Widening Participation

and Raising Standards

Report from the Inspectorate

Contents

Introduction

1   In 1997, the Widening Participation Committee chaired by Helena Kennedy QC published its report, *Learning Works*. The report profoundly affected developments in further education. It defined widening participation as:

> *Access, achievement and progression for those groups often under-represented in further education.*

2   This definition has spurred colleges and other providers of further education to focus not merely on 'getting new students in' but also in making sure that they succeed in their studies.

3   Central objectives set by the secretary of state for further education also focus on students' achievement. The sector is charged with:

- widening participation and raising standards.

4   This report surveys the sector's work in widening participation and raising standards, summarising the progress made since 1997. It also identifies some of the good practice which exists within the sector.

5   Since the publication of *Learning Works*, much has been done, nationally, to encourage and support the sector's work in widening participation and raising standards. Key developments include:

- significant additional funding from the government for the sector to expand provision and widen participation
- the introduction of the standards fund to make improvements in under-performing colleges and to disseminate the good practice developed in effective colleges
- the establishment of accredited status for colleges with consistently high-quality provision
- the establishment of 54 strategic partnerships funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) to support widening participation strategies
- the national inclusive learning strategy aimed at reshaping the learning environment to ensure that further education provision matches each student's requirements
- the government's increasing emphasis on tackling social exclusion
- the recently published Moser report on basic skills, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A fresh start*, and the plans to extend and improve the quality of literacy and numeracy provision in England.

6   Those belonging to groups under-represented in further education or with low levels of completion and achievement after entering further education, have wide-ranging abilities and interests. The majority of them are confident and articulate, and those who become students often learn quickly and are successful in their studies. However, many may:

- not have enjoyed success in their previous education and see themselves as having 'failed'
- lack confidence in their ability to study
- be less attracted to the usual programmes of study which are offered
- only consider courses available in their immediate locality
- be relatively unmotivated compared with other students
- be more sceptical and quick to leave if approaches to education are not what they want
- need different teaching methods designed to meet their preferred styles of learning
- require support in developing literacy, numeracy and study skills
- be apprehensive about assessments and examinations
- alter their learning goals more frequently
- have pressing social and economic difficulties and require a range of practical support

Introduction

- need more structured help in progressing to advanced study or employment.

7 There is no typical 'widening participation student'. Provision in colleges[1] needs to be tailored to meet each student's needs.

This survey report is intended to be useful for:

- governors and managers in further education in helping them to review their strategies to widen participation and raise standards
- curriculum managers, teachers and other staff
- staff development managers
- other providers of further education
- others with an interest in further education.

To accompany this survey report, the inspectorate is also publishing:

- case studies of six colleges successfully involved in widening participation and raising standards
- a summary report on the FEFC-funded widening participation strategic partnerships, published on the FEFC's website
- materials to help colleges widen participation in different programme areas, in the 'Making a Difference' series.

[1]*The term 'college' is used generically in this report to cover the range of further education colleges and independent specialist institutions and external institutions.*

Summary of Progress made by the Sector since 1996-97

8   Inspectors measured the progress made by the sector against the baseline findings reported in *Learning Works* and in *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice* (FEFC, 1997) using inspection evidence and statistical information. Progress has been made.

Areas in which the most significant progress has been made in widening participation

9   Compared with the position in 1996-97:

Mission and strategic commitment

- the sector has clear strategic commitments to widen participation and, increasingly, to raise students' achievements
- colleges' mission statements give strong emphasis to widening participation
- more sixth form colleges and specialist colleges are now committed to widening participation
- mission commitments are more commonly underpinned by clear strategic objectives and operational plans designed to widen participation
- strategic planning is informed by more systematic market research on groups with low participation rates

Partnerships

- almost all colleges work closely in partnership with other providers of post-16 education, and a range of relevant agencies, to widen participation
- colleges, in partnership with other agencies, increasingly contribute to economic regeneration and tackling social exclusion

- the work of the 54 FEFC-funded strategic partnerships in collecting and sharing data with local agencies has made a significant impact on planning and developing provision to widen participation

Funding

- the additional funding for widening participation, allocated by the government and the FEFC in recognition of the extra costs involved, has been widely welcomed by the sector, though some colleges consider it does not go far enough

Management

- colleges have adopted a more systematic, college-wide approach to widening participation, thus helping to avoid the danger of piecemeal and short-term initiatives that are dependent on the enthusiasms of particular staff
- widening participation is being moved from the margins of colleges' activities to the mainstream
- more colleges have a designated senior manager with responsibility for widening participation

Setting targets and monitoring

- more colleges and partnerships are setting local targets for participation rates among disadvantaged groups, though these are not always precisely determined
- the FEFC, together with many colleges, monitors recruitment of students by deprived postcode area[2]

Governance

- more corporations have made knowledge of the local community a priority in recruiting governors

---

[2]*The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions is used by the FEFC to allocate additional funding to colleges for the number of students recruited from postcode districts with high levels of socio-economic deprivation.*

Curriculum

- colleges offer a wide range of courses designed specifically to meet the needs and interests of groups often under-represented in further education

- colleges increasingly offer courses at all levels of study to encourage participation and progression for students of all abilities

- there is more widespread use of information technology (IT) and open and distance learning to help widen participation

Support for students

- many colleges have increased their fee remission and hardship funds

Quality assurance and quality improvement

- colleges have developed a range of innovative strategies to tackle low levels of participation among some groups

- more colleges are developing strategies to improve retention and achievement

- some colleges exhibit all nine of the characteristics of good practice identified by the Committee on Widening Participation, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC, and set out in *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice*

- there is increased sharing of good practice in widening participation within individual colleges

Inspection

- the FEFC inspectorate routinely reports on widening participation as part of its inspection of colleges and other providers of further education, particularly where the self-assessment report indicates that widening participation is a priority for the institution.

Areas in which slow or little progress has been made

10   Compared with the position in 1996-97, little progress has been made in:

National level

- setting national targets for participation from under-represented groups

- developing a national credit framework with a unit-led system for recognising achievement

- establishing a national entitlement for all learners to study up to level 3

- establishing a national framework for measuring the value added to students' achievements in further education

- levelling out the geographic differences affecting the chances of further education reaching disadvantaged students

College level

- ensuring that teaching for new learners is of universally 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 appropriate 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 underachievement among students from particular backgrounds
- establishing rigorous methods for measuring and reporting on progress in widening participation to senior managers and governors.

Features of Effective Colleges

11 Inspectors identified a number of features common to colleges which are successfully widening participation:

Management

- clearly defined categories of disadvantaged and under-represented groups within the locality are separately identified in terms of:
  - recruitment (including recruitment to differing curriculum areas and levels of study)
  - attendance
  - retention
  - achievement
  - progression
- there are clear strategic objectives, operational plans and targets for widening participation and raising achievement
- there are relevant policies for widening participation and raising standards
- strong management and effective organisation ensure the successful implementation of strategies to widen participation across the college
- effective use is made of local population and labour market data to plan recruitment strategies and the programmes to be offered
- good use is made of individualised student record (ISR) data, collected for the FEFC, and other information about students in planning and reviewing courses
- a senior manager has overall responsibility for widening participation
- rigorous methods for measuring and reporting on progress in widening participation are established
- the effective dovetailing of external funding and FEFC funding ensures that the core business of widening participation has long-term support from core funding
- strong and extensive partnerships with other agencies help to widen participation in the college and the local area

Quality assurance

- there are robust quality assurance and self-assessment processes which effectively identify strengths and weaknesses in widening participation
- standards and targets are set for widening participation and performance is regularly measured against these
- rates of attendance, retention, achievement and progression are correlated with information on students' backgrounds and significant issues identified
- strategies and plans are drawn up to improve attendance, retention, achievement and progression for disadvantaged and under-represented groups
- students' views are collected and analysed according to their different backgrounds
- national research and good practice developed in other colleges are used to inform developments in widening participation
- research and development initiatives are mounted within the college to address issues relevant to widening participation; for example low achievement rates among certain minority ethnic groups

- staff development underpins strategic commitments to widen participation and leads to improvements

Governance

- the corporation systematically monitors performance in widening participation among the target groups identified by the college, in terms of:
  – recruitment
  – attendance
  – retention
  – achievement
  – progression
- it receives regular reports on widening participation and raising standards
- there is a 'link governor' for widening participation

Curriculum and teaching and learning

- there are clearly planned progression routes between entry level and levels 4 and 5 within the college and/or in the local area
- general further education colleges have a wide range of provision at each level of study including entry level and level 1
- the curriculum offer is reviewed and developed to meet the needs and interests of disadvantaged and under-represented groups
- different modes of study are offered that suit groups under-represented in further education; for example, 'taster' courses and short, intensive courses
- community-based provision is located in local areas with the highest levels of deprivation
- suitable accreditation is offered and non-accredited courses are available where appropriate
- teaching methods are carefully devised to meet the needs of disadvantaged and under-represented groups

- full-time and part-time students have individual learning plans and are regularly involved in reviewing them

Support

- there are comprehensive arrangements for initial assessment, which involve part-time and community-based students as well as full-time students
- initial assessments inform teaching, and appropriate learning support leads to improved retention and achievement rates for those receiving it
- there are effective and sensitively managed strategies to identify and support students most at risk of underachieving
- comprehensive tutorial arrangements routinely include part-time students and those in community-based provision
- there are good links with specialist agencies, such as those concerned with homeless people, which help to support disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

Preparation for progression

12   From the earliest stages of their study, there are systematic arrangements to help students from disadvantaged and under-represented groups prepare for progression to more advanced study or employment.

Which Groups are Under-represented in Further Education?

13   Most colleges analyse the profile of the students they recruit and compare this with local demographic data to identify groups which may be under-represented. Colleges have developed a less rigorous approach to identifying which groups of students are more likely to leave courses before completion or more likely to fail to achieve their learning goals.

14   Data published in *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice*, 1997, showed that compared with other students:

- adults in receipt of benefit have significantly higher withdrawal rates and lower achievement rates

- adults on courses in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) have higher withdrawal rates

- withdrawal rates are higher for some minority ethnic groups including black African and black Caribbean students and full-time students of Pakistani origin

- achievement rates are lower for black African and black Caribbean students and also for part-time Indian students

- full-time male students achieve less well than full-time female students.

