004 to June 2004, visits were made to 4 SF colleges, 28 GFE colleges and 3 agricultural colleges (including a second visit to some colleges that had been visited in term one). Visits were also made to five consortia. The colleges and consortia visited are listed in Annex A. These colleges and consortia were selected as being likely to provide examples of good practice. All were invited to nominate aspects of their provision that they felt were worthy of inclusion as examples of good practice in this report. Some have been included in part 2, others are included in part 1.

8. Although visits were made to both GFE and SF colleges, it is the former, by their very nature, which have provided the bulk of the evidence for this report. While all colleges are now required to include engagement with employers in their development plans, currently there is very little direct work for employers going on in SF colleges. It must also be remembered that all colleges respond primarily to learner demand, which is not always closely aligned to employer need and that, therefore, in some instances, the needs of employers will only be met indirectly, if at all. The timing of this survey meant that although colleges were aware of the new development-planning requirements of the LSC, most of what was observed was work that had been in existence long before the issue of this directive.

Part 1. The survey

Identifying need

9. Colleges review and amend their course portfolio and teaching strategies annually. In doing so they take account of factors such as likely learner demand, LMI, the quality of existing provision and changes to the qualifications framework. In addition to undertaking labour market analyses, they assess the demand from school pupils and the general public for their courses and offer guidance on the suitability of courses for individuals. Many factors inform this guidance including the aspirations of individual learners, employment opportunities, and opportunities for progression to higher-level courses. Most colleges will also take into account specific needs of their communities, such as the requirement for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and basic skills. When recruiting to courses that are available to the general public, colleges respond primarily to demand from prospective learners rather than specific employer needs. This said, there will almost always be some correlation between the nature of the vocational courses on offer in GFE colleges and the specific industries in their localities. Moreover, all colleges collect LMI as part of their strategic and development planning.

Employer and labour market information at a regional or sub-regional level

10. GFE colleges collect a wide range of LMI produced by others. These reports are useful in enabling colleges to analyse trends and in informing the general direction of a college's development. Such reports are frequently used to support college bids for funding. Much of the information is produced at a relatively high level of aggregation, however, and is not particularly useful in informing work with individual employers. The reports can also become out of date quickly and generally say too little is about the training needs of SMEs.

11. Most, but not all, SF colleges collect LMI from a smaller number of external sources than do GFE colleges. As with GFE colleges, SF colleges summarise the information to support their strategic planning. These summaries set the scene for a college's operations and serve to support bids for funding. However, a majority of SF colleges give priority to the provision of academic or general vocational courses, primarily for full-time students aged 16 to 18, and few undertake an extensive analysis of the local labour market.

College-identified labour market information

12. About half the GFE colleges surveyed make extensive efforts to supplement the information they collect from others by engaging in direct activity with employers. Special project funding, for example, from the European Social Fund (ESF), the Employer Training Pilot (ETP) budget, local initiative funding from the LSC and the Regional Development Agency (RDA) can be used to support this work. About one in six GFE colleges, and most SF colleges, do little of this work, however.

13. One effective means of engaging with employers is systematic direct contact with individual businesses through an initial telephone call, followed up by a meeting and, if requested, a training-needs analysis. About 40% of the GFE colleges included in this survey listed this as part of their marketing strategy. Some colleges have established specific units to do this work, sometimes using external agencies to provide the staffing. This work can be very time-consuming and will not always reap reward. There is scope for colleges to share some of this work, as happens across the Sussex LSC (see case study in part 2).

14. Some colleges carry out their own market research at local and sector levels.

***Manchester College of Arts and Technology** has produced a comprehensive file of data on the wards that make up the college's main catchment area. This has been distributed to the college departments. The college commissions an external agency to assess, for example, the likely demand for hospitality-related programmes. Information is gained from questionnaire surveys.*

***Bishop Burton College** conducted a training-needs analysis for the pig industry using a postal questionnaire. The results led to 25 one-day courses delivered for staff in the pig industry in 2003–04.*

Some college managers visit companies as part of a whole-college approach to employer involvement.

***Park Lane College** has established a programme of visits, to be undertaken by its senior managers, to the top 100 companies in the area and a further programme of visits, to be undertaken by middle managers, to smaller companies.*

15. Many colleges devote considerable staff time to networking with local businesses, although it is not always evident that this is time well spent. Attendance at, for example, Chamber of Commerce meetings, local learning partnership and local strategic partnership meetings, employer breakfast meetings, and partnerships for workforce development, are part of a long list of such activities put forward by many of the colleges surveyed. Colleges may make presentations on their work at these meetings, listen to employers' views or simply get to know employers in an informal context. College regional partnerships and national committees of, for example, heads of department for construction or catering are also useful sources of LMI and for learning about what other colleges are doing. College governing bodies include business members who are valuable sources of information. Colleges also make use of awards days and other events to increase links with employers.

16. The extent to which employer liaison groups are used is variable. They are more active in some curriculum areas, such as construction, than in most others. Indeed, in many colleges, they have been discontinued or become relatively dormant due to lack of focus or lack of interest on the part of employers. Where colleges are beginning to reinstate them, these groups are being given a particular task, such as supporting a time-limited project, in order to generate and maintain their interest.

17. Colleges with a national reputation for an area of work and those that have established stakeholder groups to help support and promote projects draw on valuable sources of information.

*In vocational areas such as fisheries management and zoo management **Sparsholt College** is recognised by employers as a leader in its field. It has good informal contacts with a wide range of employers, which provide valuable intelligence.*

Chance contact and word of mouth can also be important in generating business and illustrate the value of having college staff attuned to recognising and pursuing opportunities.

*The chief executive of a major retail company, while presenting prizes at an event at **Thomas Danby College**, was told of the training opportunities the college provides. Some short courses were organised and the college is now running an apprenticeship programme for all the company's stores. College staff were having coffee in the staff canteen of a local company while undertaking some short-course training. The canteen manager expressed a wish to train the canteen staff. An eight-week course was running within a matter of weeks.*

18. Many colleges point to the wealth of employment-related knowledge gained by their staff through visits to employers to set up and monitor work placements or work-based learning, or when employers or their training officers visit the college to

monitor apprentices' progress. In many colleges, however, teachers who make contact with employers are not sufficiently skilled in marketing the college and identifying possible business and have inadequate knowledge about what the college can provide. Arrangements to ensure that the intelligence they gain is collected centrally and acted upon are under-developed. As a result, colleges fail to maximise the intelligence they have, miss opportunities for work, or risk duplication of work.

19. Some sources of readily available information are under-used. Few of the GFE colleges surveyed engage in a systematic analysis of students' destinations, use the registration data of employed students, analyse demand as identified by enquiries the college has not been able to meet, use the LSC individual learner record to see what other colleges are doing, or make use of information provided by Job Centre Plus. Few engage systematically in the collection of the views of ex-students or of part-time teachers, although there are some exceptions.

The collation of labour market information and its use to prompt change

20. Colleges generally produce overarching summaries of the results of their own labour market surveys and those of others. The reports are used to underpin strategic and development plans, to support bids for external funding and bids for CoVE status, and to inform, internally, the case for new courses. The clarity of these summary reports is variable. In the best examples, occurring in about one in four of the colleges surveyed, clear and useful summaries of the messages are provided for curriculum departments and business units.

***Wakefield College's** Information for planning 03-06 document summarises the priorities of the government, the Framework for Regional Employment and Skills Action (FRESA), the LSC and the local LSC, and regional LMI. Each department's curriculum plan is guided by LMI, the college's policy framework and its planning guidance.*

Good analysis can help to prompt and inform a college's change in direction or the development of new work.

***West Cheshire College**, following a major review of its work and after consideration of its LMI and national priorities, has rationalised its curriculum to emphasise its vocational nature. Each full-time student has a curriculum tailored to his or her employment aspirations.*

***Manchester College of Arts and Technology** has undertaken a major review of its technician education and rationalised its provision by level and vocational option in four curriculum areas.*

21. About half the GFE colleges surveyed have weaknesses in the collection of LMI or in the way they summarise it or disseminate it. In these colleges one or more of the following occurs:

- too little work is done by the college to assess need

- summary reports on the information held are insufficiently clear and precise
- communication across the college departments and units is poor so that information is not shared as well as it should be
- opportunities for developing work with employers are missed or there is wasteful duplication of effort.

22. In these colleges, responsiveness to employers is often not part of a whole-college strategy and work is usually over-reliant on informal or ad hoc activity. Few colleges have centralised the gathering, collation and use of intelligence from all sources.

Reconfiguring provision to meet identified need

23. Nearly all the GFE colleges in the survey have full- and part-time course portfolios that are at least a satisfactory match to the needs of employers and the local labour market. In half, the match is a good one for full-time courses and, in two thirds for part-time courses. Where a college does not offer an area of learning that is required by the local labour market, it is usually because other colleges in the vicinity offer it. For example, in Leeds, the GFE colleges as a group provide a complementary and wide-ranging portfolio in the different curriculum areas. Area-wide inspections show that, in most of the areas inspected, a broad range of courses is offered, particularly at Level 3, although not all students have equal access to them. However, in most areas, there are insufficient courses at the lower levels to meet the needs of the less able. In some instances, particularly in curriculum areas such as construction, the amount of specialist facilities available limits the degree to which colleges can respond quickly to a surge in learner demand.

24. The LSC statistical first release ILR/SFR 02 published in December 2003 shows that the LSC funded nearly 3.5 million learners in FE sector colleges in 2002–03, an increase of 60% on the numbers eight years earlier. Most study by part-time modes of attendance. Much of the provision in the FE sector is aimed at the acquisition of vocational qualifications. In addition, in 2002-03, slightly more than 0.5 million learners undertook work-based learning managed by a college.

