

---

24 April 1998

---

# CIRCULAR

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

---

**MAIN FINDINGS OF THE GOOD  
PRACTICE GUIDE ON  
MARKETING**

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  
Heads of careers services  
Chief executives of training and  
enterprise councils

---

Circular type

Information

---

Summary

Sets out the main findings of the  
NAO report on marketing in  
further education colleges which  
were included in *Strategies to  
Achieve and Manage Growth* and  
summarises the NAO/FEDA  
publication *Marketing: A good  
practice guide*

---

Reference number: 98/11

---

Enquiries:  
Emily Thrane  
Regional director, North West  
0161 877 2905

---

98/11

---

# MAIN FINDINGS OF THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE ON MARKETING

## INTRODUCTION

1 This circular sets out the main findings of the National Audit Office (NAO) on marketing in further education (FE) colleges which were included in *Further Education Colleges in England: Strategies to achieve and manage growth*, and summarises the findings of *Marketing: A good practice guide*. The guide was commissioned in association with the NAO, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and with the support of the Further Education Funding Council for Wales (FEFCW).

## BACKGROUND

2 The Council has invited the NAO to take part in value-for-money studies in the sector, with the aim of publishing good practice guides for some of the key activities undertaken by colleges. The first subjects to be addressed were estate management, procurement, and facilities management. *Estate Management in Further Education Colleges: A good practice guide* was distributed to colleges under the cover of 96/04. *Procurement: A good practice guide* was published and circulated in June 1997 and *Effective Facilities Management: A good practice guide* was circulated under cover of 97/34.

3 As part of its second study of the sector, the NAO undertook a study of marketing in further education colleges which was published in October 1997 as part 5 of *Further Education Colleges in England: Strategies to achieve and manage growth*. To complement this study, the Council, NAO and DfEE, with the support of the FEFCW jointly commissioned an independent investigation into marketing in FE colleges. The exercise was designed to identify examples of effective marketing practice supporting colleges' efforts to improve student recruitment, retention and achievement.

4 Following a competitive tender, KPMG Management Consulting and the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) were appointed to undertake the work.

5 FEDA and KPMG consultants visited 15 colleges; using audit techniques they researched key issues in interviews with a cross-section of college

staff. The fieldwork was carried out during October and November. The colleges included in the survey were grouped in the North East, North West, East Midlands and South East regions of England with the addition of one college in Wales.

6 Background material from the 15 colleges was supplemented where appropriate by examples from other institutions known to the project team. The guide also drew on evidence from the NAO study of marketing in the further education sector.

## MAIN FINDINGS

7 The main findings of the NAO study were:

- in terms of student recruitment, well-targeted and effective marketing can be as important as high-quality teaching
- colleges are involved in imaginative and successful promotional activity although there are big difference in the amounts colleges spend on marketing for each student varying between 1 and 3 per cent of total expenditure. There has been little attempt to target marketing expenditure to priority areas identified in strategic planning and the cost effectiveness of individual marketing activities is rarely evaluated
- colleges need to:
  - give marketing a strategic focus
  - ensure there is good co-ordination between marketing teams and senior staff involved in strategic planning and curriculum management
  - target promotional activities at particular groups and markets
  - monitor the results and evaluate the cost effectiveness of individual promotional activities.

8 The main conclusions of the KPMG–FEDA study were that:

- changes in the focus of colleges' funding from broad and rapid growth to growth in specific areas has meant that marketing and particularly targeted marketing is increasingly important to colleges
- marketing should be part of a 'whole-college' strategic planning process
- marketing should target specific segments of the community and appropriate

---

approaches should be developed for each segment. An assessment of market share and trends will help colleges to direct their strategies more effectively

- curriculum development should be part of a college marketing plan and a cost benefit analysis of any proposals to create or withdraw courses should be undertaken
- a successful marketing strategy will include efficient and effective communication with key customers. Messages and materials should be designed and targeted for particular audiences and established contacts should be fostered and maintained
- college marketing strategies, budgets and teams vary across the sector but there is no single effective format. College staff involved in marketing are increasingly being recruited for their specialist marketing background
- colleges with effective marketing strategies devote considerable attention to curriculum review, customer care, quality assurance and student services; many have a particular commitment to market research.

## **GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE**

9 The accompanying guide recommends procedures and practices which address the findings of the NAO study and the conclusions of the KPMG-FEDA study. The guide is commended to all concerned with marketing in colleges. Each chapter of the guide contains free-standing guidance on particular study areas and includes a checklist which is intended to assist colleges in their planning processes.

10 The guide is not meant to be prescriptive and recommends an approach to marketing to assist colleges. A summary of the main issues discussed in the good practice guide is attached as the annex to this circular.

11 Two copies of the guide are being sent with this circular to each sector college. Additional copies may be obtained from The Stationery Office, price £14.95.