15   ISR data, 1997-98, show that patterns of lower retention and underachievement among certain groups persist. These can be grouped by:

- **sex.** Retention rates for male students are slightly lower than for female students. Although the overall rates for achieving qualifications are similar for males and females, achievement rates for males are 5% lower on full-time courses

- **age.** Retention and pass rates for students aged 19 to 24 are about 3% lower than those for older students

- **level of study being undertaken.** Retention rates are lower on courses at lower levels. For example, among full-time students, pass rates at level 1 are 12% below those at level 3. One exception is in the construction programme area, where retention rates for level 1 are higher than at levels 2 and 3

- **coming from a deprived postcode area.** Retention rates are 3% lower for students from such areas when compared with other students. Pass rates are 5% lower overall (an improvement of 2% since

1995-96), but pass rates are 8% lower for full-time students (a decline of 1% since 1995-96)

- **being in receipt of benefit and entitled to fee remission.** As in 1995-96, retention rates for these students are 4% lower than for other students. Pass rates are 10% lower (a decline of 2% since 1995-96)

- **being in receipt of additional support.** Although retention rates are generally higher for students receiving additional support compared with students who do not, achievement rates are lower. There is a particular concern in the construction and engineering programme areas where retention rates for those in receipt of additional support are lower than those for other students. Achievement rates for full-time students in construction in receipt of additional support, at 28%, are significantly worse than the rates for full-time construction students not in receipt of such support

- **ethnicity.** All minority ethnic groups, except for those of Indian origin, have lower retention rates than other students. Black African, black Caribbean, black other and Bangladeshi students continue to have the lowest retention rates at 4% below other students. All minority ethnic groups have significantly lower pass rates than white students, ranging from 18% lower for black African students to 9% for Indian students. Pass rates for all minority ethnic groups have increased at a similar rate to all students, with the exception of black other students, for whom the achievement rate is 5% worse than in 1995-96.

Managing Strategies to Widen Participation and Raise Standards

Mission and strategic commitments to widen participation

16   It is unusual for a mission statement to refer explicitly to widening participation and raising standards. However, analysis of the sector's strategic plans for 1997 to 2000 shows that most of the further education sector shares a commitment to widen participation. Almost two-thirds of the mission statements in colleges, and just over two-thirds in external institutions, include widening participation either centrally:

> • 'to provide high-quality full-time and part-time learning for disadvantaged adults who have had little or no opportunity to pursue education or training since leaving school.... to further the development of their skills, competencies and educational achievements'

or more implicitly:

> • 'to extend the boundaries of the college into lives of people in their homes, their communities and their work places'
> • 'to strive to enhance the economic and cultural life of our communities by supporting lifelong learning'
> • 'lifelong learning and achievement for the whole community'.

17   About 10% of colleges and other providers of further education indicate no commitment to widening participation in their mission statements.

18   Approximately 75% of colleges and 80% of external institutions have strategic objectives clearly related to widening participation. Only 5% of colleges do not have such strategic objectives related to widening participation. About 20% of colleges, including a significant number of sixth form colleges, do not specify in their strategic plans what action will be taken to achieve the strategic objectives for widening participation. Almost all external institutions list the practical steps they intend to take.

19   In some colleges, well-considered strategic and operational planning ensures a systematic approach to widening participation across all aspects of provision. However, it is still common for colleges to make plans for widening participation only, or mainly in respect of basic education, community education and access to higher education programmes.

20   Some colleges identify common stages of development in strategies to widen participation that they use effectively to plan and develop provision across the college. For example, in relation to community-based provision:

• in local areas where rates of participation in further education are low, staff start by identifying the learning interests of some local groups

• short 'taster' courses in relevant subjects are offered in a community-based venue

• if the short courses are successful, longer courses are established

• similar 'taster' courses and longer courses are then offered in other local venues

• subsequently, courses at a higher level are offered in the community or at the main site to enable students to progress

• additional support is given to students to assist their transition to studying at the main site; for example, college guidance staff regularly visit community classes and students visit the main site

• reviews of community-based provision identify that certain groups, for example males, rarely participate, and so new 'taster' courses in the community are devised to meet their interests

• a new cycle begins.

21   A few colleges disseminate to others the lessons learned from their expertise in managing strategies for widening participation and raising standards. Some are using the recently introduced standards funding to support regional and national training events and to offer consultancy to other colleges.

Market research

22   Most colleges carry out market research to identify under-represented groups in their local area, and to find out about their learning needs and interests. The 54 FEFC-funded strategic partnerships have collected and shared participation data with colleges and other agencies in their area. Many have identified low penetration rates in recruiting from particular postcode areas. A few have identified groups that typically underachieve in their local area. These data provide valuable information for partnerships and individual providers to use in planning and reviewing provision.

> One partnership identified that there were 500 'lost' 16 year olds in the local area who do not participate in education, training or employment. A college was designated to take the lead in developing strategies to make contact with them and find out their interests.
>
> Another college, finding that penetration rates for further education among residents at electoral ward level ranged from 0% to 30%, focused its promotional activities and provision in those wards with low participation rates and high levels of deprivation.

23   In a few parts of the country, different agencies pool detailed demographic and socio-economic information about people not enrolling in further education. Such data help agencies to co-ordinate their efforts to work with the most disadvantaged groups. An example of this is provided by a city in the north of England.

The city council has developed a population profiling system based upon its integrated benefits system. A common claimants' form is used for housing benefits, council tax and educational hardship allowances. By combining information on claim forms with other social, demographic and geographic data, agencies have developed a powerful tool for identifying patterns of disadvantage. Data routinely analysed include:

- demographic information from the 1991 census, including age, car ownership, ethnicity, illness or disability, and overcrowding in households
- turn-out for elections
- benefit take-up, including housing benefit, reduced council tax, free school meals, school clothing grants and school maintenance grants
- enrolments in schools and further education colleges
- information from the health services
- crime statistics.

Data are analysed in relation to postcodes, wards and enumeration districts, specific housing estates and groups of streets.

The data are presented in various ways:

- **numerically**. For example, there are 16,500 16 to 18 year olds resident in the city, 4,800 attend a school sixth form, 6,000 are in further education and 250 are in receipt of a special hardship payment
- **statistically.** For example, school performance at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) is analysed in relation to the level of disadvantage
- **using colour-coded maps of participation in education in relation to socio-economic background.** For

example, on a map of the city, each enumeration district is colour coded according to the percentage of households in receipt of benefit. A dot map is overlaid showing the address of each 16 to 18 year old who does not attend a publicly funded education institution in the city

- **by identifying data at the level of the housing estate and individual street.** For example, the costs of providing benefits are evaluated. On one estate of 4,700 houses, 40% of households are in receipt of benefits averaging £117 per household a week.

The rich range of data helps agencies to target services more effectively in areas with the highest levels of deprivation. For example, local colleges are developing family learning and provision for disaffected young people on certain housing estates. The local lifelong learning partnership is a valuable forum for interpreting and making use of the data. Work is being undertaken to fill in current gaps in data, for example enrolments at private schools and at schools and colleges located outside the city, trainees in private organisations and young people in employment.

24   Many colleges use a wide range of methods to identify the learning needs and interests of students from under-represented groups. These include:

- visiting community groups
- meeting with parents at children's sports clubs
- liaising with other agencies such as housing associations or social services that are in close contact with target groups such as lone parents.

25   Most colleges use national and local labour market information to help make decisions about the provision they offer.

One college which was recruiting few unemployed men, set up courses in fork-lift truck driving designed to meet skills shortages and to recruit men from a housing estate with high levels of unemployment.

Using management information to plan, monitor and review the participation of under-represented groups

26   Although the quality of many colleges' management information systems is satisfactory, many of these systems do not accurately record retention rates for 'roll-on roll-off' programmes which students may join and leave at any time, and these programmes often play an important role in widening participation. Few colleges effectively record data relating to achievements when students' learning is not externally accredited. It is also rare for colleges to collect and use data relating to students' broader achievements when they are on accredited programmes. Such non-accredited or personal achievements, however, can be important measures of success for groups under-represented in further education.

27   Few colleges have developed their management information systems to record details of students that go beyond the nationally determined categories in the FEFC's ISR. This hampers their ability to monitor strategies to recruit and support some groups of students. Examples of groups often under-represented in further education, but not captured in the ISR, can be categorised according to their:

Personal circumstances

- ex-offenders, including those in prison
- lone parents
- probation service clients

Employment status

- those who are long-term unemployed
- those working in small and medium-sized enterprises

- those in part-time and low-paid work
- shift and seasonal workers

Previous education
- young people disaffected with school, including those excluded from school
- those with low levels of skills in literacy or numeracy

Residential circumstances
- people moving into their own accommodation for the first time, often identified in conjunction with other agencies such as housing associations or local authority housing departments
- young people leaving care

Ethnicity
- sub-groups within minority ethnic groups, for example Sikhs or Yemenis
- refugees and asylum seekers
- travellers

Disability or health-related aspects
- adults recovering from mental illness
- people with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- people recovering from dependency on drugs or alcohol
- students with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

28   A number of colleges have created additional fields in their information systems to enable them to detect patterns of under-representation and underachievement.

One college analyses enrolment, retention and achievement data for lone parents together with their rates of satisfaction with the provision.

One inner-city college records students' first languages and religious backgrounds on its

management information system and analyses recruitment in relation to the different linguistic and cultural groups to which students belong.

29   Some colleges carefully monitor patterns of participation for different groups across the range of their provision.

One college mapped enrolments from particular groups on courses across the college. It found that although the overall number and proportion of Bangladeshi students had increased in the last three years, they were mainly enrolled on ESOL courses in community-based centres. Closer investigation revealed that the actual numbers of Bangladeshi students on other courses at the college had decreased during this period. The college is drawing upon the findings of national and local research on attitudes to further education and training among the Bangladeshi community, and is meeting with community groups, to help it better meet the needs of this community.

Setting targets for the recruitment of under-represented groups

30   Many colleges set measurable targets for recruiting students from under-represented groups, sometimes as a result of detailed analysis of under-participation in the college or the locality.

Examples of college targets for periods of one to three years include:
- a 5% increase in recruitment from under-represented groups
- 5% more unemployed students or trainees
- moving from a baseline of 16% of students from deprived postcode districts to 24%

- taking on 500 more students from 'Kennedy' postcode areas
- delivering programmes in seven new community-based venues in deprived areas
- a 13% increase in enrolments on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation programmes
- to increase recruitment of lone parents to 30 and to provide all the necessary childcare support
- developing links with the eight lowest performing local secondary schools to increase progression to study at college.

31   More commonly, colleges state general intentions to recruit more of certain kinds of students; for example, men, ex-offenders or young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties. The lack of precise targets, however, restricts monitoring of progress. Also, intentions couched loosely are less likely to be accompanied by rigorous plans for implementation and more likely to result in no real or significant changes in patterns of participation.

