Funding

Use of Project Funds for the Creation of

Childcare Places

1999-2000

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Summary

Places

1   From 70 different projects, 6,425 new childcare places were created. The application of the DfEE guidance in Circular 99/35 for counting places increased the number of places reported by some institutions. Several institutions were able to provide significantly more than the number of places they applied for without any further spending. For example, some nurseries were registered for more places than institutions had anticipated and the abilities of the childminding network co-ordinators to set up new places were initially underestimated.

2   There are real benefits to widening participation in being able to offer childcare. It enables those that otherwise would not be able to participate in further education to do so, and will help institutions achieve their recruitment targets. Institutions feel that the provision is vital in retaining students that otherwise often leave the course part-way through the year. In particular, the new childcare places have attracted large numbers of short-course students and students that favour attendance at outreach centres. Such outreach and mobile provision is particularly beneficial because it takes the learning directly to those that would not normally participate.

3   The final report indicates that the current take-up of places matches the targeted priority groups (single parents, teenage mothers, those in financial need, refugees). Institutions have formal systems and procedures in place to ensure places are allocated fairly and are able to utilise the places flexibly to benefit as many students as possible.

4   Institutions report that their student-support teams and nursery managers seem to have a closer working relationship after participating in these projects. The monitoring of project information involved both parties and in several cases resulted in the establishment of more stringent checking procedures and the consideration of the needs of the child as well as the student when allocating places. The use of these places to train childcare students proved popular and was reported as an extremely positive experience for all involved. There is also evidence from the consolidation of learner support monitoring initiated for 1999-2000 that institutions have a better understanding of the true costs of in-house childcare support.

Funding

5   The Council approved 74 bids for the creation of 5,500 places, which would have required funding of £4.6 million.

6   Seventy projects were completed at a cost of £4.2 million. One bid was withdrawn immediately after the allocation of funds and three further bids were withdrawn after encountering severe difficulties. The actual funding cost per place was £647, which compared with an anticipated £830 for approved bids and a target of £1,000 set by the DfEE.

7   The lower funding cost per place is due to a combination of economies of scale delivered by projects that exceeded their places bid, and funding constraints for projects that did not achieve their bid target. Institutions were aware that the Council would not fund project costs above £1,000 per place and therefore claimed lower funding where there was a shortfall in the number of places, irrespective of the actual costs incurred.

8   Many institutions invested substantial funds of their own and their partners, as well as obtaining funding from external sources. The use of existing staff and resources also contributed to cost-effective projects that provided good value for money. A few institutions even shared resources between colleges. Looking forward, institutions emphasised their commitment to sustaining the new places in the long term, recognising the benefits of childcare in their provision of further education.

Project management

9   The endorsement of the local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) was a valuable check on the suitability of a project for an area, and many institutions appreciated this initial contact and will maintain the link for future advice. The EYDCP assisted several institutions in their research into demand for types of places and how to target the marketing of places. In some cases the EYDCP will assist an institution in sustaining its childcare provision.

10 Working in partnership with other FE institutions was a challenge for some initially reluctant institutions, but many resulting partnerships were subsequently appreciative of this approach. However, a small number of institutions were unable to resolve their differences despite genuine efforts and some intervention from the FEFC.

11 Reports highlighted a lack of project management experience in institutions. This created problems when a lack of experience was combined with tight timing requirements. Institutions requested changes both to future announcement timing and to the length of time for implementation, with a preferred finish in late August. This timescale would have the benefit of motivating the institutions to complete the places on time, as missing the deadline would result in a significant under-utilisation of capacity and a potential shortfall in student recruitment during the September enrolment.

12 Institutions also noted that the short time frame led to the adoption of quicker, but more expensive approaches, and that the greatest difficulties were experienced in the building works during the implementation phase. Effective communication, and a drive to achieve the places, were the factors repeatedly mentioned as overcoming such barriers within the partnership and in implementing the places. In general, childminding projects ran into fewer difficulties and were the quickest to implement.

13   As a general trend, problems with timing, project management and the implementation of places often resulted in a shift in focus of the provision. Time-consuming nursery new builds that ran into difficulties were exchanged for setting up childminding networks to complete the project on time and provide the care desperately needed for students' children. Often where this was the case, institutions declared an intention to complete the new build in the future.

Quality and Innovation

14   Institutions offered numerous examples of best practice and quality, including a number of positive OFSTED inspection reports. These provide confidence that the standards of the childcare provision being set up is high. It would be interesting to know which nurseries are providing play/care only and which are actively educating children and helping them learn and prepare for school. This will be included in the final report for the 2000-01 projects.

