

# *Targets for our Future*

**Response from the Further  
Education Funding Council**

**June 1998**

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**THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL**

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# TARGETS FOR OUR FUTURE: RESPONSE FROM THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

## INTRODUCTION

1 The Council warmly welcomes the government's consultation on the national targets. It believes that achieving the national targets will help bring about lifelong learning by raising standards of achievement, widening participation and by helping to fulfil the government's Investors in Young People (IiYP) initiative.

2 The Council strongly supports the criteria set out in paragraph 8 of the consultation document, that the targets should be:

- clear and memorable
- widely owned
- focused on goals which people identify and which they support
- readily measurable – at national level and below
- stretching but realistic; and
- supported by credible and coherent strategies and action plans.

3 In *Inclusive Learning* (the Tomlinson report) and *Learning Works* (the Kennedy report), the Council expressed its support for an inclusive education and training system, including everyone who is willing and able to benefit. The Council supports the government's proposal to develop targets that seek to promote basic literacy and numeracy as well as encouraging attainment at higher levels for those who have already achieved.

4 The Council makes the following proposals for new national targets:

### For adults

For those who are currently engaged in post-compulsory education:

- an increase in the proportion of adults achieving level 3 qualifications
- an increase in the proportion of adults achieving level 4 and 5 qualifications.

For those who have left post-compulsory education:

- a reduction in the length of time between adults leaving school and achieving a level 3 qualification; and
- a reduction in the proportion of adults not participating in any form of learning.

### For young people post-16

For those who are currently engaged in post-compulsory education:

- an increase in the number of 16–24 year olds attaining a level 3 qualification.

For those who have left post-compulsory education:

- a reduction in the length of time between leaving school and achieving a level 3 qualification; and
- a decrease in the rate of non-participation in education for 16–24 year olds.

### For young people at 16

- an increase in the proportion of 16 year olds reaching level 2; and
- for those in the IiYP target group, an increase in the proportion achieving a recognised qualification (but not necessarily GCSE-related).

## A TARGET FOR ADULTS

5 Continued national economic prosperity will depend upon a greater proportion of the population acquiring skills at a higher level. As a consequence, the need for lower level skills is declining. The national targets should promote the attainment of qualifications at the levels and in the volumes reflected by the future 'skills profile'.

6 The Council believes that individuals should be educated to be generally employable, rather than to undertake specific employment. The Kennedy report argued that obtaining level 3 qualifications creates a 'platform for lifelong learning'. (Level 3 is equivalent to NVQ level 3, GNVQ advanced level or two GCE A levels). The attainment of a level 3 qualification by as many adults as possible should form the main dimension of the adult target.

7 Adult learning aspirations should not end with the achievement of a level 3 qualification. Many individuals who do not currently participate in higher education have the ability to do so. The government might include in its target for adults an

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element which promotes the wider attainment of level 4 and 5 qualifications (where levels 4 and 5 are equivalent to NVQ levels 4 and 5, HNCs/HNDs and degrees and postgraduate qualifications).

8 For those who have left post-compulsory education and have not since returned, a separate set of objectives will be required within the adult target. One objective might be to reduce the level of non-participation in any form of education, so reflecting the government's desire to improve attainment amongst those with low levels of educational achievement. Another objective for this group of adults might be to reduce the length of time between adults leaving school and achieving a level 3 qualification. This would indicate the success with which adults are being attracted into post-compulsory education.

9 Including these objectives would encourage local education and training providers to work together to measure local rates of participation. Different data collection systems between providers (and lack of data sharing) mean that it is not currently possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of participation locally.

10 Therefore, the target for adults might have a number of dimensions. For those who are currently engaged in post-compulsory education:

- an increase in the proportion of adults achieving level 3 qualifications
- an increase in the proportion of adults achieving level 4 and 5 qualifications.

For those who have left post-compulsory education:

- a reduction in the length of time between adults leaving school and achieving a level 3 qualification; and
- a reduction in the proportion of adults not participating in any form of learning.

#### **A TARGET AT POST-16**

11 The Council agrees that the creation of age-related targets is sensible within the context of lifelong learning. This proposal complements the creation of an age 11 target for schools. Targets at age 11, 16 and post-16, set at appropriate levels for each age group, will form helpful intermediate points against which to measure progress towards the achievement of the main dimension of the adult target; the attainment of a level 3 qualification by an increased proportion of the adult population.

12 The Council supports a target covering the 16–24 age group, which links to the age range for the New Deal for Young People programme. Like the target for adults, this target should be multi-dimensional.

13 It should promote higher attainment amongst those with previous educational achievements. The Council is of the view that individuals in this age group should also be aiming to reach a level 3 qualification, given the strong arguments that, as a 'platform for learning', these qualifications will underpin lifelong learning. For those who have left post-compulsory education, it should promote a more rapid attainment of post-compulsory qualifications after leaving school and wider participation in education for those with low levels of previous achievement, as a proxy for measuring improved literacy and numeracy.

14 Therefore, the target for 16–24 year olds might also have a number of dimensions. For those who are currently engaged in post-compulsory education:

- an increase in the proportion of 16–24 year olds attaining a level 3 qualification.

For those who have left post-compulsory education:

- a reduction in the length of time between leaving school and achieving a level 3 qualification; and
- a decrease in the rate of non-participation in education for 16–24 year olds.

#### **A TARGET AT 16**

15 Wider attainment of level 3 qualifications is unlikely to occur unless basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well founded in school-age children. Effective action will need to be taken to improve literacy and numeracy skills within the 11–16 year cohort. The target at 16 should support this impetus by promoting higher attainment amongst those who are pursuing GCSE qualifications as well as those who will be the target group for the government's IiYP initiative.

