



# **Widening adult participation: ways to extend good practice**

**A research report for the Learning and Skills Council**

Sue Taylor

Learning and Skills Development Agency  
Regent Arcade House  
19-25 Argyll Street  
London W1F 7LS

March 2002  
(published 2003)

Published by the Learning and Skills Development Agency

[www.LSDA.org.uk](http://www.LSDA.org.uk)

Feedback should be sent to:  
Information Services  
Learning and Skills Development Agency  
Regent Arcade House  
19-25 Argyll Street  
London W1F 7LS  
Tel 020 7297 9144  
Fax 020 7297 9242  
[enquiries@LSDA.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@LSDA.org.uk)

Registered with the Charity Commissioners

Printed in the UK

© Learning and Skills Development Agency 2003

You are welcome to copy this publication for internal use within your organisation. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission of the copyright owner.

### **Further information**

For further information about the issues discussed in this publication please contact:

Sue Taylor  
Research Manager  
LSDA  
Regent Arcade House  
19-25 Argyll Street  
London W1F 7LS  
Tel: 020 7297 9119  
Fax: 020 7297 9190  
E-mail: [staylor@lsda.org.uk](mailto:staylor@lsda.org.uk)

**This publication was supported by the Learning and Skills Council as part of a grant to the LSDA for a programme of research and development.**

# Contents

	<i>page</i>
Acknowledgements	1
Executive summary	2
<b>Part 1</b>	
Introduction	5
Statistics on case study colleges	9
Case study findings	10
Commentary on the characteristics of good practice	13
Extending good practice nationwide	20
Annex A: Three college case studies	24
Annex B: Characteristics and examples of good practice	31
Annex C: Statistics on case study colleges	39
<b>Part 2</b>	
A survey of recent literature for the Learning and Skills Development Agency by Deirdre Macleod, Critical Thinking (now Policyworks)	45

## Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are due to the study team, including LSDA consultants Sheila Leevers, Jenny Scribbins and Tony Uden, who conducted and reported on the case study visits, and statisticians Terry Rudden and Amanda Russell, who prepared and analysed the data that aided the selection of colleges for the project. The author would also like to acknowledge the vital contribution made by the Principals and senior staff of 17 colleges, listed below, who gave up time at short notice to take part in the visits. Their willingness to share expertise and experience was crucial in helping the study team to analyse and describe the features of good practice in widening participation. Finally, the research team valued the guidance and support provided throughout by members of the LSC Widening Participation Steering Group.

### *Pilot/case study colleges*

City of Bristol College  
City of Sunderland College  
College of North East London  
Cornwall College  
Derwentside College  
Doncaster College  
Gateshead College  
Havant Sixth Form College  
Knowsley Community College  
Lambeth College  
Liverpool Community College  
Manchester College of Art and Technology  
Oldham College  
Rowley Regis Centre  
South Birmingham College  
South Nottingham College  
Thanet College

## Executive summary

1. This study was conducted on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), in the period October 2001 to March 2002. The aim was to identify the characteristics of good practice in widening adult participation in further education colleges. The study was designed to inform a national strategy to extend existing good practice and promote new development. It contributed to a joint review by LSC and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). A summary version was published in November 2002.
2. Following the joint review by LSC and DfES, LSC developed a national strategy for widening adult participation (for consultation by May 2003). The LSDA research findings formed part of the background to this strategy.
3. The study draws on a literature review and case studies of further education and sixth form colleges where it was expected that examples of good practice would be found. Bearing in mind the government's aim to encourage further progress in widening adult participation, an important criterion for selecting the case study colleges was that they should show evidence of growth and/or high numbers of adult learners in categories associated with widening participation.
4. Examples of good practice were present in all the colleges visited. Several have developed their mission to widen participation for adults with particular energy and commitment, combined with well-embedded and comprehensive procedures. Enthusiasm is married to a clear business approach. The report identifies and illustrates key characteristics of good practice, emphasising:
  - The importance of ***positioning widening participation as an integral part of the college's business***, with commitment at all levels
  - ***A sound business-like approach to seeking and deploying resources*** for widening participation for adults
  - ***The constant search for new ways to widen adult participation***, and persistence by staff in efforts to reach the 'hard to reach'
  - ***Continuous engagement with the community*** at all levels in the college and in all parts of the community
  - ***A rigorous approach to quality assurance***
  - ***Thoroughness in curriculum design and teaching and learning strategies***, ensuring that widening participation objectives are reflected and reinforced throughout the college
  - ***Support for learners is treated as an entitlement***, including practical and financial support as well as additional help with learning.

5. These characteristics present an updated view of the ingredients of successful practice. They do not replace the Kennedy Committee's guidelines, which remain a valid guide to the processes needed to help widen participation.
6. The report recommends **a national strategy for quality improvement and development, to improve the capacity of colleges to widen adult participation**. Above all the focus should be on colleges' skills and strategies **to improve learners' success**. This will, therefore, include not only good practice in recruiting adult learners, but also creative ways to improve retention, achievement and progression.
7. The proposed strategy goes beyond the dissemination of information about the characteristics of good practice. The suggested approach is to prepare an 'audit and business development tool', based on the features of success identified in the study. Expert external advisers would use the audit tool as part of a quality improvement and development process, involving visits to FE colleges to help develop their widening participation strategies.
8. Two messages from the study may help shape the way that resources for quality improvement are focused and strategies designed. First, **colleges' widening participation activities tend to follow an evolutionary pattern**, from a largely reactive response to community needs, to a much more pro-active stance involving the re-shaping of mainstream provision and structures. The stage a college has reached on this journey will influence the nature and extent of external advice and support required.
9. The second message is that there is **differentiation between colleges** in the degree of emphasis given to widening participation for adults in colleges' missions and business focus. For some, widening adult participation constitutes their **core business**, while for others it is **an important activity but not central to their main work**.
10. For example, colleges in the first category may have a large amount of provision at or below Level 1, but a smaller volume at Level 3. In colleges where widening adult participation is important but not core business, this picture may be reversed, with the strongest emphasis placed on work at Level 3. In productive local partnerships, colleges in the second group might see their contribution to widening participation as offering a progression route for adults who have entered further education via partner colleges or other learning providers. In a third group of colleges, such as sixth form colleges with little adult provision, widening adult participation will remain marginal to their business.
11. A variety of factors influence whether widening participation for adults is seen as core business and may affect the likelihood of successful growth in future. Some of these factors may be outside a college's control, such as the presence of other local learning providers already heavily engaged in widening participation for adults. This indicates the need for **a broader view, taking account of the activities of a range of providers** in a given location and how they collaborate and complement one another in helping adults to progress.

12. As part of their concern to close equality gaps in access to learning and employment, local LSCs will wish to treat widening participation for adults as a high priority and ensure that **appropriate provision is made across institutions, for all learners and potential learners.**
13. To achieve rapid progress in meeting government targets for growth, these findings suggest that it may be helpful to focus a national quality improvement strategy on
  - **colleges for whom widening participation for adults is core business.** Such colleges should be enabled to increase their numbers of adult learners from widening participation groups in a managed way. DfES and LSC may also wish to support them to share their practice with other colleges
  - **colleges for whom widening adult participation is an important activity, but not core business.** Such colleges may be assisted to increase their focus on this type of work.
14. In all cases – including those where widening adult participation is viewed as central to the colleges' business - the quality improvement advice would be aimed at **continuing to improve practice and develop new, imaginative and more effective ways of working.**
15. The report emphasises the need for **a favourable funding environment** to support further widening of adult participation. This includes resources to support
  - the additional costs incurred by colleges in widening adult participation, particularly the costs of learner and learning support
  - the development of new provision, which may involve risk
  - staff development activity.
16. Some of the extra costs need to be met on a continuing basis by the funding factor for disadvantage. Some, such as a national programme of staff development activity to help spread good practice, may be shorter term.

# Part 1

## Introduction

1. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) asked the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) in October 2001 to conduct a study to identify the characteristics of good practice in widening participation for adults (aged 19+) in FE colleges. The study was designed to inform a national strategy to extend existing good practice and promote new development. It contributed to a broader, joint review by LSC and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), concerned with both widening participation and growth in the FE sector.<sup>1</sup> An interim report was presented to LSC in November 2001. The final report was delivered to LSC in March 2002 and published in summary form in November 2002.
2. Following the joint review by LSC and DfES, LSC developed a national strategy for widening adult participation. The LSDA research findings formed part of the background to this strategy.
3. Based on a literature review, statistical analysis and on visits to 17 further education and sixth form colleges, this report
  - sets out seven key characteristics of good practice, presenting an updated view of the ingredients for success in widening adult participation
  - suggests a quality improvement strategy to spread good practice
  - identifies a three-stage process in the development of effective widening participation practice in colleges
  - differentiates three types of colleges, based on the strength of their mission and business focus on widening participation for adults.
4. Elements of good practice were found in all the colleges that took part in the study. Several appeared to have a particularly strong focus on widening participation for adults, combined with comprehensive and well-established strategies.

## Definition of widening participation

5. We adopted a broad definition of the groups of learners targeted by widening participation initiatives. Our definition includes new learners who are

---

<sup>1</sup> LSC worked with DfES to provide advice to Ministers on identifying and disseminating good practice in widening adult participation by FE colleges; and on the prospects of future growth in adult participation through the FE sector. In March 2002, LSC made recommendations to Ministers on how to widen adult participation in FE colleges. Ministers endorsed the recommendations and work to develop the national strategy began in July 2002. The strategy was published in February 2003: *Successful Participation for All: Widening Adult Participation Strategy* (Learning and Skills Council).



disadvantaged as a result of any one of four circumstances that are known to be associated with low levels of participation in learning.

- i. Living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood
  - ii. Being poorly qualified (have not yet achieved level 2)
  - iii. Living on a low income
  - iv. Belonging to a group that experiences social disadvantage (e.g. homeless people).
6. This represents a change from the Interim Report delivered to LSC, in which we also included the concept of 'relative' disadvantage and groups that are under-represented in the college profile. It is felt that this definition is too broad to be meaningful.

## **Study method**

7. Following guidance from LSC, we adopted an approach similar to that used in the investigation that led to the creation of Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVE), namely
- A literature review to identify known characteristics of good practice
  - Statistical analysis and scrutiny of FEFC inspection results, to identify potential case study colleges
  - A draft research instrument (a set of characteristics of good practice)
  - Case study visits to test and refine the draft characteristics
  - Revised characteristics of good practice.

## **Pilot phase**

8. The pilot phase of the study included a literature review, commissioned by LSDA and undertaken by Deirdre Macleod of Critical Thinking (now Policyworks), to identify the features of good practice commended in key documents, including the Kennedy Report and the associated good practice guide, as well as more recent reports from the FEFC Inspectorate. The main part of the literature review is reproduced as Part 2 of this report.
9. Based on the literature review, we identified eight broad areas of good practice, reflecting the dimensions of good practice identified by the Kennedy Report. These were tested in face to face discussions and/or telephone interviews with senior staff in two further education colleges that have substantial, successful experience in widening participation for adults. A revised framework was then prepared for the main phase of the study.

## **Main phase**

10. The aims and objectives of the main phase of the study were
- To amend and refine the framework of characteristics prepared in the pilot phase

- To produce a robust description of good practice that can be used to develop and improve practice in the further education college sector
  - To provide examples of good practice
  - To identify what it is that enables some colleges to stand out from the rest.
11. This was done by undertaking case study visits to 15 Colleges (13 general FE and two sixth form colleges). Colleges were selected using a range of criteria, modified following advice from LSC. The joint review was concerned with the ability of the FE sector to achieve necessary increases in participation to meet government targets. In this light, the capacity to widen participation still further was critical. Colleges that have grown and those that have large volumes of learners at lower qualification levels, and/or eligible for widening participation funding, were likely to be sources of useful practice. We therefore looked for evidence of high numbers and/or growth in one or more of the following dimensions:
- i. adult learners (aged 18+)<sup>2</sup> eligible for the widening participation funding uplift
  - ii. adult learners assessed as being below level 2 at the start of their course (ie working towards level 1 or level 2)
  - iii. adult learners recorded as 'fee waivers' due to poverty
  - iv. adult learners receiving Additional Support.
12. In addition, we set out to include only colleges that
- v. show stable or improved retention by adult learners
  - vi. show stable or improved achievement by adult learners
  - vii. have achieved satisfactory or better results in their most recent inspection
  - viii. did not raise any immediate concerns that made them unsuitable subjects for the study.

Criteria (v) and (vi) were not met for the entire sample (see paragraph 21).

13. Finally, we aimed for a reasonable geographic spread, including rural as well as urban locations in the college sample. The geographic criterion led to the separate selection of one college, based on data for all colleges in the county in question.
14. The case study visits were conducted by three independent consultants, with one day assigned to each college. Individual meetings and/or round table discussions were held with between three and eight staff. LSDA provided guidance to colleges on the range of staff relevant to the visits. Principals and/or Vice Principals were usually involved, as well as senior members of staff responsible for
- Adult learning, adult basic skills/key skills
  - ESOL

---

<sup>2</sup> At least 18 years of age on August 31<sup>st</sup> preceding the start of the academic year in question (hence aged 19 or over by the end of the academic year)

- Quality assurance
  - Student services and support for learners and learning
  - Staff recruitment/development
  - Adult learning
  - Curriculum
  - Community relations
  - Business development.
15. To gain a better understanding of how colleges work in partnership with local organisations on widening participation, one of the college visits was followed up by visits to two key local partners.
  16. It is important to stress that it was not the purpose of the case studies to evaluate how successful the colleges were in widening participation for adults. Rather, we were asking college staff to assist us, based on their experience, to identify the critical features of success. In semi-structured interviews, the LSDA fieldwork team asked staff to give their assessment of the level of their success and comment on what qualities or activities were crucial. The draft framework of good practice provided a checklist and a common template for analysing and comparing the case study findings.
  17. These factors mean that it was essentially a self-assessment exercise, within a very tight time-frame of one day per college. The evidence cannot be used to infer a direct cause and effect relationship between particular activities and particular widening participation outcomes.
  18. Since the 15 colleges included many that ranked relatively high on the selection criteria, it was to be expected that widening participation for adults would be an important activity for most, and that most would also demonstrate effective practice in some if not all areas. They were chosen with this in mind.