Places

15   Only 63% of the projects created places exactly as planned. Many institutions commented that this was because the timing did not allow sufficient planning time before the bids were submitted. Hence, ideas not properly thought through had to be subsequently amended in order to achieve a result.

16   Around 80% of institutions reported that they had difficulty counting the places and required help. Many have commented that the more structured approach for 2000-01 is helpful.

17   Many institutions misinterpreted the definition of places, taking it to mean physical places (registered capacity) or the total number of different children that used the facility. In the case of a sessional crèche, this was far more than one child every three hours. It also became apparent from the opening hours timetables that institutions often counted as only one place that which could be counted as two or even three, according to the DfEE guidance in Circular 99/35.

18   Institutions achieved a greater understanding of the counting methodology during the reporting phase of the project. Discussions with one institution resulted in the original provision for 30 places being changed to 60 places simply because the institution had miscounted initially. However, the institution more than matched the funding, giving a more realistic reflection of the true costs of the project, providing 60 places rather than the 30 they believed they had applied for.

19   Some nursery and new build projects experienced difficulties related to finance, planning permission and registration.

20   Childminding networks were quicker to set up and in these cases much of the money was spent on a network manager's salary. Once in place, managers were able to recruit large numbers of childminders for a relatively small cost, if there were enough trained people in the community.

21 Interestingly, a small number of institutions commented that providing childcare facilities had prompted the institution to provide childcare courses in the future. This will have knock-on effects in the community and could help alleviate the shortage of trained childcare workers in those areas.

Why projects did not achieve place targets

22 Half the projects changed either the type of provision or the number of places to be created for each type of provision, from the original project submission. A typical example of a change of provision was a nursery new build scheme held up by the planning committee, being changed to a childminding network because it was relatively quick to implement.

23 Several institutions were unable to achieve the number of places for which they had applied. A barrier one institution faced, despite a pre-registration social services inspection, was that the space available turned out to be not quite big enough for the number of places they required. Another common problem was not enough toilets, or toilets in an inappropriate location. Four institutions faced skills shortages and had problems recruiting staff. In several areas there was a lack of suitably qualified or registered childminders.

24 Some institutions were not able to deliver all the places because other sources of promised funding (for example, the European Social Fund) did not materialise, so the projects had to be scaled down.

Identifying demand for places and methods of place prioritisation

25 Institutions were asked how they identified the demand for places at the outset of the application process. It emerged that a variety of methods were used including extensive surveys utilising stratified samples within the community and the student population. Several institutions relied on research already conducted by the EYDCP or an associated organisation. One institution used its taster days to assess the need.

26 Many institutions employ an interview process to ensure that they meet student needs and monitor ongoing issues such as the quality of facilities and availability of places. They also keep accurate lists of students who are unable to attend because of a lack of childcare.

27 Supporting students in need was a concern for many institutions at the planning stage, and all methods adopted appeared to be comprehensive, valid and reliable.

28 In measuring demand, the projects often involved extensive communication and consultation with the EYDCP, Social Services, Health Visitors and other community groups, and feedback from parents and students. Many institutions kept records of students unable to attend the college without childcare, as well as a waiting list. Some institutions employed their own neighbourhood workers to perform front-line needs analysis. Areas of high unemployment or deprivation were specifically targeted by advertising campaigns. Marketing information was collected via responses when appropriate courses were brought on stream. In many cases, the availability of childcare has enhanced the reputation of the college, raised its profile within the community and greatly increased enrolments.

> **Tameside College** – The needs of the local community were identified through analysis of waiting lists and other indicators of demand, results of local needs-analysis projects, and analysis of the college's widening participation strategies.

> **The College of West Anglia** – The college deliberately targeted its community-based provision and created sufficient places in areas of disadvantage. This has had a noticeable effect on the widening participation activities of the partnership institutions.

> **Middlesbrough College** – The college distributed the childminders geographically to ensure equality of access to the service for students from widening participation areas.

29 All institutions paint a similar picture in that they aim to aid all students in real need of childcare, especially those that could not engage in education or training without such support. All institutions that responded prioritise lone parents, teenage parents (particularly lone teenage parents), students on low incomes or benefits, unemployed students or those on New Deal schemes, and students from widening participation areas or ethnic minorities.

> **Newcastle College** – The students using the childcare facilities are usually unemployed, single parents or in low-paid unskilled jobs. Without this provision they are unable to access the types of courses offered in the community, which attract people back onto the first rungs of the education ladder and are aimed at improving students' employability.

30 Many institutions also prioritise places for other needy groups. For example, those who speak English as a second language, basic skills students, those with few or no previous qualifications, refugees, immigrants, individuals with a disability, and students living in recognised deprived areas. One college even prioritises those with a lack of transport for a childcare place on campus rather than in the community, to help alleviate unnecessary travelling costs. Other colleges have focused on taking learning to the learners in order to achieve their widening participation objectives.

