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Project Directors:	Lesley Dee	University of Cambridge
	Mel West	University of Manchester

Senior Research Officer:	Tony Kelly
Researcher officers:	Lynn Tranter
	Jackie Farrell-Shaw

1 INTRODUCTION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The proposition that schools and colleges should develop the skills of their students as well as increasing their subject or job related knowledge is not new. Recent years have seen a variety of initiatives at national, local and institutional levels, that have been focused on skills development under a variety of names (basic skills, core skills, personal skills) and targeted at a variety of audiences (identified by age-group, ability level, course of study). Perhaps the most ambitious proposals were contained in the original National Curriculum specifications, which identified a number of cross-curricular themes and dimensions through which individual, transferable skills might be developed. However, despite the original intention, which would have placed skills development alongside subject teaching at all stages of compulsory schooling, the sheer pressure of content in the separately specified subjects quickly sidelined the cross-curricular elements. The past ten years have seen little progress in this area, beyond what can be squeezed into tutorial or social education provision, as the primacy of subjects and subject-related assessment has become even more strongly established.

While it is true that many schools have tried to provide opportunities to develop individual skills at some point, few have been able to sustain such programmes throughout the students' schooling. There has also been an unfortunate link created between skills development programmes and student ability levels and a consequent perception of skills-focused programmes as, in some sense, 'remedial'. The rationale here would seem to be that most students acquire the necessary skills through osmosis, with only difficult or less able students needing provision. We find ourselves unconvinced by such reasoning.

In the college sector, similar attempts to develop the students through tutorial or key skills programmes around the edge of the curriculum have been supplemented by a more direct approach through vocational courses, where the notion of assessing student skills has certainly become established, though teaching the skills has sometimes received less emphasis. Nevertheless, the incorporation of skills development into NVQ and GNVQ courses has been an important advance.

However, the current Key Skills initiative seems an altogether more focused-yet inclusive-programme than we have seen so far. It targets, potentially at least, all students. It

establishes the stage of education where efforts are to be concentrated. It provides for the accreditation of student achievement. It seeks to ensure that a broader and richer pattern of learning experiences are made available to all post-16 students.

These are significant goals. It is inevitable that many schools and colleges will find them challenging and will feel that they cannot be achieved without appropriate support from outside and important changes inside. These are the points of focus for this study, as we have attempted to identify what it is that schools and colleges need, both from their various partners in this initiative and to do for themselves, if the initiative is to be effectively implemented.

In carrying out the study we have been aware of, but have tried not to be distracted by, a number of factors that influence current provision and attitudes. Some of those most committed to key skills development, for example, have found that the new proposals require them to change what, up to now, might have been considered best practice. This is particularly evident where programmes have been developed around the previous Key Skills specifications or, having been embedded in GNVQs, have to be 'de-coupled'. A number of schools and colleges have taken part in the piloting of Key Skills, and have clearly developed views and accumulated experiences as a result. Some of these have featured in our samples, but we have not particularly sought them out. The wider reforms required by Curriculum 2000 are altering patterns of provision and creating uncertainties in all post-16 institutions. Though the implementation of Key Skills has typically been planned for in this context, we have endeavoured to fix on needs arising from Key Skills programmes themselves rather than engage with the issues of curriculum-wide reform.

We report our findings in eight main sections – some focusing on implementation needs at school or college level, others on needs in the classroom or workshop. We have given more emphasis to management issues and needs for a number of reasons. First, the terms of reference for the investigation points towards implementation issues. Second, it is how the Key Skills programme will be planned and organised that the schools and colleges we visited are most concerned with at this point in time. Third, we have had no opportunity within the time-frame to carry out any classroom or work-shop based studies, so our access to data about teaching and learning has been largely second-hand.

However, this is not to say that we believe successful implementation will be determined by the quality of management more than, or instead of, the quality of teaching. We have given weight to the management and organisation needs that, if met, can improve the management process, but we accept that in the end, it is the quality of teaching and learning that will determine success. Accordingly, we feel that it will be important to follow up the implementation programme in a number of cases, in order to gain a clearer picture of what is needed to foster the highest quality of teaching and learning once the Key Skills programme is in place.

We are also aware that our approach has thrown up a long list of needs, and says rather less about how practice is developing and how those needs are being met or being circumnavigated. That is because we were directed to focus on the needs, both felt and perceived, within schools and colleges as they plan for the Key Skills programme. We anticipate that more detailed accounts of how particular needs have been tackled will emerge from the FEDA sponsored Development Projects, which we see as complementing the needs analysis. The examples that we were able to identify of ‘whole’ school or college approaches, such as the integration of Key Skills through a Thinking Skills programme or through ‘self-organised learning’, suggest that there is much they can learn from each other, and it will be important to create mechanisms that allow them to do so.

Of course, though it is difficult to locate this directly in the comments and documentation made available to us, it is how the school or college staff value Key Skills that seems to underpin their responses. All of the centres we visited were able to identify needs, but, the ways they presented these needs varied. In the best examples the needs were being clearly articulated and sensibly addressed, as a preparation for action. In some cases, however, it seemed to us that ‘needs’ were being cited as reasons for inaction – as the justification for delay. This suggests that while the practical problems of managing the implementation can be identified, the development of post-16 cultures in which Key Skills are seen as an entitlement for students, rather than a further means of accreditation or an additional ‘requirement’ placed upon the teaching staff, also requires attention. The needs here may be more elusive, harder to pin down and more difficult to address, but they are equally important. We have tried to allude to such needs where the evidence justifies this, but feel that existing attitudes and beliefs will be as important to address as shortages of materials or the availability of syllabuses.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our debt to all those centres who have allowed us to disrupt their systems and programmes in order to talk to us. Though it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Key Skills have the confidence and commitment of all those we spoke to, nevertheless there were many respondents who were extremely enthusiastic about developments, who saw the value of Key Skills for their students. Though there is inevitably concern about resources, about support, about the currency of qualification, there is also a great desire to do the best for the students. We have been enormously impressed by the professionalism, the goodwill and the genuine doubts and commitment of those who contributed to this survey of needs. They deserve the credit for any 'wisdom' this report contains; the shortcomings are our own.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report relates to a study carried out by the University of Cambridge, School of Education from June 1999 to March 2000. It draws on data collected from visits to over sixty schools and colleges. Data included interviews with senior managers, Key Skill co-ordinators, middle managers, teachers and students; documentation; and seminar discussions. The report also draws on a questionnaire survey of forty-eight schools, the results of which are summarised separately in Appendix A.

The main findings are summarised below. Each of these needs are cross-referenced to the relevant sections of the report where the evidence base is presented in greater detail. The first four sets of needs refer to actions at the national level which schools and colleges tell us would increase the prospects of successful implementation. The second group require support from agencies outside the school or college, but also internal action if the needs are to be met. The remainder will only be met if action is taken within the institution.

i) The place of Key Skills in the post-16 curriculum

Schools and colleges need clear information about the requirements and expectations that the Key Skills programme will place on them and adequate resourcing to meet these expectations. They also need information and examples dealing with the integration of Key Skills into subject courses. If all six Key Skills were embraced within the wider Curriculum 2000 reforms and assessment regimes, this would increase the confidence and commitment of teachers and students alike. (4.1.1, 4.1.4, 4.4.1, 4.6.1)

ii) External status

There is a need to establish a broader climate of understanding in which the value of the Key Skills qualification is understood and acknowledged by both employers and universities and parents are made aware that this is the case. The status of 'points' earned for Key Skills in the revised UCAS tariff scheme needs to be seen as equivalent to points earned via GNVQ and 'A' level assessment. (4.1.1, 4.1.3, 4.4.1)

iii) External assessment and accreditation

Clearer and more consistent signposting across all subjects is required which not only signals the evidence required for assessment, but which also provides advice on teaching opportunities. Awarding bodies need to ensure that their external verifiers have the necessary competence to moderate Key Skills so that consistent messages are given to centres. Schools and colleges, particularly smaller establishments, value the advisory role of external verifiers and wish to see the new standards moderators maintain this function.

(4.1.2, 4.3.3, 4.5.3, 4.8.4)

iv) Managing and funding accreditation

There is a need to ensure that procedures for accreditation are as efficient as possible, avoiding duplication and wasted resources. The likely costs and sources of funding for external assessment need to be clarified for schools and colleges. (4.1.2, 4.4.1)

v) Patterns of delivery

There is a pressing need for schools and colleges to have more information about alternative patterns of delivery with a clear indication of the advantages and disadvantages of each, alongside accurate estimates of the resource requirements of different approaches. In particular, schools and colleges require more information about the integration/separation issue, practical strategies for moving from one to the other over time and the implications of the different approaches for timetabling. (4.1.2, 4.1.4, 4.2.3, 4.2.4, 4.4.1)

vi) Materials

Schools and colleges require different types of affordable materials with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity. Materials required include: a range of new initial assessment instruments for the three main Key Skills (but particularly Information Technology); subject specific teaching materials including exemplars; exemplar assessment and testing materials to help with identifying evidence and judging standards; staff training materials that demonstrate a variety of approaches to teaching and learning.

(4.3.3, 4.4.1, 4.5.3, 4.8.1, 4.8.3)

vii) *Student learning*

Schools and colleges should strive to achieve as close a match as possible between the students' initial Key Skills levels and their individual programmes. Students will need opportunities to maintain and apply existing skills as well as develop new ones. Teachers need strategies for dealing with the range of levels likely to be found in many groups. Examples of independent learning approaches are required as well as methods of involving students in assessing, recording and monitoring their own progress. There is a need to remember, however, that students may be involved in learning without formal teaching taking place and students will need support in providing evidence of their achievements outside the formal curriculum. The progress made by a few schools and colleges in using all six Key Skills to enhance students' general learning needs further research and development.

(4.2.4, 4.6.2, 4.7.1, 4.7.2, 4.7.3)

viii) *Developing staff*

Schools and colleges need to plan for staff development alongside the planning of Key Skills. It will be important to differentiate between the requirements of different staff groups, prioritising certain groups or individuals, such as the Key Skills co-ordinator. In selecting methods for staff training and development it should be remembered that while courses and training events are useful starting points, most staff development takes place within the organisation and on the job, though this is often under-utilised and unsupported. Training needs to cover classroom practice as well as assessment issues. A national, coherent and recognised set of teacher qualifications is required for all those teaching Key Skills, to ensure a supply of confident and competent practitioners.

(4.1.3, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.4.3, 4.5.1, 4.5.2, 4.5.4)

ix) *Internal Assessment*

Schools need to undertake an initial assessment of all students progressing onto their post-16 courses in order to avoid making assumptions about students' levels of knowledge and skills. This data needs to be used to inform teaching as well as placement. There is also a need for centres to ensure that there is a common interpretation of levels applied across subjects and course boundaries and internal verification procedures need to be developed to reinforce this, as one aspect of the quality assurance processes. Information for tutors about alternative ways to track and monitor student progress would be welcomed, including ways of

maximising student involvement in those processes including the use of Progress Files.

(4.1.1, 4.2.3, 4.3.2, 4.3.4, 4.8.1, 4.8.2, 4.8.4)

x) Internal status

Senior managers in schools and colleges need to demonstrate their commitment to and support for the programme, which should be underpinned by a fully resourced implementation strategy aimed at establishing the status of Key Skills teaching. Part of the strategy should involve identifying a Key Skills co-ordinator and teaching team – even if the team embraces most of the post 16 teachers – and ensuring that time is allocated for regular planning meetings, particularly in the early stages of implementation.

