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CIRCULAR

**THE
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**ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
SECRETARY OF STATE ON
STUDENTS WITH LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES AND/OR
DISABILITIES**

Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

To

Principals of colleges
Heads of external institutions
Heads of higher education
institutions receiving Council funds
Chief education officers
Principals of specialist colleges
outside the sector

Circular type

Information

Summary

Annual report to the secretary of
state

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Enquiries:
Lindy Syson
Education and institutions
01203 863006

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ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND/OR DISABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

1 This report fulfils the Council's duty under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* to produce an annual report to the secretary of state on:

- a. the progress made during the year to which the report relates in the provision of further education for disabled students in its area; and
- b. its plans for the future provision of further education for disabled students in its area.

2 The report covers the Council's 1996-97 financial year.

BACKGROUND

Council's Legal Responsibilities

3 The Council's legal responsibilities towards students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities derive from the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* (the Act). Sections 2 and 3 of the Act require the Council to secure facilities for further education which are sufficient and adequate for the population of its locality, namely England. This should be done in a way which avoids disproportionate expenditure and makes the most effective use of the Council's resources.

4 Section 4 of the Act requires the Council to secure provision at a specialist establishment outside the sector where provision in the sector is not adequate to meet an individual student's needs.

COUNCIL'S FULFILMENT OF ITS DUTIES

5 In September 1993, the Council established the learning difficulties and/or disabilities committee with a remit to review the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and provide advice on how it should best fulfil its duties under the Act. The committee, chaired by Professor John Tomlinson, published its report, *Inclusive Learning*, in September 1996. The Tomlinson committee's emerging conclusions and the recommendations of the final report have been widely disseminated, have informed the Council's

approach to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities throughout 1996-97 and have set an agenda for action for the Council and colleges.

6 The committee's main findings were:

- opportunities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in further education have increased in recent years, largely as a result of the efforts of colleges and the arrangements put in place by the Council and the new sector
- using prevailing standards, the Council is discharging its statutory duties to ensure sufficient and adequate facilities for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and to 'have regard' to their requirements.

7 The committee also found that, overall, in comparison with their peers:

- opportunities for these students are of poorer quality, evidenced in particular by the higher number of low inspection grades awarded for this provision and by the views of the students
- some groups of learners are not yet fully represented in further education. Evidence suggests gaps in provision for adults with mental health difficulties; those with profound and multiple learning difficulties; and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

8 The Tomlinson report also set out a new approach to the delivery of further education for all students which it called 'inclusive learning'. This approach involves achieving the best match between individual learners' requirements and the provision made for them. The 'inclusive learning' approach requires colleges to create an appropriate learning environment by gaining an understanding of how its students best learn and then adapting its provision to match their learning requirements.

9 At its meeting of 19 September 1996, the Council agreed to commend the report and its approach to learning to colleges and to consult on the specific recommendations. The consultation began in January 1997, with the publication of Council Circular 97/05.

10 The Council received over 400 responses to its consultation. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the recommendations. At its meeting of

15 May 1997, the Council agreed to implement 30 out of a total of 60 recommendations in 1997-98 and consider further 30 others, which required development work before the Council could reach a view. The results of the consultation were published in July 1997 in Council Circular 97/24. A steering group was established with representatives from the further education sector and national organisations to take forward work on the outstanding recommendations.

11 The steering group has four subgroups:

- the specialist colleges working group
- the careers service working group
- the local authorities working group
- the qualifications working group.

12 Annex A summarises progress on the implementation of the recommendations contained in *Inclusive Learning*.

13 One of the recommendations of the Tomlinson committee was for a major sector-wide staff development programme, the Quality Initiative, designed to improve the management and quality of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The report recommended that the Council provide funds for a centrally co-ordinated programme of staff development and training to be provided over three years, supported by a consortium of interested bodies, but centrally managed. Funding of £1 million for the first stage of the initiative was agreed by the Council. The first phase, to develop training materials and activities for the initiative, began in October 1997 and is due to be completed in August 1998.

14 The report also recommended that the Council should commission additional guidance to those involved in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Council published, on behalf of the committee, three other reports during 1996-97:

- *Duties and Powers* (TSO, October 1996) – sets out the law governing the provision of further education to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- *Mapping Provision* (TSO, January 1997) – provides estimates of the level and nature of participation by people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in further education

- *Student Voices* (Skill, March 1996) – sets out the findings of a series of student workshops.