Setting targets for retention and achievement of under-represented groups

32   Over a third of colleges made no reference to improving retention and achievement in their strategic plans for 1997 to 2000. Despite an increasing awareness among colleges that widening participation is linked to improving students' achievements, most colleges fail to set targets and develop strategies to improve achievement rates among under-represented groups.

The slow progress made in setting targets is the more surprising because of:
- the strong national policy commitment to improve retention and achievement rates
- the emphasis on target-setting to help bring about improvements

- the clear messages about persistent patterns of lower retention and/or achievement among some student groups.

A few colleges set targets for retention and achievement in relation to the backgrounds of particular students.

One college set a retention rate for lone parents of 85%.

Another college determined that retention and achievement rates on programmes designed for unemployed students should at least equal the college-wide targets.

33   In 1998-99, colleges were required by the FEFC to set, and monitor progress towards, targets for retention and achievement at course level and for the whole college. Such strategies may well lead to improvements in retention and achievement for specific under-represented groups, but it is not inevitable. Specific targets for specific groups may be needed in addition to course-related and college-wide targets.

34   Some colleges are concerned that an unintended consequence of setting targets for retention and achievement may be a reluctance among staff to recruit students whose educational history fails to indicate a strong chance of success. A few colleges are, therefore, considering new ways of assessing students' potential for successful study regardless of their educational background. Some, for example, are developing value-added measures. Apart from the systems for assessing the value added to students' achievements on GCE A level courses, however, there is no national framework for measuring the value added on vocational courses or other forms of further education provision.

35   Most colleges recognise that it is not a question of choosing between widening participation or raising achievements. A few colleges have had systematic success in widening participation and raising standards.

Widening Participation and Raising Standards: Case studies of colleges (FEFC, 2000) describes how they have done this.

36   In analysing their retention and achievement data, a few colleges compare the performance of under-represented groups against benchmarking data, including those recorded in *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice* and *Widening Participation in Further Education: Statistical evidence 1996-97 and 1997-98 (FEFC, 1997).*

One large tertiary college analyses achievement and progression data by age, sex, ethnicity, college centre and postcode area. As a result, it has identified and addressed issues such as:

- lower retention rates among some student groups in basic education

- a reluctance among younger students to enter for examinations at the end of their course in some subjects, for example in foreign languages

- poor rates of progression for students on access to higher education courses who achieved mainly at level 2

- females' lower achievement rates compared with males, and minority ethnic students' lower achievement rates compared with white students, among under 19 year olds on GCSE and GCE A level courses

- the low retention and achievement rates at some local centres based in areas with high levels of deprivation.

Structures, staff roles and reporting responsibilities

37   Many colleges have reviewed and altered their management structures, including staff roles and responsibilities, in order to focus more effectively on widening participation. There is no recommended model. Examples of such changes include:

- setting up a community and access faculty with a specific remit to widen participation on provision they directly manage, as well as to steer developments across the whole college. This is described as a 'spearheading' or 'greenhouse' strategy

- creating senior manager posts with responsibility for co-ordinating strategies to widen participation

- setting up a widening participation cross-college committee to oversee developments

- giving a senior manager responsibility for co-ordinating basic skills provision as part of student support, as an integral part of level 1 and 2 programmes of study, and as discrete courses in literacy and numeracy. The aim is to widen participation by providing students with an entitlement to basic skills, whilst offering them a choice of subjects and opportunities for progression

- altering the balance of teachers' roles to give them more time to support students; for example, through tutorials aimed at raising retention and achievement rates, especially amongst those students potentially at risk of underachieving

- deploying vocational and specialist tutors in outreach work in order to offer a good range of vocational programmes locally and to help students in community-based centres to prepare for transition to study at the college main sites.

38   Many colleges are careful to deploy staff with the right blend of skills to work on different strategies to widen participation, for example in community development work or giving support to students with poor grade GCSEs but with the potential to achieve at GCE A level. In order to recruit suitably qualified teachers with valuable cultural and linguistic skills, a few colleges provide teacher training courses aimed at under-represented groups of students and staff; for example, those from minority ethnic communities.

One college offers City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) teacher training courses in partnership with local black churches.

An external institution offers the C&G learning support certificate aimed at teachers from minority ethnic groups.

39   Not all staff are committed to widening participation and working with a broader range of students. Relevant staff development helps staff prepare for their role in contributing to the college's goals to widen participation.

40   Few colleges have staff or working groups charged with keeping an overview of developments in widening participation and reporting on progress.

Institutional policy developments

41   Many colleges recognise the close links between widening participation, inclusive learning and equal opportunities. A few of them co-ordinate policies relating to these areas. Some colleges have strategies to improve methods of teaching and learning, developed as part of their work on inclusive learning, which help under-represented groups to succeed in their studies. In a small number of colleges, inclusive learning strategies are well established and form part of programmes specifically designed to widen participation such as community-based courses, franchised provision and part-time courses.

42   Equal opportunities policies often overlap with policies for widening participation. For example, policies designed to attract more women into advanced courses in IT, also aim to widen participation for women from deprived areas, and strategies to address poor achievement rates among disadvantaged young white male students form part of a common agenda for equal opportunities and widening participation.

43   As colleges provide educational opportunities for more severely disadvantaged

groups, such as the 14 to 16 year olds excluded from school because of drug-related problems, many are identifying the need to revise or create new policies and guidelines, covering areas such as:

- home visits
- respect for the confidentiality of individuals yet effectively liaising with other agencies to support potentially vulnerable students
- work in community-based provision
- the responsibilities accruing to colleges when they are *in loco parentis* working with young people under 18, including students in residential settings
- the scope and parameters of the social and welfare roles of colleges
- assessing and addressing potential safety risks for students and staff
- record-keeping in respect of incidents.

44   A few colleges, including agricultural colleges with residential facilities, are beginning to share good practice in these areas and to develop benchmarks and performance indicators.

Funding

45   Many colleges fund strategies to widen participation from their core budgets. Some carefully dovetail this with external funding in order to extend or accelerate developments. A number of colleges have also developed ways of using external funding to pump-prime experimental activities, which may carry risk of failure but are potentially valuable, and to develop initiatives that are more resource intensive in the early phases. Some colleges use external funding to conduct research and development activities.

One college used external funding to devise a job-search study programme for unemployed students with computerised support materials. When external funding ceased,

the college was able to offer the programme and to continue to update materials using core funding.

46   Some colleges successfully attract external funding, for example European Union funds, to provide childcare or additional financial support to individual students who otherwise may not be able to afford to study.

47   Colleges welcome the additional funding and adjustments to the FEFC funding methodology to reflect additional costs incurred in aspects of widening participation. However, some consider that the funding arrangements create a disincentive rather than an incentive to recruit those who are tentative about returning to study, studying part time, or more likely to swap or renegotiate their study programmes and vary their mode of attendance. Some colleges, particularly those in rural areas, have been critical of the FEFC's use of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions index of deprivation by postcode areas as a proxy for student disadvantage. In their view, it is not an appropriate measure of deprivation in rural areas.

48   Some colleges use internal unit-costing models and adjust fee income targets in ways that give financial incentives to departments to widen participation.

One college allows departments to retain a higher proportion of FEFC funding units for students from deprived postcode areas, to encourage them to recruit and retain disadvantaged students.

49   Some colleges have made efficiency savings whilst improving the quality of experience for students.

Several colleges have rationalised their use of outcentres and refurbished a smaller number of centres to a high standard in locations easily accessible by public transport.

50   Some colleges have created internal development funds to help steer and support strategies to widen participation.

One college has a retention and success fund of £15,000. Teachers apply to the fund to support new strategies to increase retention and achievement that are particularly relevant to their courses and students. Priority is given to applications aimed at improving retention and achievement amongst under-represented groups.

Partnerships

51   Almost all colleges work in close partnership with other post-16 providers and agencies that can help them to widen participation. Many have sustained their long tradition of working in this way, despite the increased competition between colleges in the mid-1990s. Many have carefully nurtured partnerships to overcome a backdrop of competition and suspicion between agencies. Colleges' partners include: other colleges; universities; local education authorities; education and health action zones; voluntary organisations; employers; social services; careers services; shopping malls and leisure centres. Many partnerships focus specifically on widening participation.

One college works closely with the local premier league football club to engage working-class men in study.

52   Some colleges have successfully refocused their franchised provision with partner organisations to widen participation in their local area. They have withdrawn from work that is more commercially focused and out of region. The generation of some partnerships has been the result of external funding made available specifically to create partnerships, in particular the widening participation strategic partnerships funded by FEFC, or has stemmed

from a desire to meet the criteria for external funding streams. Various government initiatives, for example the development of lifelong learning partnerships and learndirect, part of the University for Industry, have stimulated the development and strengthening of partnerships.

53   In a few cases, colleges' partnerships with other agencies to widen participation have resulted in second-rate provision. One college's partnership with an agency working with ex-offenders held great promise as a way for:

- ex-offenders to receive good vocational training, appropriate learning support and effective preparation to progress to more advanced courses in a further education college or to employment
- the college to reach very disadvantaged students, often with poor levels of basic skills, most of whom would not attend a further education college
- the agency to offer a more professional education for its clients and benefit from the educational expertise of college staff.

In practice:

- trainers selected by the agency, though skilled at relating to the client group and equipped with the relevant practical vocational skills, were not effective teachers
- no initial assessments were carried out to gauge clients' learning support needs, for example, help with basic skills or for dyslexia. This was despite the wealth of research evidence that a lack of basic skills among offenders is one of the reasons for the high level of unemployment among ex-offenders and for some returning to crime
- no learning support was offered other than occasional help with measuring and using numbers when clients were cutting pieces of wood
- all ex-offenders worked on tasks at introductory levels, whatever their abilities. As a result of the agency's strong

commitment to reparation for crimes committed, they repeatedly made garden benches and bird tables for charity shops. Some clients were capable of far more challenging learning activities

- the quality of specialist equipment was poor and did not signal the vocational status of the provision
- no teacher training was offered to staff
- clients did not receive any guidance or information about more advanced courses at local colleges or elsewhere.

54   The college and the agency did not identify these significant shortcomings. They considered the partnership was effective because:

- clients developed greater discipline in punctuality and social skills
- clients enjoyed the workshops and developed some skills in woodworking
- the high retention rates indicated success, even though attendance was compulsory for clients as part of a court order.

