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THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

CIRCULAR

ILT Implementation Plan

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To

Principals of colleges

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Information

Summary

Outlines the implementation plan for information and learning technology (ILT) development within the sector from 1999 to 2002

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99/45

ILT Implementation Plan

Introduction

1   This circular introduces the Council's response to the recommendations of the Council's further education information learning technology committee (FEILTC) which form the implementation plan for the sector ILT development strategy.

Background

2   In May 1999, the sector responded overwhelmingly and positively to Council Circular 99/18 *Networking Lifelong Learning: An ILT development strategy for FE.* Informed by the response from the sector, FEILTC recommended to the Council in June 1999 a high-level action plan to take the ILT development strategy forward. That plan was endorsed and two implementation task groups were set up with a remit to make detailed implementation proposals:

- the infrastructure task group, chaired by Fred McCrindle, principal of Reading College, considered local and national networking and hardware issues
- the support task group, chaired by John Taylor, principal of Park Lane College, Leeds, considered learning materials, staff development and management and governance issues.

Progress

3   Both task groups met through July, August and September and made their recommendations to FEILTC in late September, which were endorsed. The detailed recommendations are contained in the FEILT committee's implementation plan, *Networking Lifelong Learning: Making It Happen.* This can be seen on the Council's website www.fefc.ac.uk. The implementation plan has now been formally approved by the Council.

Main Recommendations

4   The implementation plan recommends:

- the establishment of the National Learning Network (NLN)
- the development of appropriate local learning networks and college systems
- the development of specifications for managed learning environments
- the provision of development opportunities for staff to ensure competence and confidence in the use of ILT
- substantial investment in the creation and exploitation of ILT learning materials
- a further review of the tariff for ILT modes of learning
- each college to have in place a documented ILT strategy.

College ILT strategies

5   College ILT strategies have a key role in determining the state of readiness for further investment in ILT in an individual college. They are therefore an essential prerequisite for the successful deployment of ILT in students' learning programmes. The Council is working with the British Educational Communications and Technology agency (BECTa) and the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) to provide colleges with guidance and examples of good practice. The BECTa website at *http://ferl.becta.org.uk* provides a model ILT strategy to support this aim. For certain aspects of the implementation plan, the Council will require evidence of a sound ILT strategy for the college to qualify for funding.

The National Learning Network

6   The committee recommends the establishment of the NLN, centrally procured on behalf of the sector through JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee) by UKERNA (United Kingdom Education and Research Networking Association). This network is to be established by March 2001 and will connect together FE colleges and higher education institutions with links to the National Grid for Learning (NGfL). Links to the University for Industry (UfI) and the public library network could follow later.

7   The Council will fund a standard connection for every college of 2 megabits per second. Colleges which are already connected to JANET at or above this threshold will be eligible for similar funding. It will be open to such colleges to use any savings in this area to improve their connectivity.

8   Nine regional support centres funded by the Council will provide technical support to colleges. These support centres will be based in colleges and/or universities. Invitations to apply for hosting these centres will be issued shortly. Joint bids from colleges and universities will be especially welcome.

9   A list of colleges and proposed connection dates will be issued shortly. The priorities for connection are based on those colleges without 2 megabit connections but with robust local area networks (LANs). This allows for approximately 90 colleges to be connected by March 2000, with a further 150 colleges by September 2000 and the remainder by March 2001. The Council recognises that a number of successful local networking consortia have emerged in recent years. The implementation of the NLN will build upon those established partnerships.

Network services

10   FEFC will shortly become a full funding partner of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) alongside the other FE and HE funding bodies of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. JISC is charged with providing services to the further education, higher education and research council communities. The services include:

- information - bibliographic, data and film networking (managed by UKERNA) software and data-sets research activities.

11   The Council and JISC will collaborate in the management and development of network services and content for the NLN. The English FE sector will have a minimum of two representatives on JISC and on each of the following JISC subcommittees:

- Joint Committee on Integrated Environments for Learners (JCIEL)
- Joint Committee for Networking (JCN)
- Joint Committee for Authenticity and Security (JCAS)
- Joint Committee on Electronic Information (JCEI)
- Joint Committee on Awareness Liaison and Training (JCALT).

12   FE representatives will be nominated from FEILTC and leading practitioners within the sector. A report on JISC activities will be a standard agenda item for FEILTC meetings to provide feedback to the Council. The sector will be kept informed by regular postings to the Council's website.