PROVISION IN SECTOR COLLEGES

15 Many colleges are taking steps towards becoming inclusive and are reviewing the match between the students' requirements and the style of provision made for them. Some have reviewed discrete provision and others have redesigned courses to better match the needs of a wide variety of learners and to make more effective use of learning support. As a consequence of colleges adopting these approaches, there is a diminution in the use of the terms 'mainstream' and 'discrete'.

Funding Methodology

16 The Council allocates funds to colleges to reflect the extra costs which arise in supporting individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The funding arrangements recognise the cost involved in providing, for instance, additional teaching, interpreting or personal care. The Council increased the maximum value of its additional support bands in 1996-97, in line with an early recommendation of the Tomlinson committee. Colleges' claims for funds for additional support continue to be externally audited.

17 To ensure that colleges continue to provide for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the Council has continued the policy of making it a condition of funding for each college that it endeavours to enrol at least the same number and proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as in the previous year.

18 The Council also adopted, for 1996-97, funding guidance developed by the Tomlinson committee designed to tie additional support funding more closely to individual assessments and students' learning objectives. About 130,000 students received additional support in 1996-97.

19 In the light of the recommendations in *Inclusive Learning*, the number and value of additional support bands has been further increased for 1997-98. The cost of depreciation charges for special equipment has also been recognised, and colleges which are claiming additional support will be required to secure the signature of the student concerned to ensure that students are fully involved in the assessment process.

Strategic Planning

20 The Council's strategic planning framework for the sector requires colleges to analyse local needs. Colleges are asked to take explicit account of the educational needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

21 In November 1996, the Council asked colleges to prepare a three-year strategic plan for the period 1997 to 2000. This was the second full plan to be produced by colleges covering all elements of the planning framework. Colleges were again asked to give particular consideration to the needs of people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to indicate whether they had identified any needs which they could not meet. In March 1997, the Council published for colleges *Identifying and Addressing Needs: A practical guide*. Section 4 of the guidance gives detailed advice on planning for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

22 The Council will include an analysis of college plans for the period 1997 to 2000 in its second annual report to the secretary of state in the autumn of 1998.

Student Numbers and Data Collection

23 There are currently no comprehensive annual data which identify the extent of participation in further education by people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, nor the extent to which colleges are able to make appropriate provision. The Council's individual student record (ISR) currently collects information on the numbers of students who inform the college that they are registered disabled in 1996-97.

24 A special survey which has mapped provision in the sector on behalf of the Council's widening participation committee and the Tomlinson committee showed that the Council funded approximately 126,000 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in sector colleges in 1995. Current estimates from the ISR and claims for additional support funding units show that about 130,000 students benefited from additional support through the funding methodology in 1996-97.

25 The Council amended the ISR from November 1997 so that it will identify:

- students who indicate that they have learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- students assessed as requiring additional support to meet their learning difficulty and/or disability.

26 The Tomlinson committee also recommended that the Council's regional committees should monitor the sufficiency and adequacy of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in each region. The Council is currently considering how information from the ISR and college strategic plans could aid this process.

Quality of Provision in Sector Colleges

27 The Council's inspection framework was published in Circular 93/28. The inspection framework covers the responsiveness and range of college provision, as well as the quality of teaching and learning. Where the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities exceeds 5 per cent of the total college population, a grade may be awarded. From September 1997 the Council has revised its approach to inspecting colleges. Greater emphasis is placed on the college's responsibility for monitoring and improving the quality of its work. Before it is inspected, each college will have to draw up a report on its strengths and weaknesses. This includes provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspection will be of a lighter touch and the number of curriculum areas inspected reduced. It is anticipated that grades for provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will reduce from over 100 to approximately 35 a year. Inspection reports are likely to comment on the positive steps taken by colleges to become more inclusive.

28 In 1996-97, 54 colleges received a grade for the quality of their work with students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. One college received a grade 1, 31 colleges received grade 2, 15 colleges received grade 3, four colleges received grade 4 and one college a grade 5. The grade descriptors are contained at annex B. Colleges which receive a grade 4 or 5 cannot increase student numbers until they have been reinspected and awarded a grade 3 or above.