(4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.6.1, 4.7.2)

xi) Whole institution responses

All staff need to be fully informed about the purposes of the programme, the potential benefits it will bring to students and the way it will be implemented. They also require frequent high-quality feedback about progress even if they are not directly involved in teaching Key Skills. Where responsibility for teaching Key Skills is shared between subject and Key Skills specialists, the need for formal systems of communication should be recognised as integral to the success of the programme.

(4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.6.1, 4.7.2)

xii) Relevance

There is a need, through induction at the outset of their programmes, to give clear messages to students about the value of the Key Skills qualification and the assessment processes involved. To reinforce these messages, teachers need to ensure that materials for skills development and for assessment are set in contexts to which students can relate and that teaching methods optimise opportunities for applying Key Skills.

(4.1.4, 4.4.4, 4.7.1, 4.7.2, 4.8.2)

xiii) Planning and preparing teaching

As well as needing quality time for organising the whole programme, subject and Key Skills specialists need to make time for planning their teaching. They will need to make conscious decisions about the best ways of working together within available resources, drawing on their relative strengths and expertise. The processes of planning schemes of work and

designing teaching materials help to increase understanding as well as providing acknowledgement for teachers' creativity and expertise. Where schools and colleges adopt team teaching approaches, agreements about roles and responsibilities and how teachers will work together are required to ensure the best use of resources. (4.4.3, 4.5.2, 4.6.1, 4.6.2)

xiv) Building expertise and developing practice

There is a need to encourage active experimentation and a range of approaches in a climate that encourages individuals to evaluate their own practice and share experiences and materials. 'A' level teachers need to be made aware of and build on the expertise of vocational and Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers in addressing Key Skills. At institutional level, there is a need to ensure that decisions and future practice are influenced by the information that the quality assurance system provides. (4.3.1, 4.6.2)

xv) Embedding

The Key Skills initiative needs to be embedded within wider school and college policies and practices. The Key Skills programme has implications for curriculum planning and delivery, staff development, basic skills, learning support and quality assurance policy and practices. Through quality assurance, there is a need to monitor the separate strands of activity but also to ensure that there is a coherent picture of overall progress. (4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.5.1, 4.6.2)

3 COLLECTING AND ANALYSING THE DATA

3.1 Research Activities

In this section we outline the main data collection activities that were used during the investigation.

Review of Literature and Research on Key Skills

A review of literature and previous research on Key Skills was undertaken and completed at the end of 1999. This review provided the context for subsequent research activities, and was the starting-point for our discussions with staff from school and colleges.

Practitioner Seminars

Given the paucity of previous research, as evidenced from the review, and to advance our understanding of the issues likely to affect Key Skills delivery in schools and colleges, we held a series of “practitioner” seminars, to which we invited a cross-section of professionals involved in Key Skills delivery. The seminars were further structured to inform our interview schedules for the centre visits, as well adding to our understandings of the issues confronting school and colleges.

Originally we had intended to organise seminars around each of the three main Key Skills and address separately issues of organisation, but subsequently decided to restructure them to encompass whatever issues arose, in the knowledge that, in practice, such boundaries have little significance. Attendance at the seminars included representation from awarding bodies, publishing and materials development companies, and managers and teachers from schools and colleges.

Web-based trawl and postal questionnaire

It was originally proposed to gauge the extent, nature and use of supporting materials for Key Skills delivery using a website, and to initiate and moderate an electronic discussion forum. However, it was not possible to carry out the web-based trawl in the time available because of technical and organisational difficulties.

Web-based questionnaires are difficult to quality assure in any case, and information coming to us from the practitioner seminars suggested that the number of hits on such a web-site

would be small. Therefore, in place of the web-based trawl, we decided to conduct a self-completion (mostly closed-questions) postal survey of one hundred schools, selected by staged sampling. Ten Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were selected at random, and then ten schools selected at random from within each LEA cluster. The useable response was forty-eight per cent and a complete analysis of the returns is contained in **Appendix A**.

Centre visits and staff training

The programme of centre visits was designed to gather in-depth qualitative data on policy, models of delivery, quality assurance, selection of staff and staff development, teaching and assessment practices, guidance and support, staff and student perceptions, accreditation issues, and external factors affecting Key Skills delivery. **Appendix B** contains a sample interview schedule.

We initially identified forty schools and twenty FE and Sixth Form colleges to visit, representing a range of experience of Key Skills delivery and a wide geographical spread. **Appendix C** shows their location. All centres had some experience of Key Skills delivery. Independent schools and schools outside England were excluded, as were training providers.

A team of eleven interviewers, comprising secondees from schools and further education colleges, independent consultants, staff with experience working with awarding bodies, and full-time academic and research staff from the University of Cambridge School of Education, carried out the centre visits. Secondees were selected for their experience and expertise and senior management personnel from local schools and colleges acted as interview subjects in order to test and refine the interview schedules.

The interviewers worked mostly in teams and a list of interviewees was compiled for each centre, which varied with size and type of institution and, to a lesser extent, with subject availability. A typical list of interviewees for schools and colleges is contained in **Appendix D**. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for later analysis. Interviewers were regularly debriefed in order to disseminate emerging issues to the research group as a whole.

Relevant documentation, such as policy statements and organisational charts, were collected from centres wherever they were available. This process allowed the team to concentrate the interview around issues and needs rather than descriptions of practice, as well as providing

additional and supporting evidence for the analysis. **Appendix D** also contains a list of the types of documentation requested from each centre.

A widening of the research remit, which extended to embrace the views of students, necessitated changing the interview schedules and the profile of the interview teams after the first tranche of visits. We believe that the inclusion of student perceptions widened the sample and had a positive influence on the quality of data available. In all, approximately three hundred subjects were interviewed in the course of this research project which, represents a substantial sample of those involved with the delivery of Key Skills. Approximately twenty students were also interviewed.

Visits to Development Project centres

As a result of our direct involvement with two of the FEDA development projects, we supplemented our needs analysis data with visits to participating schools and colleges in the A1 and B6 development projects. Therefore, our findings are based on a slightly larger sample than was originally planned. In all, we increased our sample by approximately ten per cent.

3.2 Analysis of data

Both the qualitative data from the centre visit interviews and the quantitative data from the questionnaire survey were analysed at the University of Cambridge School of Education by the project team's full-time academic and research staff.

Data from the centre visits

The hard copy transcripts from the centre visit interviews were firstly checked against the tape recordings to ensure accuracy. The interviews were transcribed by the interviewers themselves. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed and all interviewees accepted tape recording. Transcripts were later computerised to facilitate access by personnel involved in the analysis.

All transcripts were read through first in order to get a sense of the issues. The transcripts were then coded and analysed, both individually and collectively by the research team. Essentially, all transcripts were analysed, on average, four times by different personnel.

Supporting documentation from centres was used as well as, where possible, to validate the interview transcripts.

Data from postal questionnaire

The questionnaire was coded and analysed using SPSS. More complete information can be found in **Appendix A**.

Invitation seminars

We contracted to hold twelve invitation seminars, in order to triangulate our data prior to reporting. However, given the breadth of issues that emerged from our centre visits and given the increase in sample size, we held a number of additional seminars, including one designed to gauge reaction from employers.

Between twenty and forty people were invited to attend the seminars, which were targeted at specific groups, such as senior curriculum managers, employers, Key Skills managers, and teachers and tutors. Locations were selected to represent a geographical spread over areas not covered extensively by our programme of centre visits, and for their easy access by public and private transport in order to encourage attendance. Staff cover costs were also paid to encourage attendance, which averaged ten per seminar. Given that schools and colleges are particularly busy at this time of year, we would describe the attendance as satisfactory.

Appendix E shows the location of the invitation seminars by LEA.

3.3 Reporting

An Interim Report was presented and accepted by the Consortium on 10th December 1999. Some of its findings have been reported by our partners in the Support Programme in Newsletters and at conferences.

We have written this final report using categories that were identified during the first round of data analysis and have used these as headings to organise the findings. We examined needs and issues from different perspectives; teaching, learning, management, organisation and so on. As a result, there is some overlap in the presentation of the following eight sections. However, we feel it preferable to present each of the various sections as fully as possible, despite a degree of repetition, which we hope will reinforce the messages, rather than irritate the reader.

4 ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

Introduction

We present the main findings from our visits to schools and colleges in the following section. We have grouped these around a number of organising categories that seemed to emerge from the data. Essentially, these categories are of two sorts – those that seem important parts of the process of managing the implementation of Key Skills as a programme, and those that relate to the implementation of Key Skills as a series of learning experiences for students.

The first grouping embraces planning, organising, monitoring, climate-setting and staff development activities. It will be recognised that the categories closely match those established in management literature as the major ingredients of successful change management, so it is not altogether surprising that they seem sensible areas of focus for the data from schools and colleges that are, for the most part, viewing the implementation of Key Skills as a significant curriculum innovation. However, though it is not difficult to group the needs reported to us within these categories, the degree to which particular categories are explicitly acknowledged within the schools and colleges varies.

Links to planning and staff development are readily articulated by our respondents. Links to aspects of monitoring are also frequently made, though these are more likely to relate to whether what has been planned is happening, rather than whether what had been planned is having the expected impact on teaching approaches and learning quality. In schools, particularly, there seems to be a need to develop approaches to monitoring that are focused both on outcomes and processes and that influence teaching strategy. Though organisational needs are apparent, there was often more emphasis in our interviews on what the organisation needs than on how the organisation needs to change. Climate-setting is an especially important activity, bringing together a range of needs relating to leadership style and staff motivation, the need to stimulate enthusiasm and commitment amongst students, and need for a wider climate of support and understanding in the schools' communities and from higher education providers.

The second grouping tries to bring order to the needs highlighted by those involved in the teaching of Key Skills. We have adopted three organising categories here – teaching, where we consider needs arising from the planning and delivery of Key Skills lessons or learning

opportunities; learning, which brings together those needs associated with acquiring, understanding and using Key Skills; and finally assessment, which embraces initial, formative and summative stages of assessment attached to Key Skills.

It was noticeable, during our visits, that where GNVQs were seen as having equal status to 'A'-levels, student and staff attitudes towards Key Skills were more likely to be positive. Where GNVQ was regarded as having lower status than 'A' levels, then Key Skills were also often seen as part of a 'remedial' programme, which influenced the commitment of both staff and students to Key Skills and reduced the quality of teaching and learning.

Inevitably, the data presented in these three categories are largely based on the experiences of GNVQ teachers. Limited experience of Key Skills in 'A'-level teaching means that most teachers we interviewed could only speculate about the likely issues and needs. Thus to the extent that there are differences between the vocational and academic routes that are as yet only partially understood, our recommendations should be applied to 'A'-level teaching and learning with caution.

In compiling the needs this way, we are aware that there is a degree of repetition – some needs stem from more than one category, and so similar needs are identified in different categories. In truth, this overlap is to a degree enforced by the short time-scale – there has not been time to re-order the data into a neat procession, so we have allowed the needs to emerge from the data. However, we also feel that in adopting this approach we have ensured that 'needs' suggested to us, either directly by respondents or from our analysis of what they had to say, will not be lost. We have endeavoured therefore, to be inclusive even though this creates some problems of delineation. We hope that the Executive Summary will provide a brief guide to the main findings; here we set them out as they emerged from the data.

4.1 Planning for Key Skills

All of the schools and colleges visited were planning some Key Skills provision from September 2000. In colleges, planning was typically focused on modifying or extending existing provision, though in a number of the schools formal teaching of Key Skills for assessment will be a new activity. In both schools and colleges, the development of a Key Skills 'policy' was seen as the starting point for planning, though again colleges were more likely to have an existing policy to work from. Two issues recurred in discussions with the centres about how policies had been developed - the 'status' of Key Skills and the choice of delivery strategy.