> **Rotherham College of Arts and Technology** – A mobile crèche enables provision in new geographical areas. The college's outreach courses are attracting people that are out of work, young parents, and the black and Asian community who were previously under-represented.

31 Other institutions are notable because of their undertaking to ensure their students can continue their education without interruption, for example, by guaranteeing a place for any student who becomes a parent part-way through a course, and aiming to find places for all teenage parents returning to learning.

Several institutions have indicated they will use the places to address shortfalls in the enrolment of certain types of student or to meet national priorities:

Bromley College – Priority is given to schoolgirl mothers.

Highbury College – The college undertakes to supply a place to anyone in the following groups that wishes to return to learning: the homeless, travellers, those with poor mental health or profound learning difficulties, women in refuge accommodation, ex-offenders.

Weymouth College – Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to access childcare. The report indicated that the facility provided specialist childcare entirely for children whose parents would otherwise be unable to return to training and education.

Muslim Resource Centre – The crèche was prioritised for parents from the ethnic minorities in this designated area of social deprivation.

32   Places are often combined with financial support through the learner support funds and in some institutions women returners benefit from fee remission.

33   Many colleges advocate cross-departmental links, with the nursery manager working closely with the student support teams who actually allocate places to students with greatest need. (Allocation is based on standard criteria, for example, means tests, receipt of benefit, or being unable to attend college without childcare support). The involvement of the nursery manager means the child's needs are being addressed as well as the parent's. It also provides a check within the system, ensuring that the child is using the place and that the student is still attending the course. (Note that the revised learner support monitoring forms issued recently for 1999-2000 consolidated all elements of learner support (access funds, childcare support and residential bursaries) and have stimulated greater communication between student support teams and nursery managers. Consolidated reporting is already in place for 2000-01.)

34   All the institutions reported procedures that appeared to be fair and reasonable and should ensure that places will be allocated to those most in need.

Types of course attended by parents

35   There appear to be two clear trends in the type of courses the parents attend. In those institutions that are setting up their first childcare facility the majority of places are taken up by students attending basic skills courses: ESOL, introductory IT, non-schedule 2 courses (for example, assertiveness training), access to HE and childcare training courses. In institutions that already offer childcare facilities, students using these additional places are studying a wider range of courses. The most popular are intermediate IT, travel and tourism, accounting, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and health and social care.

36   Many institutions often offered childcare for short courses to entice further progression.

37   Colleges are increasingly recognising the net financial benefit of childcare provision.

> **City of Bristol College** – When it became apparent that the required attendance on a particular course could only be achieved through additional childcare provision, the faculty made a contribution to the costs of the nursery.

> **Bournville College of FE** – The setting up of the current places scheme substantially increased demand for the courses available at a particular centre.

Meeting the needs originally identified

38   Some 85% of institutions indicated that the places had fulfilled the original need identified at the outset. Mixed responses were obtained from the remaining 15%. However, there is evidence in these cases that original samples were not representative enough to identify the true extent of the need.

39   Practically all of the partnerships that undertook some analysis on additional need identified the lack of baby places (less than two years old) and special needs places as a significant barrier for learners. Some of the institutions indicated they were reluctant to set up such places because of the expense incurred in sustaining them. However, it is encouraging to note that several institutions now have plans to implement this to some degree (again often within partnership). Many are extensively researching current need to try to anticipate demand in two years' time.

> **Croydon College** – It is hoped the unit will achieve further funding in order to set up a soft play area for children who have a wide range of special needs, including being traumatised by earlier experiences. Such a facility is very beneficial for children to begin the process of integration and establishing self-confidence in an environment of independent discovery of new skills.

40   The need for further types of places and kinds of provision differed according to the area and the facilities already set up. General themes identified include the need for more flexible childminding, for example half-day places, some evening/weekend childcare, and holiday play-scheme provision.

41   The general picture is of ever-widening demand – as each need is addressed by new projects, institutions become aware that either the need is greater than anticipated or other important needs exist.

Contribution to widening participation, retention and achievement targets

42   Reports on 82% of the projects indicated that the new places had contributed to widening participation and in some cases, to retention and achievement for students on part-year courses who were able to benefit from a mid-year implementation date.

Reports on the remaining 18% of projects did not offer any conclusions, possibly because few students were able to take up the places.

43   Advertising the places was instrumental in widening participation. One college planned their project using a range of communication channels. A taster day to encourage students with childcare needs not previously engaged in education was run in tandem with regeneration projects. Open days were arranged to promote the nursery and the facilities were mentioned in publicity material for the college and individual courses.