55   However, the college failed to ensure that the agency's clients, funded and enrolled as further education students, were given:

- challenging learning opportunities
- appropriate learning support
- help to progress to other courses or employment.

56   This illustration of well-intentioned but inadequate provision is a salutary reminder of the importance of ensuring that students receive the highest quality education and training. For many of the ex-offenders this may have been a once-only opportunity to benefit from further education.

Governance

57   Many corporations are aware of the important role colleges have in widening participation, particularly for those groups in their local communities that are socially or

economically excluded. Some governors have used their expertise and contacts to take a lead in developing strategic links with other agencies as a means of widening participation; for example, links with hospital trusts. Corporations' search committees often include 'knowledgeable about local communities' as a criterion for recruiting new governors, in line with the recommendation published in *Learning Works*. A few corporations record information about each governor's knowledge, experience and links with the community, which is relevant to widening participation, in order to draw effectively on governors' expertise. More governors recognise that widening participation means that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who enrol at the college should be given every opportunity to succeed in their studies. They are aware that widening participation is more than 'just getting students in'. However, very few corporations discharge their responsibility to monitor the college's educational provision with a clear focus on:

- the range of students' backgrounds and the identification of groups which are under-represented in the college

- the students who are least likely to succeed in their studies and why

- patterns of low retention or underachievement in relation to students' backgrounds

- strategies to address low levels of participation and patterns of underachievement.

58   Few corporations set targets in relation to widening participation that extend beyond an intention to recruit disadvantaged groups. It is rare for governors to set targets for retention and achievement for students from different backgrounds. It is too early for corporations to assess if curriculum-driven strategies to improve retention and achievement introduced more systematically across the sector in 1998-99, will address patterns of underachievement among

certain groups, for example some minority ethnic groups, or whether these strategies will result in different patterns of underachievement.

59   Many corporations have been briefed about widening participation by senior managers, drawing on the FEFC's key publications *Learning Works* and *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice* and a mapping of the college's own provision using the nine characteristics of good practice set out in the guide. A few corporations have established standing agenda items covering widening participation and have organised an annual programme of briefings, monitoring reports and governor training events.

One college's training event for governors explored how policy commitments to widen participation should influence strategic decision-making. A series of realistic 'what if' case studies generated lively debate and helped governors agree guiding principles for future decision-making. One case study focused on how to deal with a significant shortfall in the college's income. Facts and figures relating to the college's existing expenditure were supplied. Governors addressed questions such as:

- should community-based provision be preserved over and above other college-based work because its main purpose is to widen participation?

- to what extent should staff reductions be determined by commitments to widen participation or the responsibilities of the employer to its permanent staff?

- if the college had to reduce provision, which curriculum areas should remain and which should be reduced because they do not widen participation and are not essential to further education in the local area?

- to what extent should 'profitable' areas of college activity be used to cross-subsidise activities that widen participation such as development work or more cost-intensive small teaching groups in more remote areas?

A second case study was based on a fictitious report to governors of a disastrous fire in a community centre, resulting in injuries to college students enrolled there. This led to an examination of whether governors are sufficiently assured that health and safety arrangements are in place for all venues used by the college. It also provoked a debate about the previously implicit commitment that all college students are entitled to the same standards and quality irrespective of where they study and their mode of study. Governors explored the implications of their reconfirmed commitment to equity for all students, for example in respect of student support, so that policies fully cover part-time students and those enrolled in outreach centres.

60   Briefings and training events for governors help clarify the college's commitments to widening participation and avoid misunderstanding. For example in one college, governors had a misconception that widening participation meant no more than recruiting 'a few more students who didn't do quite so well at school'. At another college, governors felt they 'watched developments with quiet anxiety as senior managers drove the college to recruit students with more extreme social and personal difficulties'. These governors required information and assurance from the principal that suitable arrangements had been made for such students and that a broadening of recruitment would not lower standards.

61   As part of their regular review of the colleges' mission and strategic direction, some corporations have planned to widen

participation more comprehensively. However, many governors consider widening participation is linked to development and growth of provision rather than a reprioritising of work.

62   Several corporations have reviewed their committee structures and established new committees or task groups focusing on widening participation and inclusive learning. Occasionally, colleges have designated a link governor for widening participation and arranged meetings with the senior manager leading developments across the college.

Quality Assurance and Self-assessment

63   The quality assurance processes of most colleges do not effectively evaluate and report upon progress and successes in widening participation. A few colleges have developed quality criteria that relate to their mission to widen participation.

64   However, many colleges only evaluate their success in recruiting students from groups under-represented in further education. It remains rare for colleges to evaluate the quality of experience and outcomes for particular under-represented groups. Few colleges analyse rates of attendance, retention and achievement for under-represented groups and have quality improvement strategies that focus specifically on students from under-represented groups in further education.

Self-assessment

65   Inspectors' analysis of a sample of colleges' self-assessment reports found there was little evaluation of widening participation. Few colleges had interpreted and developed the criteria set out in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*, to reflect fully their work in widening participation.

Evaluation of these self-assessment reports showed that:

References to widening participation

- only half the reports contained an indication that the college is committed to widening participation, and this understates the level of commitment expressed in colleges' mission statements. A sixth form college which recruits students from deprived areas and has substantial provision for students with learning difficulties made no reference to these strengths in their self-assessment. Another college that recruits over 50% of its students from postcodes with high levels of deprivation and is deeply committed to widening participation did not refer to widening participation in their report
- only a quarter of the reports referred to widening participation in any of the programme area sections. When mentioned, it was usually in art and design, humanities or basic education
- few made reference to widening participation in the evaluation of aspects of cross-college provision, and widening participation was hardly ever referred to under quality assurance. Comments were mainly related to supporting students through their course, childcare, outreach provision, accessibility of accommodation and partnerships
- a few sixth form and specialist colleges were prepared to state that they do not see widening participation as relevant. One preferred to leave 'this work' to the local further education college

Judgements made about widening participation

- those which identified widening participation as a strength focused on recruitment and support for students. None made judgements about achievement and progression for students under-represented in further education
- no colleges assessed their performance in

widening participation as weak

- very few colleges include any measures to widen participation in their action plans.

An effective self-assessment report prepared by a college that successfully widens participation included:

- statements about the college's strategic aims to widen participation, strategies used and evaluations of their successful implementation
- a clear analysis of the region served by the college, describing the diverse range of client groups from deprived backgrounds and an assessment of how well the college responds to their circumstances
- the identification of the barriers to success met by many students and an evaluation of the college's strategies to overcome these
- an assessment of the college's success in establishing a range of partnerships to widen participation, which were judged to be a strength
- judgements about the impact of monitoring recruitment patterns and taking action to ensure equal opportunity commitments are implemented
- strengths in teaching relating to widening participation and inclusiveness, well supported by evidence about student support, changed teaching styles, improved assessment methods and new accreditation schemes
- strengths in the setting and achieving of targets for recruitment, retention and achievement at course and college level
- evidence of successful strategies to improve retention and punctuality of under-represented groups such as disaffected young people

- an overall judgement that measures to widen participation constituted a strength
- some weaknesses, including underdeveloped strategies to improve provision for students with dyslexia, and a lack of rigour in relation to widening participation and the analysis of students' achievements
- an action plan which included realistic measures to tackle identified weaknesses.

A self-assessment report prepared by a sixth form college identified as a strength the quality assurance for part-time evening provision designed to widen participation for adults. Evidence for this strength included:

- a guide to good practice in teaching and supporting adult learners which is issued to relevant staff
- stringent selection procedures for the recruitment of teachers to the programme
- specific induction programmes for teachers which cover effective ways of teaching adults
- a comprehensive system for observations of teaching and learning
- student questionnaires at the start and end of the programme and for early leavers
- rapid responses made to students' comments; for example, discussion with a group of students to identify a solution to criticisms
- targets set for retention and achievement, informed by the benchmarking data presented in the FEFC's widening participation publications

- the requirement for an in-depth special review if a course has poor rates of achievement.

Observation of teaching and learning

66   Criteria for judging the quality of teaching rarely focus on aspects related to widening participation; for example, the teaching of basic skills as an integral part of vocational courses, or learning activities planned to meet the requirements of students who may be at risk of underachieving. Staff observing lessons commonly assess generally held features of good practice in teaching including:

- the clarity and appropriateness of the learning objectives
- the appropriateness of teaching styles and learning materials
- the variety of teaching methods used
- the inclusion of key skills
- whether the learning needs of students are met.

67   Carefully planned teaching with these kind of features is particularly important for students who may lack confidence or have less well-developed background knowledge and skills than other students in a group. A few colleges test whether these criteria are met for all students in a lesson.

68   Examples of good lesson observations related to widening participation are occasionally found in parts of a college:

Preparation

- observers find out in advance which students in the lesson may be tentatively returning to study, potentially 'at risk' of leaving the course, or underachieving for other reasons. During the observation, they focus on how well teaching methods engage and support these students and enable them to learn

- trained observers are knowledgeable about the nature of the student group and the implications that the backgrounds of students may have for the curriculum and teaching methods

- lead 'widening participation observers' help spread good practice across the college's curriculum areas; for example, providing information on effective ways of teaching on foundation level courses or teaching able students who have low levels of motivation or confidence

- in evaluating lessons, a subgrade is given to aspects relating to widening participation

Conducting observations

- observers assess if work is appropriate to each student's learning needs

- where students find understanding theory difficult and prefer practical activities, observers identify how well teachers integrate theory and key skills with practical work

- observers monitor interactions between teachers and students and identify if there are patterns to these. For example, a teacher may engage in social rather than learning-focused discussions with students identified as needing support and encouragement, and, inadvertently, this may hinder their learning

- observations include assessing how well teachers manage the late arrival of students and student absences in ways that motivate students to arrive punctually and attend more regularly. Poor punctuality and attendance are identified by many colleges as key reasons for students underachieving

Feedback

- feedback given to teachers includes an assessment of the effectiveness of the

lesson for students at risk of leaving or underachieving

Lessons for the institution

- significant messages from lesson observations are combined to review the effectiveness of 'widening participation strategies in the classroom' across the college, and findings are used to plan improvements.