16 For the age 16 group, therefore, the Council favours a target with the following dimensions:

- an increase in the proportion of 16 year olds reaching level 2; and
  - for those in the IiYP target group, an increase in the proportion achieving a recognised qualification (but not necessarily GCSE-related).
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## KEY SKILLS

17 Key skills will be important in supporting the move to lifelong learning. We welcome the idea of a key skills target as a means of prioritising this keystone of lifelong learning. Achieving a key skills target will be a significant indicator of the success of government policies and initiatives, such as the University for Industry. The Council supports the notion of a key skills target at, at least, levels 1 to 3.

18 However, it is crucial that the targets are both realistic and achievable. At present, it is too early to establish appropriate targets because:

- the incorporation of key skills at levels 1 to 3 is not universal in the post-16 curriculum
- the content of key skills development programmes has yet to be consolidated with other studies and programmes; and
- the methods of assessment and certification are still developmental.

19 Therefore, the government should publish an intention to establish a national target now, in order to encourage commitment to the idea, but it should not define the target until further curriculum development and piloting has taken place. This may not occur until 1999-2000.

## A TARGET FOR EMPLOYERS

20 The Council supports the extension of the Investors in People standard to smaller businesses. It will be important that the target for employers encompasses the training needs of the whole workforce and that employers take account of the development needs of part-time and temporary workers as well as full-time employees. So that progress in achieving the target may be measured meaningfully, all work-related training should be accredited against recognised qualifications.

21 Employers will have an important role to play in improving the skill levels of the overall population. They might usefully be encouraged to improve the skill levels of their employees above and beyond that required by employers' business plans. Employers might encourage as many of their employees as possible to reach a level 3 qualification, so contributing to the 'platform for lifelong learning'. This is likely to require encouragement by the government, possibly including financial incentives for employers.

22 One way of encouraging employers to improve continuously the levels of achievement within the workforces and to encourage individuals to participate in lifelong learning would be to encourage employers to use individual learning accounts to fund training.

## PRESENTATION OF THE TARGETS

23 When the revised targets are launched, the Council suggests that a clear statement for each of the targets should be drawn up, stating which sectors (that is, providers) are responsible for contributing to the achievement of each target. Since the FE sector has a widely acknowledged role as the majority provider at post-16; the only comprehensive platform for lifelong learning; and the core of the nation's education and training strategy, the Council believes that the further education sector should be a major partner in setting, achieving and keeping under review the targets.

24 The Council would also strongly support a description of:

- how each of the targets will be measured and from what data sources
- the headline national target and any additional local level monitoring which will be required, for example to improve the participation or achievement rate by sex or ethnic group; and
- where the responsibility for meeting a target falls to several sectors, for example post-16 achievements in school sixth forms and FE colleges, it would be helpful to show the current contribution of each sector towards the target and the expected contribution of each sector to meeting the new target.

## ACHIEVEMENT OF THE TARGETS

### The Target-setting and Implementation Process

25 The targets must be relevant to each of the organisations that will work towards their achievement. The providers of education and training – schools, colleges and higher education institutions – deliver programmes of study that differ greatly in level and type. Each organisation must be able to pursue a target which is appropriate to their aims, but must also be able to see how their individual target contributes to the achievement of the wider national targets.

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26 There would be considerable benefit in establishing subnational targets. Subnational targets should reflect the needs of particular sectors and localities and might most appropriately be set at a subregional or regional level. Skill levels differ throughout the UK and localities will have differing abilities to achieve the overall national targets. The subnational targets should encompass the notion of 'distance-travelled', so that targets are clearly linked to the process of improvement. This will allow individual organisations to develop local targets and strategies that fit with their circumstances and present skill levels.

### **The Role of Government**

27 The Council supports the government's stated intention to take a leading role in promoting and monitoring progress towards the targets. The government should ensure that clear action plans and strategies are developed by all of those associated with achieving the targets. Further education colleges will be key players in the action-planning process since they are in the unique position of having the capacity to deliver provision on the scale required to achieve the targets. Whatever vehicle is used locally to monitor progress and implement the targets, no one sector should dominate, and all sectors should be represented.

28 The government should also consider ways of assisting individuals to take up appropriate education opportunities and of encouraging employers to invest in training for their employees. Incentives for individuals might include state or employer contributions to individual learning accounts and tax credits for part-time learners. It is important that any new system of student financial support for further education provides adequate support to learners pursuing qualifications contained within the national targets.

### **The Council's Role**

29 The Council's inspectorate has, in conjunction with colleges, developed a new approach to quality assessment which places particular responsibility on providers to assess their own achievements. The government has indicated strongly that it wishes to create benchmark data for schools so that the achievements of similar establishments might be compared. The Council is in a strong strategic position with regard to the gathering and dissemination of information from and to colleges.

It intends to develop similar benchmarking information on the retention and achievement levels of colleges as one of a further range of quality improvement strategies.

30 The Council's regional committees are advised by subregional groupings on the adequacy and sufficiency of full-time provision. The groupings are being expanded to include LEAs, with plans to involve other organisations in future years such as careers services and college representatives, following the introduction of the further education collaboration fund. The regional committees are well placed to act as forums for the identification of local priorities and for the setting of appropriate sectoral or local targets in conjunction with the proposed regional development agencies.

31 Through its newly strengthened regional structure, the Council is also well placed to promote the achievement of action plans and strategies to achieve subregional targets through a range of mechanisms including quality assessment and the Council's funding methodology. The Council would be happy to discuss further with the DfEE how such a role might best be developed.

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