For the most part, in colleges Key Skills were regarded as a more or less 'compulsory' component of the 16-19 curriculum - their status reinforced by the presence of Key Skills in vocational courses and the availability of funding for Key Skills programmes. Schools were more equivocal - though sympathetic to 'entitlement' arguments, there was often a feeling that, for the present at least, Key Skills might not be appropriate for all students. Certainly, there were concerns that a Key Skills programme might distract from, rather than enhance, the 'core-business' of 'A'-levels. There is also uncertainty about what the costs of Key Skills assessment might be, and how these are to be met.

Developing a delivery strategy posed problems for schools and colleges alike. While there appeared to be a general acceptance that an integrated approach, if it can be delivered successfully, is preferable, many centres had doubts about their own capacity to deliver such an approach. Policies often reflected these doubts, and tended to be pragmatic but practical, rather than ideal but hard to deliver.

However the policy had been developed, planning for its implementation required that a number of questions be worked through. Though it was clear from our visits that these questions had been tackled in different orders and with different levels of attention in the different centres we visited, we feel that they offer a useful skeleton upon which a summary of planning needs can be hung. These questions are to do with the 'Whats', 'Hows', 'Whos' and 'Wheres' of planning, and we summarise these below.

4.1.1 What to plan

As noted above, policies tend to be the start-points for plans, because it is the policies that indicate what we hope to achieve. In planning for Key Skills, schools and colleges seem to have made (explicitly or implicitly) two ‘policy’ decisions from the outset. The first concerns what will go into the Key Skills curriculum. This may seem obvious, in that the ‘big three’ Key Skills have been clearly identified for assessment and, in the case of colleges, for funding. However, in a number of colleges the ‘wider’ Key Skills have featured in the curriculum - and some colleges report that those that have been ‘left out’ have been more useful to and found greater commitment from students than those that are to be assessed. Other centres, with no history of Key Skills teaching as such, have approached this from the opposite perspective. Schools and sixth-form colleges often have an IT course, for example, to build on. Here, the debate may focus on what else to put in, rather than what to leave out.

The second decision relates to which students or student groups will be offered Key Skills. In a number of schools and colleges we have been told that, initially at least, Key Skills will be focused on particular groups. There are, then, a number of possibilities - ranging from teaching all Key Skills to all students to teaching some Key Skills to some students. Clearly, the choices made here in large measure reflect existing provision, the resources available, the expectations of the particular centre. But, if centres are to be encouraged to plan for the widest programme embracing the greatest numbers of students, they need to be reassured that the effort is worthwhile.

A particular difficulty in planning is finding secure starting point for teaching efforts - knowing what level or levels the students are beginning from. Though some centres have developed instruments to audit student skills in these areas, many rely on GCSE results in English and Maths as indicators, and no specific ‘audit’ is carried out in the majority of schools. Practice seems more developed in the colleges, perhaps because the students are new, perhaps because the wider range of ability found in colleges has meant that there are generally better developed systems for individual assessment and support.

The data from our visits and interviews indicate that schools and colleges will have a clearer

idea of what they need to plan for if:

- There are ‘audit’ instruments available to help assess student skills on entry to the course.
- Key Skills are clearly established as a worthwhile area of qualifications, not a short-term measure likely to fade away when national curriculum reforms and Curriculum 2000 have worked their way through the system.
- There is confidence that the tariff value attached to Key Skills in the revised UCAS scheme is likely to be accepted by universities as equivalent to points gained from other qualifications.
- It is demonstrated that the main Key Skills are recognised by employers.
- There are clear indications of whether the wider Key Skills will be bought into the assessment regime in due course.
- The costs and sources of funding for Key Skills assessment are clarified.

4.1.2 How Key Skills will be delivered

Selecting a delivery model for Key Skills has been a source of much discussion in schools and colleges. As noted above, there has been some tension between what is thought to be ‘educationally sound’, and what is practical. Most of the schools and colleges visited had adopted a mixed approach, incorporating discrete and integrated components. There seemed to be a reluctance to classify a delivery model as anything other than ‘integrated’ and some centres felt the need to provide a rationale for the constraints that led to alternative approaches. There were also problems of nomenclature - is, for example, integrated delivery but separated assessment tasks, truly integrated?

The ‘mixed’ approach found in centres most often separates out IT, and most often shows greater integration in vocational courses, despite the de-coupling of assessment. This reflects, on the one hand, the difficulty of accessing IT hardware in many schools and colleges (though the range of provision varies very widely) during subject teaching, and, on the other, the lower levels of experience amongst subject teachers of incorporating Key Skills into the subject. Significant numbers of schools seem likely to adopt a Key Skills programme for ‘A’-level students that is delivered through General Studies or tutorial schemes. In theory, this would guarantee that teaching can be concentrated within a small team of

specialist staff, but in practice many schools and colleges indicate that staffing is determined by ensuring that 'A'-level and major vocational courses are timetabled first. Schools, particularly those with smaller cohorts of 16+ students, have suggested that no other approach is possible without additional funding. Given these problems, it seems that there are likely to be a range of delivery models in use, selected to make the most efficient use of the staffing available in the particular context. However, though efficiency is important, it is not all important - how effective the particular delivery model will be likely to be the main concern. But, as yet, schools and colleges feel that there is insufficient information about effective practice available, which makes it hard to balance efficiency issues in the planning equation. It would appear, therefore, that finding the most effective approach to Key Skills delivery will become a simpler decision if the following needs are met.

- There is a need for more information about possible models of Key Skills delivery, and a clear indication of the costs and benefits of particular approaches.
- There is a need for coherent schemes for separate delivery, illustrating how Key Skills teaching can be organised outside the subject curriculum, while assessment is embedded into it.
- There is a need for information and examples dealing with the integration of teaching and assessment into subject courses.

4.1.3 Who will teach the Key Skills?

In the majority of the centres we have sampled, discussions about delivery method have been paralleled by discussions about who will do the teaching. Most of those staff who have experience of teaching Key Skills have taught these either in the context of vocational courses or as 'specialist' Key Skills teachers - there are very few teachers who have experience of teaching Key Skills to 'A'-level students, or as part of an 'A'-level course. It is perhaps not surprising that many 'A'-level teachers we spoke with seem reluctant therefore to embrace Key Skills, their lack of experience compounded by suspicions about the extent to which Key Skills may displace time or attention for 'A'-level studies.

Key Skills 'specialists' also seem to be something of a mixed group - ranging from those who are especially enthusiastic about the need to develop students' skills to those who have been assigned to Key Skills teaching because of lighter timetables or reductions in demand for

their subject teaching. In both schools and colleges, it has been suggested to us that the appointment of the co-ordinator is crucial - it is felt that a co-ordinator with sufficient credibility and authority will be needed if a strong Key Skills teaching team is to be assembled - whether specialists or not. This implies that the co-ordinator needs to be appointed very early in the planning process and is able to play a full role in the planning - including the selection of the teaching team. It has also been suggested to us that who the co-ordinator is will have a significant influence on how seriously teachers address Key Skills, and that who the teaching team are will have significant effect on student attitudes. Our feeling is that how co-ordinators and teachers are trained is equally important.

The teaching of Key Skills will be easier to plan for, and teachers in the team most effective if:

- The status of Key Skills teaching and the status of the Key Skills qualification are established as equivalent to 'A'-level or GNVQ courses
- The team is selected for its experience, interest and commitment
- Training is made available to all those who need it
- Conflicting/contradictory messages to teachers and students about the usefulness of Key Skills are avoided.

4.1.4 Where to fit Key Skills

Issues of time and of timing were frequently raised in our interviews. Some of these relate to the simple problem of 'cramming' additional teaching into the timetable. This is considered a particular problem from September 2000, with all schools and colleges we visited planning to introduce Curriculum 2000 in one form or another. It is not just a matter of finding space within the timetable, but also finding teachers who are free to teach. This has caused particular anxieties in schools, where teacher hours are very tight, and will be further squeezed by the introduction of 'AS'-levels.

However, colleges have expressed a different kind of anxiety - the worry that local schools that do not 'insist' on Key Skills will gain an advantage in recruitment over colleges that do 'insist' because they wish to access the funding. Many college staff wondered whether students would be content to see the length of their 'learning week' extended to fit everything

in – not least because of the substantial numbers holding part-time jobs. At the same time, it was suggested that there are substantial numbers of students who have poor levels of self-organisation, and who might benefit from a longer and more structured week.

But the problems of timing seemed most difficult to address when looking at how Key Skills might be presented and assessed over a two-year period. There was overwhelming agreement that unless the teaching and assessment programmes were front-loaded, students would lose interest and commitment. Two main reasons were put forward for this - first, the fact that feedback on the importance and usefulness of Key Skills may well not be reinforced as students apply for higher education or for jobs. Second, the feeling that once the 'A'-level examination season approaches, students will have very little commitment to anything else. Consequently, a four-term programme, or even a three-term teaching programme with a further term for assessment tasks, may prove an effective method of organisation. However, in these circumstances, where the 'value' of Key Skills might seem diminished at the point when the student is due to be assessed, it was also seen as vital that there was maximum clarity about both the internal assessment tasks and the external tests, so that positive student attitudes can be maintained. We feel, therefore, that:

- There is a need to give clear messages to students about the value of the qualification and the assessment processes involved from the outset.
- Examples of how the Key Skills Curriculum can be front-loaded would be helpful to those planning its implementation
- The embracing of Key Skills within the wider Curriculum 2000 reforms will increase the confidence and commitment of teachers and students alike.

4.2 Organising for Key Skills

The Key Skills programme comes at a time when fundamental and far-reaching changes are taking place in post-16 education. To an extent, this makes the national launch timely – it is sensible to initiate the teaching of Key Skills within the wider reforms. Of course, it also means that there are a number of other priorities in schools and colleges that are competing with Key Skills for resources and attention. In these circumstances, it may be tempting to marginalise the Key Skills programme, fitting it around the edges of other initiatives that seem more urgent or important. However, we feel that this would be a short-sighted approach – here is an initiative that is targeted at all 16-18 year olds and, potentially at least, can be approached across the whole curriculum. However, responding to this initiative poses a number of challenges to existing structures and patterns of organisation, particularly in schools.

In our investigations we have been able to identify a number of organisational constraints that will need to be addressed if the Key Skills programme is to flourish. We have categorised these as issues relating to the organisational structure and culture, issues relating to the role of the co-ordinator within the structure, issues relating to the way curriculum delivery is organised, and problems of time-tabling.

4.2.1 *Cultures and Structures*

As we indicate above, how Key Skills are integrated into the wider school/college curriculum is a major determinant of success. But integration is unlikely to come about unless it is organised. Though many of our respondents (particularly those at more senior levels) have identified this need, equally, a number (particularly those whose main role is teaching) have suggested that existing structures often operate against the development of cross-curricular initiatives. The strong identities of subject departments in schools and of course teams in colleges can often create barriers between groups of staff, despite official policies or good intentions.