25. Colleges amend their course portfolios regularly to meet student demand and the needs of employers in general. For example, in recent years, much new vocational provision has been developed on the basis of labour market intelligence, leading to successful recruitment in:

- sport, leisure and tourism
- call-centre training
- health, care and early years care, and classroom assistants' courses
- beauty and complementary therapies, and theatrical make-up

- media including, for example, courses in photography, video, music and music technology
- e-business
- computer networking and software courses
- construction on-site assessment and training, site supervisors' certificates and gas training
- licensed trade courses
- equine and animal care courses
- engineering multi-skilling and engineering control
- training courses for assessors to enable the achievement of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)
- courses to meet the demand created by government legislation, for example NVQs to meet the need for qualifications in the care industry, and qualifications in health and safety, security work, first aid, food hygiene and electrical safety
- courses to meet the needs of the legal professions
- courses for trade union representatives.

26. Some colleges have developed packages of training and guidance to suit identified employment-sector needs.

***Rotherham College of Arts and Technology** has developed a package specifically for the health and care industry that includes the selection and recruitment of learners, criminal record clearance, placement in industry and realistic work experience with guaranteed jobs for successful learners.*

***North Trafford College of Further Education** works in conjunction with Job Centre Plus and the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the gas industry and, using New Deal funding, has developed a programme that includes an NVQ at Level 2, block periods in college and placements in the industry, safety certification, Council for Registered Gas Installers (CORGI) registration and help to find employment. Success at gaining qualifications and obtaining employment is high.*

***Bishop Burton College** has responded to a skills gap identified by industry. For example, new course developments have taken place in bathroom and kitchen design. The industry has supported the developments by providing staff training and materials.*

27. Or colleges have developed, over a period, specific expertise to meet local or regional need: marine engineering on the Tyne; medical English for refugee doctors

and linked work placements in hospitals; print technology and process control in areas which have chemical industries; financial services in colleges close to large business sectors; theatrical sound and lighting where there are substantial theatrical industries; fashion and millinery, and tourist guiding, in some colleges close to the London retail sector and tourist attractions.

28. The curriculum of SF colleges is not immediately responsive to the needs of local employers other than by offering general qualifications, such as BTEC national diplomas or professional qualifications, which market information tells them are employers' preferences. SF colleges serve the needs of employers indirectly, however, by educating students to Level 3 in academic or general qualifications and by enabling a high proportion of their students to progress to higher education (HE). In addition, (see paragraphs 45 to 60), good SF colleges play a key role, along with GFE colleges, in developing essential skills for employability in their learners. Although SF colleges do not usually wish to compete against the local GFE college in a market that does not meet their mission, they are now reassessing their strategies for employer engagement as part of the LSC's new requirements for development planning.

Developing a responsive curriculum

(i) for employers and the local workforce

29. Of the GFE colleges surveyed, about half undertake a significant amount of employer-related training. Approximately 15% do very little work in this area. These latter colleges often rely on the enthusiasm of a small number of staff and have a piecemeal and reactive approach to working with employers. The extent of engagement is patchy across many colleges. Sometimes the business unit is active and works alone; occasionally it works with some of the curriculum departments, usually construction, engineering, business, and health and social care.

30. The colleges that participated in the survey were invited to supply data on the number of employers they worked with for various categories of training. About one fifth did not supply the data. Several of these said that they did not have the data but were intending to start collecting them. The data provided by some colleges are likely to under-estimate the extent of employer training, since these colleges counted only the work done by their business units. Some colleges did not count those employees enrolled on courses that are generally available to the public, for example part-time, day-release or evening courses. The data collected suggest that, in a 12-month period, those GFE colleges surveyed worked with:

- between 0 and 350 companies to deliver aspects of, or the full, apprenticeship framework. About a third of colleges worked with over 100 companies, half with over 50 and a third with under 10
- between 0 and 200 companies to deliver qualifications that meet legislative requirements. About half worked with over 50 companies, a quarter with under 10
- between 0 and 350 companies to deliver other workforce development. About a quarter worked with over 70 companies, about a third with none.

31. Employer/employment-related training is provided in a number of ways:

- through part-time college courses where employers pay some or all of the cost
- by means of bespoke training and consultancy for employers, either in college or on employers' own premises
- by contributing to, or taking full responsibility for, the apprenticeship framework.

College courses where employers pay some or all of the cost

32. The ILR database, completed by all colleges, includes fields to denote whether the learner is employed, is sponsored by an employer, and whether the full cost of the course is paid for by the employer. Some of this information is not required for LSC-funding purposes and is rarely used by a college to inform its own management activity. In order to collect such information, a college has to rely on learners divulging whether they are employed or not. For various reasons, this information is sometimes not readily forthcoming. It is probable, therefore, that the data contained on the ILR database under-estimate the actual work that is being done, both by the sector as a whole and by individual colleges. The ILR for 2001/02 provides the following information:

- the sector funds 3% of its enrolments through employers or others paying the full cost of the course
- additionally, employers pay the tuition fees for 4% of enrolments
- nearly 5% of enrolments are for NVQ provision
- 5% of enrolments are for three short courses that fulfil statutory requirements (first aid, health and safety, and food hygiene).

33. Colleges vary widely in the volume of the different types of work they do. For example, for the 34 GFE colleges surveyed:

- in a quarter, full-cost enrolments were more than 8% of the total; in another quarter they were 1% or less
- in nearly a fifth, enrolments where fees were paid by employers accounted for over 10% of enrolments and in a half they accounted for 2% or less
- in a fifth, NVQ enrolments accounted for over 10% of all enrolments and in a tenth for less than 3%
- in a tenth, enrolments to the three short courses specified in paragraph 30 accounted for over 10% of enrolments and in a third for less than 2%.

34. Colleges included in the survey were asked to provide details of the income they derived from this work. Several colleges did not submit the data, but, of those that did:

- fees paid by employers ranged from 0% to 12% of total income, with a typical proportion of 2%
- courses where employers paid the full cost of the provision ranged from 0% to 8%, with a typical proportion of between 1% and 2%.

Training or other work provided directly for employers

35. A minority of colleges are very active in providing training for employers.

Oxford and Cherwell College has provided training for 378 employers in the last 12 months and has £2.4 million worth of work-based learning contracts, £400,000 worth of full-cost income and £900,000 worth of fee income paid by employers.

City of Bristol College earns a fee income in excess of £3 million from employer-related work. It works with a wide range of local and national employers. In 2002–03, 1,200 employers were provided with training for their staff, representing 14,600 enrolments.

Some colleges join effectively with private training providers or other partners to deliver large volumes of work.

Barnet College, in partnership with a private training provider, has 5,500 London Underground employees registered for the NVQ Level 2 in railway services. The college draws down the funds and manages the programme; the private training provider undertakes the training and assessment. The programme has just awarded its 1,000th NVQ.

City of Westminster College is a partner of the Paddington Development Trust which, through its New Life for Paddington Single Regeneration Budget programme brings together key stakeholders involved in the regeneration of Paddington. These include Paddington First which is a job brokerage set up by the partnership, St Mary's Hospital and Job Centre Plus. Over 3,000 people have been supported into employment. Paddington First helps major employers relocating to the area. The partnership supports a wide network of small to medium-sized enterprises.

36. Other colleges are involved in highly specialised fields of activity, due either to location or to historical circumstance.

Greenwich Community College provides in-house training for tour and gallery guiding, and cultural heritage work leading to NVQs, assessor, verifier and other qualifications. It works with many of the major tourist attraction institutions, museums and galleries in London.

South Tyneside College is an internationally renowned provider of marine courses and courses for the offshore industries. Employers pay the full cost for many of these courses. Of the 9,000 adult students at the college in 2002–03, a quarter were sponsored by their companies.

Even small colleges, when they are committed to this work, are able to run effective business units.

Joseph Priestley College has established a business unit that has increased the number of employers worked with from 20 to 150 in

three years and now has a turnover in excess of £150,000. The unit worked with 2,000 students in 2002–03, the companies of half of whom paid the full cost of the provision.

37. Few colleges work with many companies to undertake training-needs analysis or research and development (R&D) activity. About a third of colleges do no training-needs analysis. Of the other two thirds, most work with up to 20 companies. About 10% of colleges work with over 70 companies. About 60% of colleges do no R&D work. Very few colleges work with more than 10 companies to conduct R&D work. A small number of colleges engage systematically in consultancy, research and development work.

Stockton Riverside College's *pressure equipment directive consultancy service, awarded centre of expertise status by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), provides consultancy, research and training on pressure equipment to companies worldwide.*

Thomas Danby College *undertakes trouble-shooting and product development with a number of companies. Its staff work with food manufacturers, for example, to solve production-line problems. Other staff work with a bakery to develop new products such as steak bakes, cakes, breads and cream products. The company says that the college has the expertise, it works in-company, is responsive and provides a quick turnaround. Its service has contributed to increased turnover. Learners evaluate the products, for example, for taste, appearance, smell and texture.*

Some colleges undertake consultancy or project work with SMEs or larger companies to help them become more effective.

Wakefield College *has several projects that are designed to meet identified local need. The Creative Edge project, a partnership between the college and a training company, provides training and consultancy in enterprise and strategic thinking, and networking, which are designed to help a business develop creativity, work more efficiently and grow. The Learning Advocates (Lead) project provides training for employers in how to clarify their business objectives, establish training plans which support them and develop learning advocates within the company. The Graduate Opportunities in Wakefield (Grow) project provides a wage subsidy, free management training and the services of a mentor to help 28 SMEs in Wakefield recruit graduates.*

*When a foreign plastics company set up a plant in north-west England, **St Helens College** developed links with it through the local Chamber of Commerce. The college accommodated a base for recruitment and interviews, did the initial assessments and induction, and provided initial training leading to NVQs at Level 2 in manufacturing for about 100 operatives. College teachers spent time at the company's sister plant in Europe in order to gain experience of using the company's training packages.*

38. Most of the SF colleges surveyed do very little work directly for employers. Only two worked with more than 20 companies; half worked with no employers. Where a college works with particular companies, this is usually because the company has approached the college directly. A few SF colleges are beginning to use ESF or other external funding to help them work with, for example, SMEs. There are exceptions to this limited level of SF college activity, however.