29 The outcome of inspection shows that provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly effective where different agencies work together to support students from the time they are in school to the time they leave college,

particularly where support is offered during subsequent employment. Provision is most successful where there is involvement of knowledgeable senior college managers who ensure that the curriculum is well organised and the quality rigorously assured, in common with all other curriculum areas.

30 Many teachers of specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supportive of their students, but frequently their students are insufficiently challenged and therefore do not reach their full potential. Students with learning difficulties are often enrolled on programmes which offer few opportunities for them to progress in their studies to qualifications within the national framework of academic and vocational qualifications. Nationally, the best provision is for students with sensory impairments; the weakest is for students with severe learning difficulties.

31 In December 1996, the Council's inspectorate published a good practice report, *Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities*. The report is designed to contribute to the continuing process of improving the quality of provision.

32 The Tomlinson committee recommended that the Council provide training for inspectors on inclusive learning and participation. This programme began in September 1997. The committee also recommended that the inspectorate should examine how best to deliver joint inspection with other agencies responsible for the quality of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Accommodation Strategy

33 The Council, with the assistance of the government office South East, conducted an access survey of 10 colleges in the South East region in March 1997. That survey showed that the cost of improving access for people with mobility difficulties to an acceptable standard was about £350,000 for each college, which equates to about £155 million across the sector. This confirms an independent estimate, made in 1994 and based on a sample of 500 college buildings, that the cost of providing full disabled access might be about £155 million. This estimate was based on the provision of 1,700 new lifts, 1,600 upgraded lifts, 1,500 new and 1,500 upgraded toilets with access for disabled people and 2,500 ramps in the 5,000 buildings in the sector.

34 Each college is required to address the issue of improving disabled access as part of its accommodation strategy. A precise figure for the area in sector buildings which is accessible to disabled students is not yet available. From a sample survey of 500 buildings, about 42 per cent of the buildings are single storey. All recently constructed buildings have full disabled access, because it is a requirement of section M of the *Buildings Regulations*. However, many colleges have older, larger buildings, approached by a flight of steps, which are inaccessible to wheelchair-users. The Council will consult shortly with the sector on the best way of estimating the area currently accessible to wheelchair-users, and on how the monitoring of improved access is best conducted.

Disability Statements

35 The *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* places a duty on the Council to require colleges in the sector, as a condition of funding, to publish disability statements. The timing and content of disability statements has to conform to regulations which were agreed by parliament in July 1996. The regulations require that colleges should have produced their first statement by December 1996 and in subsequent years by 1 October. Regulations list the minimum information to be contained in colleges' disability statements, although colleges may publish additional information if they wish.

36 The Council had received a copy of each college's first disability statement by January 1997. The statements were analysed in the light of advice from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). All of the statements comply with the legislation and therefore meet the Council's conditions of funding for 1996-97. A more detailed analysis of the statements is under way. The DfEE has advised that statements can be 'signposting' documents which refer to other college publications. The Council is currently receiving copies of colleges' second statements which were produced by 1 October 1997.

37 The Council will continue to work with Skill, FEDA and others to help colleges improve the quality of their disability statements.

PROVISION MADE OUTSIDE THE SECTOR

38 Under section 4 of the Act, the Council has a duty to secure placements for students at specialist residential colleges where adequate facilities are not available at a college in the sector.

39 In January 1997, the Council reissued its booklet for students and their parents which describes the Council's duties and responsibilities towards students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The booklet focuses on arrangements for students at both sector and specialist colleges.

Placement Decisions

40 The administrative arrangements by which the Council determines individual placements are based on an agreement reached in 1993 with the local authority associations. This formal agreement sets out the respective roles of the Council and the local authorities. The agreement is republished each year as an annex to the Council's annual circular on arrangements for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Circular 96/01 set out the Council's arrangements which applied in the 1996-97 teaching year.

41 The agreement reached with the local authority associations provides for local authorities to assess student needs against published criteria and make a recommendation to the Council to fund a student placement, where the proposed placement falls within the Council's legal duties and published criteria.