Many of those interviewed have spoken of the need for a ‘cultural shift’ if these barriers are to be broken down. They speak of the problems of ‘owning student groups’, of ‘traditional attitudes’ to subject-content links. Some assume competence to teach Key Skills, others question their own abilities. What seems to be required is a re-conceptualisation of practices and relationships that schools and colleges take for granted. Research evidence from change

programmes suggests that any changes in how staff work or how they relate to one another is unlikely to be sustained unless parallel changes are made to organisational structures and roles. It has also been demonstrated, and indeed was regularly pointed out to us during our visits to schools and colleges, that senior management must support and work through any new structures adopted if these are to become established. Consequently, we suggest that:

- There is a need to ensure that the Key Skills Programme is appropriately prioritised within the school/college, with clear support from senior management.
- In many schools and colleges, existing organisational structures, roles and relationships will need to be altered to reflect this new priority.
- Examples showing how traditional subject or course boundaries have been crossed to create a coherent Key Skills team and programme are likely to prove helpful.

4.2.2 Co-ordinating Key Skills

Almost all centres visited had already designated a member of staff as co-ordinator for the Key Skills programme. In some instances, this was a new appointment – in many it was the development of an existing role. The majority of co-ordinators either were members of the centre's senior management group, or had a direct link into it. However, the level of authority, and consequently the perceived status of the co-ordinator, varied between establishments, and often seemed to reflect the status of previous roles filled by the co-ordinator. To this extent, it seemed personal rather than structural.

It is therefore not surprising that in many centres questions were raised about whether the co-ordinator had sufficient 'clout' to ensure successful implementation. This raised doubts about whether the co-ordinator would be able to select and recruit the most appropriate staff, or would be assigned a team. There was a strong feeling that success depended on a strong and committed team who saw Key Skills teaching as a central part of their work, and a fear that it may become a 'servicing arrangement' if it is not given appropriate status from the outset.

A common problem was the difficulty of creating time (and times) when the co-ordinator could bring the team together. It was frequently suggested that opportunities to plan together and to collaborate on the development of teaching materials was a better way to ensure that

both gaps and overlap were eliminated than trying to map teaching opportunities from syllabus outlines – however well ‘signposted’. It was therefore thought important that the co-ordinator had the capacity to authorise meetings, resource professional development, and to organise the release of staff from other duties to create time to work on the Key Skills agenda. Many of those interviewed expressed doubts about whether their own co-ordinator would be able to do these.

Co-ordinators themselves sometimes seemed less clear about how they would fulfil the role, what resources would be available to them and what practical arrangements for co-ordinating the efforts of the team would be put in place, than they were about the problems they faced. Many co-ordinators had themselves received no training in Key Skills in preparation for the role, and hardly any had received any formal training in ‘co-ordinating’. We conclude from this that:

- The importance of co-ordinator’s role in securing effective implementation of the initiative needs to be underlined.
- Many co-ordinators would benefit from practical advice on how to approach the task.
- The provision of training and networking opportunities for co-ordinators is much needed and likely to be well received.

4.2.3 Organising the Delivery of Key Skills

In the majority of schools and colleges there is a belief that, in the longer term, an integrated approach to the teaching of Key Skills is likely to be more effective, and also more likely to capture student interest and commitment. However, there are a number of factors that, in the short term at least, have led to the adoption of a ‘separated’ Key Skills curriculum. There is, for example, a feeling that an integrated approach will make it difficult to ensure that the whole Key Skills curriculum is covered in each particular case. Even if the learning opportunities can be guaranteed, centres report that stand-alone lessons allow for a simpler yet more rigorous approach to assessment and preparation for external assessments. The identification and authentication of Key Skills may be easier when de-contextualised. There are a number of reasons why beginning with a small team is simpler, and probably more effective than expecting that all staff can be transformed into Key Skills teachers overnight.

Many centres will begin by teaching only one or two Key Skills, or teaching only some of the students initially. Such considerations have tended to favour a differentiated curriculum model.

There were special concerns about the teaching of AoN. In schools particularly there were doubts about using Maths teachers with students who sometimes associate the subject with personal failure and often are relieved to have reached a point where it can be 'given up'. There were often further concerns about the numbers of non-maths staff who were competent to level three in AoN themselves. Interestingly, this concern was rarely raised in relation to communication - our speculation is that many schools and colleges have more staff who could deal competently with AoN and less who are ready to teach communication than they think.

Whatever the delivery model, most centres will rely heavily on tutorial systems. Tutors (or 'mentors') will be required to play an important role 'brokering' between teachers and internal verifiers and will carry major responsibilities for assessment, student tracking and the mapping of evidence. Some respondents suggested that such systems may develop more quickly in schools, where existing pastoral programmes can be built on, than in colleges, where the pastoral curriculum is less well established. However, as we have previously noted, we found in our own visits, clearer evidence of individual audit and tracking systems in colleges.

To help schools and colleges take appropriate decisions about how the curriculum for Key Skills can best be organised:

- There is a need for high quality information about alternative delivery models, the advantages and disadvantages of each and accurate estimates of the resource requirements of different approaches.
- There is a need for information about how other schools and colleges have tackled the separation/integration issue, and on practical strategies to develop from the one to the other over time.
- There is a need to ensure that appropriate training is available to those who will be teaching Key Skills.

- Training needs to cover classroom practice as well as assessment issues.
- Information for tutors about alternative ways of tracking students and seeking and recording evidence of student competence will be welcomed.

4.2.4 *Timetabling Key Skills*

The timetable has continually been cited as a constraint that will complicate the implementation of a Key Skills programme. It is often perceived as having fixed elements, that need to be worked around. It is identified as a major obstacle to team meetings and collaborative preparation, as non-teaching ‘slots’ often do not coincide. Timetable commitments similarly constrain the development of team teaching, or the observation of colleagues in the classroom or workshop. Many subject specialists feel that the time-table is already over-crowded, and that teaching Key Skills within their subject allocation will squeeze our subject-related content. Many post-16 students already have a heavy schedule, and the introduction of additional elements creates the problem of ‘over-teaching’ with corresponding implications for students’ motivation.

While all these observations (and many others) reflect real concerns, it is difficult to see how they can be resolved without a radical re-conceptualisation of how teaching and learning can be organised. There are, however, some immediate needs, that, if addressed, may lead to a more constructive use of staff and student time.

- There is a need for information on alternative ways of time-tabling Key Skills, with examples showing how these have been implemented.
- There is a need to remind schools and colleges that students may be involved in learning experiences without formal teaching taking place.
- There is a need for examples showing how independent learning approaches can be used to develop Key Skills.
- There is a need to underline that students can themselves take responsibility for some of the tracking/evidence collection, and to provide examples of how this can be achieved.

4.3 Monitoring, Implementation and Assuring Quality

How Quality Assurance is approached is perhaps the most striking difference we have found between schools and colleges. Typically, colleges have clearly identified quality assurance as an activity, and have systems and procedures in place. For the most part, it seems, they plan to accommodate the monitoring of Key Skills implementation within these systems. Schools generally have a less formal, though not necessarily less rigorous, approach to monitoring, though where GNVQ has been offered there will be specific monitoring processes related to GNVQ programmes. There also seem to be important differences in the vocabularies used in the two kinds of centre when quality issues are discussed – colleges are more likely to be using language deriving from Total Quality Management (TQM) writings and quality assurance systems, schools to be influenced by the language of OFSTED and of development planning. It is, therefore, sometimes difficult to correlate the comments from the two sectors. However, we feel that there is common ground over a number of issues – the relationship of quality assurance for Key Skills to the existing monitoring processes, the bases for assessment and verification processes, external feedback on standards and the particular problems of tracking students progress.

4.3.1 Quality Assuring Key Skills

In both schools and colleges the integration of quality assurance procedures into existing systems will be important – because it is desirable that information about progress across the range of activities is pulled together and used, and because it would be inefficient to create a new strand of activity related solely to the Key Skills programme. This implies that some reappraisal of the broader quality assurance function will be appropriate in many cases, and that the organisation and resourcing of quality assurance for Key Skills needs to be considered in the context of the school/college's overall strategy for securing and checking quality.

In a number of centres visited, the difference between the implementation of the programme and the impact of the programme could be more clearly reflected in quality assurance systems. Some centres have clearly identified strategies for ensuring that the programme is implemented but are less clear about how impact will be evaluated.

In other centres, measures that will offer information on impact have been identified, but systematic monitoring of implementation is less well developed, so that cause and effect may

be difficult to link. Because of these issues, we feel that there are a number of needs relating to the broader processes of quality assurance that could usefully be addressed in a number of centres. These include:

- The need to organise and resource quality assurance as a central function, integrating the monitoring of separate strands of activity into a coherent picture of overall progress.
- The need to ensure that both implementation and impact are monitored through the quality assurance system.
- The need to ensure that decisions and future practice are influenced by the information that the quality assurance system provides.

4.3.2 Standards and Verification

When colleagues in schools and colleges spoke to us about quality, internal verification processes received most attention. A difficulty here was the problem of applying common standards across the range of staff involved. It was acknowledged that different members of staff had differing interpretations of the Key Skills specifications, so that different standards could arise within the same institutions. In some centres, Key Skills were assessed by teachers or vocational tutors, and internally ‘verified’ by Key Skills specialists, in others, the Key Skills specialist made the initial assessment, and ‘verification’ was by a second member of staff. Arrangements for internal verification across the centre were found in only a minority of the centres sampled.

The attention which had been focused on internal verification seemed to have absorbed most of the energy, with wider aspects of quality assurance receiving less attention. While colleges had begun to make links between existing activities, such as annual audit and self-assessment, that do fall under the responsibility of a senior member of staff, arrangements for developing the function in schools were less advanced. In both schools and colleges the numbers of staff working towards (or already possessing) the Edexcel Professional Development Qualification was sometimes presented as a quality assurance strategy, though this seemed to relate to GNVQ programmes rather than Key Skills specifically, and there were a number of doubts about whether this qualification was likely to ‘assure’ the quality of

teaching, as opposed to promoting greater consistency in assessment. Our impression, therefore, is that:

- There is a need for each school/college to ensure that there is a common interpretation of standard levels that are applied in assessment across subjects and courses.
- There is a need to develop internal verification procedures that cross subject and course boundaries to reinforce this.
- There is a need to ensure that quality assurance is seen as a function that extends beyond internal verification and for which a named (and preferably senior) member of staff is accountable.

4.3.3 External Feedback

One of the sources of difference between standards applied by different groups of staff within the same school or college is the shortage of exemplar materials. Exemplars of external test responses and of the types of tasks that could be used to generate portfolio evidence were felt to be essential, if standards were to be aligned quickly. Many of those interviewed also felt that the wording used in Key Skills specification could be simplified. Though this was a problem that, in part at least, related to the 1995 specifications, not all were convinced that the latest specifications had eliminated all the 'jargon'.

Those with experience of Key Skills within GNVQ programmes sometimes reported that conflicting messages about Key Skills caused confusion. External verifiers and standards moderators did not always seem to attach a high priority to Key Skills. Examination Boards gave different messages – even the same Examination Board showed inconsistency across vocational areas. External testing and moderation of portfolio evidence would provide more rigour, but only if consistent messages and judgements could be guaranteed.

To assist the development of quality assurance in Key Skills teaching and assessment, there is a need for:

- Simple and unambiguous specifications.

- Exemplar materials that illustrate standards, promote consistency of assessments and clarify how judgements can be made secure.
- Examinations Boards/Awarding Bodies to train external verifiers and standards moderators so that consistent messages are given to schools and colleges through external feedback.
- Sound practice to be identified, described and disseminated, especially into schools or colleges where Key Skills cohorts are small and internal resources are limited.