## Statistics on case study colleges

19. Figures 1-9 in Annex C enable comparison of the 15 case study colleges, based on the selection criteria set out in paragraph 11 i-iv, and showing growth and absolute numbers in each case.
  - Figures 1-3: use of the widening participation funding uplift
  - Figures 4-5: adults below qualification level 2
  - Figures 6-7: adults classified as 'fee waivers'
  - Figures 8-9: adults receiving additional support.
20. The colleges' positions on these four indicators are shown relative to each other and to the national averages. On all four, the majority were at or above the national average. Some were below the national average for all colleges on several criteria: two were sixth form colleges, which may be expected to have lower figures for adults.
21. Figures 10-11 illustrate performance in terms of retention and achievement for adult learners eligible for widening participation funding, compared with national averages for this group. Satisfying the selection criteria (stable or improved retention and achievement) proved difficult. An improvement in retention was often accompanied by a fall in achievement, and vice versa. In the final sample (taking the period 1998/99 to 1999/00):
  - 6 colleges out of 15 had improved both retention and achievement
  - 5 had improved achievement but at the expense of retention
  - 2 had improved retention but at the expense of achievement
  - 2 had seen a fall in both retention and achievement.
22. For the purpose of the study, retention and achievement statistics were the only readily available measures to assist in identifying colleges that are more effective in widening participation. However, caution needs to be exercised in using these indicators as evidence of successful practice. The baseline for the two sets of data differs. Also, differences between colleges in their provision for widening participation learners – differences, for example, in curricular mix and course duration - may mean that it is not possible to draw reliable comparisons.
23. Inspection reports and grades were also used to assist in the selection of case study colleges. It is worth noting here, however, that some of the colleges visited felt that the Common Inspection Framework acted as a disincentive to widening participation, by appearing to reward colleges with a more academically inclined student profile.

## Case study findings

24. The case studies offer a new perspective on the ingredients for effective practice in widening participation for adults.
25. Our initial assessment of what constitutes good practice was broadly supported by the case study colleges, but at the same time failed to capture adequately what the colleges believe to be the key ingredients of success. Senior staff often remarked that the draft framework, based on the Kennedy good practice guide and used as a research tool in the interviews, seemed incontestable but at the same time rather bland. In other words, it reflected good practice in a general way without pinpointing what mattered most of all in widening participation.
26. Since the Kennedy Committee reported (in 1997), it is likely that at least some of the practices it recommended have been widely adopted by colleges, though Inspectorate reports have pointed to variable effectiveness. The guidelines therefore remain a valid guide to the processes needed to help widen participation. Our case study findings suggest that, for colleges with a serious mission to widen participation for adults, a fresh definition of the key characteristics may now be appropriate. What this report offers is therefore not a replacement for the Kennedy characteristics, but a new perspective that builds on the recommended practice and throws some aspects into sharper relief.

## Key characteristics of success in widening participation for adults

27. Examples of good practice in widening adult participation were present throughout the sample of 15 colleges. Within the sample, several appeared to have a more strongly developed and energetically pursued mission to widen participation for adults, combined with well-embedded and comprehensive procedures.
28. A striking finding from the case study exercise was the way that such colleges married great commitment, warmth and enthusiasm about widening participation for adults, with a clear business approach that was entrepreneurial when needed. Their approach was well planned and thorough. These qualities are reflected in the seven broad characteristics of good practice listed below and explained further in the commentary that follows. **Annex A** contains three case studies, each based on a single college in the case study sample. **Annex B** summarises the key elements of practice, illustrated by examples drawn from the case study visits.
29. The characteristics of good practice give weight to four particular aspects:
  - a sound business-like approach to widening participation, allied to vision and commitment

- a clear focus on managing resources effectively to achieve widening participation goals
- an expectation that widening participation strategies should evolve continuously to reach harder targets
- the energy devoted to continuous engagement with the community.

1. ***Widening participation for adults is positioned as an integral part of the college's business, with commitment shown at all levels, including governors***

Key aspects:

- Setting out goals, objectives and expectations, backed by an implementation plan
- Securing the right staff and staffing profile, through appointments and staff development
- Creating a staff structure that reflects the importance of widening participation for adults
- Ensuring adequate investment

2. ***The college adopts a business-like approach to seeking and deploying resources for widening adult participation***

Key aspects:

- A business plan for growth in widening participation
- Creativity in securing and deploying resources; ability to take opportunities and risks and invest appropriately
- Ensuring that key widening participation staff are in a position to influence budgets
- Realistic identification of markets
- Linking the use of additional funding streams to the main purposes of the college, and using this and other means to encourage transfer of innovation to the 'mainstream'

3. ***Widening participation evolves continuously. New ways are constantly sought to widen adult participation further and staff show persistence in their efforts to reach the 'hard to reach'.***

Key aspects:

- Changing the curriculum offer in response to the needs of learners or potential learners
- Adapting provision throughout the college (curriculum, staffing, accommodation) in line with expectations for learners' progression

4. ***There is continuous engagement with the community, at all levels in the college and in all parts of the community***

Key aspects:

- Community liaison and outreach staff are integrated into mainstream staffing structures

- Active involvement with community organisations and partnerships; energetic networking and people to people contacts
- Partnership with other local learning providers to develop coherent provision and pathways for learners
- Community profiling to establish learning needs
- Negotiation of learning provision through consultation with local groups
- Judicious and innovative use of, and collaboration with, resources in the community

5. ***There is a rigorous approach to quality assurance for widening adult participation***

Key aspects:

- The same QA processes are applied to widening participation for adults as to other areas of college provision
- Learner feedback is regularly sought and acted on
- There are high expectations of learner achievement. Progress in recruitment, retention and achievement for target groups is reviewed systematically and followed by practical action

6. ***Widening participation objectives are reflected in curriculum design and teaching and learning strategies throughout the college***

Key aspects:

- Curriculum design and development are kept under continuous review
- Curricula are designed to be attractive, well-matched to community needs and likely to recruit. Market research plays a key role
- Learning pathways are well-mapped, giving learners an entitlement to progression and support and it is clear how they can take advantage of this
- All staff are encouraged to apply good inclusive learning strategies

7. ***Learner/learning support is treated as an entitlement. Support is packaged in a holistic way to meet individual needs, including practical and financial support as well as additional help with learning.***

Key aspects:

- Initial assessment and initial and continuing guidance for all learners
- An individual learning plan for each learner
- Strong tutorial systems

## Commentary on the characteristics of good practice

30. This section provides a commentary designed to clarify and illustrate the seven characteristics of good practice.

### ***Widening participation for adults is positioned as an integral part of the college's business, with commitment shown at all levels, including governors***

31. Some of the case study colleges were particularly notable for the passion, warmth and energy shown by staff towards the task of widening participation. This extended to the most senior level, with college governors and principals taking a lead in developing the vision and culture. Drive and energy were strong qualities of the leadership given.
32. In one case study example, the Vice Principal (Policy) worked with individual faculties one by one to encourage rapid, but managed, growth. A 'growth team' was appointed within the college staff management team to harness staff enthusiasm, permit experimentation and find ways to turn good ideas into practicable outcomes.
33. Creating the right management structure and staffing profile were important ways to demonstrate that widening participation was central to the college's business. Colleges had adopted a range of solutions. Common themes were leadership from the top, clear designation of responsibility and the ability to take action to meet needs.
34. In one college, the Deputy Principal led a steering group on widening participation and three key faculties had a designated responsibility for work to widen adult participation. Another had a different approach, offering first-step, non-qualification opportunities widely in subject-based faculties. This followed a decision to continue and expand work previously funded by a generous non-schedule 2 allocation that was distributed throughout the faculties.<sup>3</sup>
35. Yet another solution was the creation of a separate Community Development Unit with around 20 staff, supporting curriculum managers throughout the college on questions relating to learners' needs and identifying networks that are useful to the college.
36. Several colleges stressed the challenging nature of the work and the expectation that staff would 'go the extra mile'. It followed that having the right staff to do the job is crucial. Again, colleges approached this in different ways, with a focus on developing or changing the staff profile of qualities and qualifications through recruitment, staff development and training.
37. Some colleges placed particular weight on drawing staff from the local community and offering in-house training for teaching or outreach roles. For

---

<sup>3</sup> Funding allocated by the Further Education Funding Council (now the LSC) for the purpose of reaching and engaging 'non traditional' learners. Following the introduction of the LSC, the distinction between schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 funding has been abolished.



example, one trained people from deprived wards in the area to deliver IT teaching in those wards. Another focused on local recruitment to achieve a better match between the ethnic profile of staff and that of the community and student body.

38. In another case, a college created several new categories of staff and assistants to meet particular job requirements in a cost-effective way. These included a full-time 'associate lecturer' grade, focused on part-time provision at levels 1 and 2; and a separate hourly paid 'customer care' workforce working in the community to find venues and set up equipment for modular information and communication technology (ICT) courses. In addition, hourly paid 'student helpers' were recruited to give individual and sustained customer care during a summer-long 'open college' event that succeeded in attracting 2,500 new adult learners.
39. Continuing commitment to staff development was high on the list of priorities. One college found that 'prescribed activity' focused on widening participation bore the best results and helped foster genuinely inclusive teaching and learning. This college took the view that 'the right staff' meant focusing above all on those with a real desire to work in widening participation. Other staff members were permitted to develop their contribution to the college in a different way (e.g. extending level 3 provision). Before replicating this solution elsewhere, it would be important to ensure that it genuinely represents the best way to deploy staff strengths, and that two cultures do not develop to weaken progression opportunities and access to the full curriculum for learners.
40. By contrast, another college found that, due to a history of commitment to enhancing equality, shared by all staff and governors and embedded in the college culture, widening participation 'went with the grain' and found fertile ground in the attitudes of existing staff. The resources of staff at all levels could be called upon to promote learning. A college that invested in the site and staff of a community centre had taken this lesson to heart, having found the caretaker a major strength due to his extensive local knowledge and contacts.

***The college adopts a business-like approach to seeking and deploying resources for widening adult participation***

41. Careful, detailed planning needs to be allied to enthusiasm and commitment. As one college put it, "we start with values, then develop a realistic business plan to make things happen". This includes the proper identification of markets and funds, linked to realistic assessments of the level of widening participation activity that can be undertaken.
42. The approach is also entrepreneurial, involving actively seeking out resources for widening participation. An example of the business-like approach is a college where there is substantial delegation of budgets, enabling staff to take responsibility.

***Widening participation evolves continuously. New ways are constantly sought to widen adult participation further and staff show persistence in their efforts to reach the 'hard to reach'.***

43. A feature of the colleges that pursued their widening participation goals most energetically was their view that widening participation strategies should evolve continuously. Colleges constantly looked for ways to further widen participation. Staff development and 'knowing the market' seemed to be key features.
44. One of the colleges set up a development group with responsibility for an action plan to equip staff with the skills for successful working with learners from widening participation groups. Another referred to the need for 'continuous staff development in the blindingly obvious'.
45. A planned and progressive approach to change was another feature, illustrated in the example cited in paragraph 32. Here, a Vice-Principal worked with faculties one by one to support growth and innovation in a managed way, 'building in sufficient checks and balances as you move forward, so that growth does not become too rapid and get out of hand'. In the same college, a 'growth team' of senior staff worked to harness staff ideas for change and turn them into reality.
46. 'Knowing the market' meant an awareness, as one college put it, that despite apparent successes, the 'hardest to reach' may not have been reached. In-depth analysis of community needs, followed by detailed planning, was seen as central.
47. One college had worked unsuccessfully with seasonal showground people over a period of time. Two key changes of approach triggered a successful outcome. One was simply to plan and agree the programme with the client well ahead of their next annual visit. The second change was a recognition that the college needed to work with grandmothers as the main 'influencers' on learning, rather than mothers. Staff from the same college showed great persistence in working with a women's centre, following initial lack of interest in taking up learning. Patient work by an outreach worker resulted in a small learning group. This then doubled in size and has seen its 'graduates' go on to a degree course, an FE course and into work.
48. Beyond the foundations of staff development and market research, colleges are continuing to devise ways to extend their reach into the community. The strategies are as diverse as the communities in question. They range from joint work with the TUC to widen adult participation and improve employability through work based learning; to a partnership with a fairground owner, to run a high specification ICT learning centre as a fairground attraction; and courses run in partnership with a county cricket club.

***There is continuous engagement with the community, at all levels in the college and in all parts of the community***

49. A strategic and planned approach to community engagement was one of the features that emerged from the case studies. As an example of a strategic approach, one college, sited in an area that benefits from EU funding to combat deprivation, has organised much of its widening participation activity in area 'clusters' that match the designated regeneration areas.
50. Another college already had a high percentage of learners from deprived areas but adopted as one of its corporate plan objectives "to enable learners to succeed by further widening participation from all communities and businesses". In practice this meant a combination of work with employers, community and voluntary organisations and other local learning providers, as well as conscious efforts to contribute to the economic regeneration of the area.
51. Two kinds of partnerships emerged as important, for different purposes:
  - working with other local providers, to develop learning pathways and more coherent and comprehensive local provision for learners, and to share knowledge and information about the characteristics and needs of learners
  - working with and through community-based organisations to extend the college's 'reach' into the community and find new ways to deliver learning.
52. In both cases, the issue of who provides 'first step' and non-vocational learning opportunities arises and different models exist. The strength of the local education authority (LEA) adult education service is an important factor. Funding flows also play a part, enabling LEAs to sustain certain kinds of work.
53. For some colleges therefore, the extent and nature of their community engagement will be affected by relationships with the LEA. Our case studies suggested varying success. In one case, while co-operation between college and LEA was often good, with partnership working to secure additional funding, it appeared that co-operation was less successful in ensuring good learning pathways for adult learners.
54. In another case, a productive relationship between the college and the LEA adult education service did appear to foster good two-way progression for learners. Through differences of style and community reputation, the two providers were able to serve a wider clientele jointly than they would separately.
55. A key factor in this case may be that the LEA provided most of the lowest level, 'taster' and 'recreational' learning in the area, as well as some small group work that would be uneconomical for the college to offer. Other success factors included
  - Frequent informal liaison between college and LEA, in addition to formal partnership meetings

- A pragmatic approach to decisions on dividing up the curriculum offer. Despite having no ‘no go’ areas, there appeared to be an absence of competition. Having clear boundaries for curriculum levels and subjects seemed less important than locations, constituencies and practical issues
  - The close proximity between the two services, with main centres within walking distance.
56. An example of a partnership enabling a college to extend its ‘reach’ into the community was a cricket ‘academy’, based on partnership with a local cricket club, but also involving an employment agency. The arrangement gave the college access to a prestige venue that helped boost feelings of self-worth among unemployed men who were veterans of ‘training for work’ schemes. As a sporting facility it offered a volume and variety of work that broadened learners’ horizons.
57. One college had developed its own approach to ‘community franchising’, involving a style of working that encouraged community organisations to develop their own capacity to manage learning provision. For example, a local organisation expressed a desire for extended community-based provision to be put in place following a taster course offered by the college. The college responded by supporting the community organisation with quality assurance, staff development and learner/learning support on the same basis as the rest of the college and paid a fee to the franchisee.
58. The case studies demonstrated that community engagement is not a ‘soft option’. It involves handling complexity and sensitivity – whether linguistic, racial or political. The processes and activities may not be new, but some colleges show an impressive ability to succeed in what are frequently quite complicated tasks. For example, one of the colleges served communities in which over 140 different languages were spoken and there were tensions between different racial groups. One member of staff spoke – with reference to work on a housing estate - of needing the ability to ‘navigate the spaces between sometimes conflicting community groups’.
59. Another college served an area characterised by strong local politics, formal channels for community consultation linked to regeneration, and numerous highly organised and vocal voluntary organisations, often with their own agendas. In this situation, the college needed to find its own role alongside a variety of other initiatives. These tensions exposed the challenges that colleges face in consultation and negotiation with their communities.
60. Some colleges have taken on board the difficulties of community engagement by finding ways to develop their staff, adjust their staff profile and extend their staff resource through joint work in the community. Actively seeking appropriate staff at community level is one option. Examples included an annual recruitment fair to showcase employment opportunities with the college, backed up by training at all levels; creating a ‘community development unit’ and developing ‘community tutors’ who can complement the work of teaching staff; and appointing development workers to work with managers at local drop-in centres. Another college had premises in several public branch

libraries and contributed to library staffing, having identified libraries as good locations for reaching the community.