69   Although colleges frequently identify tutorials as a means of supporting and motivating students from under-represented groups, few routinely observe tutorials to evaluate their quality. In a few colleges, observations of tutorials assess the extent to which students who may be potentially at risk are helped to make good progress. A few colleges have developed useful criteria for observing tutorials. These include:

- the balance between the pastoral and academic content of tutorials

- the quality and effectiveness of the relationships established between the tutor and student and the extent to which these relationships support learning

- the preparedness of the tutor, so that discussion focuses on an informed review of the student's progress, planning the next steps to help the student achieve and providing the support that may be needed

- the extent to which targets for achievement are set in ways that motivate rather than discourage students; for example, in relation to punctuality, attendance, completion of assignments and performance in assessments and examinations

- how students' concerns about study are responded to; for example, if a student who is unemployed has few opportunities to work with machinery compared with students in employment

- the suitability of arrangements to follow up issues that may be impeding progress; for example, arrangements for extra practical activities in machinery workshops.

Course reviews

70   Colleges recognise that course reviews play a central role in evaluation of the quality of provision and of students' experience on programmes of study. A few colleges set some standards and targets at course level that relate to widening participation.

One college strongly committed to widening participation, sets targets and measures performance against these. Its review of a National Open College Network (NOCN) accredited suite of short courses offered at levels 1, 2 and 3 included the following:

	Target	Outcome	Priorities for action	Comment
Retention rate (%)	85	97	–	–
Male students recruited (%)	40-50	30	Targeted publicity in sports clubs etc.	Open advertising reaches women better than men.
Minority ethnic students (%)	10	6	Expand courses taught bilingually in community languages. Review relevance of overall curriculum offer. Set up staff development. More targeted publicity.	Several jointly planned programmes with minority ethnic organisations did not come to fruition.
% with no qualifications	33	50	–	–
% with qualifications above GCE A level	10	13	Review balance of work with primary target groups and intermediaries. Review targets and measures of success relevant to courses for intermediaries.	Over-recruitment due to decision to train intermediary community workers in promoting informal learning in disadvantaged areas.
Registered disabled (%)	5	9	–	–
Unemployed or unwaged (%)	40	55	–	–
% in socio-economic groups D and E	55	Data not yet available	Establish speedy ways of providing information about socio-economic background.	Analysis of students' socio-economic backgrounds held up by management information systems.
% achieve qualification	65	75	Raise target and put in place strategies to meet this. Set achievement rate for different groups and monitor achievement rates by student characteristics.	–
Progression	None set	–	Plan 'lateral progression' routes and encourage students to enrol on several courses at the same level to broaden their studies, build confidence and prepare for progression. Set target for lateral progression and progression to more advanced study.	The combination of short courses and educational guidance offered to each student helps boost progression.
Student satisfaction	Overall college target set	College target met	–	93% found course content very good or good, 95% say teachers are very well prepared or well prepared and that lessons are interesting. Team considers positive feedback is because teachers are well briefed about social and other characteristics of groups. Student interviews conducted by an external consultant confirmed that students' anxieties about returning to study were carefully allayed by teachers.

Inspectors found the college's course review system an extremely effective mechanism for reviewing and improving the quality of provision and translating the college's mission to widen participation into effective practice at course level.

71   Some colleges carry out searching investigations when courses have not been successful; for example, if achievement rates are poor.

In an external institution, a high-quality foundation programme for 'women into IT', designed for those with few or no qualifications, was revised from a full-time course to a more intensive part-time course in order to improve access for women with family responsibilities. Reviews early in the course showed:

- more women were recruited, many of whom had childcare or part-time work commitments that would have prevented them from joining the full-time programme

- students did not have enough time to consolidate and review their learning in two-and-a-half days a week. Too much time, intended for teaching new topics, was used to recap on last week's lessons

- most students came to the centre only during the three days when they had lessons. They made little use of the excellent library and other resources at the centre for private study compared with the full-time students who had followed the course previously

- women were not able to 'immerse' themselves in the technology. Five days' tuition in previous years had accelerated the learning of women who were unfamiliar and lacked confidence in their ability to understand new technologies

- the course's longstanding record of retention rates over 90% was quickly eroded as several students left part-way through the course.

The centre took prompt action to remedy the weaknesses identified. For example, they:

- renegotiated the course timetable with students and extended teaching into four days

- developed more practice and revision materials

- introduced a weekly review session to recap on the learning achieved in that week and to identify any students requiring extra help with topics.

Evaluating the effectiveness of learning support

72   Many colleges see additional learning support, including support in literacy and numeracy, as an important part of their work to widen participation. Some effectively assure themselves that learning support is of good quality and effective in improving achievement. Usually, these colleges compare the number of students who require additional support with the number who actually receive it. In a few colleges, the effectiveness of learning support is assessed by comparing the retention and achievement rates of students in receipt of support with that of other students, and by evaluating the progress they make in skills taught in learning support, for example literacy and numeracy. Occasionally, colleges compare their performance with good practice in other colleges, for example, in one college, there is a 94% take-up rate for additional support.

In one college, statistical data were used to make judgements about the effectiveness of learning support and to identify improvements needed.

- 753 students were tested for their skills in numeracy

- 73 (9.6%) were identified as needing regular support

- 30 (only 41%) took up the support offered.

Students who attended support sessions regularly improved their basic skills test scores by 32%. Students who attended less than 25% of timetabled support sessions only improved in their re-test scores by 11%.

A control group of students who did not need support, improved their test scores by only 4%.

The college took action to improve the level of take-up and attendance rates at support sessions.

Surveying students' opinions

73   Collecting and responding to students' views through questionnaires is an important component of most colleges' strategies for reviewing and improving provision. Questionnaires can be especially useful for students who may be reticent about making their views known in other ways.

One college, after finding that less confident students were rarely critical, introduced a system of 'paired peer support' . Each pair discusses and records their views on the quality of provision. This approach has generated more searching responses and criticisms than was previously the case and the college is using these to inform improvements.

74   It is rare for colleges to analyse the results of student questionnaires according to different student characteristics such as sex, age, ethnicity and measures of deprivation to assure themselves that the experience of study is of equally high quality for these groups. Where colleges have done this, some have found that the views of under-represented students are different from those of other students. In most colleges, whole-college or course-based analyses of responses to questionnaires means that the opinions of under-represented groups are hidden among responses from other students.

75   Some colleges use other methods of seeking students' views, such as small focus groups.

In one college, a 'support and views' group for African-Caribbean students was set up as a consequence of the college identifying that achievement rates were slightly lower for these students. The group worked with staff to identify support arrangements that would help them study and ways in which the college could improve its provision for them. The students were centrally involved in deciding on the improvements needed and staff reported back to the group on the progress made in effecting these.

Research and development

76   In addition to using findings of national research and development projects, many colleges themselves conduct valuable research on a range of issues relating to widening participation. Often such research is undertaken in partnership with other agencies such as the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) and local universities. Research findings often lead to improvements.

One college established a research project to examine retention issues for under-represented groups such as women returners, students with disabilities, minority ethnic groups, and students with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties.

Outcomes of this project included:

- raising teachers' awareness of links between disadvantage and admissions, tutorials, action-planning and student support
- a pack on good practice in improving retention

- a computerised package to help students improve their study and 'course survival' skills

- the appointment of a co-ordinator to monitor and increase the take-up of learning support

- teachers' heightened awareness of the importance of effective tutoring

- the 'destigmatising' of learning support for students aged 16 to 19, partly through delivering support as part of vocational courses and by locating learning support services next to the main study centre.

Staff development

77   In many colleges, priorities for staff development are closely connected to the college's strategic aims, including the aim of widening participation. Staff development programmes help to disseminate new thinking and good practice in widening participation across the college. Some events focus on good practice in widening participation developed by other providers such as the adult education services of local education authorities.

Several colleges have undertaken staff development programmes in using new learning technologies with reluctant learners.

At one college, the staff development programme included: dissemination of information on entry level qualifications; inclusive learning methodology and practice; effective teaching at entry level, and supporting students with challenging and difficult behaviour.

At another college, teachers practised 20 different teaching skills chosen from a booklet which listed 100 different approaches to learning. The programme was positively received and resulted in

greater willingness among teachers to try out new methods to met the needs of under-represented students.

Teachers in one college were briefed about the local army barracks to help them organise teaching and to provide learning materials which were suitable for army personnel; for example, to cater for those called away on duty at short notice so that they could continue their studies. Many of the students had few qualifications and lacked study skills. The college also trained officers in assessment techniques so that they could continue to help students gain vocational qualifications if students were posted abroad.

78   In a few colleges, teachers new to the teaching of disaffected or under-represented students are inducted and helped to develop teaching methods suitable for diverse groups of students.

In one college, an induction pack for teachers included open learning and case study materials designed to promote teaching methods tried and tested with the college's priority student groups, those under-represented in further education.

At another college, an in-house certificate in education and training led to action-research into raising the profile of learning support to give it high status in the eyes of students who require support, as well as other students.

79   A few colleges organise whole-week staff development programmes focusing on widening participation. Some of them base their activities on materials introduced in *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice.*

One college used a staff development week to conduct audits of practice using the nine characteristics of widening participation

published in *How to Widen Participation: A guide to good practice*. Staff identified existing good practice and made plans to share expertise and make improvements.

Teaching and Support for Students to Raise Achievement and Improve Progression

The curriculum

80 Most general further education colleges offer courses at each level of study in different curriculum areas. They have recognised the importance of providing entry and level 1 courses across programme areas to help students with poor basic skills or learning difficulties and/or disabilities to start at an appropriate level and progress to more advanced courses. Some colleges introduced lower level courses after identifying poor achievement rates on level 2 courses. However, the provision of entry and level 1 courses is better developed in some programme areas than others. They constitute 16% of provision in construction, 20% to 30% in agriculture, business, hotel and catering, humanities and business studies, and 50% to 55% in science, and health and social care. There are very few full-time courses at entry level and level 1 in art and design, science and health and social care; significantly more in agriculture, engineering and construction. Many colleges have developed close links with other providers to make sure that in the local area there are clear routes for progression from entry level to degree level study.

81 The proportion of entry level and level 1 provision varies between colleges. Some colleges carefully monitor the balance of their offer and review it in the light of local school attainment rates, basic skills levels in the local area, skills shortages and the college's overall commitment to widening participation.

One college considered that its 26% entry and level 1 provision, 23% level 2, 25% level 3, 8% higher education, and 18% non-schedule 2, represented a good distribution.

Another college in an area of high deprivation and poor levels of attainment at school has 63% of provision at entry and level 1; 19% at level 2; 15% at level 3; 3% higher education and 0% non-schedule 2. It works in partnership with other organisations, such as the local education authority and the Workers' Educational Association, for its non-schedule 2 provision. The college plans to extend provision at level 2 and, at the same time develop strategies to help students progress easily from study at level 1 to level 2.