***Josiah Mason Sixth Form College** is as active as many GFE colleges, engaging with, for example, 27 companies for aspects of modern apprenticeship work, 51 for work to meet statutory need and 26 for other workforce development. It undertook training-needs analysis with 45 companies last year.*

Features of responsive work with employers

39. Effective providers tailor courses to suit employers' needs in a number of ways:

- by providing courses that have several start times in the year; by offering different modes of attendance, for example full-time, block-release, part-time, day, evening or weekend provision; or by offering distance or e-learning
- by providing a place of study to suit the employer. For example, training that is dedicated to one company may be done on the employer's premises. Much of the assessment that leads to NVQs has to be carried out in the workplace
- by aligning the curriculum content and qualification (if any) offered with company need.

40. Almost all the GFE colleges in the survey reported that they use at least one of the methods detailed above. Colleges undertake training on company premises at times to suit the employer. This may include delivery at the start and end of shift working and during shifts, including the night shift. In some cases provision will be delivered in college at times to suit employed students, for example on Friday afternoon when companies complete their week early, and on one other evening; sometimes employed students can choose one from two evenings or two days per week to suit varying commitments.

Cirencester Tertiary College runs digital media courses over the weekend. Demand determines the start dates of a range of customer service and business administration and management courses.

Wirral Metropolitan College provides a course in the certificate of first-line management for Vauxhall Motors' employees who work to a rotating three-shift pattern. The training is offered at three different times in the week to enable all employees to attend, regardless of which of the three shifts they happen to be on that week.

41. Distance and e-learning are used increasingly.

New College Durham's CoVE in travel and tourism services and its partner CoVEs in other colleges identified that there was a need to provide online distance learning for tourist guiding and for customer service training. In response, innovative methods of delivery are being developed. For example, a course in tourist guiding is offered through distance learning using Learndirect and the CoVE website, increasing the availability of the provision. Learners will be able to take exams in any of the CoVE travel and tourism colleges.

Courses can be tailored to match a company's work or to make best use of company and college expertise.

When Jaguar took over the car-manufacturing plant at Halewood it found that its workforce lacked the required fault-finding and diagnostic competencies in auto-electronic systems. **St Helens College** was asked to develop a training programme for 30 employees. Two teachers spent time at the plant in the Midlands and at dealers' premises, learning about the specific technical and training issues. Working with an awarding body they developed an NVQ Level 2 in auto-electronics. The course is a mixture of work delivered partly in the college, partly at the manufacturing plant to suit shift patterns and partly at dealers' premises.

Mid-Cheshire College staff and staff in local care homes recognised the need to develop training provision that would meet the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000. Building on its partnerships with the local care consortium and the early years childcare and development partnership, the provision has grown significantly. Carers can obtain qualifications from foundation level to Level 4. College staff play a key role in providing teaching, support for work-based assessors and internal verifiers, and learner support. Approximately 550 employees are presently being supported. Training is delivered in the college and at work, and can be started at different times of the year.

42. In order to provide courses as conveniently as possible, some colleges are establishing learning centres in companies.

Telford College of Arts and Technology, helped by RDA funding, has established 13 learning centres on company premises to facilitate training programmes for employees and their families. Employees can access, via the internet, courses offered by the college and receive supported training for basic skills, key skills and information technology (IT) in the centres. The college is contracted in long-term partnerships with over 200 companies locally and nationally to deliver training.

Some colleges provide a complete package of promotion, selection, training and support.

*The Financial Services Authority (FSA), wanting to address age and ethnicity imbalances in its workforce, asked **Tower Hamlets College** to work with it to attract young people into the industry. GCE A level Year 2 students who were considering employment rather than HE were selected. They visited the FSA and listened to presentations given by FSA staff to increase their low level of awareness of the Authority and the Canary Wharf development in London. The college and the FSA designed a short course on the employability skills of, for example, communication, telephone technique, customer care and confidence building. This was followed by work placement supported by FSA mentors. Six students have subsequently joined the Authority. The college is also providing diversity training for FSA staff to equip them with the skills to support and develop the new recruits. The project is to be expanded to include other organisations.*

43. Not all colleges are as responsive as these. In many colleges, this degree of flexibility is available only in some curriculum areas or only in the business unit's work. The timetabling of teachers presents barriers to flexibility when cover cannot easily be found. Some colleges operate predominantly during term times and are difficult to contact during the holidays. The availability of staff with the right expertise for this work can also be a problem.

44. The few SF colleges that undertake work for a particular company usually do so in a limited range of areas, typically in IT, basic skills and care, and short courses to meet legislative requirements. The work has usually been requested by the company rather than as part of a more general college marketing campaign. Where this work occurs, it is often well matched to a company's needs, for example provided in-company and between shifts.

(ii) for students in college

45. This section considers the ways in which colleges develop 'employability' in their full-time learners in addition to the requirements of their main programme of study. The term 'employability' covers the attributes needed to gain employment and which will make a positive contribution to an employer's work. An important way in which employability is developed is by ensuring that learners are well taught and are exposed to an appropriate variety of activity and a work-related curriculum. The establishment of high expectations, for example, of students' behaviour, standards of

work and for the meeting of deadlines, inculcate sound habits that will set students in good stead in their working lives.

46. Most colleges provide at least a satisfactory range of activities that enhance learners' general employability. About a third of the GFE colleges and half the SF colleges in the survey have a curriculum that is well designed to develop the attributes and skills for enhancing learners' employability. About 1 in 10 GFE colleges were considered not to be doing enough.

47. Both GFE and SF colleges provide a range of activities that is additional to the main course taken by each full-time learner. These include tutorials that usually comprise careers education and guidance, and study skills; the key skills of Application of Number, Communication, and Information and Communication Technology and, in some colleges, the wider key skills. Aspects of colleges' enrichment programmes, such as Young Enterprise activity, also contribute to developing an understanding of the demands of employment.

48. Although colleges have a raft of policies relating to the above activities, only a minority bring them together under an overarching policy on employability.

***West Cheshire College** has designated itself a 'Vocational College', and has introduced the notion of vocational and learning passports. Curriculum design is influenced by the importance attached to developing work readiness and employability. 'Vocational passports' include appropriate additional qualifications and the three key skills. 'Enrichment' activities are customised to employment sectors. Progression and employment potential are considered carefully when courses are planned. Curriculum-development plans address the ways in which employer engagement and employability are developed, for example, by including visiting speakers, visits, work experience, professional conduct and a work-related curriculum.*

***Lewisham College's** curriculum model stipulates that, whatever students plan to do next, they need to be ready for the new experiences. Seven 'readiness pathways' are being incorporated into courses, including 'work readiness', which is general preparation for work, and 'job readiness', which relates to the skills and knowledge needed for a particular job.*

***Telford College of Arts and Technology** has a full-time curriculum model of five weeks' learning followed by a 'management week' in which students review their work and develop new learning plans. The activity in these management weeks leads to a certificate in employment skills, accredited by the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE). It includes enrichment activities, time to catch up on assignment work, tutorials and short courses in, for example, web design, IT and first aid.*

Aspects of the curriculum that develop employability

49. In response to Curriculum 2000, colleges have established curricular provision that seeks to improve full-time students' key skills of communication, application of number and use of ICT. The achievement of these key skills is also a requirement of the modern apprenticeship frameworks. Colleges devote considerable resources to the development of key skills. They differ in the way in which they teach key skills, but a combination of taught time and time and support for portfolio building are usually provided. Colleges vary in the extent to which they integrate key skills' development into the other activities the students are undertaking. The quality of key skills' teaching is variable and attendance often poor. Achievement rates for each of the key skills are often low. This is a cause for concern.

50. Colleges adopt several methods of making links between their teaching and the world of work. These include assignments that are related to work, the use of work experience to inform and enrich other work done by students, and the use of part-time teachers who are employed in an associated industry. Visits to relevant events, companies and other venues; the use of visiting speakers; and participation in regional and national competitions are often included in the curriculum. In hospitality provision, for example, students benefit from visits to catering establishments and from providing catering and waiting services at prestigious sporting events.

***Barton Peveril College** provides work-related assignments. Much of the coursework is related to real companies. Business students devise a marketing plan for Eastleigh Rugby Club; computing students design an accompanying website; leisure and tourism students plan and organise a trip for staff and other students to the European Parliament.*

***New College Durham's** CoVE in travel and tourism uses its good links with employers to enhance the full-time curriculum. For example, employers provide guest speakers, equipment and secondment opportunities for teachers, and industry updates. Learners taking the interim certificate in tourist guiding help out with Durham's summer and Christmas festivals, giving them valuable work experience and providing guides who have sound local knowledge.*

51. Teachers in land-based colleges make good use of the college estates, work placements and local work sites to help students develop practical skills. In one college, for example, students carry out grounds maintenance at a football stadium. In business, good use of students' own experience is made on management and professional courses during lesson discussion and assignment work. In the best lessons, this experience is used imaginatively by teachers to put the theoretical concepts into a practical context. In hospitality, communication skills are developed effectively when students work in the college restaurants and travel shops. Students on NVQ programmes are often brought together for practical lessons in restaurants and kitchens, enabling those on the Level 3 courses to develop higher-level skills by supervising lower-level students. This works well when students have clearly defined job roles and the tasks are appropriate to the different levels of the award.

Realistic work experience in college

52. Many GFE colleges provide real working environments on college premises through which competence towards NVQ qualifications can be achieved and employability developed. Those most often provided are hairdressing and beauty therapy salons; restaurants and other eating outlets; retail outlets and travel agencies, sometimes owned by major travel companies, which are open to the general public. Less commonly, a few provide butchers, cake and sweet shops where learners sell college-produced foods, confectionery and merchandise. Employability attributes are enhanced in these situations because learners are exposed to real commercial pressures and have to serve customers from the community.

At Boston College practical work in the college restaurants and bistro is appropriately challenging, presents realistic workplace demands and successfully develops good technical and social skills. Students at different NVQ levels work well together and with the teachers in these situations.

53. SF colleges sometimes introduce elements into their curriculum that serve to link learning more closely with employment.

Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College's early years students manage groups of Year 3 primary pupils who come to the college to study science and design technology. This eight-week course involves 90 primary pupils annually and provides valuable enrichment for the students.