***There is a rigorous approach to quality assurance for widening adult participation***

61. Case study colleges with well-embedded quality procedures for widening participation emphasised two requirements: comprehensiveness and consistency. In these colleges, the quality assurance regime applied not only within the college but also to community-based franchised provision, work in voluntary organisations and 'the smallest outreach centre'. The same rigour was applied to widening participation work as to other aspects of college provision.
62. Progress in recruitment, retention and achievement for specific target groups was systematically reviewed. Colleges were aware of the potential conflict between objectives for retention on the one hand, and achievement on the other. One college was concerned about the number of learners for whom the outcomes were not recorded, and treated this as a failure to capture information. It responded by contacting individual 'non-completers', finding out what might help them to complete and putting this in place – including producing specific materials, or providing laptops for home use.
63. Actively seeking and using learner feedback is an important element in quality assurance: in one college, adult learners took part in course reviews. In another, 'You tell us' forums were held three times a year in outreach centres, with personal invitations to all the centres' learners.

***Widening participation objectives are reflected in curriculum design and teaching and learning strategies throughout the college***

64. The defining feature here was the thoroughness of the curriculum strategies adopted by some of the colleges. Expectations in respect of learners' progression were a strong influence: in one college, for example, the curriculum offer was built to allow progression from pre-entry to level 3. The bulk of provision in this college was at level 1, leading to a 'centre of excellence' at level 3, equipped for those who wished to progress to higher education. Another college developed a determined approach to 'bridging' between ESOL and basic skills off-site teaching and 'mainstream' teaching. ESOL/basic skills teachers were encouraged to 'teach across' other curriculum areas, so that they were familiar with the learning opportunities available. This activity was matched by teachers in other curriculum areas visiting the off-site locations.
65. Another characteristic was the attention paid to community interests and labour market relevance when designing learning programmes. One college had developed a range of courses, including arts and media, childcare, youth and community work, and mentoring, with both community demand and employment opportunities in mind. Several emphasised the importance of lower level vocational opportunities.

66. A further aspect was the way in which other college strategies were designed to reinforce the curriculum strategy for widening participation. In one college this meant matching the curriculum offer at levels 1, 2 and 3 with accommodation in smaller, accessible local centres in the community.

***Learner/learning support is treated as an entitlement.*** *Support is packaged in a holistic way to meet individual needs, including practical and financial support as well as additional help with learning.*

67. Support for learners and learning is a crucial foundation for good widening participation for adults. In some of the case study colleges, it was viewed as a basic entitlement for all learners. One college made a point of advertising it widely, ensuring that 'community workers and health workers have the message that we will give students the support they need to succeed'. In this particular case, the entitlement was delivered even when not 'fundable', for example, for a learner who does not meet the threshold for additional support.
68. Colleges are finding new ways to provide learner/learning support, tailored to widening participation provision. One of the colleges had created a separate, hourly paid workforce, to help support the delivery of three-hour, community-based ICT modules. The main role of these staff was to find suitable community locations, provide 'customer care' and help learners with equipment if needed. The same college also employed hourly-paid FE-college, ex-college and HE students to help learners through the initial stages. This model was tried, with great success, in an 'open college' event held throughout summer, then extended to mainstream part-time provision.
69. In another college, all learner/learning support staff worked to achieve the City and Guilds Certificate in Learning Support. The same college was looking to increase its 'Curriculum Customer Support Officers' who follow up non-attendance.
70. The degree of collaboration between learner/learning support staff and teaching staff will be a key ingredient of success. One of the case studies showed how these links can be used systematically to encourage better retention and achievement. Learners applying for childcare funds received an in-depth interview and follow up, to ensure that the childcare worked for them and that the learners also made progress. Academic and childcare arrangements were reconsidered if problems arose.
71. Financial support for individual learners is often a crucial part of the 'package' of support needed. Several colleges referred to the importance of substantial access funds and supplemented these from their own resources as well as using additional funding streams where possible. In one case study, the college top-sliced its budget to create a separate fund for learner support for asylum seekers. In another case, all staff were required to understand the arrangements for learner financial support. Some colleges ensured that they took advantage of advertising, to give high profile to financial support arrangements in college recruitment and promotion.

## Extending good practice nationwide

72. The case study colleges welcomed the recognition that the study implicitly gave to their work. They particularly appreciated the concern to find out about the 'whole picture', rather than investigating discrete elements of a college's widening participation work. The prospect of a higher national profile for widening participation was viewed positively.
73. There was a concern that a national strategy on widening adult participation should not involve 'awarding' colleges simply to compensate those that are not designated as Centres of Vocational Excellence. In any event, some colleges would expect to demonstrate excellence in both widening participation and vocational work.

## A quality improvement and development strategy

74. A strategy aimed squarely at *quality improvement and development* in widening adult participation was thought preferable. For example, a national strategy aimed at extending good practice could involve
  - An 'audit and business development tool' aimed at senior managers. This would be a document, setting out questions to help managers establish what stage their college has reached in widening participation. The characteristics of good practice identified in the present study could form the basis for such a document
  - This approach would be best applied as part of a quality improvement process, involving expert advisers. The advisers would visit colleges to assist managers in assessing and developing their practice
  - Publication of statistics at a sufficiently disaggregated level to enable colleges to benchmark their performance.
75. In considering how to shape a national quality improvement strategy, it may be helpful to have in mind the way in which widening participation evolves in a college. Based on the case study exercise, it is possible to identify (in simplified form) three main development 'phases'. These relate to how effective the college is in widening participation. Quality improvement strategies could be tailored to suit the stage the college has reached in its development.

**Phase 1:** the college is responsive to community needs and commits resources to this purpose, but the response is largely a reactive one, rather than pro-active

**Phase 2:** the college is pro-active in seeking to identify community learning needs and develop appropriate responses

**Phase 3:** the college works to re-shape its mainstream provision and its structures in response to identified needs.

## Contrasting missions

76. There are further questions to resolve in determining how best to achieve significant progress nationally in widening participation for adults. This study indicates that it may not be appropriate to expect all FE colleges to attempt to develop widening adult participation as their core business. Factors that may be outside the control of the college will influence the likelihood of a successful outcome. These include the critical mass of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, the length of time the college has been active in widening participation, the presence of other local adult learning providers already heavily engaged in widening participation, and whether there is local competition for students.
77. Thus, for a variety of reasons – some historical and circumstantial, some based on choice – colleges will differ in the extent to which they pursue a mission to widen participation for adults as the core of their business. Our case study sample included colleges in which widening adult participation was a central goal. In other cases it was less important, or marginal to the main business. The study points to three broad ‘types’.

### Type 1

*The college with a strong ‘community’ mission, aiming to serve the whole of its local population, and actively engaged in social and economic regeneration. Adults make up a large proportion of the student body.*

#### **Box 1: Example of type 1**

A high proportion of college X’s population experiences economic, social or educational disadvantage and has done so for a number of decades. Despite gains in employment in new service industries over recent years, the local unemployment rate is much higher than the national average. GCSE A\*-C achievement levels are well below the national average. FE participation rates in post-16 education have risen, although they still remain well below the national average, particularly in the case of young men. The college has always had a high proportion of adult learners. Volumes of part-time adult learners have risen in recent years.

Widening participation is a real driver for the college. It believes that there is considerable scope for widening participation still further and is committed to doing so. The college is located in an economic regeneration area and its widening participation strategies are both linked to, and shaped by, these regeneration activities. Recent structural re-organisations within the college were undertaken in the expectation that the college would be better able to increase levels of participation and educational success by widening access to the FE curriculum and providing a broad curriculum to meet new needs.



## Type 2

*The college where widening participation for adults is treated as important work but not as the core business of the college.*

### **Box 2: Example of type 2**

College Y is located in one of the poorest areas in England. However, the configuration of housing, with poor households interspersed with wealthier dwellings means that very few districts qualify for widening participation incentives.

College students are mainly from the resident working population and are assumed to come from poorer households. Historically, locals appear to have had limited expectations of the power of education to transform opportunities for individuals.

While the college does not see itself as having a role in community or economic regeneration, it does view widening participation as important. However, it believes that, because its population does not, in the main, benefit from widening participation financial incentives, widening participation is not an economic activity for it to pursue. Widening participation is not at the heart of its business. Nevertheless, the college has developed mechanisms and practices to assist disadvantaged individuals, since many potential and current students have low prior levels of educational attainment or have difficult financial circumstances.

## Type 3

*The college where widening participation for adults is marginal to the main mission and business focus.*

### **Box 3: Example of type 3**

College Z regards its main purpose as providing a high standard academic level 3 route to university for 16-18 year olds. It has a large proportion of 16-18 students, the majority of whom are studying three A level subjects. Only 10% of college activity is at level 2 or below. There is no foundation work, as there is a very high degree of local competition, and others in the area are in that market. The college sees its level 3 work as its niche market, but is willing to undertake other work that does not harm its primary mission.

The college is located in the centre of a large housing estate. However, it makes no particular effort to attract students from this estate. It runs an adult programme, which it considers complementary to its main work.

The area is very mixed socially and in terms of housing, containing affluent areas as well as socially deprived areas. The main competition is for academically able 16-18 students, and the college is careful to maintain its good reputation in that field. It believes its successful adult work builds on its academic reputation locally.

All the adult provision is offered in the college campus, and there is no outreach activity.

78. In view of the government's target for growth in student numbers in the FE sector, LSC may wish to consider ways to assist or 'incentivise' colleges that might be described as Type 1 and those developing in that direction. The aim would be to encourage and enable them to increase numbers and widen their intake in a managed way, while continuing to improve outcomes for adult learners. Colleges in Type 2 may also benefit from encouragement to continue to widen adult participation, to the extent that this does not divert resources from their core business.
79. Disseminating information about good practice in widening adult participation, and doing this within a programme of well-focused quality improvement support, will help to extend existing successful practice. However, it is worthwhile to note that other conditions are needed for widening participation strategies to thrive.
80. Among these conditions is a favourable funding environment. One of the messages to emerge from the case study colleges is the need for colleges to be in sound financial health to support widening participation activity. Experimenting with new provision in pursuit of widening participation goals involves financing risk. Supporting learners from disadvantaged groups requires additional resources, above the level of the 'disadvantage funding factor' (for widening participation). The case study exercise revealed examples of determined and creative approaches to finding the necessary resources to achieve widening participation goals. There is likely, however, to be a threshold where a widening participation plan becomes difficult to sustain on economic grounds.

## ANNEX A

### Three college case studies

#### *Case study one*

##### **Background context**

This college is located in a very poor area with a high unemployment rate and is situated within a development area for economic regeneration. Although there are wealthier places in the vicinity of the college, it is the poorer areas that are the college's main recruitment area.

The area is home to a very large, mobile population of refugees and asylum seekers and refugees account for at least 20% of the college's intake. Over 140 different languages are spoken in the area and there are some tensions between different racial groups. The student body is about 30% white; the rest are black (African and Caribbean), Asian, Bangladeshi and other minority groups.

The college is the only FE provider in the area. There are no other significant providers – although there are some small-scale offers of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and basic skills. The college works with these small providers through local networks. Adult students from non-traditional backgrounds are found in all college areas – mainly at levels foundation, 1 and 2.

##### **The college's approach to widening participation**

The college's commitment to **enhancing equality**, and to giving real opportunities to students from deprived backgrounds, is shared throughout the college by all staff. This has been developed over years, **led by the senior team and the governing body**, but is now fully embedded in the culture of the college. The college has published a series of pledges which make clear to prospective and current learners, staff and others associated with the college what they can expect of their learning experience. Each pledge has actions and milestones associated with it to ensure that words are supported by action.

The college's current Corporate Plan focuses upon, and brings together, the main aims of the college, so that economic regeneration of the area, working with employers, and work with community and voluntary organisations combine together to achieve synergy in the college's overall mission. Because the Corporate Plan is widely consulted upon, within and outside the college, it is 'owned' by a variety of college stakeholders and is acted upon.

The college sees its success as being due to the combination of its location, unfilled local demand, the business needs of the college, and the commitment of all staff and governors to promoting greater equality through education. Since incorporation, the

college's Average Level of Funding (ALF) has reduced from £27 to £17. This has meant that managers had "either to halve the college, or to grow". The college's **business needs**, therefore, have been congruent with its ideological priorities.

**Market research** is seen as key to the college's success in widening participation and depends upon effective partnerships with groups in the local community. The college is active in a wide number of local partnerships. The college uses research by the LEA on the resident population and needs analyses conducted by the former local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide information upon which to base the college's strategy.

The main growth has been in the areas of Adult Basic Education (ABE), ESOL, and provision for adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD). A particular college initiative has been to **modularize the curriculum** into "bite-size chunks", so that students always leave the college with some credit, and the motivation to return.

**Clear progression pathways** have been mapped in all areas. For example, ESOL is offered in more than 20 community locations, as well as on the main campus. Progression from ESOL to "mainstream" is encouraged by bridging courses in curriculum departments, by teachers in curriculum areas visiting ESOL off-site locations, and by ESOL teachers being encouraged to "teach across" into curriculum areas, so that they are familiar with opportunities. Similar strategies are adopted in relation to basic skills provision. The importance of vocational opportunities at levels 1 and 2 is fully recognized in the college's offer and priority is given to enabling all students to develop "key skills for employability".

In every case, the effectiveness of community development and of teaching to adult widening participation (WP) groups depends on **dedicated staff** who understand needs and relate well to the target group students. The college has a well-developed staff development programme, and all staff are encouraged to engage with good inclusive learning strategies.

One particularly successful **community programme** run by the college is the delivery of a range of provision on a local housing estate with a history of social unrest. The programme has been negotiated through local consultation and local people have been involved in the design of the offer. The college believes that the initiative has been critically dependent on individual staff, able to cope with complex community working and able to negotiate between the competing, and sometimes conflicting, demands of community groups. They have visited groups, held open days and offered tasters. There is now a programme on offer, well taken up, of ESOL, basic skills, some childcare, and non-schedule 2 courses in stress management, arts and crafts, and aromatherapy etc.<sup>4</sup> The community programme is linked to the main college offer through mapped-out progression routes.

---

<sup>4</sup> 'Non-schedule 2' refers to funding allocated by the Further Education Funding Council (now the LSC) for the purpose of reaching and engaging 'non traditional' learners. Following the introduction of the LSC, the distinction between schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 funding has been abolished.

Emphasis is given to having a strong **tutorial system** throughout the college, which is extended to all students attending courses of six hours a week or more. Additional Learner Support (ALS) needs are identified by tutors at individual level. All students are eligible for additional support (whether “fundable” or not), and access is “limited only by the budget”. Emphasis is placed on careful initial assessment in all programme areas. The effectiveness of this is reviewed annually by cross-college staff, who have an objective perspective.