> **North Area College** – While statistical feedback from subject tutors indicates an improvement in retention, the most significant improvement relates to increased participation rates, for example, the access course enrolments increased by 100%.

> **Totton College** – The facility has been used to support workshops for single mothers for short sessions as well as offering long-term places. This has attracted large numbers to taster sessions and encouraged enrolments onto FE courses.

> **The Rutland College** – The drop-in basis proved attractive to some unwilling to commit to a full course. Places are available for a wider range of courses, over more days and for longer hours, enabling a non-traditional take-up.

> **Preston College** – Four young women are currently attending year 11 at school but have babies. The expansion of the childcare will have a significant impact this coming September (2000) at main enrolment.

44   Establishing childcare provision in outreach or minority areas can dramatically widen participation.

> **Walsall College of Arts and Technology** – Palfrey Community Association is situated in a predominantly Asian community. By increasing the number of programmes offered at this site the college will be able to attract more students who meet the widening participation criteria.

45   Even establishing a network of childcare workers can have a knock-on effect in widening participation.

> **Wakefield community-based centres** – A major impact has been made in attracting into education and training the childminders themselves, as members of the targeted communities.

46   The location of the facilities is a crucial factor. There is a demand for both on and off-site provision. On-site provides security to parents who are nervous about leaving their children and off-site provides convenience because it is close to home. Quality childcare also aids retention.

Blackburn College – The college tries to place the children in the same building as, or at least near the course venues for those parents nervous of leaving their children, for example, those that do not speak English as a first language.

West Thames College – Refugee families were reluctant to use childminders or be out of sight of their children.

Lambeth College – The facilities have enabled the college to offer students places near their homes. The places have definitely helped to improve retention. Students' attendance and progress have been closely monitored and continued payment through access funds has been linked to these.

Croydon College – Parents have said that they feel confident about studying, knowing their children are on site. There is also no extra travelling time caused by having to drop children off.

Tynemouth College – Parents prefer to know that their children are being cared for on campus.

Worcester College of Technology – Experience of childcare provision over the last ten years has shown that parents who have secured good quality, affordable childcare are more likely to remain on courses and achieve their qualifications. With this expansion of provision, the college expects the trend to continue and therefore improve prospects for many families.

Effects on the community and other partners

47 The childcare places are an effective step in supporting the entire community. Some comments provided by institutions noting the benefits of the new childcare places for the community are included below.

Dukeries Community College – 'The potential gain to the community is enormous. Poor parenting causes considerable social damage. Truancy, underachievement, antisocial behaviour all cost society money. We can make a significant contribution to reducing these losses, as well as adding less quantifiable benefits like raised self-esteem and confidence, better quality of life.'

City of Sunderland College – 'The college has a dedicated community unit, which deals with franchise and outreach courses. For some people this has been a lifeline. For example, we ran a course at a local health centre and the course would have closed if childcare had not been provided. The parents had a limited understanding of our language and could not have travelled to a main college centre. This support was crucial for them.'

Using the new facilities to train childcare students

> **West Thames College** – Running a crèche to support students doing a sessional crèche work qualification had the benefit of practical work experience on the doorstep. Furthermore, the course helped introduce new ideas and encouraged good practice, which was of direct benefit to staff, students and the children.

48   Only four institutions were unable to offer on-the-job training to students within the new facilities. This was because neither the institutions, nor any other institutions within the area, offered childcare courses.

49   A majority of the partnerships that trained students within the new childcare facilities used the students only in a supernumerary capacity. However, it appears that not all social services departments require this for registration, and in some cases students on NVQ courses are not required to be supernumerary. Despite this, most institutions still insist on all students being supernumerary, which demonstrates a commitment to delivering high quality childcare. However, several institutions expressed the view that using students in a non-supernumerary capacity would save money without necessarily compromising quality.

> **Reading College and School of Arts and Design** – The running costs of college day nurseries could be reduced by a considerable amount if social services accepted Diploma in Nursery Nursing (NNEB) second-year students as unqualified staff, instead of supernumerary. Such students can be doubly supervised by qualified nursery staff and their on-site college lecturers. Obviously, there would need to be a fixed ratio of qualified staff to students, and to numbers and ages of children.

50   Several institutions suggested that the work experience motivated the childcare students, gave them a realistic impression of working within childcare and aided course retention. The work experience provided a wide range of opportunities for students, for example, small group play, managing a whole group of children on the same task, and one-to-one interaction in learning. Different types of play involved storytelling and messy play, creating wall displays, and directly experiencing the effectiveness of equipment and toys. Many institutions also commented that the variable utilisation of the facilities gave students experience in both busy and quiet periods. The latter enabled qualified staff to provide a high level of attention and additional training and support to vulnerable students. As well as the childcare provision, students have named work-based supervisors and are regularly visited by tutors who are work-based assessors.