Work experience in the locality

54. Most GFE colleges make arrangements for at least some of their full-time learners to undertake organised work experience. About a third of the GFE colleges surveyed arrange for a substantial proportion of their students to undertake work experience. In a few, work experience is the exception rather than the norm. In over half the SF colleges surveyed only learners on vocational or general vocational courses or on courses below advanced level, and learners hoping to enter specific professions, such as the medical profession, are given this opportunity. In contrast, in other colleges, large numbers of learners benefit from work experience.

55. In some curriculum areas, work experience features strongly. For example, the awarding bodies for health and care stipulate that work experience is needed; full-time advanced students in agriculture often spend the second year of a three-year course in industry.

56. Not enough work experience is planned to enrich and inform the main curriculum, however. Many colleges allow it simply to exist alongside the main curriculum and there is little assessment of its quality. However, good practice does exist in this respect and, when it does, students clearly benefit.

Additional qualifications

57. Most GFE colleges arrange for students to undertake additional qualifications, at least in some of their curriculum areas. For example, engineering students may study individual NVQ units and computer-aided engineering qualifications; computing and ICT students may study for commercial networking qualifications; health and social care learners may take health and safety, first aid and lifting and handling qualifications. In some curriculum areas, such opportunities are underdeveloped. For example, in construction, few students have the opportunity to take additional qualifications, and in travel and tourism and hospitality few study a foreign language.

58. About one third of the GFE colleges in the survey cited the provision of these additional qualifications as one of the key ways in which improved employability is achieved for their full-time students. These additional qualifications can be helpful in enabling students to gain employment.

Tutorials

59. Colleges generally provide a tutorial hour each week for their full-time students. This includes preparation for HE, or other likely destinations, and a programme of careers education and guidance.

***At Barton Peveril College** a well-structured and targeted careers programme is delivered through the college tutorial programme. Students who indicate that they intend to progress to employment are given additional support and guidance in preparing for this. A weekly careers bulletin is disseminated. An annual HE fair, highly regarded by students, is attended by some 40 universities. An annual arts fair takes place at which HE institutions specialising in arts and media subjects attend. An annual 'Futures Fair', attended by local and some national employers, is aimed at students not intending to go to university. Work-based learning opportunities are promoted at this event.*

60. Not all students receive a formal careers education and guidance programme, however. Sometimes only students on vocational, general vocational or non-advanced courses receive it. In some SF colleges, less emphasis is given to careers advice in relation to employment than to advice and guidance on applying to HE institutions.

Colleges and work-related learning at Key Stage 4

61. Many GFE colleges are making an important contribution to enabling school pupils to experience a more vocational and work-related curriculum at Key Stage 4. For example, around three in four colleges of FE were involved in the first year of the Increased Flexibility Programme, a national initiative aimed at enhancing vocational and work-related learning opportunities for 14–16 year olds. Colleges were nearly always the lead partner in the 260 partnerships between schools, colleges and work-based learning providers established for the purpose. Early findings show that these partnerships have:

- helped improve pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance

- broadened the curriculum available
- strengthened pupils' learning and deepened their understanding of a vocational sector
- increased their knowledge of other providers of education and training
- improved pupils' access to good-quality accommodation, equipment and realistic working environments.

However, there is still a need for these partnerships to increase their links with local employers.

Planning and managing the work

62. Certain features occur frequently in the colleges that provide extensive training for employers:

- the mission and strategic objectives of the college reflect employer engagement explicitly
- data relating to this work are collected systematically
- the management structure reflects these priorities by usually having a member of the senior management team holding overall responsibility
- a separate business unit or faculty, or both, play a key role in operations
- responsibilities for employer engagement are devolved to those curriculum departments that are active in this work and reinforced through appraisal
- there are good arrangements, for example through cross-college committees, to disseminate information
- there are arrangements to ensure that the college can respond quickly to identified need
- the effectiveness of the college's engagement with employers and of the development of students' employability attributes are carefully evaluated.

Strategic management

(i) Strategy

63. GFE colleges' missions usually make reference to meeting the needs of the communities they serve, and this includes employers. However, they vary in the

degree to which they specifically include employer engagement. Colleges build on these mission statements by providing a series of strategic and operational objectives. The extent to which these have addressed the training requirements of local employers has been patchy since incorporation. SF colleges tend to have more general missions and give priority to the academic and general development of the individual student.

64. Half the GFE colleges surveyed have given training for employers a high priority. In about 1 in 10 GFE colleges, strategies are underdeveloped, however. Among the GFE survey colleges there is a close relationship between the strength of a college's strategy to develop training for employers and the extent to which it provides this training. In most of the SF colleges in the survey, there is little or no priority given to the development of training for employers.

65. In the light of the LSC's development-planning requirements for 2003–06, all colleges are required to set targets for employer engagement, the number of employees they intend to work with for each year of the planning period and the success rates for work-based learning. While some GFE colleges surveyed have set clear and achievable targets, others have struggled to do so. In these cases, colleges fail to specify clearly the definitions they are using and the baseline volumes of work presently being done. Many colleges do not have an accurate picture of how much work they are doing with employers. A minority of colleges are hesitant about setting clear or demanding targets until they know how they will be used. In addition, there are currently no nationally recognised and clearly defined measures of performance by which colleges can assess their own level of responsiveness.

66. Many SF colleges confine their targets to improving employability rather than employee training. Commonly, targets are framed round increased work experience or improvements in the accuracy of destination analysis. Again, there are as yet no benchmark guidelines to help colleges measure their success in improving the employability of their learners.

(ii) Collection and use of data

67. As already identified, the failure to have a clear idea of how much work with employers is taking place seriously hinders the development of meaningful targets. Only about a quarter of the GFE colleges in the survey have good arrangements for the collection and use of data and other information relevant to working with employers. In about two out of five these arrangements are unsatisfactory.

68. The main college learner database, the ILR, is not fully completed nor is it used sufficiently. Those fields that relate to LSC funding are required to be fully complete and their accuracy is audited. Other fields that capture, for example, work that is fully paid for by employers, are often incomplete. Some colleges have a clear record of what their business unit is doing but not of the rest of the activity across the college.

69. Colleges operate different databases for various aspects of their work. For example, the business unit will usually have a database to record details of the employers it works with and the activity undertaken. Other central college units, such as the marketing department, the work-experience unit and the unit that co-ordinates

work-based learning, will usually have databases that help them manage their work. Curriculum departments keep records of varying degrees of sophistication. Few of the GFE colleges surveyed have established a database system that collects information on all the work the college does with employers.

***Rotherham College of Arts and Technology's** database can be interrogated by occupational area and the different levels of contact established within each firm, for example managing director, training or personnel officer. Direct access to the database is through the business unit, where it is updated weekly.*

***City of Bristol College** has a sophisticated client management system. Details about clients, including the size of the company, enquiry details, bookings, purchasing history, achievement of qualifications and student progression, are stored on the system. The extensive database is used for marketing to both individuals and companies, and enables focused targeting of employers by sector. Companies are provided with updated information about qualifications and courses and also changes in legislation that might affect their businesses.*

A quarter of the GFE colleges in the survey say that they are currently developing systems to enable them to capture the information on the work with employers more comprehensively. SF colleges generally have employer databases to manage work experience but, since most do little direct work for employers, there are few established data systems for that aspect of employer responsiveness.

(iii) Funding

70. GFE colleges make use of a wide range of income streams to develop and fund their work with employers. LSC recurrent funding is regarded as of critical importance. However, it does not cover fully the development costs entailed when working with employers and is reduced when a college works with one company and/or delivers training on a company's premises. There are many other funding sources: RDA funding, LSC workforce development and local initiative funding. ESF income and European Regional Development Funding (ERDF), which supports capital development, are used by colleges in designated areas of deprivation. Government funding from, for example, the DTI helps colleges improve their capital equipment. CoVE funding is helping to improve significantly the equipment and accommodation in the colleges that have CoVE status and helping to increase enrolments and work with employers. These are essential sources of funding to assist colleges to develop new provision and support activity such as training-needs analysis, special projects with employers and in-company learning centres.

71. Many colleges say that employers, however willing they are to pay for training for their managers, are less willing to pay for lower-level training. Employers, colleges report, feel that raising the levels of basic skills possessed by those in the workforce is a responsibility of the government. ETPs are addressing this issue in the areas in which they operate.

72. Each type of funding has different restrictions on its use and different audit-trail requirements. Many colleges employ people who have expertise in bid writing to produce the submissions needed to acquire some forms of funding. The varied conditions attached to different funding sources lead to confusion on the part of employers and exasperation at the high levels of bureaucracy on the part of colleges. Colleges express frustration over:

- the difficulties in getting employers, especially SMEs, to pay for training
- the difficulties presented by the LSC policy of only funding full qualifications when colleges need to develop bespoke training for a particular company that will not fund the training itself
- the length of time needed to get a qualification onto the QCA qualifications list
- the impact on retention and achievement rates if employees, having gained what they want from a course, leave before completing their qualification, and how this will affect colleges' forthcoming inspection and their chances of meeting their LSC success targets for retention and achievement
- the bureaucracy attached to the funding, in particular, of 'other' qualifications, that is, those that are not on the QCA qualifications list
- the discounts operated by the LSC on the funding of training which is dedicated to one employer and/or conducted on an employer's premises
- the bureaucratic barriers to working across local LSC boundaries
- the cap on adult training when a college has reached its targets for this work
- the short lead-in times for some projects and the pressure to achieve qualifications before the end of short-term projects.

73. Colleges are wary of taking on work that entails more than the normal degree of risk. Recurrent funding has become tighter. Some colleges have experienced difficult financial circumstances since incorporation, for example, when funding streams such as those for franchised work were capped at short notice. ESF funding is paid retrospectively and places additional financial burdens on a college until it is credited.