42 The Council received 1,524 recommendations for placement in the 1996-97 college year. A total of 1,267 were agreed, 80 not agreed and 177 withdrawn. Total expenditure by the Council in the 1996-97 financial year on securing placements in specialist colleges is £36 million for 2,062 students. This figure is made up of 1,267 new students for whom recommendations were agreed and 795 students already placed and where the Council is continuing to fund their placement.

43 In 1996-97, the Council met its administrative target of taking 90 per cent of decisions within six weeks of receiving a recommendation where all the required information is supplied. Unfortunately, around 60 per cent of recommendations are incomplete and require substantial work by Council staff before a decision can be made.

44 In 1996-97, 80 recommendations for student placements were not agreed. All such students are invited to ask the Council to review its original decision and can subsequently seek a review by an appeals panel. Two students, in 1996-97, requested that the Council's appeals panel consider the Council's decision. The appeals panel upheld the

Council's decision in the case of one student; for the second student, the appeals panel recommended that the decision be reviewed and the Council subsequently agreed to fund the placement.

45 The Council funded placements at 89 specialist colleges in 1996-97. These colleges vary considerably in size from those catering for under five students to those with over 100. Not all the students at these colleges are funded by the Council and the ratio of Council-funded students to students funded from other sources varies considerably. Some students are jointly funded by their local authority.

46 The Council has set up a joint working group with the specialist colleges. The group discusses a range of issues such as the funding and quality of provision at the specialist colleges. The outcome of discussions will inform the Council's proposed arrangements for placements to specialist colleges in 1998-99.

47 The Council is currently undertaking a review of its internal arrangements for considering placement recommendations. The review will be completed by the end of February 1998. It will include an assessment of the Council's procedures in light of its statutory duties and an identification of the appropriate roles of the Council and other agencies in the placement process.

Interpretation of Schedule 2(j)

48 The Council was involved in a judicial review in 1996-97 over its interpretation of schedule 2(j) to the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. Courses falling within schedule 2(j) are those for independent living and communication which prepare students for entry to courses under schedule 2(d) to 2(g). The Council took the view that it had no power to fund the placement of a 19 year-old student because his development was at such an early stage that no course could be said to prepare him for entry to one of the courses within schedule 2(d) to 2(g).

49 The court confirmed that the Council was entitled to consider the student's individual circumstances when deciding whether any given course was likely to prepare them for entry to another course within schedule 2.

New Establishments Procedure

50 In 1996-97, the Council had in place a procedure for considering whether or not it would fund placements at establishments not previously in receipt of Council funds. The procedure for considering establishments which were new to the Council involved analysing a detailed questionnaire completed by the establishment. The Council has continued to develop these procedures. For 1997-98 onwards, all new establishments are visited by the Council's inspectorate and a report produced which provides professional expert advice on the suitability of placement before a decision is made by the Council.

Fee Levels for Council-funded Provision

51 The Tomlinson committee recommended that the Council continue the process of converging fees for specialist colleges. The Council had already begun, in 1996-97, to require specialist colleges charging fees above the median for colleges making a similar range of provision to amend their fees.

52 The joint working group, whilst agreeing in principle with the policy of convergence, advised the Council to commission an independent consultancy to investigate the relative costs of providing for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This project began in autumn 1997 and will report in the spring of 1998 to inform the Council's fee negotiations for the teaching year 1998-99. In the interim, in 1997-98, the Council has allocated a flat fee increase of 1.5 per cent to all specialist colleges. This compares to efficiency gains of 3.5 per cent required of sector colleges.

Capital Grant Scheme

53 In August 1996, the Council invited bids for the second round of the capital grant scheme. The operation of this scheme had been transferred from the DfEE to the Council in 1994. As for the first round of the scheme, specialist colleges were invited to apply for grants to support projects which addressed immediate health and safety problems; improving physical access to buildings and the security of equipment.

54 Applications were received from 16 colleges in respect of 29 projects estimated to cost £933,105. The applications were considered against published criteria and grants totalling £364,994 were awarded to 14 of the colleges. This funding covers the

1996-97 and 1997-98 teaching years. The Council intends to review the scheme before further proposals are invited.