4.3.4 *Student Tracking*

How effectively students can be tracked through their Key Skills programmes was seen as central to the quality assurance process. Many centres have invested considerable time in the designing of log sheets or diary systems for their students. Most schools and colleges will rely on the students to track their own experience and collect their own evidence, but there is less clarity about how student progress will be monitored by the centre. This is a particular issue for schools, where resources are likely to be especially scarce. Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges have been informed that a tranche of money will be released to cover Key Skills, tutorial and enrichment programmes. No such funding has been announced for schools, where the monitoring of student progress in Key Skills will be further complicated by the adoption of Curriculum 2000 recommendations. The debate about whether subject teachers, general studies teachers or personal tutors should undertake the role of monitoring student progress is a difficult one in colleges. It is even more difficult when there are no funds available, whatever method is chosen.

It would help to promote effective quality assurance of student progress, therefore, if:

- Schools and Colleges are provided with examples of simple but effective tracking systems for students.
- Schools and colleges are encouraged to monitor the use students make of the tracking system and to review progress regularly.
- Funding is earmarked for the tracking and monitoring of student progress in schools.

4.4 Creating a Positive Climate

As with other recent reforms, successful implementation of the Key Skills programme can only be determined in the classroom. Consequently, the levels of enthusiasm and commitment that teachers and lecturers bring to their task will be of central importance. It is vital, therefore, that some attention is given to the creation of a positive climate around this programme, and that deliberate actions are taken that will increase the commitment of those involved – or, at least minimise the impact of those factors that are likely to undermine morale and motivation among the teaching group.

In the interviews we have conducted in schools and colleges, factors influencing the motivational climate have frequently been mentioned. Of course, many of these are mentioned elsewhere in this report, as they may well relate to planning needs or the development of sensible implementation strategies. However, we feel that it is important to raise such issues again in this context, because the need to generate positive attitudes amongst those implementing the programme is paramount. Here, we have pulled together the factors influencing commitment into four broad groupings – *external* factors, that are essentially beyond the control of the individual school or college; *organisational* factors, that derive principally from the school/college's own implementation strategy; *personal* factors, which relate to the characteristics of teachers and lecturers themselves; and *student* factors, which indicate some of the ways staff are influenced by the attitudes and behaviours of the student group. A brief description of the kinds of issues that have been brought to our attention in each of these groupings follows, together with our own summary of what are the most pressing needs to be addressed if high levels of commitment are to be developed and maintained.

4.4.1 External Factors

Many teachers and lecturers have made reference to the confusion and uncertainties associated with Key Skills in the wider community. Far from promoting Key Skills, employers are often described as knowing little about them, except as an integral part of vocational provision. Similarly, parents seemed suspicious about 'new' courses, particularly ones which seemed to displace or distract from 'A' level studies. Universities too, were seen as generally more interested in established qualifications. Though the announcement of a tariff for Key Skills attainment under the UCAS scheme last December meets some of the issues raised here, there remains a degree of cynicism in schools and colleges about the value

that will be attached to Key Skills points, particularly in the older universities and for courses where entry is strongly competitive.

There was dissatisfaction too with the level of guidance that had been given to schools and colleges, and sometimes with the quality of guidance offered. For some, timescales were unrealistic, timing of announcements unhelpful, specifications, when they appeared, 'too vague'. Long and eagerly awaited 'sign posting' by the examination boards in 'A' level syllabuses, for example, did not meet all expectations, similarly, some felt that the QCA had been 'less helpful' than it might.

For colleges, there were significant funding issues. The practice of attaching budgets to courses in light of income generated by the courses, now commonplace, made it difficult to find funds for activities which generate no direct income, at least in the short term. The recent announcement of funding which colleges can access to resource Key Skills programmes is likely to be an important development and to lead to changes here. But, in many sixth forms the additional staff hours required to teach and oversee the Key Skills programme also requires some re-ordering of priorities, though there does not appear to be a parallel incentive.

Where Key Skills programmes were already being offered, a number of practical problems seemed to arise. "There is too much bureaucracy and paperwork" is one typical comment, "We are already taking on more than we can manage, now all this ..." another. Certainly, the amount of time required to maintain the programme was a frequent cause of concern, which often spilled over into frustration and anger. Similar frustrations arose from the shortage of appropriate teaching materials, particularly in vocational contexts (possibly because this is where there has been most activity) and the lack of time to develop these.

These are simply examples of the sources of dissatisfaction we encountered that could not be, for the most part, resolved by the individual school or college, yet, as one respondent put it, "The key to any successful transition of this scale, and I perceive it to be a very big change, is staff commitment and staff understanding ...".

It seems therefore, there are a number of needs to be addressed if that commitment is to be nurtured. We would suggest that principal among these are:

- The need to establish a broader climate of understanding, in which the value of the Key Skills qualification is both understood and acknowledged by employers and universities and parents are aware that this is the case.
- The need to make absolutely clear the requirements and expectations that the Key Skills programme will place on schools and colleges and to resource these adequately.
- The need to produce information about the alternatives available, in terms of delivery modes, assessment and accreditation, and to disseminate this quickly into schools and colleges.
- The need to promote the development of appropriate resources and materials for teaching and assessment. The emphasis should be on quality, not quantity.
- The need to ensure that procedures for records, assessment and accreditation are as efficient as possible and avoid wasteful duplication, without compromising the development of National standards.

4.4.2 Organisational Factors

Beyond these wider needs, there is also ample evidence that schools and colleges could do much themselves to contribute to the climate surrounding Key Skills implementation.

Though most institutions stated that a Key Skills policy was being developed, many did not as yet have one. There were also wide differences in the ways policy formulation was being approached. We believe that the simplest and most effective approach to policy development is to involve those who will be implementing the policy before it is drawn up, rather than later. This in itself would do much to increase commitment levels. It is also important that, once agreed, the policy is properly resourced. Indeed, agreement of a policy should mandate the resources required for implementation, not leave individual members of staff to lobby for the wherewithal. In some instances, it is clear that policy development has become rather abstracted from the implementation context, and these need to be brought back together.

This link is more likely to be sustained where senior management is actively involved, and offers practical support. In this context, time is probably the most valuable resource – time to

plan with colleagues, time to develop new skills, time to develop approaches and materials. Nevertheless, the activities of individual teachers and lecturers need to be co-ordinated, to be brought together and focused. This is more complex than simply designating someone as ‘co-ordinator’ – it means ensuring that there is someone with clear authority in relation to the implementation of the Key Skills programme and clear accountability for how this is done and what it achieves.

This, in turn, may well require some re-structuring, some alteration of existing roles, of existing decision-making procedures. It is foolish to expect a co-ordinator to manage the implementation effectively unless the organisation is altered to reflect the new role and responsibilities, particularly when the role cuts across existing groupings and (potentially) relates to all students. The person selected to co-ordinate will also have important messages for the staff, and reflect the status of the programme within the school/college. We do not believe this is a role that can be given to an ‘underemployed’ member of the Senior Management Team with confidence of success – not least because the co-ordinator will have to develop processes for ensuring that the whole staff group are aware of the Key Skills programme. Similarly, it may be tempting to look to those teachers/lecturers with the lightest workloads as potential ‘Key Skills’ deliverers, but these are unlikely to be the most appropriate colleagues for the job.

There are, then, several issues that can be managed at the institutional level, and will need to be actively managed if staff commitment is to be secured. Prominent amongst these are:

- The need to demonstrate senior management’s commitment to and support for the programme, and its willingness to resource it adequately.
- The need to co-ordinate the Key Skills programme, even if that means altering current structures, roles and systems to ensure that the co-ordinator is able to do the job.
- The need to involve the wider staff group in discussions and decisions about the programme, and to ensure that even those not currently teaching Key Skills, and all those who are, enjoy frequent, high-quality feedback about progress.
- The need to select a strong team to launch the programme, rather than allowing timetable ‘spaces’ to determine membership.

- The need to develop a clear implementation strategy, rather than simply a policy statement.

4.4.3 Personal Factors

Inevitably, the degree of commitment to the Key Skills programme is determined by personal, as well as system or school/college level factors. Many experienced post-16 teachers have spent the better part of their careers developing their subject knowledge and honing their skills in transferring this knowledge to their students. Our interview data suggests that such staff may have a natural suspicion of the programme, and may have negative attitudes – if not towards the notion that students need Key Skills, then towards the idea that they should be teaching them. By contrast, we have also spoken to many experienced teachers of vocational courses who have developed very positive attitudes towards Key Skills – but as an integral element of the particular GNVQ programme – not as a set of stand-alone skills. We report this to demonstrate both that the staff who will need (eventually) to be involved in Key Skills teaching come from a whole range of starting points, and that previous experience, whilst an important factor, does not necessarily predispose the teacher towards positive attitudes.

It is also the case that the status of the Key Skills programme within the school or college has an important influence on the attitudes of those involved in teaching them. As mentioned above, the way the implementation is planned and resourced are key factors, but so is the ‘selection’ of the Key Skills teams. Where there is a perception that a deficit model is operating, with those having spare capacity or lighter teaching loads being handed the job, morale seems correspondingly low and attitudes towards Key Skills, even amongst those not involved in teaching, can be unhelpful. In several of the centres we visited, this seemed to be an issue.

Even where commitment is high, sometimes this is blunted by a lack of specific skills or by uncertainties about major aspects of the programme. Differing levels of competence and understanding can also be the source of considerable frustration within the team, especially where this is compounded by bureaucratic recording systems and few opportunities for the team to get together to discuss common issues and approaches. It was pointed out to us that, in colleges particularly, the problems of multiple sites and part-time staff can exacerbate these difficulties.

Many interviewees have suggested that active networking with colleagues in other establishments is an important source of information and ideas, and can bolster morale and commitment. However, networks need to involve appropriate groups of colleagues, and to be clearly focused around common concerns, or they become a further demand on teachers'/ lecturers' time, and an additional cause of frustration. Both good and bad experiences of 'networking' were reported to us, as were the sensitivities of 'networking' with an establishment that is, in some respects, a competitor.

Inevitably, any major change in practice will meet with some resistance. Our interviews suggest that some teachers feel their own subjects or courses are being 'devalued' by the changes, others show that they are anxious about their abilities to develop new skills or work in different contexts. Such responses are to be expected, but it is nevertheless important to consider what can be done to minimise the negative effects of such feelings. Consequently, we feel that there are a number of common needs, which, if addressed, would make it easier for most schools and colleges to develop an appropriately skilled and highly motivated Key Skills team. These are:

- The need to ensure that *all* staff are fully informed about the purposes of the programme, the potential benefits it will bring to students, and the way it will be implemented in the particular school/college.
- The need to ensure that appropriate training and development needs are identified, planned for and systematically implemented. It is important to remember here that while courses and training events may be useful starting points, most staff development takes place within the organisation and within the job, though it is often unacknowledged and under-utilised.
- The need to develop a clear sense of identity within the Key Skills team – even if the 'team' embraces the majority of post-16 teachers - and to ensure that the team is able to meet regularly, and where possible in 'quality time', during the crucial phase of implementation.
- The need to encourage active experimentation and a diversity of approaches – it is most unlikely that any one 'orthodoxy' will suit all teachers or all students – in a climate that encourages individuals to evaluate their own practice and share experiences and materials, and tolerates differences.

- The need to establish the status of Key Skills teaching and the rewards (both tangible and psychological) for teaching them effectively are equal to those associated with conventional subject- based or course-based teaching.