Operational management

(i) Structures

74. About 75% of the GFE survey colleges have created business units or curriculum departments for the provision of work for employers. In some cases, the business units are the first point of contact with the employer and delegate at least some of the training and assessment to the curriculum departments. In other cases, they operate largely in isolation from the rest of the college. Business units often provide a year-round service and use staffing contracts and external agencies to facilitate improved responsiveness. They can send out an external image that is more commercial and attractive to employers than that of the college as a whole.

***Barnet College's** business unit responds well to employers. Open all year, the unit has its own logo, identity, building and staff. Its core business is within the areas of care, retail, rail and legislative requirements. Success factors include:*

- *sticking to its 'core' work and knowing when to refuse business*
- *having its own identity, being open all year and starting at 08.00 when employers like to phone*
- *having a small, stable workforce who know the employers personally*
- *senior management support, both from the college and the businesses engaged*
- *working in partnership with departments within the college, private providers and different consortia*
- *acting as a broker for employers, finding solutions in terms of funding and qualifications, and then minimising administration and paperwork for employers*
- *gaining the loyalty of freelance trainers and assessors by providing staff development opportunities and paying them on time*
- *having access to a range of funding streams to avoid dependence on any one source.*

75. About half the GFE colleges in the survey, in an effort to increase their work for employers, have recently reorganised their management arrangements.

***Park Lane College** has created a vice-principal post for strategy and business; a cross-college workforce development group, which is a committee of the academic board, and a faculty for services to business.*

***Greenwich Community College** has established a workforce development directorate, an external development forum and new management posts.*

Some colleges are disbanding their business units and integrating the work within the curriculum departments in order to increase the sense of ownership for employer engagement within the faculties, and to increase the contact made by vocational teachers with employers. They believe that vocational teachers can give vocational credibility, which some staff in a business unit cannot.

***Reaseheath College** delegates the responsibility for employer engagement to each of its programme area departments. It does not have a separate business unit. Programme leaders are encouraged and supported to develop their links with employers.*

Some curriculum departments are strengthening their management arrangements to facilitate this engagement.

***Warwickshire College's** engineering department has restructured its staffing. It now has a business generation officer; two teachers, who are employed specifically to undertake business-improvement technique work with employers; workplace assessors; and a team of three training officers, who spend their time recruiting new apprentices, reviewing their progress and finding work placements.*

76. In contrast, those GFE colleges that are doing relatively little bespoke training for employers have often failed to establish strong links between the business unit and the curriculum teaching departments. The departments see the business unit as carrying the prime responsibility for this work. In these colleges, senior managers have failed to establish an appropriate whole-college emphasis for work with employers.

(ii) Promoting the work of colleges with employers

77. All colleges make use of a range of general methods of promotion such as the production of prospectuses for full- and part-time courses, the use of local and regional newspaper advertisements, trade publications, mail shots and open days or evenings. Many attend trade exhibitions and careers fairs. Many use their links with other organisations to promote their work, for example, by attending breakfast meetings and events or meetings of the local LSC, the Chamber of Commerce or Business Link, and ensuring their presence in these organisations' publications. Some have regular newsletters which are distributed to employers they work with.

Word-of-mouth advertising through positive training experiences and a good reputation are considered as key promoters of a college's work.

78. Some colleges point to a marketing strategy for their work with employers and make good use of targeted advertising. Some of the most effective promotional work is done through initial telephone contact followed by a visit and training-needs analysis. A few colleges have dedicated telesales units.

79. About 80% of the colleges in the survey have a dedicated section for workforce development on their website. In most cases, these sections are clearly signposted, are easy to access and give a clear overview of the provision. In a few cases, they are not easily accessible, being located under, for example, a section on partnerships or corporate provision. About a third of colleges say that their website plays a key part in their promotional work. Some use the websites of employer and government bodies, such as the Chambers of Commerce and Business Link, to promote their work. Some colleges have developed joint websites.

80. Nevertheless, only about a quarter of the GFE survey colleges were judged to be implementing a promotional strategy well. A substantial minority were considered to not be doing enough promotional work. Weaknesses include:

- an insufficiently focused approach to promoting their work with employers
- insufficient use of direct visits to companies
- poor sharing of existing intelligence and insufficient use made of the intelligence-gathering and promotional opportunities presented by college staff, many of whom have a good knowledge of the employers they deal with
- a promotional budget that is too small to enable the college to undertake sufficient general work or to fund telesales work or cold calling
- staff who engage in marketing work being unable to give readily a price for their provision
- marketing materials that are not of the appropriate quality and make it difficult for important information to be found
- promotion of the training product, but not giving enough attention to how this will benefit the company.

Many companies have:

- the perception that GFE colleges are for full-time, 16–18-year-old, mainly academic, students

- a low level of understanding of what GFE colleges can do, especially among SMEs
- a low level of understanding of major training initiatives such as modern apprenticeships
- a view that colleges are not flexible enough to provide what they need or that their provision is of low quality.

(iii) Working in partnership

81. Most GFE colleges surveyed are involved in a wide range of partnerships that promote their work with employers and their provision of a curriculum that develops the attributes of employability among their learners. None of the GFE survey colleges was judged unsatisfactory in this aspect of their work. They are often proactive in setting up partnerships and seek genuine partnership arrangements that benefit all parties. Partnerships can often help widen access to training, provide a speedier and more flexible response to requests for training, spread the development costs and risks associated with new ventures, and share the expertise held by members of the partnership. Partnerships can also have some negative effects, however. For example, they can sometimes become mere talking shops and work against a quick response that a single provider, operating independently, might be able to offer.

82. **Inter-college partnerships** can prove useful in developing employer-related work and in successfully bidding for external funding.

***Thomas Danby College** is a member of a regional group of six colleges, the careers service and Rathbone Training Services. The partnership has successfully bid for ESF funding to operate the Access to Community and Employment programme, aimed at providing employment access for 60 people who are experiencing significant disadvantage.*

Inter-college partnerships can also prove useful for raising the impact of colleges in an area of work.

***Bishop Burton College's** participation in the ELITE consortium of land-based colleges has enabled it to take a leading role in the Forward Farming project. This project has facilitated partnerships with stakeholder groups, industry liaison panels, large company suppliers to the agricultural industry such as Unilever and Renault, and with agencies and local authorities.*

In addition, they can be useful in providing a co-ordinated marketing approach through, for example, joint marketing literature and linked websites.

***The six colleges in the Tyne and Wear sub-region** link together in a well-established consortium known as the 'G6'. The principals of the colleges meet monthly and a range of sub-groups exist to share*

information and develop joint strategies in the different areas of college operations. They have developed a G6 employers' charter. Currently the group is focusing on a 'Skills House' initiative. This initiative will establish a single entry point of contact for employers, the RDA, Business Link, and other bodies; act as a broker for work with employers; undertake market research and manage bids for funding.

83. Regional Development Agency (RDA) and LSC funding, can help to provide a co-ordinated solution to a skills shortage in a region. They can help link colleges and other organisations, enhance their resources, and help to make good use of areas of college expertise.

*Following an RDA survey, which identified skills shortages in the rapidly growing ethnic food market, the RDA and the local LSC have funded a group of about 20 colleges and private training providers to set up the **International Food Skills Academy**. This Academy, led by **Thomas Danby College**, has access to excellent modern resources and is developing training in the workplace and in college. High-quality learning packs and computerised presentations have been produced to help ensure consistency in the quality of delivery. The training covers the major skills areas that help make a business a success, for example business practice, supervisory management, kitchen management, cooking skills, wine service, food hygiene and the use of IT.*

*The **Yorkshire Rail Academy** is a joint venture between the **York College** and the National Railway Museum. Funding from the RDA, is enhancing York College's CoVE in rail engineering and has contributed to the establishment of modern learning facilities, a rail-engineering laboratory, and an external track infrastructure which are adjacent to the National Railway Museum. The facilities are used by the college, the rail companies in the region and school pupils*

84. **Partnerships with private providers** are also well established in a number of colleges. Many private providers have long experience of working with employers and can offer flexible staffing and expertise, and enhanced credibility in particular areas of work. Colleges make use of franchising and other arrangements, for example, to enable the St John Ambulance, fire brigades, CITB-Construction Skills, security organisations, and health and care training providers to deliver work-based and other training.

85. Colleges can add value to a partnership with a private provider by making use of college expertise in, for example, accessing funds, providing quality assurance, and provider expertise in delivering flexible and dispersed training and assessment.

***Stockton Riverside College** works with a private provider to deliver NVQs to major national retail companies. The college holds the awarding-body centre approval and buys in trainers and assessors from the private provider, which has a well-developed set of contacts with the industry. The college also works in partnership with a Carillion training centre to deliver work-related qualifications.*

86. Many employers, group training associations (a company, owned by a group of employers and established to provide training for it) and other private providers use colleges to provide the technical certificate for modern apprenticeship programmes. These partnerships benefit from close working practices.

***North Trafford College of Further Education's** gas installation and maintenance CoVE provides college-based courses as part of the modern apprenticeship programme run by a group training provider. The college provides technical training and personal development activity such as an outward-bound project and work placement. In another development, the college is providing a pre-apprenticeship course that is designed to lead to progression to apprenticeship programmes managed by several private training providers. The college helps with the interviewing and initial assessment. Successful students undertake a full-time course at the college and are recruited onto apprenticeship programmes when appropriate.*

87. **Partnerships with equipment manufacturers** can be of mutual benefit in a number of ways. The college has the use of modern and expensive equipment and/or consumables it could not otherwise afford and the company is able to display to potential customers a piece of equipment in a working environment. Learners who are familiar with a particular piece of equipment are more likely to recommend its purchase when they are employed. These arrangements are often seen in colleges that train the apprentices of motor vehicle manufacturers and main dealers, and in engineering workshops.

***Warwickshire College** has partnership arrangements with several equipment and product manufacturers. For example, one manufacturer of modern computer-controlled measuring equipment provides its machines and replaces them free of charge as new models are released. An area of the engineering department's metrology centre is company badged. College students benefit by being able to use modern equipment and the company can demonstrate a working machine to its clients.*

88. **Partnerships with employers** also bring benefits to both sides involved. Colleges contribute to the partnership their expertise in selecting and adapting qualifications, developing courses, providing training, drawing down funding and applying quality assurance arrangements. Employers provide the trainees and often the trainers and assessors.