82 Several colleges devise courses that sit between the four main levels of study in further education, vividly referred to by one college as 'mezzanine' level courses. These courses help sustain students' confidence and ease their transition to more advanced study. Many colleges also offer a range of short courses at each level of study. Short courses are especially important starting points for some students, for example those returning to study after a long break or recovering from mental illness. Many colleges have developed modular programmes to help widen participation.

One college reviewed its range of courses in childcare in order to widen participation more effectively and make provision more efficient. Over the last five years, provision in childcare has grown from 60 students on a nursery nurse course to 425 students enrolled on a range of courses. The college has established:

• broader programmes including introductory short courses, for example in babysitting, and short courses in pre-school play, through to national

vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 in childcare and early years and NVQ level 4 in play

- a curriculum map showing all core and specialist modules in care for each level of study, and the times they are run during the year, helps students plan their own programme

- a common core programme at the different levels; including working with colleagues; planning activities for children; equal opportunities; working with families; child protection; and social and emotional development

- core modules offered at seven outreach sites so that they are readily accessible

- courses offered at different times, including day, evenings and weekends. Modules are carefully sequenced so that if students are absent they can pick up modules in the evenings or at weekends

- individual learning programmes for each student. For example, a student might take parts of a full-time course, adding modules taught as Saturday schools and some open learning. Each student has a different combination of tutorials, taught sessions, use of open learning materials and work-based assessments

- tutorial support to suit each student's needs; ranging from a termly review of progress to weekly individual tutorials for those with little confidence and less motivation, who need more support

- different entry points, timed so that a few students are inducted together to form a supportive base group

- a well-equipped care resource centre with open learning materials and CD-ROMs. It is staffed from 08.00 hours to 20.00 hours daily. The centre has a small play area for children.

Outcomes

All students respond positively to having a programme tailored around their needs and availability. Many disadvantaged students enrol and achievement rates are good. Saturday schools help motivate part-time students; they value the chance to complete a module during one day of intensive study.

College's own review

The substantial time invested in curriculum development and planning has resulted in provision that is more accessible, progressive and effective in widening participation.

83   Most colleges regularly review the range of programmes they offer.

One sixth form college which three years ago offered mainly GCE A levels and a few higher level GNVQs, has developed a broader portfolio of courses to meet the needs of 16 to 19 year old students with lower levels of qualification on entry. The college now offers courses in numeracy at levels 2 and 3, a certificate in musicianship, free-standing qualifications in key skills at different levels, and courses in nursery nursing and childcare. Each student has an individual learning programme which combines GCE A levels and/or GCSEs with other types of course appropriate to their needs.

84   Inclusive learning initiatives have led many colleges to develop individually planned learning programmes for students. These are particularly valuable for students often under-represented in further education, who are more likely to need carefully tailored programmes that give them the right amount of challenge, support and opportunities for early success in their studies. Such students also benefit from teaching methods that are matched to their preferred learning styles. In some colleges,

individual learning programmes are opening up 'mainstream' courses to a more diverse range of students, many of whom would not have been ready to enrol on these without the supportive process of planning their own learning programme with a tutor. Few colleges have individual learning plans for every student.

85   There are examples of colleges redesigning courses in fundamental ways to make them more successful in widening participation and raising students' achievements. Some colleges give priority to 'revitalising' courses that have lower than average retention and achievement rates and which are not successful in recruiting students from groups under-represented in further education.

One college was concerned about the low retention rate of 56%, on stage 2 sign language. This contrasted with the 77% retention rate and 73% achievement rate on the stage 1 courses. Many students were from disadvantaged backgrounds and these students were found to be the least likely to succeed on level 2 courses. The college initiated a 'widening participation' programme review. They recognised that:

- the step from stage 1 to 2 was too great for most students, particularly those with lower levels of confidence and study skills

- students enrolling for stage 2 had not been prepared for the level of commitment needed, for example about six hours of practice each week

- students were given too few opportunities to learn about deaf culture.

Action taken

The team of five teachers pooled ideas and jointly planned the 'revitalised' course. As a result, the college:

- developed two NOCN accredited courses lasting 10 weeks at levels between stage 1 and stage 2, and stage 2 and 3, to assist progression

- introduced more in-depth guidance interviews for individuals before they started the courses

- taught in a more structured way and used a common approach

- made sure all communication in lessons was in British Sign Language, the target language

- double-staffed lessons to provide more intensive guided language practice

- prepared a sign language handbook for students

- made 50 videos carefully linked to the course content, so students could practise their signing skills independently

- purchased more books and resources relating to sign language and the deaf community for the library

- introduced a practice log book for students to record their progress

- built in individual tutorials for 15 minutes each term. (This was subsequently found insufficient and extended to one hour a term)

- arranged work experience and cultural placements; for example joining the 'friends for young deaf people embassy' and helping in local deaf clubs

- set up more cultural and social events; for example, sign singing

- celebrated a range of students' achievements. The college set out to beat the world record for the largest sign singing group and achieved this with 417 people.

Outcomes

- 210 students enrolled on stage 1 courses

- 87% of the students on stage 2 courses had progressed from stage 1

- improved retention rates and achievements on the stage 2 course. Forty students started stage 2, many of them from disadvantaged backgrounds; 38 completed and all are expected to pass the examination.

College's own review

The new strategies are working much more effectively for all students on the stage 2 courses, including those often under-represented in further education. Some opportunities were missed to link with other language teachers, for example in French and ESOL, to share good practice in the teaching of languages.

Programmes designed for under-represented groups

86 Most colleges design some courses specifically for students under-represented in further education. A wide range of such courses is offered across the sector. There are hundreds of quotable examples. Programmes are designed to:

engage people with few or no qualifications, such as:

- programmes designed for young people excluded from school that combine vocational courses and strong tutorial support. One college's programme had a retention rate of 81% and an achievement rate of 100% in 1998-99

- courses for school classroom support workers

- programmes for staff working in residential care homes

- family literacy

- short non-schedule 2 courses offered in areas of high deprivation, such as introduction to the Internet, which also provided students with information and advice about more advanced courses in IT

- customised NVQs at level 1 and 2; for example, provision in a large tyre factory which led to unqualified workers achieving nationally recognised awards and gaining promotion. It also led to better awareness of health and safety issues, improved problem-solving at work and reduced manufacturing times

- courses designed for employees with low levels of skills in small and medium-sized enterprises; for example, basic courses in IT developed with employers in a local enterprise park. The college provided the course in a spare room on one company's premises, using laptop computers

- short courses for farm workers taught in village halls, which involved using computers to track and monitor herds of cattle and sheep to meet recently introduced public health requirements

involve people on low incomes, such as:

- courses on running a credit union for members

- programmes designed for students who are homeless and staff working in hostels

- courses in community safety, after identifying an interest among local tenants' groups

- programmes in community development skills for those actively involved in making improvements in their own local areas to tackle social exclusion and poverty

attract men, including young men, such as:

- custom spraying cars

- cartoon drawing and graffiti art

- 'ride for work' for disaffected young men in

a rural area, designed with social services and the police force. It includes a level 1 NVQ in horse care, and involves work experience in stables and additional mentoring and support from policemen from similar backgrounds to the students

- ESOL for Gurkhas based at a local army centre

- establishing a learning centre in a supermarket

prepare unemployed people for work, such as:

- the wide range of 'return to work' courses combining study skills, job-search skills work placements and some vocational study

- a course for unemployed Asian women preparing them to work in professional areas.

Open and distance learning

87   Many colleges have put the development of open and distance learning programmes, using IT-based materials, as a strategic priority. Some colleges see these developments as widening participation by enabling students to study at their own pace and at times that suit them. Colleges have met with mixed success. It is not uncommon to find achievement rates of under 20%. Features of effective practice in open and distance learning for students who may have low levels of confidence and lack study skills include:

The programme

- the training of staff, drawing on good practice developed in working with disadvantaged students by open learning organisations such as the National Extension College

- careful planning of what is learned at a distance and what is done when students come together for a short residential course or day school

- consideration of when students need to meet their tutors in person rather than communicate with them by telephone or electronic mail. Many disadvantaged students need face-to-face individual and group tuition, especially in the early stages of a programme

- students have an individual learning programme which is regularly reviewed with them and revised as needed

- a 'study-buddy' or small 'base-group' which students can lean on for support. Members are carefully selected so that they can help each other, for example a student with no IT skills is paired with someone with good skills and students from one locality are grouped together so they can meet easily

- materials designed to help students develop independent study skills, including building up skills in using IT for study

- keeping ways of using technologies simple so they do not create additional difficulties for students

- formally recognising students' new competences in using learning materials and IT independently; for example, in a record of distance learning skills. Skills include: using electronic mail; looking information up on the Internet; anticipating factors that may demotivate one; identifying strategies for getting help; drawing up an action plan for the first month's study and achieving it

- exercises designed so that students get prompt feedback and recognition of their achievements

Tutorial support

- training for tutors in supporting open and distance learning students, and effective use of different forms of communication

- strong tutorial support, with more support at the start of programmes focusing on using IT, learning materials and self-motivation

- transferring responsibility for initiating contact from the tutor to the student only when the student is ready

Success criteria and review
- clearly defined and challenging retention and achievement targets
- careful monitoring of the performance of students from under-represented groups and strategies to implement improvements if these groups underachieve.

Accreditation

88   For many students with low confidence and experience of past failure in education, assessment of any kind, especially in the form of tests or examinations, is daunting. Some teachers are skilful in introducing the requirements of accreditation sensitively and in plain English avoiding technical language. At the same time, they use formative assessments to boost students' confidence and to demonstrate to them that they have already completed work that provides concrete evidence towards gaining the qualification.

89   Most students, often those with few or no qualifications, are keen to have their learning formally recognised and to gain a national certificate. Some colleges effectively combine different forms of accreditation to help widen participation.

Women returners in one college's 'women into management' course, gain:
- a qualification in supervisory management
- an English Speaking Board certificate for skills in giving oral presentations
- a qualification in the key skills of 'improving own learning and performance'
- qualifications in IT.

Students value the opportunity to gain a suite of qualifications relevant to their career goal.

90   Most colleges use NOCN accreditation for programmes designed specifically for groups under-represented in further education. Many use the NOCN framework effectively to accredit small steps in students' learning, helping them gain in confidence and strengthen their motivation. The facility to combine credits at different levels on the same programme of study means learners can accelerate their achievement without needing to transfer to different provision at a higher level. However, some colleges are concerned that NOCN credits are less widely recognised by employers and that eligibility for FEFC funding is uncertain. Some are not aware that to be eligible for FEFC funding, NOCN-accredited courses should lead to students directly progressing to a qualification on the secretary of state's approved list of national vocational or academic qualifications.