## SUMMARY OF MARKETING: A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

### WHAT IS MARKETING?

1 Marketing is defined as ‘the management function for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements at a profit. In further education, marketing can be interpreted as the means by which college senior managers use a sustained and thorough knowledge of present and future markets to ensure that strategic planning addresses the education and training needs of customers cost effectively.’

### WHY IS MARKETING IMPORTANT TO FURTHER EDUCATION?

2 Changes in the focus of colleges’ funding from broad and rapid growth to growth in specific areas has meant that marketing and particularly targeted marketing is increasingly important to colleges. A college needs to ensure a balance between its curriculum and its customer and business needs; since its marketing strategy should be consistent with its mission, the strategy should aim to be responsive and to stimulate demand.

### A STRATEGIC VIEW OF MARKETING

3 The marketing plan should inform the college strategic plan and be an integral part of the strategic planning process contributing to the college’s objectives and business viability. Together, the marketing and strategic plans spell out what people in the college will do to fulfil the college’s mission.

4 The marketing plan should be tailored to the college’s mission. There will be some elements such as overall aims and strategic analysis which will be common to a college’s marketing and strategic plans. A marketing plan should include:

- statement of corporate aims and values
- situation analysis of the external environment and the college’s capabilities
- specific marketing objectives
- adjustments to the marketing strategy to meet these objectives
- action programme
- evaluation and review.

### MARKET RESEARCH AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

5 Market research is carried out in order to:

- forecast demand
- identify market wants, needs, opportunities and attitudes
- evaluate provision and performance.

6 A college will need to undertake market research in order to plan its marketing strategy. Colleges should work with partners in local communities to share research and information on local markets. An integrated college marketing management information system will include:

- information from the market
- marketing records
- statistical models
- primary research
- secondary research.

### HOW TO TARGET A MARKETING STRATEGY

7 Market segmentation is the process of dividing the overall potential market. These segments will comprise different potential targets, each of which will show certain characteristics. The purpose of segmentation is to co-ordinate a college’s provision with its customers’ requirements.

8 A degree of specific segmentation is necessary if a college is to respond to the various customer groups in the markets it intends to serve. Colleges should be aware that ‘broad brush’ marketing may lead to individuals being treated uniformly and thereby being discouraged from taking up a learning programme. Appropriate marketing approaches should be designed for each segment of the market.

9 Measuring the share of sections of the market other than school-leavers may not be straightforward but will ultimately be valuable to a college’s strategy. Similarly, trends in market share over time are as important as the precise nature of the share and both will help to indicate where a college should target its resources.

### CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

10 The links between curriculum, quality and customer satisfaction are fundamental to the success of a college’s marketing strategy.

11 Co-operative and constructive relations between curriculum teams and marketing staff are essential and a cost benefit analysis of any proposal to introduce or withdraw a course should be undertaken.

12 Some colleges have developed systems of self-assessment which enable them to examine the curriculum and its delivery and support services with colleagues, students and external stakeholders. This approach forms the basis of the Council's approach to inspection from 1997-98 and will be the foundation for the development of accreditation.

### **SELLING, PUBLICITY AND CUSTOMER RELATIONS**

13 Colleges need to be both systematic and innovative in their selling techniques placing an emphasis on strategies which will be the most effective in retaining customers over time. Wherever possible, this should be achieved by working in partnership with customers.

14 Selling activities should be supported by efficient communication with the markets which a college aims to serve. Compared with school sixth forms and universities, further education colleges generally have to work harder to communicate their message.

15 The approach to selling in the colleges should be made explicit in a plan on which guidance should be provided for all staff. Sales communications should focus on the benefits and outcomes of education and training; they should be:

- sustained
- appealing
- targeted.

16 Relationship marketing which builds on, fosters and maintains established contacts is key to a college's marketing strategy. Of particular importance are:

- media relations
- liaison with schools
- involvement in the community
- liaison with employers.

### **ORGANISING, PLANNING AND RESOURCING**

17 The organisational and administrative systems which characterise marketing in colleges, including the types and levels of staff employed and the budget allocated to marketing in colleges vary considerably, although there is no single organisational structure that guarantees an effective marketing approach. Marketing success is usually connected with the employment of marketing personnel who are chosen for their expertise in understanding customers.

### **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

18 Systems of planning, monitoring and evaluation which help to ensure value for money in promotion are characterised by:

- testing materials
- analysing audience research data
- monitoring the effectiveness of provision
- analysing trends.

### **CONCLUSION**

19 Colleges need to apply the principles of good marketing practice. Strategic plans should include a clear and coherent view of marketing which will support the college strategic plan and help the college to achieve its objectives. Approaches should be targeted to separate customer groups and should be able to forecast demand, contribute to a quality assurance system and inform curriculum development. A strong corporate identity communicated to all staff will contribute to an effective marketing strategy.

Published by the  
Further Education Funding Council  
April 1998