The college believes that attractive curricula for adults must be supported through **other college strategies**. It believes that, in general, successful work with adults requires an adult ambience; returners can be put off by “large numbers of noisy, large 17 year olds dominating the scene”. The college deals with this by geographically zoning curriculum areas; it dedicates a site 100 yards from the main building to ESOL, Basic Education, Health and Care.

## **Case study two**

### **Background context**

This college has survived by continually finding ways of maintaining or extending its recruitment in the disadvantaged community it serves.

The college covers a wide rural area including significantly dispersed and isolated communities. It has a number of substantial main centres and also makes provision in some 24 community venues. It is the leading supplier of New Deal for young people and adults and for long-term unemployed adults in the region.

Nearly one-third of the population in the college’s catchment areas have poor levels of literacy.

### **The college’s approach to widening participation**

The college makes much use of **market research**: to establish the interests of current users of FE and of non-participants; to find out why people dropped out of their programmes and to encourage them back. For example, the college recently carried out a survey of 1000 part-time learners who had withdrawn from IT courses over the previous 18 months. In a number of cases, it appeared that learners on very flexible programmes had found the learning methods to be too flexible and had become de-motivated. The college offered a taught course and waived fees in acknowledgement. Over 150 learners have since re-joined the programme.

*The college has a strong commitment to researching thoroughly its decisions and programme offers. The college is currently surveying 5000 adults by post to identify which programmes might be of interest to them. Half of those being surveyed are previous users of the college and half have not used it before. The college has selected respondents as far as possible to reflect the local community profile and is offering a draw with cash prizes for people who return the survey.*

In response to its research into local needs, the main **curriculum change** has been to shift emphasis (including staffing) from level 3 work to levels 1 and 2. The college has extended curriculum 2000 structures to levels 1 and 2 and there is now the potential for any student to mix and match programmes.

As a means of encouraging prospective learners to try out new things and of reducing drop-out, the college has offered one-day tasters for its access provision. This has enabled individuals to get a feel for the likely time commitment and study skills they will need and has been a successful strategy. Out of 20 potential students who attended tasters, 19 started the course, and retention has been much improved.

The college has introduced new **learning methods** as well as new programme offers. It attributes much of its recent success in adult recruitment to the investment it made in its Flexi Centres. These are open 9am-9pm each day (9-4 Fridays) and Saturday mornings. The centres are staffed by college curriculum staff and learning support assistants, who are IT trained (funded via ALS, IT and adult education training); programme delivery is either through paper packages or on-line materials. The college has achieved considerable success in recruitment through the centres. Basic skills support is provided in centres where it is needed. Not only has the college been prepared to invest in new initiatives, but it has also been ready to amend offers in order to **continuously improve**, where these have not been fully meeting needs. As noted earlier, for example, some learners found the Flexi Centres too flexible and not suited to their learning styles. The college offered these learners taught provision in its place.

The college is working with a range of **community groups** and providers at very different stages of development; it relies on them for information about needs and interests – relationships are still largely at the trust-building stage and much time is spent by the college building relationships and finding ways to meet needs. The college recognises the importance of sensitivity in dealing with quite proud communities which have fallen on hard times. It seeks community workers who are known and trusted by their communities and who have the energy and enthusiasm to nurture relationships over time. The college believes that plenty of networks and **effective networking** are key to successfully widening participation.

## ***Case study three***

### **Background context**

A high proportion of this college's population experiences economic, social or educational disadvantage and has done so for a number of decades. Despite gains in employment in new service industries over recent years, the local unemployment rate is much higher than the national average. GCSE A\*-C achievement levels are well below the national average. FE participation rates in post-16 education have risen, although they still remain well below the national average; there are particular problems with the achievement of young men. The college has always had a high proportion of adult learners. Volumes of part-time adult learners have risen in recent years.

Widening participation is a real driver for the college. It believes that there is considerable scope for widening participation still further and is committed to doing so. Recent structural re-organisations within the college were undertaken in the expectation that the college would be better able to increase levels of participation and educational success by widening access to the FE curriculum and providing a broad curriculum to meet new needs.

## **The college's approach to widening participation**

The college has developed and implemented strategies to ensure that the **staffing complement is appropriate** for widening participation and that it is **appropriately structured** and **well-qualified**. With union agreement, the college has introduced a new 'associate lecturer' grade starting in basic skills and possibly extending to other areas in due course. This is a full-time post, restricted to delivery of part-time provision at levels 1 and 2, reserving traditional lecturers for levels 3 and above. This enables the college to identify and appoint at the right level of qualification needed for this work rather than for the full range, and to avoid the need for large numbers of part-time staff. The college **faculty structure** also fully supports widening participation. Each of the four faculties has two assistant heads, one for resources and one who has the remit for adults and for part-time provision.

The college believes that there is plenty of scope for continuing to widen participation in the local area and it continues to be a real driver for the college. The college makes **flexible use of senior management posts** to support growth and innovation. For example, the role of Vice Principal for Policy is to help faculties foster rapid growth. The VP Policy started with Information Technology and has now moved on to Care and Business.

The college considers that a key strategy for success is the ability to take opportunities and to **invest appropriately** in them.

The college has, from the start, found ways of releasing substantial amounts of capital for investing in outreach premises and in high levels of ICT equipment. It has done this by reducing taught hours on courses and using the capital released to support effective learning outside class contact hours; for example, extensive library and ICT resources plus appropriate staffing for them. It also uses capital to provide large areas for learning and to ensure learning areas and learning centres are physically attractive. It sees innovative and thought-through approaches to **increasing cost effectiveness and investment as essential requirements** for successfully widening participation.

The college also uses similar strategies to release resources to target additional learning support and financial support upon learners. The college waives fees for all its level 1 and most level 2 provision. Where possible, it creates larger learning groups than the norm, providing them with varied staffing.

Over the past 4 years, the college has invested a total of £300,000 to improve facilities, setting up 10 new centres. It plans to set up 3 further centres over the next 3 years at £10,000 per centre. Environments in outreach are now generally good.

The college considers this attention to finance as a fundamental element for successfully increasing and widening participation.

A good example of the college's approach to deploying resources to meet needs is the 'It's for You' programme. The college used funding to create a separate workforce to work in the communities, to find locations where small groups would get together for a 3-hour introductory ICT module. The staff were primarily there to provide customer care, not pedagogy; they set up the laptops and provided support if needed. The laptops did the rest and the learners printed their certificate at the end as a proof of achievement. Venues for the courses were pubs, houses, cafés, even trains.

Within the college senior management team there is a 'growth team' to **harness the enthusiasm and ideas of staff** and to find ways of turning them into something practicable or smoothing their path, e.g. a fast-track process for appointments. The growth team gives staff status and allows them to experiment and make mistakes without fear of retribution. The college has also set up a 'transition team' to support the **successful embedding of innovation** throughout its provision.

One example of a recent idea being turned into action was the decision to open the college throughout the summer, using marquees, plentiful ICT provision, and taxis to bring people in from other areas. The main focus was ICT and encouraging learners to apply ICT to other interests. The initiative was enormously successful. It attracted large numbers of people who had not been in post-16 education before: the target was 500 and actual attendance was 2500. A key success factor was the use of student helpers who put people at ease and helped them feel welcome.

**Judicious use of outreach in partnership with other community organisations** has also been vital. The college began its library links by working with a school library – the college providing the ICT facilities and a librarian, the school providing the location and meeting other costs. This led to working more widely with public branch libraries in similar ways. The college now has premises in 7 branch libraries and a substantial involvement with the main central library, involving all-year guidance as well as ICT. This has now been developed as a learning centre, bringing together the library, the careers service, an all-age guidance service, a college learning centre and Learndirect.

All of the college's **franchise work** is with community-based voluntary organisations. It sees these as an excellent way of building or sustaining capacity within a locality. All franchise tutors have free access to college training programmes.

The college has found that ICT curricula have been extremely effective in attracting learners. ICT appears to be a draw because it carries no stigma, as most adults need to learn it, and because learners can learn individually, but in a social group setting. Basic skills support is added in as a matter of course and the college has set up its first library-based basic skills centre. The college has well-established ICT pathways, and it is seeking to extend ICT learning to other curriculum areas.

**Quality assurance systems** are also crucial in ensuring that teaching and learning remain of the highest quality and in monitoring the impact of the college's activities



on retention and achievement. Registers must be 100% accurate and quality systems comprehensive and consistent. With regard to recruitment and retention, the college had a significant number of unknown outcomes, which were largely a failure to capture information. Staff knew what had happened to these learners but this was not recorded. A decision was taken to contact 'non-completers' individually. Having collected information from staff where available, learners were asked what they needed to help them complete and the college did its best to provide it, including producing specific materials and making a bank of laptops available for learner use at home. The scheme worked well and is being continued.

In addition, the college has set up 'assessment boards' within each section, which look at whether each learner on a course passed or failed, what might have helped them pass if they did fail and taking action where possible. The assessment board is complemented by a 'student board' to pick up any student who missed out on the assessment board process. This system is to be extended to all outreach work over a 3-year period.

## ANNEX B

### Characteristics and examples of good practice

- 1 *Widening participation for adults is positioned as an integral part of the college's business, with commitment shown at all levels, including governors.*

Actions/approaches	Examples
Setting out goals, objectives and expectations, backed by an implementation plan	College C has 7 pledges which it publicises to staff, students and the general public. Each of these pledges is supported by an action plan and milestones for implementation. The result is a coherent approach to widening participation, raising standards and economic regeneration of the area to which staff and governors are fully committed.
Securing the right staff who understand the needs of widening participation learners and who can relate well to them (through appointments and staff development) and creating a staff structure that reflects the importance of widening participation for adults	<p>College D has made great efforts to change the profile of its staff to reflect more closely the community and the student body. Recruitment is focused on the community, with an annual recruitment fair showcasing the whole range of employment opportunities. Training is offered at all levels from basic non-teaching jobs to certificate of education.</p> <p>College H is asking all main staff working at level 1 to take a City and Guilds course and hopes to extend this to staff working at other levels.</p> <p>College K believed that traditional FE lecturers were not necessarily the most appropriate people to engage WP learners and decided to recruit new staff who were well equipped to deal with the specific needs of non-traditional learners.</p> <p>At college B, the faculty structure fully supports widening participation. Each of the four faculties has two assistant heads, one for resources and one who has the remit for adults and part-time provision.</p>
Ensuring adequate investment in opportunities to widen participation	College B has found ways of releasing substantial amounts of capital for investing in outreach premises and in high levels of ICT equipment by reducing taught hours on selected courses and by using the capital released to support effective learning outside class contact hours. It also uses capital to provide large areas for learning and to ensure learning areas are physically attractive.

**2 The college adopts a business-like approach to seeking and deploying resources for widening adult participation.**

<b>Actions/approaches</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<p>A business plan for growth in widening participation</p> <p>Creativity in securing and deploying resources; ability to take opportunities and risks and invest appropriately</p> <p>Ensuring that key widening participation staff are in a position to influence budgets</p> <p>A realistic identification of markets and how best to meet their needs</p>	<p>College C had suffered a significant reduction in the unit of funding (ALF) since incorporation. This meant that the choice for the college was to shrink or to find new areas of business. The college's business needs were congruent with its corporate priorities.</p> <p>At college B, a growth team has been created within the senior management team to harness the ideas of staff and to smooth the path to their introduction, such as a fast-track appointment process. Development through the growth team gives these projects status and allows staff to experiment and make mistakes without fear of retribution. One such example was the decision to open the college throughout the summer and actively bring people in. The focus was first on IT and then applying IT to other interests. The programme was very successful. A key factor was the use of student helpers - they made people feel welcome and found out what they wanted.</p> <p>Where a taster course in the community delivered by college A leads to an extended desire for learning, the community is encouraged to take responsibility for managing the ongoing provision, where it is able to do so. The college supports the community organisation by providing quality assurance, staff development and learner/learning support on the same basis as for the rest of the college and the community group is funded to manage, recruit and run the courses. The college has a number of successful programmes running through this arrangement.</p>
<p>Linking the use of additional funding streams to the main purposes of the college to transfer innovation to the 'mainstream'</p>	<p>College H - Use of non-schedule 2 pilots to try out new formats and provisions that they would not otherwise have explored.</p>
<p>Ensuring that resources are deployed sensitively in support of widening participation objectives</p>	<p>College D has been careful to equip all centres, irrespective of location, with a consistently high level of ICT and other equipment. The college believes that familiar patterns of displacing old kit into the community is counterproductive and does not send out an appropriate message.</p>

**3 Widening participation evolves continuously. New ways are constantly sought to widen adult participation further and staff show persistence in their efforts to reach the ‘hard to reach’.**

<b>Actions/approaches</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<p>Continual and persistent awareness that the hardest to reach may not be being reached, and development of strategies to further widen participation</p> <p>Anticipating change rather than waiting for it to become standard practice</p> <p>Changing the curriculum offer in response to the needs of learners or potential learners</p> <p>Adapting provision throughout the college (curriculum, staffing, accommodation, teaching and learning strategies) in line with expectations for learners’ progression</p> <p>Continually seeking new partnerships through which to reach learners and deliver provision – eg community franchise partners and training organisations</p> <p>Much use of market research to establish interests of current users of FE and non-participants</p>	<p>At college H, in response to market research and community consultation, the main curriculum change has been to shift emphasis (including staffing) from level 3 to levels 1 and 2. Curriculum 2000 structures have been extended to levels 1 and 2 so that all students may mix and match their programmes.</p> <p>At college G, there has been a drive to change the role of the teacher. The teacher’s role is now seen to encompass support, guidance, referral. This effort is driven through the Principalship and is delivered through staff and course team meetings, management team meetings and targeted staff development.</p> <p>College H makes much use of market research: to establish the interests of current users and non-participants; to find out why non-completers dropped out of their courses; and to encourage them back.</p>
<p>A willingness to take risks with new provision or initiatives and to be prepared to amend or reject experimental approaches if they are not having the desired effect</p>	<p>College H runs ‘flexi-centres’ as a central element of its widening participation strategy. These are open for long hours and enable learners to follow self-managed learning through paper or on-line learning packages. While very successful for most, some learners reported finding the flexi-centres too flexible and felt they could not find the self-discipline needed to complete their programmes using flexible study methods.</p>