51   All the institutions' reports conveyed the impression that the experience for the children and the students was very rewarding. A number of reports noted the positive way in which the children responded to interactions with the students.

52   Several institutions provided students with the full range of work-experience opportunities in full nursery day care, sessional crèche care, mobile outreach facilities, and childminding within the home with experienced tutor/trainer childminders.

Funding

Sources

53   The majority of institutions invested money from their own funds and this often more than matched the FEFC grant. Many institutions also identified that substantial management and other staff time was donated to keep costs low.

54   Approximately 10 partnerships received grants from the European Social Fund (ESF), New Opportunities Fund (NOF), Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) sources. Seven partnerships received additional funding for the project from their local education authority (LEA). The FEFC grant only covered the costs of the entire project in 18 partnerships. The majority of these were childminding networks.

55   Sources of miscellaneous grants that institutions have successfully accessed include housing capital receipts, day care services, National Childminding Association, lottery funds, 'Faith in the City', Day Care Services Play Provision and the YMCA. Additionally several institutions raised money through sponsorship and fundraising.

Use of funds

56   Details of the use of funds are shown in table 1. As can be seen, the 1999-2000 childcare projects have created 6,425 places at a cost of £4,156,511.

Table 1. Bids approved and outcomes

	Funding	*Number of places*	*Cost per place*	*Number of projects*
Approved bids	£4,566,710	5,500	£830	74
Outcome	£4,156,511	6,425	£647	70

57   Reasons for the lower funding outcome include better 'cost performance' in delivering the target places, lower funding claims or FEFC claw-back of allocated funds for non-achievement of places, and withdrawal of projects by institutions due to external factors. Where institutions' costs escalated above the original allocation, or places created exceeded the original target, further funding was not given.

> **College of West Anglia** – The college created 1,036 childminding places for £131,750, giving a cost per place of £127. Within this total are an extra 666 places created at no additional cost.

58   Funds for childcare places were allocated on a 'funding' cost per place, not an actual cost per place. Therefore, reductions in funding consequent upon a reduced number of childcare places form an understatement of the real costs incurred. For the 2000-01 bids, both 'funding' and actual costs per place will be monitored.

59   During the implementation of the 1999-2000 projects, institutions were asked to report on three generic types of provision. However, not all institutions were able to provide this information and therefore the breakdown of the 'funding' cost per place has been based on 84% of the project returns. The relative costs of the different provisions are shown in table 2.

Table 2. 'Funding' costs per place

Provision	Places created	Expenditure	Cost per place
Childminding	969	£545,724	£563
Crèche/mobile	1,831	£1,289,767	£704
Nursery/day care	3,151	£2,063,642	£655
Total (59 projects)	5,951	£3,899,133	£655

60   As expected, childminding shows the lowest average cost per place. It was not anticipated that the cost for nursery/day care would be lower than that for crèche/mobile. However, it is apparent that some institutions used the grant to buy places at private nurseries as a cheaper alternative to investing in new facilities. For 2000-01 institutions have been explicitly advised that the grant may be used only for capital and/or revenue funding to set up facilities or arrangements that will provide new childcare places.

Value for money

61   Childminding is an inexpensive childcare solution and, if staffed by qualified workers in the community participating in a formal network with training and peer group support, it can offer tremendous value for money. The College of West Anglia's project is one of these. Once the network manager was in post, the college was able to recruit and consolidate large numbers of childminders into the network, far exceeding the original targets.

The College of West Anglia – The lead manager had an in-depth understanding of childcare provision and the college was able to exceed the 370-place target. Cost effectiveness was achieved through a very short implementation time. Experienced staff were seconded from the lead college to pilot the collection of information from community-based providers. These staff were well known in the EYDCP and were active members of the PLA. Seconded staff from the Under-8s Forum, had already worked in childcare settings and had credibility and known standards of excellence through Norfolk Social Services/OFSTED inspections. Their confidence communicated itself to the new team. The 'roll-out' was carefully planned, as was the induction of new staff. Field workers were fast-tracked into the project. Sharing tasks and resources between the lead colleges also accelerated the project, for example, the appointment of field workers, leaflet design and the database. No time was wasted, thus enabling targets to be exceeded.

62   Other ways of achieving value for money included use of college labour, refurbishing existing facilities rather than engaging in new build, buying effectively, and creating flexible provision using shared resources.