Quality of Provision in Specialist Residential Colleges

55 Provision funded by the Council at each specialist college providing for Council-funded students outside the sector was inspected by the end of the 1996-97 teaching year. Following an inspection visit, and on the basis of the inspection report, specialist colleges are required to forward action plans to the Council and to respond to issues raised in the visit. In the 1996-97 reporting year, 19 colleges were inspected. Seven of these were reinspections because the college provision had previously received a grade 4 or 5. Three colleges were reinspected on more than one occasion because no significant improvement was observed.

56 Most students in specialist colleges receive good education and training. Strengths have outweighed weaknesses in 44 per cent of specialist residential colleges inspected over the last four years. This provision caters for 76 per cent of students funded by the Council in specialist colleges. Although almost a third of establishments inspected have weaknesses which outweigh their strengths, they cater for just 10 per cent of those students funded by the Council. Those establishments not meeting the educational needs of students are reinspected, some more than once.

57 In the better provision, teaching is based on detailed and effective initial assessment. Clear objectives are set within individual learning programmes. Teaching methods are appropriate. Assessment is continuous and individual performance targets for students are set and met. Students' work is appropriate so that they achieve their primary learning goal, success in examinations or formal assessments. Students' achievements are recognised and celebrated. Some students progress to further education courses, higher education and employment.

58 In the specialist colleges with the higher grades, teachers successfully use the experience of residential life as a vehicle to promote effective interpersonal skills and skills for everyday living. However, in the weaker establishments there is a lack of a framework for learning and little curriculum leadership. Staff lack appropriate

specialist knowledge of teaching strategies and do not understand how learning difficulties or disabilities impact on learning. Students do not follow programmes tailored to their individual needs and teaching often emphasises the completion of tasks at the expense of learning. The range of qualifications offered to students is narrow and performance in internal assessments is poor.

59 Specialist colleges were notified in 1995 that the Council would formally review its willingness to fund students at a specialist college where the provision funded by the Council is judged to have weaknesses which outweigh the strengths. The Council accordingly informed colleges in April 1997 that it would not consider new placements at colleges with poor inspection grades until the provision had been reinspected against an agreed action plan and was judged to have achieved at least a grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses. Since the beginning of the inspection cycle in 1993, 19 per cent of specialist colleges have been judged to have more weaknesses than strengths. There are 14 colleges that have not yet achieved a significant enough improvement and where new recommendations are not currently being considered.

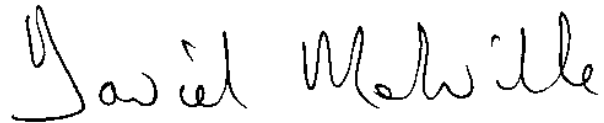
60 The Tomlinson committee recommended that the Council should establish a list of specialist colleges at which it is prepared to fund provision. The Council has interpreted this to mean colleges which have gained a grade 3, with satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses. The Council's annual circular will in future list those colleges which have achieved a grade 3 on inspection of their Council-funded provision.

61 The Council began a new cycle of inspections in September 1997 and aims to inspect the provision it funds at all the specialist colleges using its new inspection framework by 2001.

62 The Tomlinson committee also recommended that the Council should contract only with colleges that have policies and procedures in place for the protection of students. This has been adopted by the Council as a requirement from September 1997. The Council also proposes to include in its contract with specialist residential colleges a requirement that students are allowed access to careers education.

CONCLUSION

63 The Council is committed to its duty to have regard for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and to improving the quality, responsiveness and value for money of provision for these students.



PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS IN *INCLUSIVE LEARNING*

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Council decision</i>
The Council should consider inviting colleges to share in the duty to have regard to the need of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.	Further development 1997-98
Colleges to adopt a new, practical guide for conducting needs analysis to inform their strategic planning, currently being developed in partnership with the widening participation committee.	Implemented
Colleges to be required to explain in their strategic plan where their student population does not reflect the local population.	Implemented
The Council should establish subcommittees of its regional committees to review the sufficiency and adequacy of facilities by monitoring these students' participation in further education.	Further development 1997-98
ISR to (a) replace existing registration field with a new field to count students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whether or not they require additional support; (b) introduce a new field to count students who have been assessed as requiring additional support, whether or not it is funded by the Council; and (c) retain the current field recording students receiving additional support funded by Council. The Council should also produce broader guidance about the fields.	Implemented
Regional subcommittees should invite bids for start-up funding from colleges in collaboration with other agencies as necessary where a shortfall in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is evidenced.	Further development 1997-98
Regional subcommittees should support the development of local transition groups to enable effective transition from school to college.	Further development 1997-98
The Council should include information on the effectiveness of these strategies in its annual report to the secretary of state.	Further development 1997-98
All Council inspectors should be briefed on the concept of 'inclusive learning'.	To be implemented 1997-98
Inspection grades to be awarded based on the extent to which colleges provide learning and participation which are inclusive and which benefits all students.	Further development 1997-98
Publish college inspection grades for 'inclusive learning'.	Further development 1997-98
Retain a separate grade for provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities where it constitutes 5 per cent or more of the college's provision.	Further development 1997-98
As part of the preparation for inspection, require colleges to include in their self-assessment report, reference to the development of 'inclusive learning' for all students.	Further development 1997-98
Secure systematic joint working with other inspectorates (for example the social services inspectorate) responsible for assuring the quality of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in further education.	To be implemented 1997-98
Provide training for inspectors in delivering joint inspections with other agencies.	To be implemented 1997-98

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Council decision</i>
Expect colleges to develop quality assurance arrangements to monitor 'inclusive learning'; expect colleges to report on the outcomes of these quality assurance arrangements in their self-assessment reports.	Further development 1997-98
Expect colleges to ensure that students receive support to take part in quality assurance activities.	Further development 1997-98
Inspection reports on provision funded at specialist colleges to be published.	Further development 1997-98
Ensure that colleges have systems to protect vulnerable students, for example staff vetting procedures.	To be implemented 1997-98
Contract only with those colleges which have an effective complaints procedure for students.	To be implemented 1997-98
Council to contract only with colleges registered under the <i>Registered Homes Act 1994</i> .	Further development 1997-98
Maximise the extent to which learning is inclusive.	Further development 1997-98
Maximise the rate of change by which the sector is able to offer inclusive learning, consistent with realistic but demanding expectations on colleges.	Further development 1997-98
Operate the funding methodology for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the same way as for other students.	Further development 1997-98
Retain the additional support bands of the methodology.	Implemented
Introduce more additional support bands above the value of the top band.	Implemented
Allow costs of enabling equipment, learning technology and minor adaptations for individuals to be included within additional support bands.	Implemented
Retain both the college's responsibility to plan its provision and allocate funds and an allocation methodology which is based on students' individual requirements.	Further development 1997-98
Work with colleges to derive a clear statement about the level of support available to all students in every college before the threshold for additional support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is reached.	To be implemented 1997-98
Require students and colleges to agree formally to additional support form.	Implemented
Allocate new funds to the entry component of the learning programme to enable the proper assessment of students' requirements.	Further development 1997-98
Publish an accessible guide to the funding methodology designed for students, parents and those who work with them.	Further development 1997-98
Continue to fund individual students at specialist colleges where necessary.	To be implemented 1997-98
Allow regional subcommittees to recommend start-up funding for new provision in the sector where evidence of shortfall is demonstrated and when this can be done more cost effectively than by placement at a specialist college.	Further development 1997-98
Require sector colleges to assess whether they can match the student's requirements before agreeing a placement at a specialist college.	To be implemented 1997-98

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Council decision</i>
Allow the first term at a specialist college to contribute to a detailed assessment of a student's requirements.	To be implemented 1997-98
Promote funding arrangements that enable and encourage collaboration between specialist and sector colleges.	To be implemented 1997-98
Continue the policy of convergence between fees for comparable provision at specialist colleges.	To be implemented 1997-98
Develop an approved list of specialist colleges which make high-quality provision and give better value for money.	To be implemented 1997-98
Commission a survey of the accessibility of college buildings for students with learning difficulties and disabilities.	Further development 1997-98
Commission a survey of the technical support used to enable students to learn effectively.	Further development 1997-98
Publish a good practice guide on the basis of the accessibility and technical support surveys.	Further development 1997-98
Include the likely costings of individual equipment, enabling technology and accessibility in its recommendations for funding to the secretary of state.	Further development 1997-98
Seek to have the list of courses under schedule 2 amended to include specific courses which provide progression opportunities in life skills for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties.	To be implemented 1997-98
Take a wider view of progression within the wording of schedule 2(j) to enable students to acquire new skills at the same level as their current course or maintain skills already learned where this represents an achievement for them.	Further development 1997-98
Conduct a review of programmes for students with learning difficulties and disabilities offered under schedule 2 after these recommendations have been implemented.	Further development
Investigate the costs of external specialist support purchased by colleges on a national basis with a view to identifying quality standards and reasonable levels of charges.	To be implemented 1997-98
Ensure that regional technology centres are funded for the development and support of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.	Further development
Strengthen the external audit of additional support funds and promote collaboration between external auditors and the Council's inspectorate in order to ensure effective use of these funds.	To be implemented 1997-98
Meet with the Department of Social Security (DSS) and the Department of Health (DoH) at the highest level to explore the scope for co-operation and simplification in the allocation of funds, to ensure that funding opportunities for students are maximised and double funding minimised.	To be implemented 1997-98
Negotiate an agreement with the DSS and specialist colleges about the appropriate role of student benefit payments in meeting the costs of residential provision.	To be implemented 1997-98