**4 There is continuous engagement with the community, at all levels in the college and in all parts of the community**

<b>Actions/approaches</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<p>Appropriate community liaison and outreach staff are identified and integrated into mainstream staffing structures</p> <p>Active involvement with a wide range of community partnerships and existing community groups; energetic networking and people to people contacts</p> <p>Community profiling to establish learning needs</p> <p>Partnership with other learning providers</p> <p>Negotiation of learning provision through consultation with local groups</p> <p>Judicious and innovative use of, and collaboration with, resources in the community</p>	<p>College F runs a staff training project with funding from the regional development agency. The college takes people from deprived wards and trains them to deliver IT in that ward. Some are now employed by the college. This reinforces the college's link with that community.</p> <p>At college G, the college plays a role in regeneration activity and partnerships and has encouraged the formation of community groups in deprived communities where none existed before.</p> <p>WP is only viable, according to college J, if a college works with existing groups in the community, with whom potential students are already in contact and whom they trust. This requires considerable energy on the part of the college.</p> <p>At college D, much marketing is deliberately carried out by word of mouth with community groups.</p> <p>At college E, the college gives out an actual name and telephone number rather than the college freephone number. It finds that this results in more WP enquiries.</p> <p>At college D, information about possible financial support for learning is high profile, intensive and a major element of recruitment and promotional efforts.</p> <p>College C began to deliver a range of programmes on a very deprived housing estate with a history of unrest and social problems. The programme was negotiated through local consultation and the involvement of local people in the design of the offer. The initiative has been critically dependent on the individual staff involved in community liaison being able to negotiate between conflicting priorities in different parts of the community.</p> <p>College B considers libraries and the use of ICT as being particularly important to community outreach. At first, it worked with a school library, providing the librarian and some ICT facilities. Then, these methods were extended to public libraries in the community. The college contributes to library staffing and ICT and delivery staff, but does not incur extensive overheads. It is now involved in 7 branch libraries and the main library, which has been developed as 'The Learningplace', bringing together the careers service, an all-age guidance service, a college learning centre and learndirect.</p>

**5 There is a rigorous approach to quality assurance for widening adult participation**

<b>Actions/approaches</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<p>The same QA processes are applied to widening participation for adults as to other areas of college provision</p> <p>Cross-college moderation systems that support quality and enable identification and sharing of good practice</p>	<p>College A takes a 'triangular' approach to quality assurance – this involves a commitment to widening participation; insistence on high standards of retention and achievement; and genuinely inclusive teaching and learning strategies.</p> <p>College G is administered in four segments: 14-19; adults; work-based learning and corporate clients. A set of standards is published for each and many of the issues identified as good practice in teaching and learning for WP are incorporated in these and applied without distinction to all adult learners.</p> <p>College D has a development group that has responsibility for an action plan to equip staff with the skills they may need to work successfully with WP students. For example, some community tutors may need to improve their subject skills and qualifications while some main grade staff may need help with understanding different learning styles and/or the nature of some local communities.</p> <p>At college D, all staff have a contractual commitment to development and training and equal access to staff development.</p>
<p>Learner feedback is regularly sought and acted on</p> <p>There are high expectations of learner achievement. Progress in recruitment, retention and achievement for target groups is reviewed systematically and followed by practical action</p> <p>Practical action is taken to understand and address issues associated with 'at risk students' and non-completion of programmes</p>	<p>At college E, the presenting needs of communities are carefully analysed to ensure that the college offer is exactly right.</p> <p>At course team meetings in college D, there is a standard item on 'at risk' students which are rigorously followed up.</p> <p>College B decided to contact individuals who had not completed their courses to discuss with them why they had been unable to complete and to provide the assistance they needed to help them complete. This ranged from producing specific materials to providing a lap-top for use at home. It has also set up assessment boards and student boards to identify why students are failing and to take action to help them pass, if possible.</p>

**6 Widening participation objectives are reflected in curriculum design and teaching and learning strategies throughout the college**

<b>Actions/approaches</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<p>Curriculum design and development are kept under continuous review.</p> <p>Curricula are designed to be attractive, well-matched to community needs and likely to recruit. Market research plays a key role</p>	<p>College B has found ICT courses to be particularly attractive. ICT appears to draw learners because there is no stigma attached to it as most adults need it and learners can learn individually. Basic skills is added in as a matter of course.</p> <p>The main areas of growth in college C have been in ABE, ESOL and SLDD for adults. A particular college initiative has been to modularise the curriculum into 'bite-size chunks' so that students always leave the college with some credit and the motivation to return.</p> <p>College E and college H use taster sessions as a means of encouraging interest in learning. The colleges have also found that small 'taster' programmes are a useful way to reduce drop-out and make sure students know what they are signing up to. Retention rates have been much improved as a result.</p> <p>Colleges E and F have made extensive use of Open College units to build learner confidence and self esteem. The colleges believe that bite-sized learning allows early success.</p>
<p>Learning pathways are well-mapped, giving learners an entitlement to progression and support</p>	<p>College C has a significant number of asylum seekers and refugees amongst its intake. ESOL is offered in more than 20 community locations as well as on the main campus. Progression from ESOL to 'mainstream' programmes is offered through bridging courses in curriculum departments, by teachers in curriculum areas visiting ESOL off-site locations and by encouraging ESOL teachers to teach across into curriculum areas so that they are familiar with opportunities. Similar strategies are applied to encouraging progression from basic skills provision.</p> <p>At college H, the progression of ESOL students onto mainstream provision is encouraged in a variety of ways – through vocational courses targeted at ESOL students (computing with ESOL) through use of ALS for language support on vocational courses, through highly differentiated ESOL groups and through an overview of ESOL curricula to ensure that it is not too restrictive.</p> <p>At college G, much effort has gone into creating a collaborative guidance service between all major providers in the city. This helps make curriculum pathways clear.</p>

<b>(6 continued)</b> <b>Actions/approaches</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Sensitivity to adult learners needs in designing the use of space for 'returner' curriculum provision	College C recognised that many returning adults could be put off by large numbers of noisy teenagers in open areas of the college. It decided to zone curriculum areas by dedicating a site 100 yards away from the main building to ESOL, Basic Education, Health and Care.
Initial advice and guidance is widely available and there are sophisticated student support processes	At college D, temporary initial advice and guidance arrangements are made available at each centre during enrolment. At college G, all learners are assessed using an established system which the college believes accurately identifies the support needed by individual learners.
All staff are encouraged to apply good inclusive learning strategies	At college G, the student support process is led by the Inclusive Learning Manager. It builds on the initial assessment and feeds back detailed advice on both individuals and the learning group. Materials to deliver specific aspects of support have been devised and are easily accessible to staff. A series of simple practical manuals has been devised as a guide to learning methods/styles and to the characteristics of certain forms of disability and strategies for supporting these learners. A staff development programme is also run as a result of the issues being raised through initial assessment. Teaching staff are also then encouraged to take the relevant basic skills or other qualifications.

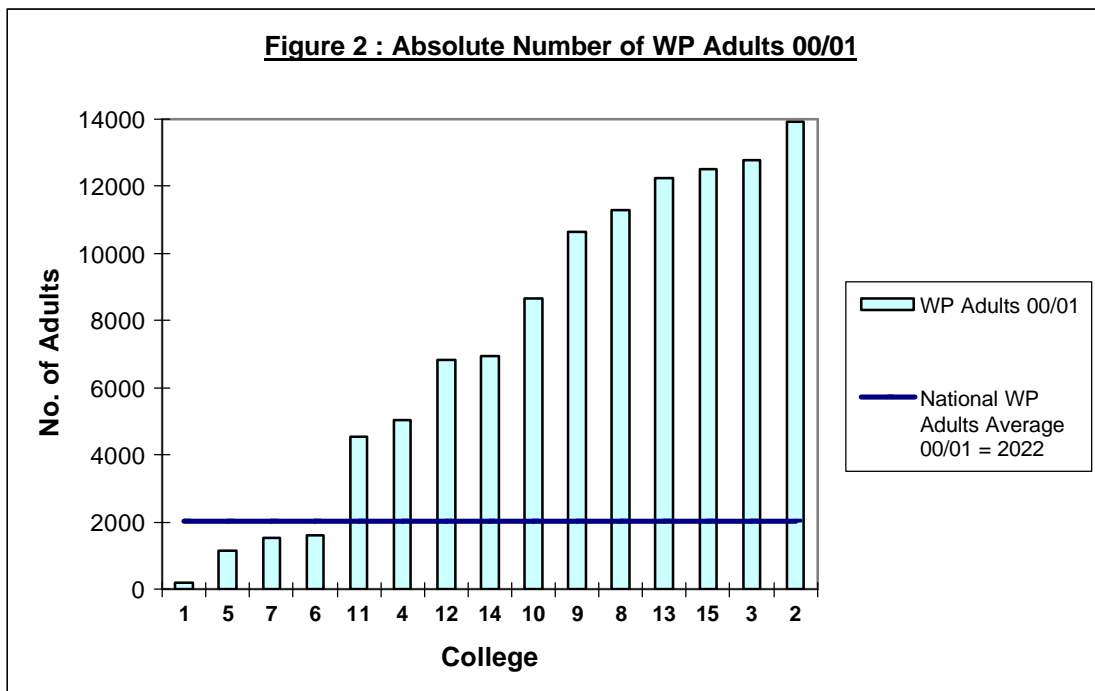
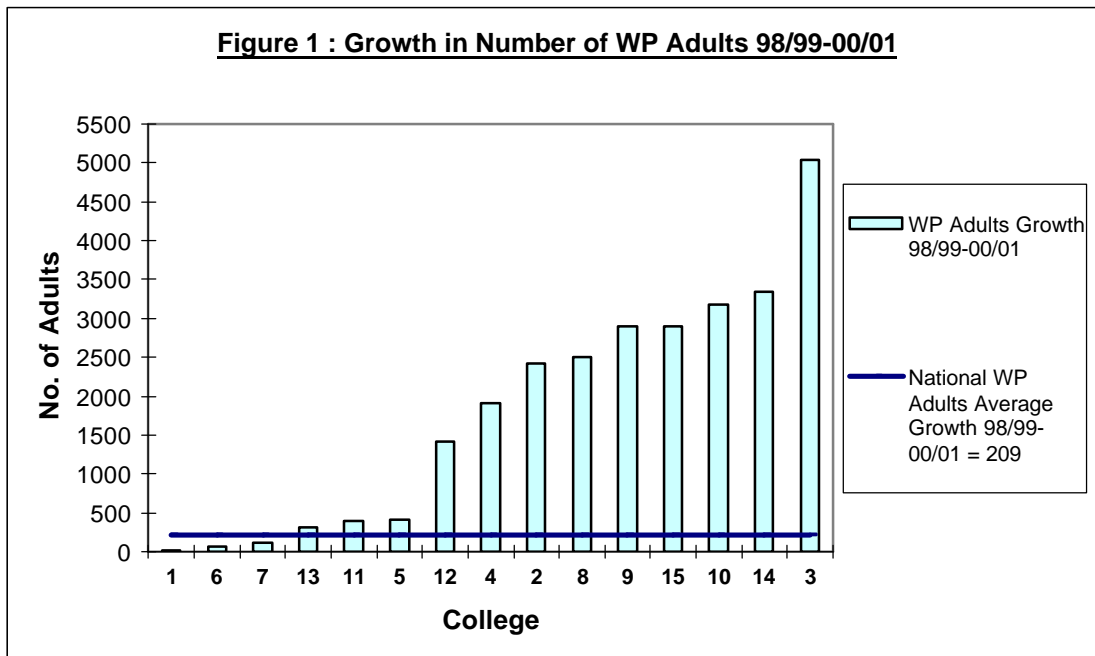


**7 Learner/learning support is treated as an entitlement. Support is packaged in a holistic way to meet individual needs, including practical and financial support as well as additional help with learning.**

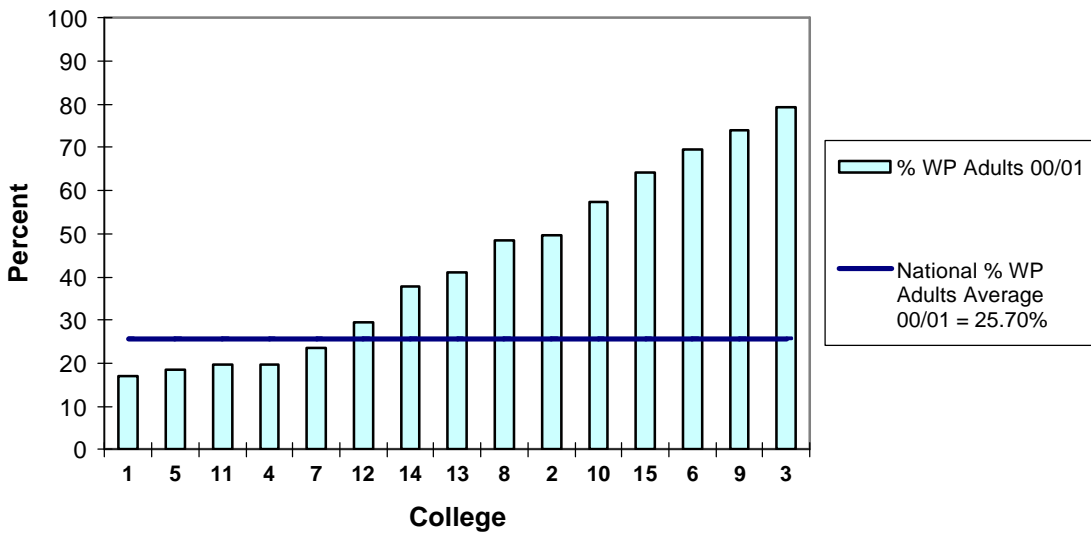
<b>Actions/approaches</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<p>Initial assessment and initial and continuing guidance for all learners</p> <p>Strong tutorial systems</p>	<p>At college C, all students attending courses of more than six hours a week are entitled to tutorial support. Additional learning support needs are identified by tutors at individual level. All students are eligible for additional learner support, whether LSC-funded or not, and access is limited only by the budget. Emphasis is placed on careful initial support in all programme areas.</p> <p>At college D, every learner has a personal tutor, with a basic entitlement of a general tutorial programme plus one hour per week one-to-one tutorials for students on six hour programmes and proportionally less for students on programmes of fewer hours.</p>
<p>An individual learning plan for each learner</p> <p>A well-articulated system of learner financial support</p>	<p>At college D, all learners have an individual learning plan. These are initiated with subject tutors and put together by personal tutors in collaboration with the student, taking account of initial assessment. The plan follows them throughout their college career.</p> <p>At college A, every student is entitled to the support that they need. Learner support is financial, learning and practical support is widely advertised and known about in the community. Effective links with community support organisations, like counselling services, allow the referral of those with an 'on-course wobble'.</p> <p>At college F, the college aims to provide financial support to students without affecting their benefits wherever possible. It has £400,000 of access funding which it uses in ways to match the job seekers' allowance, but only paying a small amount in cash so as not to affect benefit. This system needs careful managing.</p> <p>College J believes that, in its catchment area, free courses for learners have been essential in attracting students initially. Even relatively low college registration fees have been regarded by potential learners as a deterrent.</p>