91   Some colleges, as well as being careful to select appropriate accreditation, also assess whether a learning programme benefits from being accredited.

In partnership with an agricultural college, a local voluntary project for people recovering from mental illness co-ordinates and funds non-schedule 2 'taster' courses at the college in a range of vocational areas. The college and the project decided that these first tentative steps back to study would not benefit from being accredited. The project also provides a counselling study group for clients to help them overcome anxieties relating to studying at college. Clients are helped to prepare for progression to accredited provision.

92   Many colleges find GCSEs unsuitable for students who have already failed these examinations in school. Significant numbers of students do poorly on their second or third attempts at gaining a grade C or above in their GCSEs. This compounds their earlier sense of failure and deters them from further study.

Some colleges identify more appropriate alternative qualifications. A number regret the removal of particular qualifications from the nationally approved list, because they found some short qualifications well suited to provision designed for groups under-represented in further education.

93   Most colleges agree that a national credit framework with a unit-led system for recognition of achievement remains a key national priority. They consider that insufficient progress has been made at national level since the publication of *Learning Works* in 1997.

Using initial assessment to inform teaching and support for students' learning

94   Few colleges systematically use initial assessments of students' basic skills and learning support requirements to inform teaching. Students often under-represented in further education may be affected disproportionately, as many require additional support. The most effective practice involves:

- sensitively introduced screening of basic skills and key skills for all students, including those on part-time courses and in outreach locations

- teachers making it clear that students cannot fail or pass this assessment and that its purpose is to find out if the college should provide learning support

- using screening materials which suit particular groups of students; for example, which enable those with low levels of literacy to read social signs rather than extended text

- specialist assessments for students who indicate they may be dyslexic

- identifying students' preferred learning styles

- assessing students' strengths and their potential to succeed in study; for example, by assessing motivation, and by looking at

problem-solving and inquiry skills in everyday contexts and indicating their valuable transferability to study contexts. Assessing and recognising strengths helps to boost motivation

- carefully phased and more detailed diagnostic assessments related to a student's subject area

- striking the right balance between finding out at the start of a course about students' support needs and how teaching should to be adapted to meet these, whilst avoiding students feeling that they are being overwhelmed by tests

- discussing the findings of screening and diagnostic assessments with the student as soon as possible

- agreeing an individual plan for learning support with targets and review dates. This should involve the teacher, student and learning support tutor working together

- ensuring that vocational staff are trained in supporting students' basic skills development as part of their teaching

- providing a range of vocationally relevant support materials.

95   Aspects of weaker practice that contribute to students from under-represented groups not completing courses or underachieving, include:

- not having strategies to overcome successfully negative attitudes of students to additional support

- failure to offer initial screening of basic skills to some students; for example, those in community-based sites or part-time students

- insufficient initial assessment of the mathematical skills required for courses such as engineering

- an over-reliance on subject teachers referring students for extra support in basic skills or on students taking the initiative themselves

- inadequate monitoring of the take-up of additional support among those who have been identified as needing it, and of attendance rates at support sessions

- a low proportion of those requiring additional support receiving it. Rates of under 50% are common in some institutions compared with 94% at one college

- teachers not using findings from assessments to plan how teaching and support should be combined to promote learning most effectively

- teachers' inadequate planning of teaching to support the development of basic skills of students and to extend methods of learning

- poor liaison between subject teachers and staff providing additional support

- little or no monitoring of correlations between retention and achievement rates for students receiving additional support compared with students who do not receive support.

Teaching methods

96   As colleges recruit students from a greater diversity of backgrounds, many are reviewing and developing their teaching methods to suit the needs of new types of learners. In some colleges this process is barely starting, whilst in others it is well established. A significant impetus for broadening teaching methods has come from the national inclusive learning strategy.

As part of their strategy for inclusive learning, many colleges have developed teaching methods appropriate for students with challenging behaviour, and approaches for those requiring multi-sensory teaching.

97   Few colleges have developed effective teaching methods across the full range of their provision. Inclusive learning is least likely to have impacted on part-time and franchised provision.

98   Effective teaching methods designed specifically for students often under-represented in further education include the following examples from colleges:

- planning courses so that the content is linked to under-represented students' experiences

- offering 'taster courses' to encourage the participation of under-represented groups

One college used its BBC education centre well to provide short courses for groups under-represented in further education. BBC-devised materials were linked to television programmes like the 'Windrush Series' about people who came to England from the Caribbean. The college organised 'Windrush' courses, accredited by the NOCN, in partnership with African-Caribbean community organisations. The focus was on recruiting older African-Caribbean people who first came to England in the 1950s. The college gave students who enrolled information and advice about other courses in which they might be interested; for example, family history or tracing your family tree using a computer, as a next step.

- tailoring course induction so that it supports students and helps 'bind' them as a group of learners

In one college's basic skills open workshop, new enrollees are seated together close to the teacher for the first few weeks of their programme until they are ready to work more independently.

- establishing ground rules with students that help build strong group cohesion,

making them feel they are in a 'safe learning environment' and able to ask for help if they do not understand points

In an adult residential college, ground rules developed with students typically cover such aspects as:
- confidentiality about personal issues discussed in the group
- listening to each other
- not judging fellow students
- respecting difference
- adhering to equal opportunities and recognising everyone's right assertively to challenge behaviours or views that are discriminatory
- punctual and full attendance to help everyone in the group make progress.

- starting with simple and achievable tasks; for example, in introductory computer courses, using simple games software such as 'solitaire' and 'paintbrush'
- using teaching methods matched to students' different abilities, levels of confidence and preferred learning styles
- being alert to students' circumstances and responding to these

One college found that several students on ESOL courses experienced high levels of depression. The teacher organised social activities and practical activities based on students' interests that helped them to relax and have their contributions to the college recognised; for example, arranging flowers for the college. Another college, realising that the London Underground strike might make students anxious about submitting assignments on time, extended the return date.

- using teaching methods that reinforce and develop students' basic, key and study skills
- encouraging students to support each other's learning; for example, by placing students in pairs so that they support each other in lessons and outside college. Some colleges have found this particularly effective for female students, but less so for men
- using participative learning methods that extend students' repertoire of learning skills whilst developing their confidence and communication skills, for example discussions, role-plays, working in teams
- integrating theory with practical activities, especially as many students on practical courses think they are no good at academic study and are not motivated to learn theory
- teaching methods and learning objectives that help develop the skills and attitudes for more advanced courses or the workplace. For example, preparing students for employment by requiring appropriate dress, punctuality, telephoning in advance if they will be absent, as well as learning vocational skills. Achievements in these other areas are recorded with students
- paying particular attention to helping unemployed students practise the necessary disciplines of study and employment in industry

One college, as part of courses in catering agrees a phased plan for students to get up early for learning activities, culminating in checking off the delivery of fresh food from the markets at 06.00 hours. Their success in being punctual for each of the earlier sessions is recorded.

- using learning diaries, in which students reflect on and describe their achievements and the ways in which they overcame

difficulties in learning. Referring to notes made at the beginning of a course after the first month or so helps to boost confidence and increase motivation

- recording students' achievements at every stage of the course to help boost their confidence

- scheduling deadlines for assignments so that extra support is provided for students beforehand in planning, practising and exploring ways of presenting assignments

- setting small amounts of homework on a regular basis to help students develop research and inquiry skills and apply their new learning in everyday contexts

- using volunteers, such as youth workers or mentors, to support teaching. Roles are agreed and volunteers often help to plan and review lessons. Some colleges have found this approach works particularly well with male students

- adapting materials to suit those with differing levels of literacy, making use of symbols, photographs and plain English as appropriate

- using case studies and learning materials related to students' past experience and interests; for example, on a course in accounting with several African-Caribbean students, researching and including references to locally run 'box-hand' credit union loan schemes in the African-Caribbean community

- offering thorough preparation and ample practice for students entering examinations for the first time for many years and for those who have a track record of performing poorly in examinations.

Tutorial support

99 Many colleges have identified the strengthening of tutorial support as a central strategy for improving retention and achievement rates among groups of students under-represented in further education. Some colleges recognise that they have given insufficient emphasis in tutorials to supporting students' learning and achievement.

In a college that successfully widens participation, the central importance of tutorials had been effectively conveyed to students. One unemployed male student, when asked by an inspector if tutorials were important to him and helped him achieve, was bemused and replied:

'Tutorials - well of course they're important! They're the headquarters of the course!'

Student perception surveys in one college indicated that students found tutorials boosted their confidence and self-esteem and helped them to develop essential study skills.

100 Many colleges are renaming personal tutorials as 'progress tutorials', signalling a significant shift in their main purpose. In most colleges, tutorials focus on reviewing each student's progress with them, setting targets for achievements and agreeing an action plan for how to succeed in their studies. Personal issues or practical support requirements are explored in relation to helping students identify ways they can achieve good levels of punctuality, attendance and make good progress on the course. Tutorials covering these areas are routinely available for full-time students.

101 Some colleges are beginning to tailor tutorial support more flexibly to meet the particular requirements of individual students. They:

- plan the balance of one-to-one, small-group and whole-group tutorials to meet the needs of each student

- review activities used in tutorials and establish ways for students to play a more active part, for example by asking students to assess their own performance

- give more tutorial support to students

identified as 'at risk' of not completing a
course or not achieving

• give more tutorial support for those
  experiencing more severe personal and
  welfare-related problems. For example,
  one college allocates an hour-long tutorial
  each day for school excludees, whereas
  most other full-time students have one
  hour a week for tutorials

• schedule tutorial support so that it is
  concentrated at stages of the course where
  students may be more 'at risk' of losing
  confidence or leaving; for example, in the
  early stages of a course, or leading up to
  examinations. One college identifies
  students potentially at risk four weeks
  before final examinations, and gives extra
  tutorial support to help prevent them
  'falling at the last fence'

• use tutorial arrangements to help develop
  and reinforce key skills and study skills

In an adult residential college, personal
tutors are closely involved in the successful
five-week foundation period on the access to
higher education programme. They help
students to assess their own key skills and to
strengthen study skills, such as learning
effectively with others in a group. Each
week focuses on different areas, for example:
reading skills; note-taking and extracting
information from text; note-taking in class;
essay writing; interpreting a graph or table.
Personal tutors meet with their students
weekly and support the development of key
skills. They mark all students' assignments
during this foundation period in order to get
to know each student's skills and abilities
well.