St. Vincent College – The college provides an excellent example of how value for money can be obtained by re-deploying college staff and resources. An existing building was renovated by college-employed labour, thus providing better value than outside contractors. The pod building was built out of previously-used sections of buildings that were refitted together. Additional alterations, plumbing, and service connections were carried out by college staff moved from other duties. Planning work was carried out largely by the college project manager. Further expertise was provided by the YMCA, the college's partner organisation. Throughout the setting up of the project a dedicated manager was not required.

West Suffolk College – 'A considerable amount of time and effort has been given to the project by staff members. We converted a premises previously used as a cash office. A large part of this refurbishment was undertaken by college staff and none of the time has been charged to the project, thus representing outstanding value.'

Wirral Metropolitan College – Existing college infrastructure and facilities were utilised to minimise establishment costs and to meet requirements for registration. Where possible, the college completed the refurbishment in-house in order to minimise the costs. This meant that places could be created in a short timescale and that most of the funding was allocated to childcare places rather than infrastructure costs. The college also made effective use of the nursery grant for early years. This project has led to interest and demand from parents who would otherwise have sent their children to a pre-school once their children reached the age of three.

Tynemouth College – All building work was subject to competitive tender arrangements and was scheduled alongside other projects to gain maximum efficiency.

Bromley College – The college was able to save money by purchasing in bulk.

Wakefield community-based centres – A local resource base has been established to share access to large equipment, and to vary the play resources and toys available for use. This represents better quality provision for children by varying their materials, and keeping costs down by sharing toys.

Reading College and School of Arts and Design – Art students designed the nursery garden. They were given a brief and worked in small groups. The designs were viewed by the under-8s advisor from social services. The best ideas, that is, the most practical in terms of appeal, safety and costs, were incorporated into the final design. Carpentry students built the playhouse and storage shed for the garden.

Sustainability of the places

63   Reports on 82% of the projects indicate that plans are in place to sustain the facilities in the long term. The majority of institutions that do not yet have plans are investigating other sources of funding and are committed to supporting the childcare provision from their own funds if no other sources of funding are forthcoming.

64   In the majority of partnerships the institutions have agreed to assist with basic maintenance and running costs, and each institution intends to allocate a budget to underwrite any shortfall in funding not met by other sources of income. In some successful partnerships the EYDCP have promised to provide resources, staffing or funding for the facilities.

65   Institutions were asked to indicate the sources of funding they have lined up to sustain the new facilities. The most frequently mentioned sources of funds are detailed below:

■   support from the European Social Fund and bids for Single Regeneration Budget monies

■   use of learner support funds. Many institutions indicated their intention to introduce a sliding-scale pricing system where some students will get free childcare, while those with modest incomes will be charged a reasonable rate. Full commercial rates will be charged for community usage

■   government funding includes childcare support for New Deal students, grants for three and four year olds, Sure Start and a range of LEA-sponsored schemes

■   income generation from community use, for example, letting the facility to groups in the evening or at weekends, or by running a breakfast or after-school club in the facility. Several institutions indicated they would open the childcare facility during holiday periods to help generate funds.

Project Management

Partnership between institutions and with the EYDCP

66   During implementation, many institutions indicated to regional office staff that they felt there was no benefit in working with other further education (FE) provider institutions. However, many of the final reports elaborated on how helpful the project partnership had been in overcoming difficulties, and expected that the benefits of the project partnership links would continue, outlasting the project in many ways.

> **Burton** – The partners have expressed a desire to keep the group together for future bids and developments and are committed to sharing knowledge and experiences for the benefit of the partnership.

67   Several institutions stated their commitment to continue working within the EYDCP to maintain standards and provide further childcare.

> **Wirral Metropolitan College** – 'Additional community groups have expressed an interest in some form of future partnership arrangements with the college. These include Arch initiatives, Pathways groups, the community education team, Serve Wirral and Liscard Hall. We are discussing how best we can work together with these community groups to facilitate access to relevant education and training for the under-represented groups these organisations support. Another impact is the increased articulation of the need for childcare support in other deprived areas served by the college. The work on additional places built up a very positive working relationship with the EYDCP, including an agreement to continue meeting to develop further initiatives. The recruitment of childminders from the local community has had a direct impact on raising the profile of the college's commitment to childcare.'

68   The EYDCPs have also, in some cases, made a commitment to contribute towards the funding of the provision, and assist in co-ordinating the childcare network and in feeding back training needs to the institutions.

> **Middlesbrough College** – 'Good local media coverage has helped to raise interest and professional standards amongst childminders. The outcome is that we will be resourced to continue standards work in 2000-01 by the EYDCP.'

69   Continuation of the project partnerships may be essential to sustaining childminding networks. They enable childminders in remote situations to receive support from the project co-ordinator, and institutions can run training days and courses for the childminders, enabling them to meet up, share best practice and socialise, thus forging further links within the community.