# ANNEX C

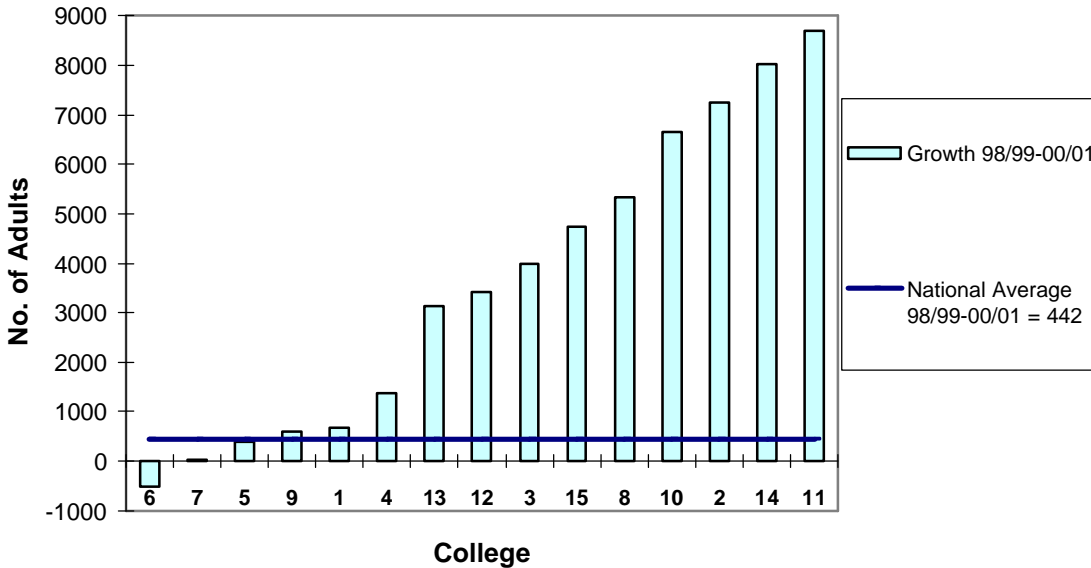
## Statistics on case study colleges



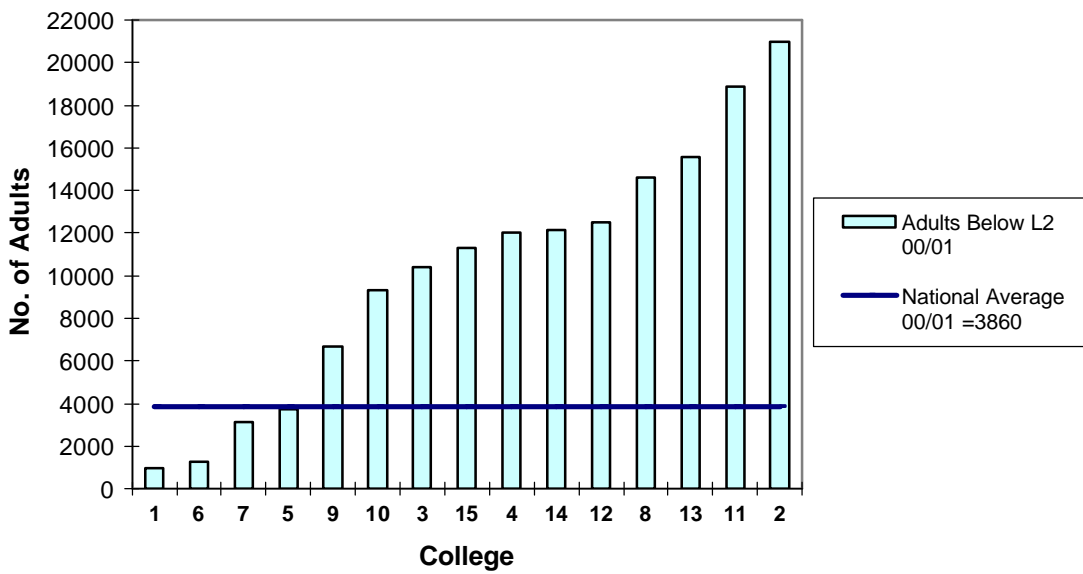
**Figure 3 : Proportion of Adults who attract WP 00/01**



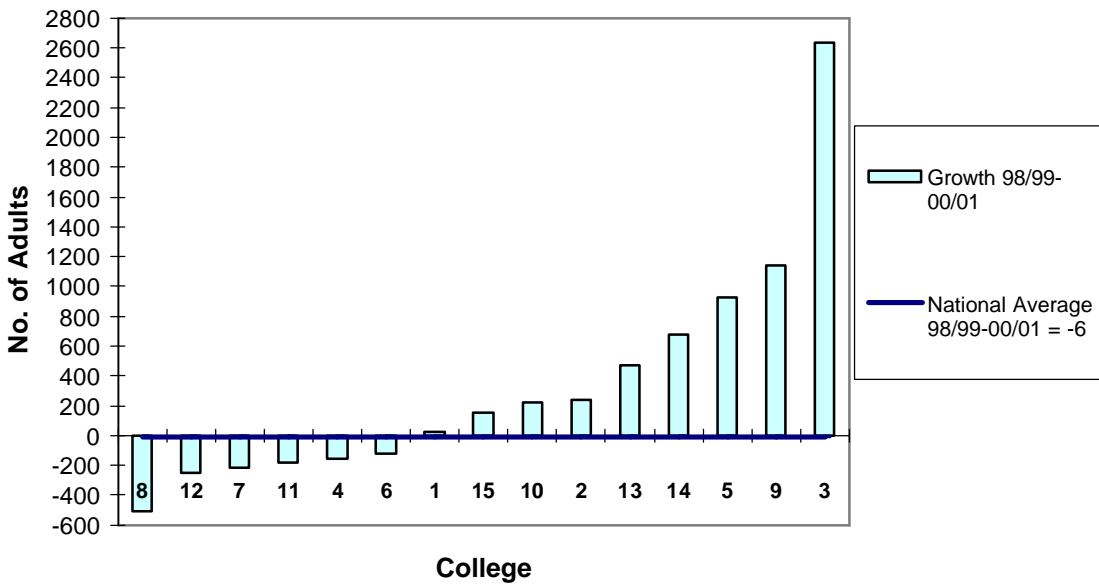
**Figure 4 : Growth in Adults Below Level 2 98/99-00/01**



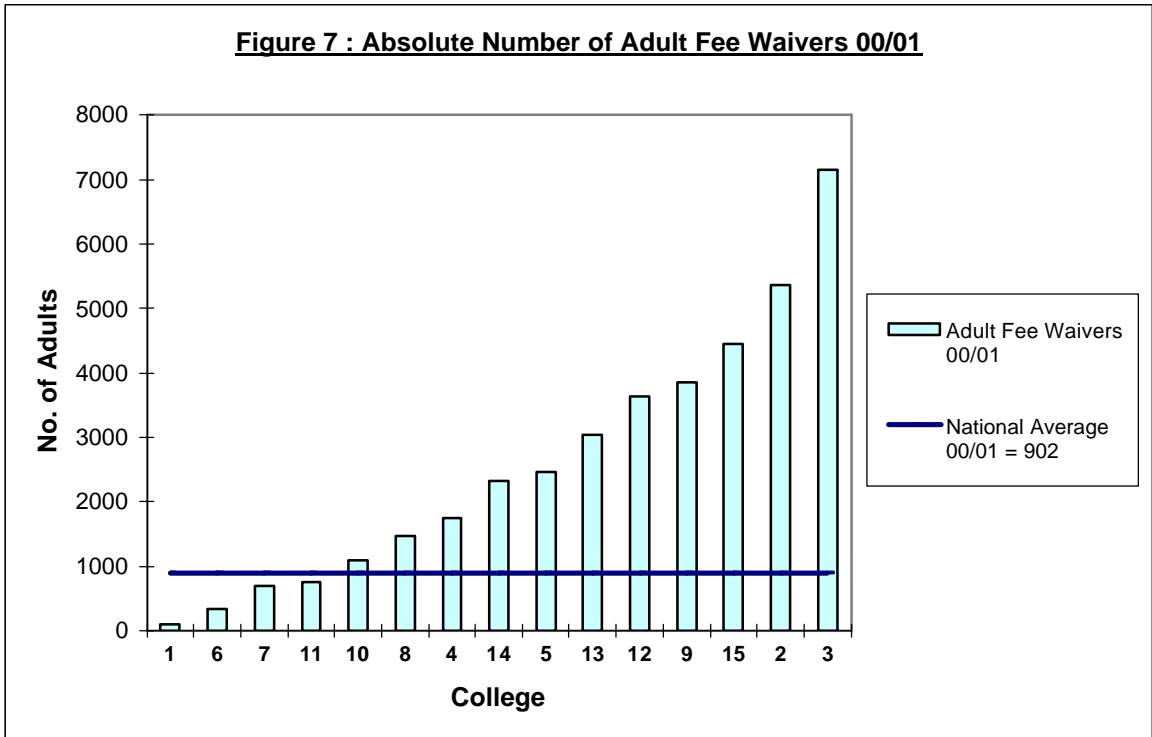
**Figure 5 : Absolute Number of Adults Below Level 2 00/01**



**Figure 6 : Growth in Adult Fee Waivers 98/99-00/01**



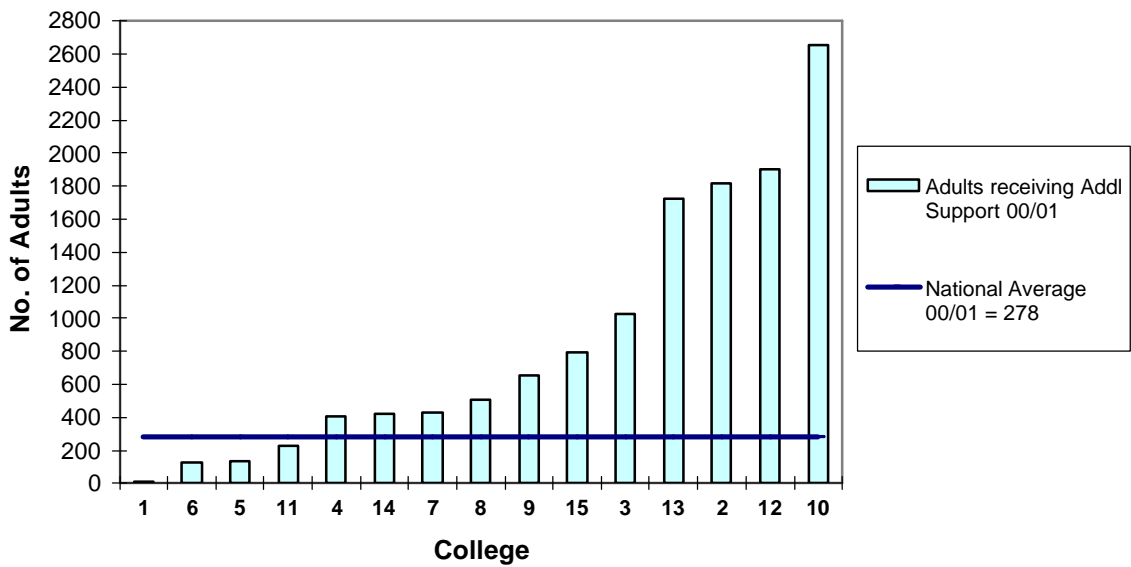
**Figure 7 : Absolute Number of Adult Fee Waivers 00/01**



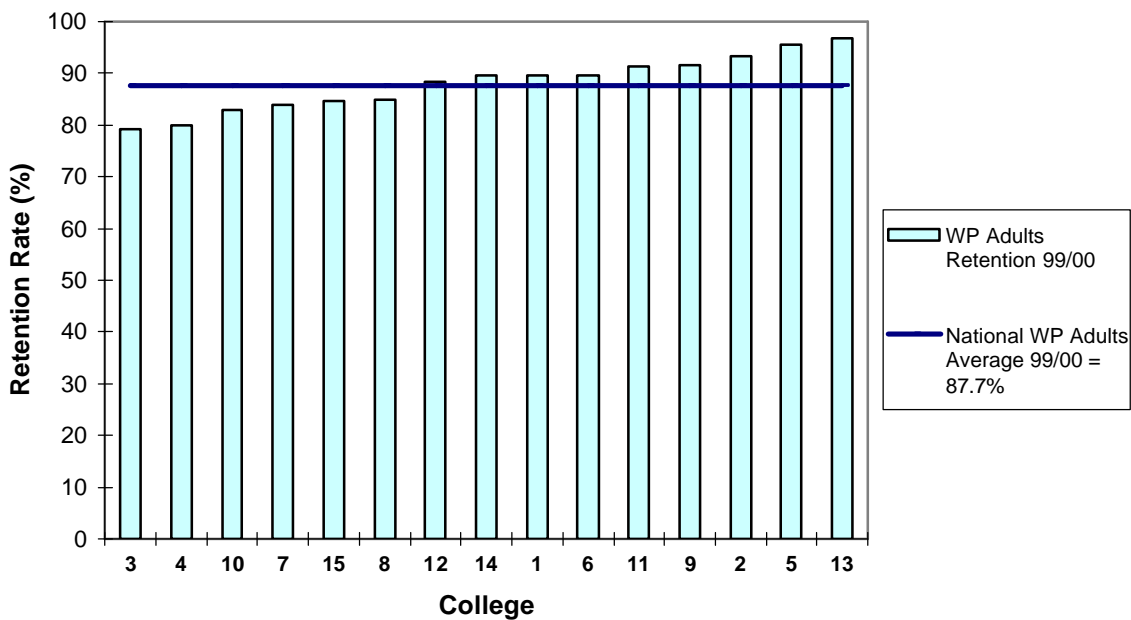
**Figure 8 : Growth in Adults receiving Additional Support 98/99-00/01**

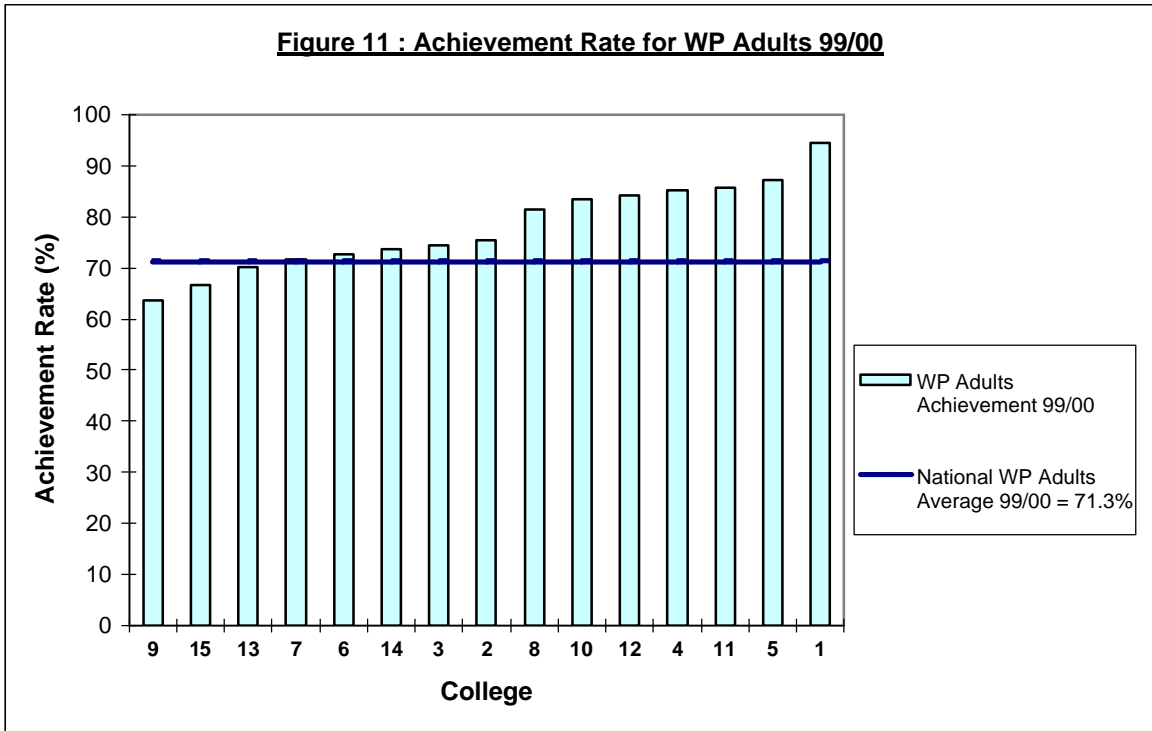


**Figure 9 : Absolute Number of Adults receiving Additional Support 00/01**



**Figure 10 : Retention Rate for WP Adults 99/00**





**Note**

National averages for retention and achievement are based on all FE colleges (general and 6<sup>th</sup> form combined). The comparators for 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges are:

- i. national WP adult retention rate 99/00 for 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges = 86.3
- ii. national WP adult achievement rate 99/00 for 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges = 80.8

**Part 2**

**GOOD PRACTICE IN WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN  
FURTHER EDUCATION**

**A SURVEY OF RECENT LITERATURE FOR THE LEARNING  
AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

**BY CRITICAL THINKING**  
Now Policyworks

November 2001

**Contact: Deirdre Macleod  
Partner**



## Contents

	Page
KEY FINDINGS	47
INTRODUCTION	49
Process by which the literature was selected and surveyed	49
THE LITERATURE REVIEWED	
Policy reports	50
FEFC Inspectorate reports	53
Evaluations of, and lessons learned from, recent policy initiatives	55
Reports on issues relating to widening participation	59
Good practice initiatives	61
Annex 1 Areas for improved practice drawn from FEFC Inspectorate literature	63
Annex 2 References	64

## KEY FINDINGS FROM A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

- A number of different types of publications offer examples of practices, activities and approaches that might be helpful in widening participation.
- Although the report of the FEFC's Committee on Widening Participation, *Learning Works* (the 'Kennedy Report'), which was published in 1997, is now over four years old, it appears that much of the practice and the approaches described in the report remain relevant. This has been confirmed by examining other more recent publications which present the findings of research conducted as part of evaluations of policy initiatives and other studies. The practices identified in these documents are generally similar to those identified in the Kennedy Report. Further work on widening participation appears to have served to refine and develop practices, rather than to suggest the need for major change.
- Key practices or issues which are identified in more recent work as having a positive effect upon recruitment, retention and achievement of non-traditional learners, and which are either not mentioned or are given little emphasis in the Kennedy Report, include:
  - the importance of leadership and commitment at senior level within colleges to widening participation, and commitment to widening participation amongst all staff across the college
  - the importance of outreach and engagement activities and the extent to which colleges need to be prepared to persist with these activities, commit significant resources to them and develop them on a planned, longer-term basis
  - the importance of providing appropriate staff development to ensure that front-line staff – from reception to teaching staff – have the skills that they need.
- A key omission from the literature appears to be that, since the publication of the Kennedy report, there has been no attempt so far to identify the extent to which colleges have implemented the practices that it recommended or what the precise impact upon participation, retention and achievement rates has been of specific practices or strategies adopted by colleges. While the FEFC has, each year, prepared detailed statistical evidence reporting on progress made with widening participation, quantitative evidence of improvement has not been correlated with qualitative evidence on college activities. Without such work, the continuing relevance of the Kennedy recommendations remains more a confident hypothesis than a tested fact.
- The extent to which each practice or approach cited has been verified independently as being effective or good practice varies. In a number of cases, examples of good practice have been self-reported by project managers. In almost no cases is there an attempt to measure the precise contribution that particular practices or approaches have made to participation profiles, recruitment, retention, completion or achievement rates. However, several

reports do highlight practices that the authors regard as having been crucial to the success of the project concerned.

- While some publications – mainly published by the FEFC Inspectorate – describe cross-college, integrated approaches that might be taken to widening participation, many of the publications offer a more fragmented view of what works, describing single examples or case studies in the context of an examination of a particular aspect of the process of widening participation. While none of the publications that offer single activity examples of strategies to widen participation suggest that pursuing any one activity alone will lead to widened participation, it is difficult to get a view, in many publications, of the minimum or key set of activities that need to be put in place to have an effect.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1 This is a report on the findings of a survey of selected recent literature on good practice in widening participation. It has been prepared for the Learning and Skills Development Agency.

2 The review is based on the survey of approximately 30 recent, relevant publications. As such, it is a limited study and does not claim to be a comprehensive survey of literature on the matter. There is a great deal of practice cited within the literature. This review does not attempt to identify each approach or practice cited; to do so would result in an unmanageable volume of information for the reader and it would not be possible to do so within the short timescale allotted for the literature review. Rather, an overview of the methods and relevant conclusions is presented for each document or groups of documents. This should enable readers to follow up references or points of interest, should they wish to do so.

3 The literature survey considered a range of publications in which the authors identify practices that they regard as being effective in widening participation. This briefing paper reports on:

- the nature and purpose of the documents in which examples of good practice are cited
- the approaches to, and strategies for, widening participation and the characteristics and criteria underpinning effective practices that are most commonly cited in the literature
- how these criteria and examples have been derived, what evidence exists to support their designation as characteristics or examples of good practice and how the colleges exhibiting these practices were identified
- the extent to which the literature surveyed offers independent evidence that the examples used have had a positive effective on participation, retention, achievement and progression rates
- practical examples and case studies of good practice that are cited in the literature and references to where these may be found.

4 At Annex 1 are examples, drawn from FEFC Inspectorate literature, of areas in which college practice in widening participation needs to improve throughout the sector.

### **Process by which the literature was selected and surveyed**

5 The publications considered as part of this review were identified by searching relevant sites on the worldwide web and in the catalogue of the National Library of Scotland. Staff at the Learning and Skills Development Agency identified a number of the Agency's own publications which they believed might be useful sources of practice. The documents examined have been grouped by type below.

## THE LITERATURE REVIEWED

### Policy reports

6 Perhaps the most important single source of thinking on widening participation in recent years has been the report of the FEFC's Widening Participation Committee, *Learning Works* (described from hereon as the Kennedy Report). This report, published in 1997, along with its accompanying volume of statistical evidence and a good practice guide, focused thinking on the issue, reminding colleges, policy-makers and other stakeholders that '*we know how to widen participation, now we need to make it happen*' and provided an analysis of the extent to which the college sector was pursuing effective strategies.

7 The report was very much a 'state of play' report. It set a number of baselines, including:

- a description of the extent to which the sector was taking action to widen participation
- criteria for good practice and strategies for good practice derived from various evidence sources
- baseline data against which colleges could measure progress with widening participation and against which success across the sector more generally could be measured.

8 Although the report is now over four years old, it appears that much of the practice and the approaches described remain relevant. This has been confirmed by examining other more recent publications which cite good practice and which generally re-state the criteria and practices identified in Kennedy. Further work on widening participation appears to have served to refine and develop practices, rather than to suggest the need for major change. Some of the documents published subsequent to the Kennedy Report provide examples of practice that add to the 'core' practices identified by the Kennedy Good Practice Report.

9 In the context of the current programme work being pursued by the Agency on widening participation, it is worth re-visiting some of the key headline findings of the report, including that:

- there was good practice in widening participation, but that it was not systematic or consistent. This has resulted in inequitable treatment of learners in different communities, depending upon the quality of the provision that they have access to
- luck played too great a role in whether the needs of a prospective learner were met
- even within individual institutions, good practice in widening participation was patchy

- well-developed widening participation strategies did not happen accidentally; they needed to be well-planned and managed.

10 The Kennedy Report derived nine main characteristics of good practice in widening participation. These were that:

- marketing should be planned and based on intelligence
- there should be strategies for contacting non-participants
- there should be good quality, impartial information and that guidance should be readily available
- there should be effective support for learning
- financial and practical support should be provided
- the curriculum should be relevant and enable students to progress
- there should be effective teaching and promotion of learning
- there should be mechanisms for recording students' achievements which acknowledge all learning, are meaningful to students and which are recognised by employers, education providers and others
- management information should be accurate and should be used to evaluate students' progress and other aspects of provision.

11 The characteristics were derived from:

- evidence from different groups with an interest and/or responsibility for FE, including students, teachers, managers, policy-makers and from groups who do not usually participate in FE
- testing characteristics of good practice derived from this evidence in 40 field visits
- identifying effective practice in WP developed by different providers of adult and FE in England
- the findings of relevant published reports
- statistical data about students' backgrounds.

12 Crucially, the report argued that the nine identified characteristics needed to be regarded as being more than the sum of their parts and that action to widen participation needed to be present in all aspects of a college's work. It observed that

no providers in the research sample considered by the Committee exhibited all of the characteristics, although several were exhibiting some of the characteristics.

13 The Good Practice Report, an accompanying volume to the Kennedy Report, elaborated upon some of the reasons why participation was not being widened. A key problem was reported to be a gap between a college's mission statement and its ultimate success in widening participation. The reasons for this, and the extent to which it still occurs, might provide useful information for the Agency's current study. They included:

- mission statements not being supported by the necessary strategic planning and systems to put widening participation commitments into practice
- efforts to widen participation not being consistent across the college
- the college not actively seeking out non-participants in its locality and not providing suitable opportunities for them
- college responsiveness being restricted to providing for the more vocal local communities and employers
- provision for under-represented groups not being consistent over time
- there being an over-dependence on short-term project funding for initiatives to widen participation
- the aim of widening participation being new to the college.

14 It also elaborated upon the nine criteria for widening participation by drawing out for each:

- the needs of the learner
- the role of the provider
- standards for colleges
- evidence that should be sought and used to support college widening participation strategies
- examples of how standards and strategies might be achieved in practice.

15 It also made some important recommendations for action across the FE sector, all of which remain relevant. They were that:

- more systematic strategies were needed to address persistent patterns of under-participation and under-achievement among some groups

- some innovative and different approaches were needed to tackle under-participation and under-achievement
- the proposed common standards in widening participation, identified by the Kennedy Committee from a range of sources of evidence including Inspectorate evidence and college visits, needed to be achieved in all colleges
- colleges needed to set themselves further and more challenging standards and targets
- more rigorous methods were needed to measure and report progress in widening participation at college, local, regional and national levels.

### **FEFC Inspectorate reports**

16 The FEFC Inspectorate published three linked reports on good practice in widening participation in 2000. The reports were:

- *Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Colleges' Case Studies*
- *Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Report from the Inspectorate*
- *Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Contributions made by the FEFC-funded Strategic Partnership*

17 The reports surveyed the sector's work in widening participation since 1997 and also identified some of the good practice within the sector.

18 The evidence contained in the first two reports have been derived from Inspectorate evidence gathered through routine inspection visits and statistical evidence. Inspectors gathered the evidence contained in the third report by examining work being undertaken by the widening participation partnerships created in response to the Kennedy Report.

19 The Inspectorate reports confirmed the Kennedy criteria for good practice and extended them by drawing out other areas of activity that inspectors regarded as important but which were implicit rather than explicit in the Kennedy Good Practice Guide. These include governance and management, quality assurance and general resources. The reports identified features of colleges that were effective in widening participation and factors that the Inspectorate believed were critical to the success of college widening participation strategies.

20 A useful aspect of the Inspectorate reports is that they take a whole college approach to examining good practice, rather than focusing on single examples of useful approaches. Many of the other reports examined as part of this review report on the impact of various initiatives or practices in ways that mean that it is difficult to determine how that practice interacts with other strategies or practices. As such, the Inspectorate report builds on the Kennedy Good Practice Guide which stated that a



whole college approach must be taken to widening participation and that a wide set of activities - from marketing to effective teaching and learning to progress monitoring - must be in place.

21 The Inspectorate Guide to Good Practice states that good management, sound quality assurance arrangements and effective teaching and learning are 'threshold' requirements for a college to succeed in managing and improving strategies for widening participation and raising standards.

22 The Kennedy Reports, the Inspectorate Reports and other key sources were used in compiling this review. The Kennedy Good Practice Guide was used as the 'core source'.

23 The reports also identify a number of colleges which, in the Inspectorate's view, exhibit good practice throughout the college and have been successful in widening participation. College retention and achievement rates are likely to have been used by the FEFC Inspectorate in determining effectiveness. However, the precise reasons why the Inspectorate have singled out these colleges as being particularly successful are not explicit in the report. The colleges mentioned are:

- Knowsley Community College
- Barking College
- Northumberland College
- Thurrock College
- Hackney Community College
- Joseph Chamberlain College.

24 While the Inspectorate Reports identified many examples of good practice and, by implication, less effective practice, they provided no analysis of the precise contribution that each practice, either alone, or in combination, has had upon retention, achievement or progression rates amongst target groups for widening participation.

### **Chief Inspector's Annual Report 1999-2000**

25 The FEFC Chief Inspector's annual report for 1999-2000 provides a useful overview of recent progress within the sector on widening participation although, again, it does not provide any information on the precise impact of particular strategies for widening participation upon recruitment, retention, completion and achievement rates. It reported that:

- colleges were beginning to put in place more systematic, college-wide approaches to widening participation. While they were beginning to set targets for performance, these were usually related to the recruitment of

students, rather than their achievements, and were often not specific enough

- two-thirds of colleges inspected in 1999-2000 had strengths in widening participation. Well-managed strategies to deliver the college's commitment to widening participation were found in nearly one-third of colleges
- curriculum areas in which there have been significant contributions to widening participation in 1999-2000 include IT, agriculture, construction, hospitality and catering, health care and music, social sciences and education. However, it is not clear whether this statement is intended to mean that specific developments or practices to widen participation may be found in these curriculum areas or more simply that the largest increases in participation have been observed in these curriculum areas
- thorough monitoring of college performance in widening participation by colleges is unusual. It is rare for colleges to set appropriate targets and performance indicators and to use these to steer developments and monitor performance in widening participation.

26 Areas for improvement include:

- the quality of teaching and learning for new learners
- systematic support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- assessment of the quality of provision for those learners most at risk of leaving before they complete or fail exams
- inadequate analysis of local needs and market research
- under-developed curriculum pathways from community-based provision to other courses
- quality assurance arrangements that give little focus to widening participation or raising standards.

### **Evaluations of, and lessons learned from, recent policy initiatives**

27 Many of the conclusions on 'what works' and examples of practice that have been published post-Kennedy can be found in evaluation reports of a range of post-16 education policy initiatives concerned with targeting disadvantaged individuals or groups. These include evaluations of:

- the DfES Union Learning Fund
- the DfES Adult and Community Learning Fund

- the FEFC non-schedule 2 pilot projects
- the FEFC Kennedy strategic partnerships
- the DfES Information, Advice and Guidance services.