Local learning infrastructure

13   The committee recommends the allocation of funds during 1999-2000 to improve the quality of LANs in all colleges. The Council is currently identifying the means by which approximately £13,500 may be allocated to each sector college in December 1999. The funding available for this purpose is £5.8 million in this financial year, £3.8 million for 2000-01 and £19.4 million for 2001-02. As this year's sum is relatively modest, and all colleges are continually updating their local networking infrastructures, the Council considers that an even distribution of funds is more appropriate than a weighted distribution. (This should not be seen as a precedent. Later funding arrangements will take into account individual college sizes and needs.) Colleges will be required to report how this money has improved the quality of their LAN. Further information concerning the release of these funds and the required reporting method will be issued shortly.

Management Issues

14   The committee recommends that the Council considers changes to the funding methodology so that the full benefits of flexibility of study are made available to students, whatever their mode of learning. The Council has already established a subgroup of the tariff advisory committee (TAC) to review the funding of distributed and open distance learning. Once this work is complete the Council will ask the subgroup to review the funding for other forms of electronic learning activities.

15   The committee recommends early detailed research into managed learning environments with the aim that a specification and open standards for these environments be developed for the sector. In order to facilitate authentication and the tracking of individual learning, the committee recommends that research be undertaken concerning student tracking and unique identifiers for students. The Council has approved funding for these activities and has asked the FEILTC to give them early priority in the implementation plan.

Learning Materials

16 The committee recommends an audit of sector ILT materials which may be worthy of licensing but also to identify gaps in provision for possible future development. A budget of £5.7 million over three years for commissioning new ILT materials that are deemed likely to receive volume use throughout the sector has been set aside by the Council.

17 A pedagogically based ILT materials development initiative at college level is considered to be an essential element to engage college staff and to secure valuable college-based ILT learning resources. The Council has approved a budget of £3 million for 2000–02 for this purpose.

Staff Development

18 To make best use of ILT for learning, teaching staff need to be competent and confident in using the technology. The committee therefore recommends that Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) works with colleges and sector organisations to develop standards for ILT use in both curriculum and business practice for implementation by September 2000. It is envisaged that there will be a single coherent structure for continuing professional development, within which ILT skills are embedded.

19 An immediate start is required on a programme for the initial training of ILT champions who will be responsible for the cascading of ILT awareness and skills to staff within each college.

20 The Council will work closely with the UfI to develop and deliver an on-line learning programme for core IT/ICT skills for staff to deliver the agreed ILT programmes.

21 The Council recognises that there are skill shortages in colleges within existing IT technicians. £0.8 million over two years has been earmarked for the purchase of vendor-specific training for technical staff, particularly in the area of networking support skills.

Evaluation

22 In order to evaluate the benefits of the £74 million over the development period, all colleges will be asked annually to provide quantitative information on ILT investments. This additional funding provided by the government is essentially for capital spending. Colleges are asked to ensure that any such capital expenditure is separately identifiable, as the Council will be requesting this information on an annual basis, to meet DfEE and Treasury requirements. Detailed guidance will be issued later.

23 More in-depth qualitative information will be sought from a sample of 50 representative colleges to identify the benefits of using ILT in a learning environment. The purposes of the evaluation are to:

- supply evidence that the £74 million is being spent efficiently and effectively
- demonstrate how this and other investment in ILT is changing teaching and learning in FE
- provide firm, clear evidence of changes for both teachers and learners.

24 The DfEE requires that all new ILT funding achieves additional benefits for students and teachers and does not substitute for existing expenditure. Where central funds will in future pay for ILT activity which is currently paid for directly by the college, there is a need to demonstrate that these ILT 'savings' are being applied elsewhere within the college's ILT budget. There will be instances in the allocation of local funds where it will be necessary for colleges to demonstrate that matched funding has been provided.

Expenditure summary

25   Table 1 shows the planned expenditure in each of the financial years from 1999 to 2002.

Table 1. Proposed expenditure (£ millions)

	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	Total
National Learning Network	5.1	10.5	13.0	28.6
Local learning infrastructure	5.8	3.5	19.4	28.7
Learning management	0.5	2.4	4.0	6.9
Learning materials	0.3	3.0	5.6	8.9
Technician/champion training	0.3	0.6	0.0	0.9
Totals	**12.0**	**20.0**	**42.0**	**74.0**

Further Information

26   As the Council decides upon the details of other parts of the implementation strategy, that information will be communicated to colleges by letter or circular as appropriate, as well as being posted to the Council's website.