70   Furthermore, in a number of cases, institutions have undertaken to provide training (from first aid to formal qualifications) for the childminders within the network completely free or at low cost. This can only have a positive effect on the quality of childcare offered and directly benefit the children within the community.

71   Another valuable outcome of working within project partnership has been closer co-operation between institutions. The institutions that offer childcare provision, but do not offer childcare courses, have opened up their provision to other institutions' students to provide work experience opportunities.

> **Redcar and Cleveland College** – The college has a more focused role within the EYDCP and now has representation in a range of community groups concerned with early years provision, especially vocational training.

> **West Thames College** – The college has established close liaison with primary schools, other providers, housing and health workers, tenants' associations and community leaders. It is working with many groups for the benefit of the community.

72   One project partnership set up a structure within the community to enable referrals from health and welfare staff, assisting potential students with childcare requirements to contact the institution and arrange childcare and study support.

> **York College** – The project has brought together a strong working group which will continue to work co-operatively to overcome childcare barriers in the future.

73   Many institutions commented that the experience of project management was invaluable and the institutions were motivated to set up further provision now.

74   However, not all institutions were able to work so successfully with their partner institutions.

> **Merton College** – The difficulties stemmed from contractual management, including the departure of the key manager at a critical phase of the project, followed by a subsequent inability of the steering group and the contract managers to adequately oversee the project.

Adequacy of the project timescale and the timing outcomes

75   This topic generated the greatest volume of responses. Many institutions made the point that to plan and implement places within seven months compromised the value for money of the projects, as the quickest option had to be taken rather than the cheapest. Several also noted they had concerns regarding the quality of the provision set up in such a short timescale.

76   Throughout the implementation of the 1999-2000 projects, and the preparation of the 2000-01 projects, institutions continually telephoned the Council to comment that the six-month implementation time was just too short to set up any form of childcare except the most basic arrangements.

77   Specific problems identified by institutions included:

■   insufficient time to carry out a feasibility study before making application

■   the amount of staff time required to establish a completely new nursery on a limited budget, identify appropriate cost-effective accommodation, and decide on fixtures and fittings

■   ignorance of the scale of conversion required for suitable childcare accommodation.

> **The Rutland College** – 'We could have planned a larger (more economical) project with longer timescales.'

> **St Vincent College** – 'The very short amount of time available to set up the project did not allow contingencies to be built into the initial project timetable.'

Warrington College – 'An earlier announcement of the project would have allowed more planning lead-in time and prevented certain problems.'

Middlesbrough College – 'It is unrealistic to expect a project to both create and fill places in the timescale allotted, for example, it takes three months for registration.'

Wirral Metropolitan College – 'The timescale was very short. It did not really allow adequate time for preparation to meet social services' registration requirements. The partnership was able to implement within the overall timescales because of the experience and determination of the partners involved and because the original project submission was based on the utilisation of existing infrastructure and facilities.'

Croydon College – 'We thought the timescale was too short, as we were starting from scratch and needed planning permission and compliance with building regulations. Also, many parents did not want to disrupt their children after the start of term in September.'

78   Institutions repeatedly requested that they be given an entire teaching year to set up the places with the go-ahead given just before the summer break or in September, and works continuing all year until August. Places would then be ready for the student intake in September of the following teaching year.

79   All institutions felt that a September implementation date would be sensible, for two reasons. First, individuals who could not attend the institution without childcare do not enrol, and parents that have arranged alternative childcare do not want to change carers mid-year. There is therefore little or no demand in March for new places. Second, because there is little demand to sustain the provision before the next academic year begins, it is often a waste of resources (operating costs).

The Sheffield College – 'We felt that the set timescale was unrealistic; to set up new childcare places and ensure efficient and effective preparatory work and consultation with Sheffield EYDCP, a longer time is required. An academic year would have given us time, with confirmation of the bid in the summer so that we were ready to start in September, with the new places available in the following September.'

West Herts College – 'The in-year scheduling proved complex, as it did not synchronise with the college's annual planning and budget cycle. It would have been useful if the project had started earlier in order to tie in with the beginning of the academic year.'

Bournville College of FE – 'There was a general feeling that the timescale was very tight and that earlier indications of funding availability would greatly assist in planning and execution of similar projects in future.'

> **Worcester College of Technology** – 'Initial notification came during the summer closure. A longer timescale in which to submit and develop the project, and less interim reports, could have lessened the difficulties.'

> **Redcar and Cleveland College** – 'The positioning in the academic year when places were expected to be made available has not produced an immediate and significant demand from clients, that is, May is not as good as September.'