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Council decision</i>
Seek to have transferred to it funds currently allocated by LEAs in discretionary awards and transport to further education students, or, in the short term pending such a transfer, to help colleges and LEAs negotiate management agreements whereby the college manages the funds nominally allocated by the LEA.	Further development 1997-98
Explore with the government the establishment of a single post-16 funding agency.	Further development 1997-98
Encourage the development of an enhanced national record of achievement to be used as evidence of students' progression within schedule 2(j)	Further development 1997-98
Support the development of a pre-foundation award entitled Skills for Adult Life which is made available within the national qualifications framework and incorporated into general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation level core skills.	Further development 1997-98
Encourage the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), the Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority (SCAA) and others to review the assessment requirement for written tests at GNVQ foundation and level 1 and consider the development of alternative, rigorous and more flexible approaches to assessment.	Further development 1997-98
Consider whether its funding methodology could do more to encourage colleges to offer units of accreditation by ensuring that colleges which offer them are not disadvantaged financially.	Further development 1997-98
Ensure that awarding and examination bodies are better informed about the Council's funding arrangements for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.	To be implemented 1997-98
Encourage these bodies to find a common language to describe students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their assessment requirements.	To be implemented 1997-98
Encourage examining and awarding bodies to allow centres greater freedom to make individual arrangements for students.	To be implemented 1997-98
Promote a joint departmental circular setting out the powers and duties of education, social service and health bodies in relation to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, identifying any gaps.	To be implemented 1997-98
Work with other agencies to provide information for students, parents and advocates based on the circular.	To be implemented 1997-98
Encourage colleges to promote local transition groups to plan transition to college for individual students.	To be implemented 1997-98
Develop and test the idea of a named person in college responsible for co-ordinating a further education plan for each student which draws together aspects of an individual's learning whilst in further education.	To be implemented 1997-98
Work with colleges and others to develop a further education plan using the existing learning agreement as a starting point.	Further development 1997-98
Develop a code of practice for its use.	Further development 1997-98

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Council decision</i>
Consider with training and enterprise councils (TECs) and voluntary organisations how to fund college-based support for students moving on to employment.	To be implemented 1997-98
Work with the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), local education authorities and representatives of the careers service to ensure that the careers service contracts meet the needs of colleges and students.	Implemented
Work with the DfEE, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), the Further Education Staff Development Forum, universities, institutes of higher education, awarding bodies, college and professional associations and others to establish a central co-ordinating and advisory body for accredited teacher education concerning students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.	Further development 1997-98
Provide funds for a centrally co-ordinated programme of staff development to be provided over three years, supported by a consortium of interested bodies but centrally managed. The programme would have objectives that are linked directly to the committee's recommendations on learning and learning environments, assessment, collaboration, support for learning, organisation and management.	Initial implementation and further development 1997-98
Make available funds for a period of three years in order to assist colleges to implement the committee's recommendations.	Further development 1997-98

GRADE DESCRIPTORS

The procedures for assessing quality are set out in the Council Circular 93/28. During their inspection, inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the reports. They also use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – provision which has many strengths and very few weaknesses
- grade 2 – provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – provision with a balance of strengths and weaknesses
- grade 4 – provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – provision which has many weaknesses and very few strengths.

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