***St Helens College** identifies NVQs that can meet the training needs of a company and then helps the company to deliver the training. For example, one company wanted a programme to provide qualifications for shift workers that would satisfy legislative requirements. The college identified the appropriate NVQs in chemical processing, developed sample portfolios and entered a contract to provide training on four sites nationally. The college has trained company employees to become trainers, assessors and verifiers and provides on-going support to enable these staff to deliver the training and assessment. The college provides an initial assessment of each prospective trainee, does the induction on*

company premises to suit shift-working patterns and has developed the training and assessment programme, using the technical expertise of company staff.

89. Employers can also provide work placements, visits and visiting speakers for full-time students, and staff with current experience of the industry. Some colleges have developed partnerships with large numbers of employers to provide work placements for their students. These are especially strong in health and care where placement is a mandatory part of the qualification. NHS trusts, regional health authorities, colleges, private providers and the social services combine in care consortia to facilitate training and increase the number of care settings in which learning and assessment can take place.

The London Leisure College is a partnership between **Greenwich Community College** and **Greenwich Leisure Ltd**, a trust that manages over 30 public leisure centres in conjunction with boroughs and councils in London. The partnership provides a wide range of sport, recreation, leisure and tourism courses. The London Leisure College is located at a Premiership football club, creating a real sporting and leisure environment. Leisure centre staff work alongside college teachers, providing current experience of the industry. The Trust offers work experience for students and job opportunities when they graduate. To fit in with sporting activities, much of the teaching takes place at weekends or in the evenings.

90. CoVEs are facilitating productive partnerships between colleges and private training providers and are helping to increase the involvement of employers in college activity.

The Logistics College North West is a CoVE which is a partnership of six colleges, private training providers and the Transport and General Workers Union, formed to deliver training to the logistics sector.

(iv) Assuring quality

91. Colleges usually apply the same quality assurance procedures to their work with employers as those used for their other work, particularly if it is funded by the LSC. These procedures usually include the collection and consideration of evidence from learners' achievements, learners' views, the observation of teaching, the operation of internal moderation systems and the views of external moderators.

92. About half the GFE colleges in the survey said that they made use of the views of employers. A few do this informally, through discussion at employer liaison meetings. Others make use of formal questionnaires to survey opinion. For training that is fully funded by an employer, reliance is placed more on repeat business and employer views elicited during meetings. Few colleges seek to introduce measures that would improve the rigour of the analysis of what employers and learners are saying. The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) and, more recently, the LSC have done some work on establishing national benchmarks for learners' answers to

particular questions, but little has been done to establish benchmarks to help analyse employers' views.

***Park Lane College** can trace through time the answers employers give to particular questions. The analysis shows that, in the period from 1994 to 2000, employer views, taken every three years, have improved. For example, their responses show that a significantly higher proportion of the employers surveyed now feel:*

- *well informed about the college*
- *the college's students are well prepared for work placement*
- *the college is giving a better response to enquiries*
- *training needs are being met.*

93. Few colleges have an employer charter that lists service standards for training and commitments about what an employer can expect of the college and what the employer is expected to do, if it provides, for example, work placements. Some colleges include these points in their student charters. A few include them on their website.

94. College self-assessment reports are usually written to match the Common Inspection Framework (CIF). The CIF has a section that asks how far programmes or the curriculum meet external requirements and are responsive to local circumstances. As an answer to this question, the CIF requests a consideration of how programmes take account of community and employer needs. Many colleges require their curriculum departments and business unit to answer this question for their areas of work. The answers usually comprise listings of examples of what they do and rarely evaluate rigorously the extent of their responsiveness. Insufficient use is made of employers' views and how well the provision matches market need. Not all colleges collate the departments' responses and answer the CIF question for the college as a whole. Where they do, the evaluation suffers from the same weakness of listing activity rather than evaluating what is done against need. With no national benchmarks against which to measure their performance and, in many colleges, insufficient data about what they do, the analysis lacks rigour.

95. Quality assurance procedures for some of the component parts of a college's provision to develop employability attributes among its students are in place and are considered in college self-assessment reports. With few colleges having an overarching policy on employability, quality assurance for this aspect of provision is patchy, however. The use of destination data, the views of ex-students and the quality assurance of work experience and its impact on the curriculum are underdeveloped in many colleges.

(v) Resources

96. About half the colleges in the survey quoted skills shortages among their staff as limiting their ability to do more work with employers. In some curriculum areas, the salary levels are not sufficient to attract applicants with the right qualifications,

expertise and flexibility. Some colleges quoted the poor perception of teaching as a career as a barrier to recruiting well-qualified staff. These difficulties, leading to shortages of staff of the right calibre, are often acute in construction, aspects of engineering and business management, legal work and IT. The higher salaries paid to school teachers are attracting some teachers away from colleges. Insufficient pay is quoted as a barrier to better employer engagement, particularly in London.

97. In some areas of work, the high demand for training is causing difficulties. For example, the volume of demand for training to meet legislative requirements in health and care, in health and safety training, and in gas training and other aspects of construction is outstripping the pool of available teachers and assessors who are able to do this work. There are also shortages of teachers qualified to teach and assess basic skills.

98. Colleges find that not all their teachers are able to provide a good-quality service to employers. Some teachers have been teaching in a college classroom setting for many years and are not flexible enough, or lack confidence, to adapt their teaching styles successfully to suit the needs of employed adults. Timetabling difficulties and the need to provide suitable cover for teachers who are required to work with employers at short notice can also curtail work with employers.

99. Colleges operate a number of strategies to overcome these difficulties. Sometimes a college will employ staff from agencies to help increase their ability to respond flexibly. Private training providers are used by some colleges. These providers can sometimes offer increased credibility in some areas of work, long-standing experience of working with industry and flexibility. Some colleges operate different contractual arrangements for staff who carry out a high volume of work with employers and have moved away from contracts which stipulate an annualised number of teaching hours. Overtime contracts for full-time teachers are used in some colleges to increase flexibility and to avoid adversely impacting on the normal teaching timetable.

100. Professional development programmes give only patchy support to the skills needed for working with employers and developing a curriculum that develops employability attributes among learners, although there are some notable exceptions.

***West Cheshire College** has a professional development programme to support employer engagement. Emphasis is being given to ensuring that vocational teaching teams have the required skills to engage satisfactorily with employers. In this college an advanced teaching practitioner leads a self-help group for staff engaged in work-based training.*

101. One essential aspect of professional development for vocational teachers – the placement of staff in industry – is becoming more common, however.

***Leicester College** has introduced a ‘vocational fellowship’ – one month’s training for teachers to go into the workplace to gain new skills. The company finances part of the costs, the teachers give up two weeks’ holiday and Leicester College releases the teachers from two weeks’ teaching.*

City of Bristol College's technology work-based learning staff receive an induction from major employers. This helps them become familiar with the core values of an employer and the particular terminology and language used so that they can reinforce these when they work with apprentices. The teachers work closely with employers' staff when designing and delivering the programmes. The employers have a high regard for the teachers' skills, knowledge and experience.

102. Most colleges have good equipment in at least some curriculum areas. There are, however, pockets of the curriculum in many colleges where equipment is reaching the end of its useful life, for example some engineering equipment, and some hairdressing, catering and construction facilities. Special funding, for example CoVE funding and funding from the EU, is important in enabling a college to purchase expensive, modern equipment. Manufacturers provide equipment at reduced cost in some colleges (see paragraph 87).

Darlington College of Technology's CoVE in media (digital production and design) has enabled the purchase of state-of-the-art media and telecommunications equipment including both a radio and television broadcasting studio and facilities to host student websites.

In Hull College the equipment purchased as part of the CoVE in engineering manufacture is portable, to enable it to be used on employers' premises. Mobile process training rigs allow working models of different systems, for example programmable logical control systems, to be demonstrated with faults created to enable investigations and remedial strategies to be proposed.

103. Colleges have, in the last decade, been able to improve the state of their general accommodation markedly and this improvement makes a significant contribution to employer-related work, although, in some colleges, timetabling constraints prevent the use of their better accommodation for work with employers at peak times. Many colleges have excellent conference facilities that can be hired out to companies and bring in revenue. Most colleges now possess at least some accommodation that is of a sufficiently good standard that it can be used to provide courses for employers and their staff without qualms about its quality.

Part 2. Examples of good practice

A college business unit

Telford College of Art and Design's business unit 'In-company Training' trains employees mostly on company premises, often in in-company learning centres. The unit has grown considerably since it was established in 1992 and is now the largest department in the college. It operates in nine main employment areas including spectator control, food, engineering, business, customer service, warehouse and distribution, key skills and IT.

The unit works with over 200 employers, from SMEs to large multinationals, both locally and nationally. Over 4,000 learners received training in 2002–03. There is a target to increase this by 40% in 2003–04. The unit's income target for 2003–04 was over £2.5 million. At inception, most of its income was generated from employers paying the full cost of the provision. Now most, apart from income from some higher-level work, is generated from LSC funding. The unit holds a large ETP contract. Income from the unit's work helps significantly in improving college resources and accommodation.

In 1992 the college realised that, due to timetabling constraints, it could not respond to an engineering company's request for in-company rather than traditional day-release training. Five teachers, who were deemed to be entrepreneurial, were taken off timetabled teaching to concentrate on in-company training. The business unit presently has 130 staff, 80 of whom are employed as assessors on business support contracts. Many of the staff are based at company premises. They use digital equipment, including laptops and cameras, and e-mail, to collect and send evidence of competence and to keep paperwork to a minimum.

The work is promoted through high-quality literature with an appropriate mix of general and sector-specific information, direct telephone calling and visiting. The unit's reputation plays a major role in attracting new work, much of it through word-of-mouth advertising.