At the end of the foundation period, the
personal tutor completes a key skills checklist
and has an individual diagnostic assessment
interview with each tutee to draw up a key
skills action plan. Students have more

tutorial time at the start of the course when
they need more support. Tutorials are also
scheduled to coincide with potentially critical
times for students, for example, before the
first assignment is due, when they are
applying to higher education and towards the
end of the course. Students are entitled to
additional tutorial support by negotiation; for
example, if they have been ill and have
missed work.

• invest resources in extra tutorial support
  for students

One college allocates extra teacher hours
from their retention fund, when a course
team submits a plan of how they will help
students deemed 'at risk' to succeed and
achieve. Most course teams choose to use
the extra teaching hours allocated for
additional tutorials.

• review tutorial support for disadvantaged
  students, identify successful approaches,
  and disseminate features of good practice
  across the college.

102 Tutorial support for part-time students is
underdeveloped across the sector. Part-time
students and those in community-based
provision are least likely to be entitled to tutorial
support. Where they do receive tutorial support,
the teacher usually also acts as tutor. Support is
informal and only given to students who make a
request, not necessarily to those who most need
support. Features of effective practice in tutorial
arrangements for part-time students include:

• an entitlement to individual tutorials for
  each student, for example, for 30 minutes
  each term. Teachers organise this in
  different ways, depending on the nature of
  the course and the needs of students. For
  example, some teachers organise a rolling
  programme of individual tutorials, seeing
  one student 15 minutes prior to the lesson
  starting and one student at the end of the

lesson. Some teachers schedule one lesson every six weeks or so to review progress with each student individually whilst the rest of the students complete other work that is set

- adapted versions of the college's tutorial programme, record-keeping and action plans for full-time students are used in arranging tutorial support for part-time students

- teachers drawing on other services in the college, where necessary, to help support part-time students; for example, counselling or guidance services, at times and at a location convenient to the student.

Other learning and practical support for students

103 Students from groups under-represented in further education are more likely to have support requirements than other students. Occasionally, colleges recruit students experiencing great disadvantage or personal trauma and in need of specialist support without making sure that the college has the necessary skills or suitable links with other agencies. Some colleges have developed sophisticated support strategies.

At one college, six out of 12 students in a GCSE class were living rough on the streets or were drug users. The college is committed to an 'open access' policy. It has trained teachers in working with students with challenging behaviour and security staff on ways of supporting teachers and administrative staff if needed. The college has 10 professionally trained counsellors. It has developed close links with relevant specialist agencies, including those for homeless people and drugs advice. The college reduces the size of teaching groups if too many students have particular support needs. Although this college prepares

carefully in providing for a wide range of students, it closely monitors any difficulties and regularly checks that its support systems are working for the full range of students.

104 Most colleges have a good range of support services for students. They provide:

- support in basic skills and ESOL

- suitable support arrangements relevant to students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for example dyslexia or autism

- support assistants who work closely with students requiring additional support and their subject teachers. They explain assignments and help students to organise their work in manageable chunks

- access to welfare advice and personal counselling to help students overcome anxieties that are impeding their studies, including specialist counselling such as debt counselling

- help with transport

- financial assistance for those in hardship, often providing subsidies beyond the funding available through the FEFC's access funds

- referral to a wide range of relevant specialist advice agencies

- innovative forms of support; for example, drawing on the services of youth and community workers who are trusted by the target group to provide additional support in college

- specialist warden support in residential colleges, for example, wardens who are professionally trained counsellors

- orientation for groups unfamiliar with formal education in England, for example refugees or asylum seekers.

Preparation for progression

105 Students from under-represented groups may be more likely to:

- have lower aspirations for a career or more advanced study
- need more encouragement and confidence-boosting in preparing to progress to higher level courses
- have fewer contacts with employers or teachers and students on higher level courses; a lack of 'social and cultural capital' upon which they can draw
- have little if any money to support future study
- lack role models of 'people like them' succeeding in more advanced study and employment.

106 Many colleges have developed a range of strategies to help less motivated or less confident students prepare for more advanced study or employment, as well as strategies to increase rates of progression for disadvantaged students. However, few colleges have systematic strategies for ensuring that all its students receive effective preparation for progressing to other courses or to employment. One college developed an effective core module on personal and professional development for basic skills students, but this is not used more widely on foundation level programmes or provision tailored specifically to widen participation, such as courses in ethnic catering.

Examples of effective practice found in colleges that encourage progression include:

Initial guidance
- helping students decide on 'a secure route' to employment, by advising them about the likely chances of securing employment at the end of their course

One college identified through its market research that local horticultural engineering companies experienced problems in recruiting trainees and suitably skilled staff. Their own review of work placements confirmed that garages and motor vehicle

workshops are challenging environments for students who work more slowly or have a learning difficulty and/or disability. In contrast, horticultural engineering companies are often smaller, more supportive and have a good track record of offering students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities employment at the end of their course. The college made sure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities interested in engineering were helped to assess the likelihood of gaining employment at the end of their course before they decided whether to study horticultural or motor vehicle engineering.

- discussing with students how they might strengthen their curriculum vitae and employability, especially with those students who have few or no previous qualifications or who have past experience that may deter employers, such as criminal convictions or long periods of unemployment. They might, for example, plan to gain other qualifications in areas such as first aid or GCSE English, and gain some relevant voluntary work experience

Progression as part of the curriculum
- planning progression routes in vocational areas which typically have poorly paid and qualified workforces, by closely linking vocational courses to more advanced provision in order to help students retrain for more professional jobs or gain promotion

One college plans courses in cleaning science at levels 1 and 2 to lead to higher level NVQs in customer care.

- building vocational elements into courses in basic skills and ESOL
- planning provision to include a 'wedge' of study at a higher level, for example in

higher level key skills, to demonstrate to students that they are capable of study at a more advanced level and to ease the transition between one level of study and the next

- integrating with main studies a unit of study on planning personal and professional development

In one college the development module included: making decisions about next steps; drawing up an action plan for how to prepare for progression; practising the skills needed for more independent study.

- providing an NOCN-accredited careers education programme

In an external institution, this covered: what I want to do next; exploring my choices; researching my choices; writing a career plan; positive job-search skills; applying for jobs; knocking on the right doors.

- arranging carefully structured visits to local employers so that the least articulate or confident students have opportunities to interact and pose questions. For example, by helping these students prepare questions in advance, organising one-to-one meetings with employees or holding discussions in small groups so that the most vocal students do not dominate
- arranging visits to careers fairs and exhibitions about further training which are structured so that students with less confidence or weak communication skills benefit

At one college, reviews indicated that, despite invitations, few ESOL students visited college-wide education and careers days. ESOL teachers arranged for groups of their students to visit the college's large exhibition set up for the National Organisation for Adult

Learning's (NIACE's) national 'Adult Learners' Week'. A pair of students visited each stand to ask questions they had prepared beforehand. Each pair prepared a brief presentation for others in the group about what they had learned about courses and services offered by the college. They advised any student interested to visit the stall for more information. Students gained in confidence and encouraged each other to consider enrolling for other courses at the college and to make use of student services, including the careers service.

- including work placements for students least likely to be able to gain employment

One external institution added NVQ units linked to work placements to its GNVQ courses in engineering and IT to give unemployed students and refugees, a high proportion of its students, practical work experience and some specific vocational qualifications.

Role models

- inviting former students from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds to be present during induction or in the early stages of the course

In an adult residential college, former students came to talk about their own fears and lack of confidence when they started the course, how they overcame these and how the course helped them to get their current job or get accepted on a higher level course.

- designing teaching materials to include references to people from different backgrounds holding responsible jobs, and to those making important contributions to the development of the subject discipline; for example, people from minority ethnic groups, women or people with dyslexia

- taking advantage of national initiatives to promote the idea that 'people like you do succeed'

In one college, as part of International Women's Day, they invited a range of women to talk to female students on lower level courses about their successful careers in related vocational areas.

- setting up mentoring systems so that students who may be at risk of failing are supported by people in employment who come from a similar background or have similar experiences to themselves; for example, placing a student who is recovering from alcohol dependency in contact with a carefully chosen member of Alcoholics Anonymous

Helping students plan financial arrangements to support further study

- giving students long lead-in times for any visits to employers or universities which involve a charge being made so that those who need to can pay in small instalments or save up gradually
- including fund-raising in the curriculum

One college, in its courses for unemployed adults, includes residential study, team-building exercises, various visits and a unit on fund-raising. Students apply their new knowledge and skills to find sources of funding to support them with their future studies.

- making sure students are well informed about the shorter-term financial implications of further study as well as potential longer-term financial benefits of securing better-paid employment, and helping them to weigh up these 'costs and benefits'

- informing students at an early stage of any hardship funds, sources of charitable support or fee reductions to which they may be entitled on the course to which they intend to progress

Location of provision to assist progression

- planning the location of provision targeted at disadvantaged students, so that it is given status by being in a prime location in the college
- arranging visits to the main site for students based in community centres, or teaching later elements of their course on the main site, to encourage them to feel at home and prepare for more advanced study

Taking services to students in community-based provision

- offering educational guidance and 'taster' courses in local communities or meeting places for under-represented groups to encourage participation and progression; for example, in gurdwaras (Sikh place of worship), unemployed workers' associations, social services' centres or working men's clubs
- ensuring that guidance workers visit all courses in outreach locations at times most appropriate to students least likely to progress; for example, midway through the course and not at the final session when there is no time left on the course for staff to give further support to students who need it

Careers education and guidance

- promoting careers services among groups they assess as least likely to inquire about such services independently, for example homeless people or asylum seekers
- maximising opportunities provided by other agencies to help students gain

experience and prepare for future careers or more advanced education.

In a sixth form college, students from minority ethnic groups are encouraged to join, and supported in attending, the weekend programmes organised by some universities for potential applicants from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Annex

Methodology

During 1998 and 1999 inspectors:

- made 49 in-depth visits to colleges

- analysed all 1997 to 2000 strategic plans

- visited eight FEFC-funded strategic partnerships

- analysed a range of statistical information held by the FEFC

- analysed inspection evidence from 1997-98, 1998-99 and part of 1999-2000.

An advisory group supported the exercise and gave valuable advice. Its members were:

Sue Carrol, Barking College

Professor Robert Fryer, University of Southampton

Lynne Morris, Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College

Judith Norrington, Association of Colleges

Anna Reisenberger, Further Education Development Agency

Kim Roberts, Department for Education and Employment

Judith Summers, NIACE

George Sweeney, Knowsley Community College

John Taylor, Park Lane College