4.4.4 The Importance of Student Response

It is hardly surprising that the majority of those teaching derive their sense of esteem and find their commitment in the responses of their students. When talking to those teaching Key Skills, the reactions of students have consistently been mentioned. We explore this issue further in the section which looks specifically at teaching and learning issues, but we would want to underline here that the creation of a supportive climate for the introduction of Key Skills, and certainly the continuing commitment of those teaching them, will be heavily dependent on student attitudes to the programme. In our discussions with staff from schools and colleges with some experience of Key Skills teaching, albeit in rather different contexts, student achievement and teacher enthusiasm correlate strongly with positive perceptions of student attitudes. Conversely, where the programmes have been less successful, student apathy or resentment have frequently been cited. Obvious as it may seem, we therefore feel that it is important to record that:

- There is a need to include students as partners in this programme, rather than to regard them as its 'objects'. This means developing strategies that actively involve students at each stage. They need information and explanation as much as they need teaching, if implementation of the Key Skills programme is to be successful.

4.5 Developing Staff

Despite the widespread recognition that the knowledge and skills of those teaching the Key Skills programme are the basic ingredients for successful implementation, few of the schools and colleges sampled had a systematic, planned programme for staff development. Most had offered some training – typically ‘one-off’ or ‘*ad-hoc*’ events, but very few could point to a coherent programme linked to an overall implementation strategy. Nevertheless, staff development issues surfaced in our interviews with staff from all levels, though these were, for the most part, expressed as general concerns or problems, rather than thought-out analyses of specific needs. Reviewing these issues, we feel that they can be grouped around four themes – the *planning and management* of staff development, the *processes and methods* of staff development, the *content* of staff development, and the problems of *accreditation*. Below, we indicate the sorts of issues that seem to be causing concern in schools and colleges, and try to identify the major needs these concerns highlight.

4.5.1 *Planning and Managing Staff Development*

A central concern is finding ways to integrate staff development for the Key Skills Programme into the wider staff development activities of the school or college. Generally, the influence of development planning has led to deliberate linking of staff development to priorities for school or college development. However, this link is often quite tenuous, because of different planning cycles, changing priorities, the lead-in time required for some activities, the availability (or non-availability) of appropriate development programmes. The Key Skills initiative is an ‘addition’ to the existing set of established priorities – inevitably there is some disruption of existing plans. Equally inevitably, there have been varying rates of progress towards the ‘re-ordering’ of priorities, with a predictable impact on planning processes. Consequently, we have found that a lack of clarity about the priority to be attached to the Key Skills Programme has delayed progress of staff development activities in many schools and colleges. We have also found that the co-ordination of the staff development function has been separated from the planning cycle in several establishments, so that the integration of staff development into organisational development is delayed. It is clear that a more ‘thermostatic’ relationship needs to be developed between these functions.

The lack of clarity referred to also creates problems of differentiation. It seems that general, rather than specific training is offered, largely because it has not been possible to trace specific implications of the Key Skills implementation through from policy to practical

consequences for the different groups of staff involved. In some cases, schools or colleges involved in the piloting of Key Skills report that they have learned much about the different development needs of different groups from the experience. But this is a time-consuming and cost-ineffective approach – if ways can be found to disseminate what has been learned quickly into the majority of schools and colleges, time and resources will be targeted more effectively.

The following groups have, for example, been identified to us as presenting specific needs, beyond the general need for appropriate induction to Key Skills.

- A-Level teachers
- Heads of Departments
- New staff and NQTs
- Maths staff who will teach AoN
- English staff who will teach Communication
- NVQ staff
- Support staff

This list is by no means exhaustive – though it does underline that schools and colleges have very different staff groups who each present their own, different staff development needs. A further grouping often identified by colleges is part-time staff, employed either directly or via agencies, whose contracts do not require them to attend meetings or training sessions.

There are also issues relating to the continuing management of staff development as an activity. Too often, the major emphasis seems to have been placed on planning (however poorly integrated), with little attention given to following up, evaluating and exploiting the new knowledge and skills that staff are acquiring. This is particularly important for Key Skills implementation, which is being carried forward on very tight time-scales and budgets.

In summary, therefore, we feel that there are needs relating to the management of staff development that include:

- The need to plan staff development for Key Skills staff alongside the planning of Key Skills implementation.

- The need to integrate the staff development programme for Key Skills into the wider staff development programme of the school/college.
- The need to recognise that while all staff require training, it will be important to differentiate between the different requirements of different staff groups.
- The need to target specific staff development activities initially on those whose need is greatest/most urgent.

4.5.2 Selecting appropriate methods

In our visits to schools and colleges we found many examples of both external and internal sources of staff development. External sources of support included awarding bodies, LEAs, FEDA, the QCA and 'Key Skills Consultants'. Most often these had provided the opportunity to participate in events, where information was available that up-dated staff on developments, rather than developing the staff as such. Nevertheless, such events were generally seen as beneficial. Consultants offered different experiences – most often coming into the school or college to work with groups of staff. Again, there was an appreciation of the value of such experience, though sometimes it was not always clear what the agenda would be until the consultant arrived.

Where internal training has been organised, it ranges from information-giving to more ambitious programmes, which go beyond information into practical help and advice. Both formal and informal approaches are common, with the following methods most often cited.

Discussion Groups;

Shadowing colleagues;

Team-teaching;

Writing schemes of work or assessment talks in groups;

Working together on the production of teaching materials.

All of these activities were seen as potentially valuable methods of developing staff skills, but there were constraints (especially time and cost) that limited their use and effectiveness.

There was also a feeling that the most successful activities had tended to involve self-selecting groups, and several interviewees spoke of their doubts about how easy it would be to involve all those who needed staff development rather than those who wanted to develop. Libraries, for example, and teaching assistants, may play crucial roles.

The main needs relating to identification and selection of appropriate methods appear to be:

- The need to have clearer information about who offers what – what do Exam Boards offer, what will the LEAs do, what else is available externally.
- The need to stimulate a more creative use of the opportunities for staff development internally – perhaps by making models or examples of possible approaches more widely available.
- The need to match methods more carefully to the training goals and the staff targeted.
- The need to extend training to the relevant support staff.

4.5.3 Training Materials

There seemed to be a general shortage of good quality training materials. The majority of centres wanted materials that offered ideas and guidelines, rather than ‘packaged solutions’ which were unlikely to be usable without modification anyway. There was a desire for ‘exemplar’ materials, that could provide starting points for staff development, but many schools/colleges felt that there was sufficient internal expertise to produce high quality teaching materials in-house, the problems were finding time to produce them and strategies to disseminate them effectively throughout the teaching team. One exception to this was the request for materials that could be used for training in assessment, with the interpretation of evidence and aligning of judgements with national standards identified as especially difficult training issues.

Some of those interviewed felt that development of training materials had been held back by a lack of clear guidance, from the DfEE, from QCA, from Exam Boards, about expectations. It was suggested that simply ‘asterisking’ where a Key Skill might be assessed within a particular syllabus or unit of work was unhelpful. More detail of how the Key Skills could be applied would bring more clarity. Training materials therefore needed to carry consistent messages, whatever the source, and also to be clear and ‘jargon-free’. At the same time, they needed to underline that Key Skills offered opportunities for a range of teaching styles and learning contexts, rather than promote a single approach.

The data available to us suggests that there are needs associated with training materials.

These include:

- The need to make more widely available exemplar materials, particularly materials addressing the nature of ‘evidence’ and the bases for assessment.
- The need to simplify and standardise the language used by the various partners, so that a common vocabulary can be promoted through training activities.
- The need to ensure that training materials illustrate a variety of teaching approaches, and also point out opportunities for independent and collaborative learning.

4.5.4 Accreditation of Training

Many of those interviewed spoke of the need to acknowledge staff training through accreditation. A majority of these had experience of GNVQ teaching, and so were aware of the existing training and qualification opportunities. This issue was raised less frequently by those new to Key Skills, though there was a general acceptance that if training was required, some acknowledgement should be available to those who had trained. Even amongst those with previous experiences there seemed to be some confusion about which of the qualifications available would be most appropriate.

Some staff had taken the Key Skills Professional Development Qualification. However, the assessor awards (D32, D33, D34) were most frequently mentioned, though those who had achieved these qualifications sometimes had mixed feelings about their relevance to the teaching of Key Skills. While the focus on assessment was seen as helpful, teaching, which was generally considered a more important activity, was somewhat neglected. While this emphasis from awarding bodies was understandable, it was unsatisfactory .

Some suggested that bringing staff confidence and competence up to acceptable standards would require all Key Skills teachers to hold qualifications in each of the three areas. But most focused on the desirability of ensuring that staff hold a qualification in a Key Skill that

they will be teaching. Needs arising from accreditation, therefore, seem focused around:

- The need to establish a national, coherent and recognised set of teacher qualifications, common across awarding bodies.
- The need to ensure access to accreditation opportunities for all those teaching Key Skills.
- The need to ensure that accredited training addresses the problems of teaching Key Skills, as well as assessment issues.

4.6 Teaching

When teaching and learning are effective, we have found that some teachers are able to use Key Skills to help students take more control of their own learning. In turn, students can begin to use their skills to enhance their learning in a range of contexts. Yet while the knowledge about teaching and learning is expanding, much remains unknown, not least in the area of Key Skills. To improve the quality of teaching and the range of teaching strategies and styles used, we need to understand much more about how people acquire and are able to use these generic skills.

Whether or not to integrate the teaching of Key Skills into subject teaching is a central theme within this report, and the issue of integration is at the core of the teaching process because of its implications for how teachers work with each other and in the classroom or workshop. How this is being resolved, combined with the underlying attitudes and commitment of staff, provides the background to our findings on teaching. We have divided this section into two broad areas: *planning* programmes and session content and *approaches to teaching*, including, range of teaching methods used, differentiation and the use of support mechanisms.

4.6.1 Planning

The emphasis in planning Key Skills teaching was placed on the main Key Skills of Communication, Application of Number and Information Technology, despite the fact that a number of teachers regarded the wider Key Skills as “just as important”. Generally speaking, communication was perceived to be easier to integrate into wider curriculum content than the two other main Key Skills. Teachers are divided in their opinions, however, about the benefits of teaching IT and AoN as ‘standalone’ or as integrated subjects. AoN was regarded as the most problematic skill, because of the difficulties of integrating the subject matter. This may be related to the specifications themselves. Certainly, much of the Key Skills development work in AoN demands a certain sequencing of tasks: collect data; analyse data; and present data, for example. Consequently, even if these tasks are embedded within different host subjects and ‘signposted’ within different topics, these subjects and topics have to be sequenced in a similar fashion. Some teachers expressed the view that sequencing topics for Key Skills assessment sometimes distorts subject teaching. But some managers felt that integration of AoN involved an implicit commitment to co-ordinate teaching across traditional subject boundaries, which would have further implication for sequencing subjects.

Generally speaking, the nature of the host subject content in vocational courses does not appear to be a major stumbling block when deciding whether or not to integrate the teaching of Key Skills. By contrast, the extent to which Key Skills can be taught through some academic subjects is a cause for concern. As yet, we have little empirical evidence to draw on here, though many centres believe that it will not be possible for students to gain coverage of Key Skills through certain combinations of 'A'-levels. Instead, they are considering using alternatives such as the Diploma of Achievement, General Studies, ASDAN awards, Sports Awards, Work Experience or an additional 'A'-level to ensure teaching opportunities.

There are also concerns that subject knowledge may be diluted because of time spent on teaching Key Skills. One Head of Sixth, however, saw Key Skills as a vehicle for challenging traditional approaches to 'A'-level teaching, and there was some evidence to support his view. For example, the integration of problem-solving skills into 'A'-level geography teaching had, according to one teacher, greatly enhanced the learning of her students. Another noted the impact of IT in the quality of their presentations and on the subsequent level of satisfaction students experienced. Several teachers compared the work habits of their GNVQ students to those of their 'A'-level students noting how much more self directed and motivated the former appeared and attributing this to Key Skills. A college Science co-ordinator observed: '(GNVQ students had a better grasp of) how to look at a particular problem, how to plan it, how to solve it, how to put it over... how to present it to other people so that they understand it.'