Professional development is a high priority. The unit's appraisal system assesses the match between the commercial needs of the unit and the ability of the individual and the team to meet these needs. In order to meet demand, all staff in the learning centres are qualified to at least the first level to teach basic skills. As staff work on company premises, they are also familiar with employers' working practices and requirements. A major success factor is the ability of the unit to adapt to changing needs. For example, it established one of the first call-centre training facilities. When a company that makes computer peripherals changed its product, the unit trained the staff in the new work. For the same company, the unit provides induction for new

staff, has trained staff in Japan and is now working with the company's supply chain businesses.

A business development directorate

Sutton Coldfield College's business development directorate, led by a vice-principal, is one of three teaching directorates; the others being the 16–19 directorate and the adult and continuing education directorate.

The business development directorate manages a significant amount of work for employers. The income target for 2003–04 was £4.5 million, which is 14% of total college turnover. Provision includes work-based learning, Learndirect, full-cost recovery provision (£0.5 million of full-cost income annually), NVQs, technical programmes and bespoke packages. Areas of learning covered are engineering and manufacturing, business management, customer service, basic skills, call handling, care and cleaning. There are approximately 1,500 learners on in-company NVQs and a further 600 on modern apprenticeships. The college works with about 90 different organisations and provides training on some 40 different vocational courses, using 48 assessors.

Some interesting training strategies are in operation. For example:

- all apprentices spend a year in college before joining a company. During this time, they complete their key skills. This has reduced the average completion time and improved full framework completion for these students
- all work-based learners use a common portfolio that becomes familiar to them as they progress
- there is a strong emphasis on assessors working in teams in order to help assure quality; retention and pass rates for work-based learning were significantly above average in 2002/03.

Some training needs are identified through organisations such as Business Link and the local Chamber of Commerce, and the directorate works closely with the local LSC to develop provision in line with identified need. Much of the new work is developed either by initial contact by the directorate staff or through repeat business and follow-up work. A relatively small amount of money is spent on promotional literature because this is not seen as an effective form of marketing.

The directorate uses funding from many sources, but the employer is presented with a net price, without the detail. Employer representatives welcome this approach.

Staff in the directorate are employed under different contractual arrangements from main grade lecturers, providing the required flexibility of response. Business development managers are responsible for finding the business and maintaining contact with the company. They work closely with curriculum managers who are responsible for the provision. The business development managers have to meet income targets and the curriculum managers have to meet retention and achievement targets.

A sixth form college business unit

Godalming College's business training centre is located in the town centre to make it more accessible to the business community. Business training income was £500,000 in 2002–03 and is expected to increase by 50% in the next year. In 2002–03, the college provided training for 1,100 staff from 225 employers.

Courses provided include business management, care, literacy and numeracy, ESOL and IT. Training and assessment are available on a flexible basis at the business training centre or on employers' premises. Continuous professional development workshops are provided for SMEs. Employers are supported through a telephone helpline, e-mail or visits.

Enquiries are responded to promptly. The college has a high rate of converting enquiries into business. This is, in part, due to the detailed initial discussions that help ensure common understanding about how the training will relate to the employer's business objectives. Course content and how it is to be covered are discussed with the employer and adapted to ensure best fit. An information and advice service is provided for employers, either at the training centre or the workplace, to ensure that their needs are met. There is a high rate of repeat business.

Trainers have business rather than academic backgrounds. All trainers and assessors, have up-to-date knowledge, and many are currently engaged commercially in their specialist area.

The college works collaboratively with a local bank to promote management training for small businesses and sole traders and with Business Link on joint promotional events. Business training is promoted through press releases, radio interviews and press advertising, and by targeting key sectors through mail shots and group e-mails. A successful feature is the college's clever use of branding. The college uses its reputation for high-quality provision with learners aged 16 to 19 when promoting courses for employers, using Godalming College as a brand name for excellence.

Employers played an important role in the consultation process for the college strategic plan 2003/06 and in the development of the mission statement. An

employer forum meets quarterly, to inform the planning of new courses in the light of current skills needs.

The stringent quality assurance systems used in the college are applied to business training activities. These include the production of detailed self-assessment reports, which are validated and monitored by senior management, and the corporation, internal verification and the evaluation of teaching. Evaluations with learners and employers are undertaken after induction, each workshop and at the end of each programme.

A whole-college approach to working with employers

Hull College has developed a whole-college approach to forging employer links. Corporate decisions are responsive to local economic conditions and take account of the regeneration strategies being implemented in the region. Development plans for each of the college's schools and individual units provide a response to the college's aim of meeting the needs of employers. For example, in response to the college's aim to increase the number of workforce development projects and work-based training activities, the curriculum schools are planning to increase the provision of work-based NVQs and to offer flexible solutions to employers' training needs. Many sources of funding, including ESF, RDA, city council and LSC recurrent funding, are used to develop the work and fund the training. The college business unit, INVEST, provides many bespoke courses, some of which are charged at full cost to the employer.

Governors play a key role in promoting employer engagement. The corporation includes key industrialists who review, as part of their remit, the suitability of the curriculum to meet business needs. They are members of many external employer groups and related bodies, and of the college's employer consultative groups, which help to ensure that the curriculum is responsive to local employers.

Some major projects are developed in response to external need, for example care training in response to government legislation, training for the port authorities in response to the needs of employer groups and engineering training in response to declining college enrolments. The college has a long tradition of employer links in construction and of providing high-quality training. The regeneration of housing in east Hull created an opportunity to expand this training.

Marketing co-ordinators from INVEST regularly visit companies to discuss training issues. These visits are followed with customised and costed training proposals. Market research questionnaires are used to assess employers' needs and awareness of available training. A recent survey of local solicitors identified a demand for Institute of Legal Executives' courses. Much of the training comes through repeat business. In addition, INVEST uses press releases, targeted mail shots, a database of contacts, a website and corporate brochures to promote its

work. Newsletters are used by the care consortium to promote its activities. Awards ceremonies, for example in construction, in partnership with the National Federation of Builders, are used to celebrate the achievements of local trainees.

Major employer-engagement projects are as follows:

- **INVEST** designs and provides a range of customised training for employers. The training includes management, IT and customer service programmes, and trainer and assessor awards. Growth has been rapid. Numbers have increased from fewer than 1,000 to over 3,000 in the three years to 2003. Annual turnover is above £1 million. The unit has recently moved to well-equipped accommodation at the Kingston Communications stadium.
- **Team Humber** is a group training association established by Hull College in conjunction with the Humber Port Authority. It arose from the port's employers wanting to change the industry's culture of casual labour, low-skills base, poor safety and ageing workforce, by establishing a lifelong learning culture. Over 2,000 training courses have been provided since the association's inception in 2001. Progression into employment from the 'dockgates' programme of basic plant and equipment training is high.
- **The Hull Care Consortium**, established in 1997, is a partnership between the college and 50 care homes. Its activities have grown in response to the Care Standards Act 2000. The consortium helps care establishments produce plans for workforce development. Nearly 400 employees were registered on NVQ programmes in 2002–03. A forum for sharing good practice meets regularly in care homes.
- The aim of the **Hull Manufacturing Workforce Development Unit** is to promote training and provide courses that help companies to become more efficient and improve quality and output. Over 40 companies have become involved and close to 4,000 employees have achieved vocational qualifications. A manufacturing improvement group, with a regular attendance of 60 managers, shares good practice. The group meets monthly to discuss topics such as lean production methods and total quality management.
- **The on-site construction training centre** is training the workers required to construct new amenities and to refurbish 2,000 council dwellings on a large housing estate. The project includes the construction of a new 'village' costing nearly £2,000 million. The training centre, with support from the city council, was opened in 2003 and offers NVQ programmes and trains 90 apprentices.

Quality is assured in a number of ways. Project business plans include targets and milestones against which progress is monitored. The college's self-assessment process draws on evidence from many sources including the observation of teaching, employer-perception surveys, pass rates, skill development, growth and profitability. The evidence indicates that quality is high and that the college is responding well to need. The LSC has awarded Hull College a Beacon award for its

work with employers. A set of performance indicators is to be developed to enable better assessment of responsiveness to the needs of employers.

The college uses staffing arrangements that promote flexible and relevant training. For example, INVEST has a staffing complement of 20, with specialists in each area of training. Five other staff undertake marketing, sales or administrative roles. Team Humber employs specialist staff from the industry. In the care consortium, all 60 work-based trainers and assessors are employed by the member companies. The manufacturing workforce development unit has a unit manager, two senior training consultants and 15 trainers.

Work with employers benefits the college's other work. It has supported the expansion of college-based engineering provision, for example the introduction of a foundation degree and the development of a national certificate programme with a local company. The work with Team Humber has helped develop a locally devised unit for the NVQ in stevedoring.

A land-based college: using the curriculum to enhance the performance of the industry

Bishop Burton College is a land-based college that has Beacon status and two CoVEs, for agriculture and equine studies. The college's good practice in determining and responding to the needs of employers has three strands:

- the use of the college farm to demonstrate good production practice and to conduct farming research
- the establishment, through the 'Forward Farming' project, of a stakeholder group of local farmers and representatives of other agencies with an interest in rural affairs. This group, whose members are paid for their services, has undertaken detailed consideration of the training and knowledge needs of local farmers
- a programme of dissemination events, through the 'Forward Farming' project, to assist the industry in updating practice. These have raised the profile of the college in supporting farmers' professional development.

The college operates a profitable commercial farm, including a large pig unit. The farm's objectives are to provide an educational resource, to display sound environmental and husbandry practice, and to provide a resource for demonstration, trials and investigative research work. Successful operation of the farm units enhances the college's credibility with the industry and with students, and provides staff with opportunities for continuing professional development. Over £20,000 of research work is commissioned each year. The work includes research into welfare issues arising from the transportation of livestock, studies of animal vaccines, feed

trials and arable-cropping trials. Learners are informed of the work and some participate during their college courses. Results of trials are disseminated through the college website, through farm walks and open days, and through short courses.