28 These reports are concerned with the evaluation of large-scale initiatives which have been implemented across a large number of learning providers or other bodies. Therefore, it is perhaps understandable that any quantitative evidence about the impact of the initiative tends to relate to the initiative as a whole, rather than to specific aspects of the initiative. Where there is more detailed analysis of the impact of aspects of each initiative, the evidence cited tends to be qualitative.

29 In some cases, where evaluations report good or effective practice, the examples cited are self-reported by project managers and are taken as given by the authors of the evaluations. This is evident in the first phase evaluation of the non-schedule 2 pilot projects. In this evaluation, there is little independent verification of whether the practices described have indeed had a positive impact upon participation, retention or progression, although there is an attempt to obtain some verification by comparing the views of project managers with student perspectives on the success of the project. The report does cite many instances of practices or facilities which were introduced by colleges in response to identified learner needs and the report demonstrates that the learners in question appear to have appreciated these developments. As responsiveness to learners' needs is generally agreed to be a characteristic of good practice, such attempts to develop facilities may be regarded as being examples of positive practice.

30 The methodological difficulties associated with self-reporting were recognised by the evaluators of the second phase who were specifically charged by the FEFC with identifying examples of good practice. They noted that the design of the evaluation did not allow them to bring an independent judgement to bear upon whether aspects of practice were indeed good. As such, they recommended that practice identified should be regarded as 'emerging' rather than as 'good' practice.

31 Notwithstanding these issues, the reports do contain findings and conclusions which might be helpful to the Agency's current work on good practice in widening participation. Some of these are summarised below.

### ***Non-schedule 2 pilot projects***<sup>5</sup>

32 The evaluation of the non-schedule 2 pilots concludes that the projects had been successful in attracting individuals and groups targeted.

33 There are useful 'negative' outcomes from non-schedule 2 projects which may be translated into lessons learned – eg: the extent to which project staff underestimated the amount of time required for engaging new learners through

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Non-schedule 2' refers to funding allocated by the Further Education Funding Council (now the LSC) for the purpose of reaching and engaging 'non traditional' learners. Following the introduction of the LSC, the distinction between schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 funding has been abolished.

outreach work; the difficulty of finding suitable staff; and the need for appropriate staff training and development.

34 The report observed that potentially effective practices were not happening. These included monitoring learning and achievement and developing common quality standards across partnerships. While the report noted that some of these practices might not have been established because of a lack of time since the setting up of the projects, this observation might also indicate the extent to which they were not regarded as priority activities.

35 The report identifies factors 'essential' to the success of the projects, such as: student relationships with their tutor; staff skills in outreach and community work; strong relationships between the FE college and other partner education providers; and the opportunity to deliver and design programmes outwith the constraints of FEFC-funding linked to schedule 2.

### ***Adult and Community Learning Fund***

36 The evaluation report of the Adult and Community Learning Fund contains a section on what was effective in recruiting new learners to the project. It also provides a useful perspective on why well-established practices in widening participation amongst disadvantaged groups have not spread across educational institutions as rapidly as they might have. It observes that:

- Government policies were not consistent in encouraging providers to engage with the hard-to-reach so that many professionals had no incentive other than their own values and aspirations to engage in demanding and resource-intensive work. Any widening participation initiatives were, as a result, fragmented and dependent on ephemeral funding streams
- the transformation of the supply side in the 1980s and 1990s meant that colleges became the major deliverer of further education for adults, overtaking local authorities. This may have resulted in discontinuities in traditions and approaches.

37 On the basis of empirical evidence from field visits, the evaluation describes six practices that it believes were essential to the effective engagement, retention and achievement of adult and community learners. These are similar to the Kennedy characteristics in terms of the emphasis upon outreach and identifying learners' needs, but extend them in terms of the importance of group work, the role of inspiration and the role of informal learning. They are:

- person-to-person direct recruitment
- the role of inspiration and example in encouraging diffident and uncertain learners
- building the curriculum on the basis of learners' needs
- flexible and adaptive teaching practices

- accreditation and assessment that appeared achievable and manageable to learners
- learning by stealth so that learning appeared incidental to the ostensible aims of the activity
- building group cohesion to support learner confidence and motivation.

### ***Union Learning Fund evaluation***

38 The evaluation of the Union Learning Fund described in DfES research report 282 draws out similar practices from a union perspective. On the basis of empirical research drawn from field visits to projects, it recommends that, in seeking to build capacity to support employees in becoming learners, unions should:

- base activities on the needs of members within a sector
- develop 'agents for change' that facilitate access to learning
- make linkages with wider union objectives and engage other union members
- develop union policy on lifelong learning
- clarify roles and responsibilities across union structures
- strengthen and extend partnerships
- share good practice and build skills and expertise
- evaluate and communicate success to others.

### ***Local Adult Information, Advice and Guidance Service evaluation***

39 Chapter 4 of the evaluation of the recently established Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) pathfinder partnerships offers conclusions on the impact and outcomes of the partnerships. There is little information on practices that were particularly effective in referring on learners to colleges or in identifying needs, but there are general conclusions about the value of the partnerships in improving the level of information on clients amongst partner organisations and in improving the awareness of partner organisations about the extent of learning opportunities available within the local area. The creation of the partnerships appears to have led, in some areas, to a more planned approach being taken to identifying and meeting the needs of adults in the local area. This suggests that active involvement by a college in a lifelong learning partnership and the involvement of IAG providers within that partnership might be helpful to overall efforts to widen participation.

## ***Kennedy Strategic Partnerships***

40 Veronica McGivney's summary of the experience of the Kennedy strategic partnership in Oxfordshire provides a useful list of effective practices and lessons, including:

- the need for a multi-agency approach to widening participation
- that collaboration with other partners is essential to obtain the wide range of skills and resources necessary for success
- the importance of collective approaches to widening participation: individuals appear to feel less vulnerable in groups than on their own and more motivated when they are with people they already know or work with
- the benefits of segmenting target groups to ensure that planned approaches are appropriate to specific types of needs.

## ***More general evaluation of efforts by the FE sector to widen participation***

41 A key omission from the literature appears to be that, since the publication of the Kennedy Report, there has been no attempt so far to identify what the precise impact upon participation, retention and achievement rates has been of specific practices or strategies adopted by colleges. While the FEFC has, each year, prepared detailed statistical evidence reporting on progress made with widening participation, quantitative evidence of improvement has not been correlated with qualitative evidence on college activities. A recent report by JM Consulting on the *Costs of Disadvantage* also picks up on this point and recommends that the Agency might consider pursuing a longitudinal study of activities, costs and outcomes of practices designed to widen participation. The findings of this literature review support JM Consulting's recommendation. Without such work, the continuing relevance of the Kennedy recommendations remains more a confident hypothesis than a tested fact.

## **Reports on issues relating to widening participation**

42 Further conclusions about 'what works' are found in a range of work by the Agency on aspects of college provision and quality improvement, including reports on:

- community profiling to improve college responsiveness
- differential achievement in colleges with high widening participation factors
- widening participation on inner city estates.

## ***Community Profiling***

43 This LSDA report by Adjei Barwuah and Ian McCallum examines the scope for community profiling to help colleges compare the characteristics of a college's

student population against those of its catchment area and provides advice on how colleges might improve recruitment amongst target groups of individuals, including current non-learners.

44 Profiling appears a useful tool for colleges wishing to improve their marketing strategies. As part of its work on widening participation, the Agency might consider investigating the extent to which profiling activities are pursued by colleges.

### ***Student Persistence and Drop-out in Further Education***

45 This LSDA report by Paul Martinez and Felicity Munday, entitled *9000 Voices*, demonstrates that student retention can be influenced significantly by factors that colleges can influence. It provides some useful practical suggestions for colleges on how to deal with a number of problems that learners or staff might experience in relation to participation in, and drop-out from, learning. The suggestions are not described in the report as being a comprehensive list of good practice; rather they are described as possible ways forward on problems that students might present and, as such, might be helpfully incorporated into any future practical guidance that the LSDA might prepare for colleges on the challenges of widening participation. The report suggests, for example:

- developing ‘buddy schemes’ and ‘keeping in contact strategies’ where there are problems of student withdrawals between application and enrolment
- peer support, coaching and mentoring, where a student has problems settling into a course
- initial development of study skills and early review and action planning where a student appears to have early difficulties with course work.

### ***Differential achievement in colleges with high widening participation factors***

46 This report by Peter Davies and Terry Rudden, entitled *Differential Achievement: What can we tell from the ISR?* and a follow-up report, entitled *Closing the Achievement Gap: Colleges Making a Difference*, both conclude that relative differences in ISR profiles are only able to explain a minority of the inter-institutional differences in rates of retention and achievement amongst colleges with high widening participation factors. The achievement rates of the lowest achieving colleges are below average primarily because they are lower across the large majority of ISR categories, not because their student profiles differ in ways to reduce overall achievement rates – though that is the case to some extent. In drawing these conclusions, they echo the finding of Martinez and Munday that colleges are able to influence the retention and achievement of students, including those who do not usually participate in learning, to a significant extent. Of all reports reviewed, *Closing the Achievement Gap* comes closest to confidently linking improvements in achievement to particular approaches or strategies. For example, it notes that the following combination of factors seemed to characterise colleges with higher levels of achievement, or the most notable sustained improvements:

- the centrality of student achievement within the mission of the college, coupled with a widespread awareness of this across the staff
- a belief among the majority of staff that interventions at college-level could make a difference, and that students were not pre-destined for low achievement because of their backgrounds
- a general commitment to quality assurance and improvement across course teams and individual teaching staff, as well as at managerial level.

47 These findings are important as they point to cultural issues about the influence of the values and beliefs of staff on the effectiveness of the college in widening participation. The potential importance of cultural issues does not come across strongly in the Kennedy criteria and might be added as an issue for investigation by the Agency in its work on widening participation.

### ***Widening Participation on Inner City Estates***

48 This report by Adjei Barwuah and Margaret Andrews, published in 1999, offers a number of recommendations on how colleges might improve their responsiveness to disadvantaged people in poor urban areas, many of which overlap with the recommendations of the Kennedy Report, *Learning Works*. There are several potentially valuable recommendations which go beyond those of Kennedy, including:

- the importance of not assuming that anyone can teach learners who have traditionally been excluded from post-16 education provision. Staff development and training are required, as well as monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning
- the importance of ensuring that, where programmes are accredited, the accreditation is recognised by employers and external education institutions
- the importance of making sure that programmes for learners provided on an outreach basis are mainstream and attract enough core funding to ensure consistency and quality
- the benefits of using local role models from under-represented groups to provide advice, wherever possible.

### **Good practice initiatives**

49 Through the FEFC Standards Fund, colleges exhibiting good practice, or at least with something to share, have been allocated FEFC funds to disseminate good practice to other colleges. It is not clear how this practice has been identified as being particularly useful or good practice, other than through self-identification by colleges. It is likely that college inspection information has been used as part of the selection process. Colleges that intend to disseminate practice on widening participation as part of the activities for which they are being funded, are:



- Liverpool Community College
- Doncaster College
- Knowsley Community College
- Loreto College
- Luton Sixth Form College
- Lewisham College
- Park Lane College
- St Charles Catholic Sixth Form College.

## **Annex 1**

### **Areas in which slow or little progress has been made at national and college level with widening participation since 1996-97**

#### **At national level**

- Setting targets for participation from under-represented groups
- A national credit framework with a unit-led system for recognising achievement
- Establishing a national entitlement for all learners up to level 3
- A national framework for measuring value added to students' achievements in FE
- Levelling out the geographic differences affecting the chances of further education reaching disadvantaged students

#### **At college level**

- Ensuring that teaching for new learners is universally of good quality
- Providing appropriate learning support and tutorial support, on a systematic basis, for part-time students and those in community-based provision
- Establishing systematic arrangements for learning pathways and accredited learning support
- Establishing mechanisms for recording students' broader achievements
- Ensuring that under-represented groups succeed in their studies
- Ensuring that educational and careers guidance is routinely available to students, including part-time students and those in community-based provision
- Establishing criteria for widening participation as central features of quality assurance and self-assessment
- Monitoring retention, achievement and progression rates in terms of students' individual needs and previous educational background
- Developing strategies to address persistent patterns of under-achievement among students from particular backgrounds
- Establishing rigorous methods of measuring and reporting on progress in widening participation to senior managers and governors.

## Annex 2

### References

Department for Education and Skills, *Evaluation of the Union Learning Fund*, DfES Research Report 282, 2001

Department for Education and Skills, *An Evaluation of the Adult and Community Learning Fund*, DfES Research Report 284, 2001

Department for Education and Skills, *Evaluation of Local Adult Information Advice and Guidance Services*, DfES Research Report 241, 2001

Department for Education and Skills, *Adult and Community Learning: A Literature Review*, DfES Research Report 262, 2001

Department for Education and Skills, *Assembling the Fragments: A Review of Research on Adult Basic Skills*, DfES Research Report 220, 2000

Further Education Funding Council, *Learning Works: the Report of the FEFC's Widening Participation Committee*, 1997

Further Education Funding Council, *How to Widen Participation: A Guide to Good Practice*, 1997

Further Education Funding Council, *Widening Participation in Further Education: Statistical Evidence 1996-97*, 1997

Further Education Funding Council, *Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Colleges' Case Studies*, FEFC, 2000

Further Education Funding Council, *Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Report from the Inspectorate*, FEFC, 2000

Further Education Funding Council, *Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Contributions made by the FEFC-funded Strategic Partnerships*, FEFC, 2000

Further Education Funding Council, *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief Inspectors' Annual Report*, FEFC, 2000

JM Consulting, *The Costs of Disadvantage: Report by JM Consulting for the LSDA*, 2001

Learning and Skills Council, *Benchmarking Data 1999-2000*, 2001

Learning and Skills Council, *Performance Indicators 1999-2000*, 2001

Learning and Skills Council, *Widening Participation: Statistical Update*, LSC, 2001

LSDA, *Differential Achievement: What does the ISR profile tell us?* P Davies and T Rudden, 2000

LSDA, *Closing the Achievement Gap: Colleges Making a Difference*, P Davies, 2001

LSDA (FEDA), *9000 Voices: Student Persistence and Drop-out in Further Education*, P Martinez and F Munday, FEDA, 1998

LSDA (FEDA), *Community Profiling to Improve Responsiveness*, A Barwuah and I McCallum, 1999

LSDA/Institute for Employment Studies, *Attracting New Learners: A Literature Review*, J Hillage and J Ashton, 2001

LSDA, *Stimulating Demand for Learning: An Ideas Paper on Attracting New Learners*, U Howard, 2001

LSDA, *Back on track: successful learning provision for disadvantaged young people: Summary report and recommendations*, S Taylor, LSDA, 2000

NIACE/LSDA, *An evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects, 1999-2000*, M Greenwood, A Merton, S Taylor, 2000

NIACE, LSDA, *You mean it's OK to ask...? The evaluation of non-schedule 2 pilot projects, 2000-2001*, M Greenwood and A Merton, 2001

NIACE, *Working with Excluded Groups*, V McGivney, 2000

NIACE, *Excluded Men: Men who are missing from Education and Training*, V McGivney, 1999