The importance of time spent on planning the content of programmes was stressed by a range of respondents, whether designing specific Key Skills modules, integrated schemes of work or assignments. Careful planning helped to ensure coverage of Key Skills, assisted in better communication between Key Skills and subject staff and acted as a staff development tool. Nevertheless, we feel that planning for Key Skills had been carefully worked through in a minority of cases only. We believe therefore, that:

- School and college staff at all levels need to be made aware of the benefits of Key Skills to learners.

- Centres need to allocate time to planning, especially in the early stages of development.
- More empirical evidence is needed on the relationship between Key Skills and the host subjects and the extent to which Key Skills can be successfully integrated needs amplifying.
- Subject and Key Skills specialists need to make conscious decisions about the best way to design and use assignments which maximise the use of their relative strengths and expertise.
- The process of designing materials needs to be recognised by schools and colleges as an integral part of both increasing teachers' understanding and ownership of Key Skills as well as valuing their creativity and flexibility.

4.6.2 Teaching approaches

As noted elsewhere, we have identified a range of different delivery models. The structures that schools and colleges put in place for the management and organisation of Key Skills will have a direct impact on the quality of teaching, the kind of arrangements that teachers make for working together and the issues that arise. When these systems are underpinned by positive attitudes, as well as being carefully planned and thought through, there is likely to be greater consistency in the quality of teaching and the extent to which staff work together to plan Key Skills programmes and materials.

A wide range of approaches to the planning and use of assignments was identified most of which involved some collaboration between Key Skills staff and subject specialists. That said, most of the following examples are drawn from GNVQ or NVQ programmes though we believe that they have much to offer 'A' level teachers.

- Integrated assignments planned and taught by Key Skills and subject specialist teachers.
- Integrated assignments taught by subject specialists but jointly written and checked e.g. communication and AoN integrated into group projects. These projects also support the development of the wider Key Skills such as working with others and problem-solving.
- Integrated assignments written and taught by subject specialists.

- Key Skills specialists identify Key Skills on subject specific assignments to guide vocational tutors.
- Additional assignments focussed on specific Key Skills but subject related are used by subject teachers, but jointly written e.g. GNVQ Science.
- Key Skills are contextualised in subject related assignments but taught separately.
- Contextualised assignments for self study designed by Key Skills specialists.

Some of the more innovative teaching methods we have identified which could well be adapted for use on 'A' level programmes include practical projects involving all the Key Skills for use on work experience programmes, mock interviews on employers premises, peer support programmes, and the use of video to record end of unit presentations. Where Key Skills are taught separately, the importance of using practical approaches was emphasised, leading students gradually towards abstract ideas.

The need to cover the subject content as well as teach and assess Key Skills creates dilemmas for teachers in deciding the overall purposes of a particular session or activity. Similarly, teachers report difficulties in managing the different levels of attainment of individual students either in specific Key Skills or subject focused sessions. Of course, the issue of how to differentiate teaching to meet different learner needs is not a new problem for many teachers and it is likely to continue to be poorly tackled because of its complexity. However, Key Skills presents teachers with new difficulties, because groups are generally determined by subject rather than Key Skill level, and it is unrealistic to expect differentiation to take place without significant training and development for teachers.

To help address these issues, team teaching approaches are used by some centres which acts both as a form of staff development and as a means of sharing responsibility for different tasks between the two teachers concerned. A Key Skills lecturer describes the process in her college: 'Instead of having students dragging their heels about their work, they accept us completely. We work in the room with their own tutors and we go round from student to student to give feedback. We mark their assignments after they've been marked for course purposes. The students all know that they're going to be marked twice.'

Another means of tackling the problem of different levels of attainment has been to establish Key Skills workshops or drop in centres. These are mainly found in colleges rather than

schools, however. These may be subject or key skill specific e.g. science, information technology or they may be general workshops. General workshops are staffed by Key Skills specialists or subject specialists but with Key Skills expertise. Particular specialists are scheduled to be available at different times during the week. Some of the staff in such centres are often learning assistants - they are not qualified teachers but can offer help to individual or small groups of students with their Key Skills work. Sometimes small groups of students are scheduled to use the workshops at different times of the week, other centres operate on an individual drop in basis. Self supported materials have also been devised although some students, particularly at foundation and intermediate levels, find these difficult to work through without substantial support. Staff also report difficulties with group management and noise control.

There is a potential overlap between the operation of these workshops which provide additional help and support with Key Skills and the provision of basic skills, ESOL or learning support for students with special educational needs. In some instances the divisions between each of these functions have been removed so that a Key Skills specialist would be just as likely to be able to provide support for a student with specific learning difficulties or one who requires foundation or entry level basic skills. In other instances, clear distinctions remain which can lead to overlap, duplication of effort or wasted resources.

The use of IT both as a teaching tool and also as a support for teaching requires access for staff and students to adequate and up-to date equipment and software not least because IT packages are being used to support the delivery of the other Key Skills and subjects as well as for specific IT teaching. Of course, decisions about where to locate machines will effect the extent to which IT can be integrated into general teaching. If they are located centrally it is clearly much harder to integrate their use into general teaching. Nevertheless, many schools and colleges favour IT 'suites', despite looking for integration. While some schools and colleges had benefited from grants to update equipment, schools in particular were concerned about inadequate access to both hardware and software. We therefore recommend that:

- Teachers need training and support in how to manage their teaching to take account of students' different levels of Key Skills, including ideas for extension activities.

- ‘A’-level teachers need to be made aware of and build on the expertise in teaching Key Skills of GNVQ and Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers.
- To ensure effective team teaching, schools and colleges need to develop agreements about how teachers will work together, their relative roles and responsibilities and time allocated for joint planning.
- Schools and colleges need to review the role and purposes of Key Skills, basic skills, ESOL and learning support to ensure that any differences in the type of support that is offered are identified and justified. The different functions of each type of support need to be communicated to teaching staff to ensure that they are clear when to seek help and advice for themselves or for individual students.

4.7 Learning

In our research we were interested to find out how students were responding to the Key Skills initiative. We wanted to know about their levels of *motivation*, the extent to which they were supported in *transferring and generalising* Key Skills and whether Key Skills enhanced students' capacity in *learning to learn*.

4.7.1 Motivation

Motivation lies at the heart of the learning process and is closely related to achievement.

Young people are more likely to achieve if they are motivated. In fact, students' attitudes towards Key Skills were mixed, with GNVQ students likely to be more positive than 'A'-level students. Factors seeming to influence these attitudes included:

- The attitude of teachers. The more positive teachers were towards Key Skills, the more motivated the students were likely to be.
- The status of the Key Skills programme. If the provision was seen as 'remedial', students were disinclined to participate. Separate or discrete classes tended to reinforce this attitude amongst students, although staff emphasised that many students need specific development and practice in Key Skills.
- Lack of understanding of the need for Key Skills. Students are aware that Key Skills are not compulsory and not a requirement for employment or university entrance.
- Previous experience of learning. Many students appear, for example, to associate mathematics with failure, and, particularly students who did poorly in their GCSE are often reluctant to attend AoN classes which are seen as 'more maths'.

While some students valued the opportunity to revisit aspects of their learning which they may have forgotten, others criticised teachers for repeating work already covered in Key Stages 3 or 4. According to students, insufficient attention is paid to what students can already do.

Some students resent having to choose A level and A/S level courses which will ensure coverage of Key Skills. Yet centres also report varying degrees of success with extra-

curricular activities such as ASDAN and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, since, again, lack of compulsion means that some students do not participate.

In some centres, there had been a deliberate attempt to increase student motivation, though it is important to emphasise that only in the minority of instances had centres taken conscious decisions to address this issue. Those who had done so, emphasised the following points. First, it is important to emphasise the relevance of Key Skills to students. An effective induction programme to Key Skills is seen by many staff as essential. Programmes are used to explain the rationale and relevance of Key Skills, not only to employment and university entrance but to wider aspects of life. Past students are invited back to talk about how they have used their Key Skills. Residential courses were also found useful in providing opportunities to demonstrate the wider relevance of Key Skills to students, as was work experience.

Second, students need to have their prior learning recognised. Centres who used base-line assessment data to make sure that students were placed on the correct level programme, reported more positive attitudes from students.

Third, students need feedback on their achievements and to be able to see that they are enhancing their performance in other contexts. This, of course, links to assessment and the student's role within that process. Some centres encourage students to take responsibility for monitoring and tracking their own progress which can heighten the students' awareness of development. However it is the dialogue that takes place between teacher and student or student and student that plays the most important part in contributing to students achievement and hence motivation at level.

To maximise the learning response, these findings indicate that schools and colleges need to:

- Recognise, in the light of the central part played by student motivation and commitment, that specific strategies be adopted to address this issue.
- Take active steps through induction and the design of teaching assessment methods and materials to ensure that students recognise the relevance of Key Skills.

- As far as possible, ensure a match between students level of attainment in Key Skills and their individual programme.
- Involve students in the assessment of their own work.

4.7.2 *Transfer and generalisation*

If Key Skills are those skills which are generic and transferable across a range of contexts, then the implication must be that, if these skills are to be learnt successfully, the best way to teach them will be through providing opportunities for learners to use them in a range of learning situations. So how best can schools and colleges ensure that students are able to apply these skills? Yet, on the whole, very little is known about how Key Skills are learned or the most effective teaching approaches. Consequently decisions about how to teach Key Skills are as likely to be driven by pragmatic and organisational concerns, as by sound pedagogical arguments.

Yet it was clear that understanding the practical application of Key Skills to everyday life is an important factor in motivating both staff and students. The more enthusiastic students we spoke to provided examples of how they had used their Key Skills at work. Practical projects designed for use in the workplace or other real life contexts provided students with opportunities to apply their Key Skills in a real situations, and past students who had been invited to talk at induction programmes, about the uses they had made of Key Skills since leaving college clearly had impact.

As well as imaginative teaching strategies linking Key Skills to the world outside the classroom, the importance of teamwork and effective systems of communication between Key Skills and subject staff were emphasised as vital in ensuring the transfer and generalisation of skills. Also stressed was the need to move beyond a checklist approach or ‘test’ culture, where competencies are ticked off as part of a paper exercise, to providing concrete evidence of skills application that students can recognise for themselves.

We were also reminded that while some students need help with acquiring new skills, (particularly those with a low skills base), others need help with maintaining them. As one student pointed out specific Key Skills sessions can act as a refresher course after the long gap between Key Stage 4 and the start of an ‘A’-level programme.

Schools and colleges have often made separate provision in the form of workshops or separately taught sessions even where there is a predominantly integrated approach but the complexity of the issues surrounding the acquisition and application of Key Skills remain poorly mapped. Nevertheless, our interviews and visits suggest that to assist with transfer and generalisation,

- Teaching staff need ideas about how best to support students in applying Key Skills across a range of contexts.
- Where responsibility for teaching Key Skills is shared with Key Skills specialists, schools and colleges need to ensure that effective systems of communication exist between specialist and subject teachers.
- Centres need to recognise that students will need opportunities to maintain and apply skills as well as acquiring new ones.
- Centres need to recognise that students can provide evidence of their Key Skills achievements from both within and outside the formal curriculum, and inside and outside the school/college.
- Students need to be supported in generating, collecting and collating evidence of their Key Skills competencies from a range of experiences and contexts.