Bishop Burton College is a member of a consortium of five land-based colleges that has obtained Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' funding to manage the 'Forward Farming' project. This project aims to establish demonstration farms in order to develop and share good practice. Bishop Burton College manages two aspects of the project. One of these is the 'virtual pig unit'. The college has a large commercial pig unit of over 3,000 animals. Animal health restrictions make it increasingly difficult to use the unit for demonstration purposes, so information about the unit's performance is disseminated through the internet. The project has also funded seven 'Business Clubs' for farmers in the region. These clubs aim to extend the college's engagement with farmers, and enable the farmers themselves to have a voice in the development of training and the exchange of knowledge. The 'virtual pig unit' website project has led to the development of a diploma in pig production and management by distance learning.

The 'Forward Farming' project has enabled the college to enhance its links with employers and raise the profile of its training. The project has effectively updated knowledge in the industry and also among college staff and mainstream learners. Agencies such as the Environment Agency and companies such as Unilever recognise the college as an effective conduit through which they can make contact with the farming community.

A partnership between colleges, employers, a trade union and private training providers

The **Logistics College North West (LCNW)**, a CoVE, was established to meet a regional skill shortage in logistics and transport, which arose out of the European Working Time Directive. The Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) used part of its learning fund to identify the different training needs of the industry and explore possible collaborative structures for providing training.

LCNW is a collaboration between six GFE colleges and the TGWU, led by City College Manchester, and has a main office at the Runshaw Business Centre in Chorley. Training programmes comprise a mixture of bespoke and externally accredited courses, including driver licensing and certification, hybrid Institute of Leadership and Management qualifications and courses in transport and employment law.

LCNW aims to provide a 'one-stop shop' in order to:

- facilitate access to high-quality, industry-specific and affordable training

- create opportunities for new entrants and returnees to the workplace
- help tackle recruitment difficulties facing the sector
- develop a common logistics curriculum and, in conjunction with the SSC, a range of relevant qualifications
- ensure that the volume and level of training can meet the current and future demands of the industry.

Training is offered at the six colleges in partnership with local employers and private training providers. For example, Knowsley Community College provides a six-week driver training programme run in conjunction with two transport companies and Job Centre Plus. Three colleges, on behalf of LCNW, have provided training for unemployed people, with a high proportion progressing to employment. The colleges provide 'off-the-job' training, including basic skills. Specialist private training providers, which own much of the professional equipment such as lorries and fork-lift trucks, provide the 'on-the-job' training. In its first year of operation, LCNW has enrolled over 1,300 learners in partnership with nearly 150 different employers. One college, in partnership with a local school, has developed logistics case studies to be used on a GCSE in applied business.

Funding is drawn from many sources including CoVE development funding, RDA, European and local LSC development funding, and LSC recurrent funding from the four local LSCs. The range of funding streams creates a significant bureaucratic burden. The lack of a precedent for this type of college, with LCNW not being a legal entity, has created difficulties in establishing working protocols.

LCNW is managed by a project board comprising representatives from the six colleges and the TGWU. An employers' forum discusses developments. Each college's development plan is linked to LCNW priorities to create a co-ordinated, strategic approach. LCNW's aims include developing more Level 3 programmes, attracting more non-traditional learners, providing work placements for teachers, opening training centres in the colleges and in companies and developing mechanisms for central data collection.

An area-wide approach to meeting skills needs: Sussex LSC 'Colleges for business'

Sussex LSC has identified 12 key employment skills sectors for Sussex. In building its support strategy for these sectors, it used two separate initiatives: the LSC's CoVE programme and the concept and criteria developed by the LSDA to define a 'College for Business' (CfB). Sussex LSC drew up a collaborative plan to ensure that each of the 12 employment sectors were covered by a CoVE or one or more of its GFE colleges specialising in the sector. The good practice and experience gained through the CoVEs was used in the other vocational areas of their college to support them in achieving CfB criteria. An audit tool was developed to assess whether a

college conforms with the criteria. The tool was initially used by three of the colleges, which received additional funds to support the implementation of the resulting development plan. After reviewing the pilot, the other GFE colleges in Sussex joined the process. A group of senior managers from the colleges and Sussex LSC review progress regularly and a group, which includes the college principals and Sussex LSC directors, oversees developments.

The colleges work closely together in matters relating to meeting skills needs. For example:

- each college contributes, for half of their time, an adviser to the 'Sussex People Development Adviser Network'. These advisers work with two others from HE institutions and six from 'Sussex Enterprise' (the local Business Link agency) as a brokerage team to contact employers and ensure that employers' needs are met by an appropriate provider. Sussex Enterprise's employer and contacts database is available to all partners
- the colleges have made several successful collaborative bids for European funding. One of these bids has helped the colleges support business owner start-ups by offering a 12-week course to improve business planning. Another resulted in research into network building and the provision of development services, other than training, for small businesses
- the colleges are to make a joint appointment to liaise with the three local authorities, to develop accredited training packages for local authority staff.

The colleges report considerable growth in bespoke short-course provision for employers and in their work-based learning provision. They consider that the strategy of developing a planned CoVE provision from the outset, and linking this to the CfB concept, has been an important factor in achieving these increases.

A sixth form college's approach to employability

Greenhead College is an academically successful sixth form college which, while not having an explicit policy on 'employability', has developed a curriculum that successfully develops a wide range of attributes relating to employability.

Examples of the range of activities that bring this about are:

Project and work-shadowing week (PaWS)

Held in June, this well-organised project is compulsory for all first-year students.

Work shadowing for 500 learners is managed by a placement officer and a team of 18 teachers. The college has a database of nearly 1,000 employers developed through individual contact. Learners meet their placement supervisor prior to the week. Contact with students is maintained during the week through visiting or telephone contact. Students are required to keep a diary and write a report, employers to complete an evaluation questionnaire. Student comments include:

- 'confirmed my ambitions to work in law'
- 'challenging and worthwhile, and I gained greater insight into my career choice'.

A further 350 learners choose from 30 different projects, which include:

- a management skills project run by the navy
- law court visits linked to a mock court case enacted at the college
- writing, producing and developing sets for a play performed by primary school pupils.

The 'Liverpool project'

This programme, jointly delivered with the Open College North West and Liverpool University, introduces students to groupwork, managing a long project and self-evaluation. About 12 projects a year are run with about 4 learners working as a group on each. Projects include genetic technology issues, medicine-related topics and microbiology in bread making. Learners undertake formal project planning, groupwork and its management, complete a report, give a formal presentation and engage in self-evaluation. The students' written projects are of good quality.

The Engineering Education Scheme

This national project, part of the Royal Academy of Engineering 'BEST' programme, is designed to increase the progression of high-achieving learners into engineering. Professional engineers from local companies, who provide financial support, work with two groups of four learners on company-related problems. Each group designs and produces drawings using computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment, develops prototypes, produces a display stand illustrating their work, makes a presentation and undergoes a formal interview and assessment by assessors appointed by the Institute. The projects are rigorously managed, and both the presentational and technical quality of the students' work is good. Examples of recent projects include a lapping machine to use on valves and a security device to secure laptops in vans.

Voluntary service in the community

This is part of the college's elective enrichment programme. Approximately 500 learners undertake voluntary service in the community during their stay at the college. The projects usually last for a term or longer and take place during free periods, in the evenings or on Wednesday afternoons, at lunchtimes and sometimes at the weekend. A wide range of options is available. Attendance is high and learners are required to write a report at the end of the project. The services worked with write an evaluation report.

Careers education and guidance

This programme pays good attention to work-related issues. An early session includes a wide-ranging discussion about employability skills needed by employees. A taught session, supported by guidance sheets, explains how to research a career, and lessons on developing curriculum vitae and interview preparation are part of the tutorial programme. Mock interviews, involving employers, are available on demand. A 'what's ahead?' day includes sessions on looking for a job, surviving group interviews, and opportunities in a range of employment areas.

Subject teaching

Teaching is firmly focused on the world of work. For example:

- visits, visiting speakers, successful engagement in competitions and other subject enrichment activities are a strong feature of the provision
- psychology students participate in real-life social psychology investigations and PhD students talk to learners about their research
- English students participate in creative-writing courses and journalism, and produce the college newsletter
- the college theatrical production involves about 150 learners in acting, set-building, costume-making and music-making
- business studies students undertake a range of work-related activity that is closely linked to the curriculum. For example:
 - a local engineering firm explains how it goes about exporting and engaging in international trade
 - learners complete operations management projects based on local firms
 - a management consultancy runs an annual one-day course on lean manufacturing.

Annex A. Colleges visited

Further education colleges

Barnet College

Bishop Burton College (land-based)

Brooksby Melton College (land-based)

Carlisle College

Cirencester Tertiary College

City College, Birmingham

City of Bristol College

City of Westminster College

Darlington College of Technology

Daventry Tertiary College

Dudley College of Technology

Greenwich Community College

Guildford College of Further and Higher Education

Harrow College

Hereford College of Technology

Hull College

Joseph Priestley College

Keighley College

Kensington and Chelsea College

Leeds College of Technology

Leicester College

Lewisham College

Manchester College of Arts and Technology

Matthew Boulton College

Mid-Cheshire College
New College Durham
New College, Swindon
North Trafford College of Further Education
Orpington College
Oxford and Cherwell College
Park Lane College
Reaseheath College (land-based)
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
Runshaw College
Sandwell College
South Birmingham College
South Trafford College
South Tyneside College
Sparsholt College (land-based)
St Helens College
Stafford College
Stockton Riverside College
Sutton Coldfield College
Tamworth and Lichfield College
Telford College of Arts and Technology
The College of West Anglia
Thomas Danby College
Wakefield College
Walford and North Shropshire College
Warwickshire College
West Cheshire College

West Kent College

West Suffolk College

Wigan and Leigh College

Wirral Metropolitan College

York College

Sixth form colleges

Barton Peveril College

Christ the King Sixth Form College

Coulsdon College

Gateway Sixth Form College

Godalming College

Greenhead College

John Leggott Sixth Form College

Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College

Josiah Mason Sixth Form College

Leyton Sixth Form College

Portsmouth College

Sir George Monoux College

Sixth Form College, Farnborough

Spelthorne College

Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College

College consortia or other groupings

Academy of Finance (London)

G6 Group of Colleges (Tyne and Wear)

Logistics College North West

London Leisure College

Sussex Partnership – Sussex LSC