4.7.3 Learning to learn

While recognising the importance of Key Skills, the majority of staff we spoke to regarded Key Skills as additional subjects to be fitted into the existing timetable. A few, however, believed that Key Skills can enhance students' capacity to learn so that, in the long term, they become more autonomous as learners and possibly 'lifelong learners'. 'Learning to learn' goes well beyond the Key Skill of Improving Own Learning and Performance. It includes learning to share responsibility for learning with teachers and lecturers, and seeking opportunities to improve learning performance across the whole curriculum.

We found a few examples of how individual teachers or teams and, in two instances, an entire school and college had attempted to make learning to learn (or thinking skills) the basis for the Key Skills programme. In one example, group projects have been developed by a motor vehicle department into which communication and IT have been integrated. Working co-

operatively students complete the project and are then asked to discuss each other's strategies and approaches to particular tasks, as 'learning to learn' becomes a pedagogical vehicle.

In another example, a college had based its tutorial programme on 'self-organised learning' in which students have regular 'learning conversations' with their tutors. Students are guided in responding to a series of questions based on their goals, the methods they will use to achieve these, the intended outcomes and outcome measures. These processes assist students in planning the next stages of their learning and Key Skills are linked to the specific substantive goals of the learner.

One school had developed a comprehensive Key Skills programme for Key Stages 3 and 4 in which pupils were encouraged to undertake a whole range of practical tasks linked to everyday life. Pupils are rewarded for solving problems in their own ways and 'doing things as they see it', thereby helping to raise their self esteem as well as Key Skills levels.

To enable students to become more conscious of Key Skills some schools and colleges encourage the students themselves to identify opportunities for applying Key Skills in their course work. This can lead to difficulties, however, if providing the evidence of achievement becomes an end in itself for the student at the expense of understanding the substantive content. While examples of the kind described here are rare, they do provide powerful evidence of how Key Skills can be used to strengthen the whole of a student's educational experience. Our feeling is that this is a priority area for further research, seeking out specific examples of how a school or college can assimilate Key Skills, including the non-assessed skills, into teaching strategies and the design of learning opportunities. We feel that significant opportunities for Key Skills development arise through extending the pedagogies through which subjects or courses are delivered. Therefore, we suggest that:

- The field needs more examples of this kind to convince teachers of the potential of Key Skills in enhancing students learning.
- Such examples need to be presented in the context of delivery models, subjects, monitoring arrangements, teaching methods and materials, assessment etc.

4.8 Assessment and Accreditation

The problem of assessment of Key Skills learning presents a new set of challenges. Indeed, it has been suggested that on some vocational programmes the assessment of student performance has displaced the teaching process. To exploit fully the relationships between assessing, teaching, and learning, it is important to remind ourselves about the purposes of assessment. Of course, judging what a student has learnt is a central objective of the assessment task, but equally, so is using assessment data to plan what and how to teach next. Thought also needs to be given to engaging students themselves in a process of self-assessment and reflection on their learning, as it is this, rather than ‘signposting’, that will most effectively enable students to use their skills across the curriculum. Our data suggests that issues relating to assessment and accreditation can be categorised into four broad strands – *base-line and diagnostic* assessment, particularly on entry to post-16 centres; factors relating to the *models* used for *assessing* Key Skills; processes for checking *standards*; and *tracking, monitoring* and *accreditation* of the Key Skills.

4.8.1 Base-line and Diagnostic Assessment

Most of the schools contributing to the research did not undertake any form of base-line or diagnostic assessment for students continuing on to post-16 courses. There was a general reliance on GCSE grades for Maths and English to assess potential for Application of Number and Communication respectively. Some centres used informal assessment to ascertain competence in Information Technology but, most relied on student having covered the material prescribed in the National Curriculum. Some schools referred to other information they had about students such as Standard Assessment Test and Cognitive Ability Test data. Very few students appeared to join schools from other centres, consequently these centres felt that the knowledge of students’ abilities built up during their time pre-16 provided sufficient information for decisions to be taken about suitability of chosen 16+ courses, including Key Skill programmes.

Most colleges used the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit diagnostic assessment to identify students requiring additional basic skills support. However colleges were very aware of the need to undertake an initial assessment to help identify the Key Skill capabilities of all students. Some colleges already had initial tests for Key Skills in place, commonly either one of their own devising, West Nottinghamshire College’s pack or the Colchester Institute/Cambridge Regional College diagnostic test. The West Nottinghamshire test

consists of paper-based assessment tests for Communication and Number together with supporting materials for skills development while the Colchester/Cambridge tests consist of tests for Communication and Application of Number which are paper-based or computer-based. Centres commented on the lack of a suitable initial assessment for Information Technology.

This initial assessment data should ideally be used first to decide which level of programme a student requires and then to plan teaching. We found relatively few examples where this was done systematically.

With regard to initial assessment, we feel that:

- There is a need for an initial assessment tool for Information Technology, and continued development of instruments for assessing Communication and AoN.
- There is a need for 11-19 centres to undertake an initial assessment of all students progressing onto post 16 programmes, rather than assuming knowledge.
- There is a need for 11-19 centres to decide which additional information available to them will also best inform them about students' Key Skill attainment.
- There is a need to ensure that base-line and diagnostic assessment data is used to inform teaching, as well as placement.

4.8.2 Assessment Models

Very few centres have had experience of Key Skills within 'A' levels or across broader post-16 provision. All had had experience of GNVQ and one school was found to have a Key Skills programme which started in Year 7 though it did not trace clearly through to year 11. GNVQ centres reported most success where assessment opportunities were focused within vocational assignments with some contextualised stand-alone pieces of work used to 'plug the gaps'. This method was found to be particularly useful to motivate students for Application of Number, which was frequently mentioned as the most difficult Key Skill to cover, and the one requiring most additional input and stand-alone assessments. A teacher commented, "Communication very much occurs naturally. IT occurs pretty naturally, and we've found we've been able to use the work that we've done in vocational areas to build up a full portfolio... AoN causes the greatest problems and there is most resistance from

students to doing it as well.” However, Information Technology was frequently delivered separately too, mainly due to practical rather than pedagogic considerations.

Stand-alone sessions were found to work well where they had been developed as part of an overall, systematic strategy for Key Skills delivery and assessment. Student motivation and success was found to be greater where assessment and skills development were based on relevant and interesting scenarios .

There is much variation in systems of assessment. Some centres rely on GNVQ staff to assess Key Skills within the vocational assignments, others use Key Skills staff. Many centres recognised there were staff development problems associated with all staff assessing Key Skills when Curriculum 2000 is implemented. Few centres had decided on models for implementing Key Skills for September 2000, but a number were considering the use of General Studies as the vehicle, because this would involve less staff and reduce the problems of staff development.

The nature of the final assessment has clearly influenced some delivery models in some centres. Nine of the centres visited had taken part in the Key Skills Pilot Programme and, as a consequence of the demands of the external assessment, three centres had made the decision to deliver and assess at least one of the Key Skills within GNVQ courses in separate lessons, even though they had successfully integrated all Key Skills into vocational units (using the 1995 specifications). These centres also emphasised the importance of making assessment tasks relevant for students, who were resentful of ‘artificial’ or ‘manufactured’ tests.

We feel, therefore, that:

- Schools and Colleges need to ensure that materials for skills development and assessment are set in contexts to which the student can relate.
- Many staff will need to be trained before making consistent judgements about students attainments can be made with confidence.
- Awarding bodies need to signpost in detail the assessment that must be undertaken to provide evidence for Key Skills, rather than simply identifying teaching opportunities.

4.8.3 Standards

In many centres, teachers were uncertain about the standards and how to apply them. They were hopeful that exemplar materials would be produced for Key Skills 2000 to clarify the standards required. Centres who had experience of external moderation/standardisation meetings commented on their usefulness. Some centres had processes in place where opportunities were provided for staff to meet and discuss the standard of work required and to look at students' work. These included the larger centres where, in addition to a Key Skills Co-ordinator, it was common practice to appoint consultants to lead each of the Key Skills of Communication, Application of Number and Information Technology. The consultants organised meetings for their particular area of expertise, providing opportunities to share ideas and problems, disseminate latest news, discuss standards and how evidence might be collected.

To achieve a consistent standard of assessment across the programme many centres restricted the numbers of staff involved in the delivery of Key Skills, using a general studies programme, for targeted delivery rather than attempting to use evidence from opportunities occurring in 'A' levels. The data available to us about standards suggests that:

- There is a need for exemplar material both to clarify the standards necessary to achieve a particular level and provide information about the external assessment.
- There is a need for centres to have simple but rigorous quality assurance procedures relating to assessment.

4.8.4 Tracking, Monitoring and Accreditation

Much concern was expressed about the lateness of the publication of the 'A' level specifications, and of the perceived inadequacy of the signposting of assessment opportunities provided in the new specifications. Centres also identified the areas of tracking and monitoring as major hurdles to the introduction of Key Skills for 2000. Existing practice in some centres identified Key Skill coverage on front sheets of assignments. These were then re-assessed either by the vocational or Key Skill staff and students were 'signed off' on their logsheets if the Key Skills were achieved to the correct level. Other centres appeared to rely on the student's own ability to identify where they had covered the Key Skills, and to log these with the assistance of the vocational or Key Skill tutors. Centres applying the latter

approach frequently commented on too much time spent 'explaining' the Key Skills to students, and the students' difficulty in understanding the standard of work required. It also appeared that in such centres the Key Skills were not assessed until the process of logging was undertaken.

One of the consistent messages regarding KS 2000 was the difficulty of deciding who should track and monitor Key Skills. Monitoring arrangements for Key Skills within GNVQ courses are sometimes included within the regular review sessions with the GNVQ tutor. The few centres where Key Skills have been piloted with 'A' levels identified the monitoring of students as problematic. These centres appear to have used personal tutors to track and monitor progress.

Simplified tracking systems are needed for Key Skills 2000 and some centres felt that an electronic system would be beneficial. Many centres looked to the Awarding Bodies to provide model tracking sheets which could be adapted to meet the needs of individual schools and colleges. Others felt that using the General Studies programme would facilitate tracking because it would be easy to identify where the evidence opportunities lay.

Centres are also divided over the value of the summative assessment tools available. Centres involved with the pilot programme broadly welcomed the rigour of external assessment although some centres believed that the tests were currently too similar to GCSE exams and that preparation for the tests detracted from teaching.

Concern has been expressed in some quarters about the poor level of understanding of Key Skills exhibited by some external verifiers. Under the GNVQ 1995 specifications, external verifiers have focused on checking portfolios for the vocational evidence, with little time being spent on the Key Skills. One centre commented that they have often had external verifiers who were 'less competent' to assess Key Skills than their own vocational staff, and who can offer little support to teachers. Another centre commented on the 'nit-picking' attitudes of a verifier. It was felt important that external verification, while rigorous, did not reduce staff confidence and commitment.

The standards moderation meetings held within the Pilot Programme were felt to be helpful and informative. Centres were concerned that advice and guidance that came through the external verification system would be lost if the standards moderation relied on postal standardisation or a single visit at the end of the academic year. In conclusion, we suggest that:

- Centres need different examples of how to track and monitor Key Skills in order to develop their own procedures.
- There is a need for a simple system for recording and assembling assessment data, possibly IT based.
- There is a need for external verifiers/standards moderators from awarding bodies to possess the necessary competence to moderate Key Skills.
- There is a need for awarding bodies to continue to provide advice and support to centres, despite the change in role from external verifier to standards moderator.

APPENDICES