Institutions' difficulties in managing the project

80 Twenty-five partnerships had problems in managing the project. These problems were often caused by lack of communication resulting in the lead institution being unaware of the appropriate monitoring information.

81 Specific problems associated with the management of projects included:
- delays due to the timing of management meetings
- disagreement or lack of co-operation between partner institutions
- key staff on long-term sickness or absence, or leaving the organisation; and
- setbacks due to flu and Christmas.

> **East Surrey College** – 'It was difficult to co-ordinate three very different organisations some of which altered staffing fairly frequently.'

82 Institutions that experienced problems were asked how the issues were resolved. A common theme was that a schedule of monthly meetings helped to keep projects on track. Previous experience of partnerships and sharing information and expertise were key enabling factors.

> **Tameside College** – 'The previous existence of the City Pride colleges group meant that we were able to co-ordinate a bid effectively and formal management meetings were supported by a number of bilateral arrangements. We would have welcomed a longer time-frame both for submission and implementation of the bid.'

> **Redcar and Cleveland College** – A decision was taken to include, consult with, and have representatives on a steering group who are from key agencies from the statutory and voluntary sectors. Openness, a desire to collaborate, and a need to learn from others removed the potential for suspicion about motives and agendas in collaboration.

83 Partnerships and the development of long-term links have been a very valuable experience for some institutions.

> **North Area College** – The organisation, implementation and monitoring of the project have been positive experiences for both partners. Regular meetings and correspondence facilitated both the smooth running of the project and developed a collaborative approach. Close working relationships and sharing of good practice have been key outcomes.

84　The application process for the 2000-01 funding round has been redesigned to incorporate the lessons learned from the early experience of implementing the 1999-2000 projects. In addition, the regions have been fully briefed and alerted to look out for potential problems before a project is accepted for funding.

Institutions' difficulties during implementation

85　Just over one-third of projects suffered some form of implementation difficulty or delay (even if the overall deadline of 31 March was not affected).

86　Most problems were associated with building works, for example:

- planning permission problems, including building alterations, change of use and objections related to vehicular congestion and noise

- issues with architects and tender submissions

- early difficulties in obtaining accurate information on the cost of work in a project

- fire regulations

- contractors not completing work to schedule

- landlords causing delays in signing leases

- goods from suppliers not arriving on time

- unforeseen issues arising from refurbishment works, for example, the discovery of asbestos, requiring a specialist contractor and close monitoring by environmental health

- failure to provide toilets in an acceptable location for social services registration.

> **Croydon College** – 'During the course of the project the property changed hands and we had to restart negotiations with a new landlord and new solicitors. We had a budget shortfall and had to spend some time identifying alternative cost centres in order to secure funding for the staffing of the childcare unit. There were also some delays from social services for the registration.'

87　Another problem was delay in staff appointments because of the time taken for police checks through social services. A small number of institutions had real difficulties recruiting staff because of the shortage of childcare skills in their area. The institutions had either to advertise several times in order to gain applicants or scale down the size of the childminding networks.

88 A significant number of institutions reported that difficulties were minimised by a close working relationship with the EYDCP and within the project partnership. Good communication between all parties, and a real drive to make progress in order to meet the deadline were essential in overcoming difficulties successfully. Patience, persistence and problem-solving abilities were vital qualities for successful project partnerships. Good communications and sustained contact within the partnership often resulted in other interested parties supporting the project, and valuable future contacts were made with a wide range of organisations and key individuals. Where persistence was not enough, difficulties were overcome by strategies such as refocusing the project, involving the EYDCP in contingency plans, relocation of staff responsibilities, and sharing ideas and good practice.

> **The College of West Anglia** – The concept of the project for non-FE partners was at first difficult to understand. The roll-out of the project benefited from the early secondment of the college's senior nursery staff who had knowledge of the region's provision. Working in partnership with the EYDCP from the early stages facilitated access to the Childcare Information Service for mailings to all providers, presentation of the project to NEYDCP, and effective communication to community groups through the network of Norfolk early years facilitators.

89 Application forms for the next round of funding (2000-01) require institutions to think through the building construction process carefully before applying, and to provide contingency plans where necessary in order to minimise timing issues. This is designed to improve all institutions' project management capabilities. Nevertheless, there may still be a need to allow more time for the preparation and implementation of future projects.

Quality and Innovation

90 Institutions were asked to identify any aspects of the project that represented best practice or were innovative.

91 The majority of institutions provided many varied examples describing the quality of their facilities. Many of the new places represent a new initiative for the college, often based in areas of deprivation and offering flexible courses and childcare facilities. It is also encouraging that many nurseries confirmed that they are applying for an OFSTED inspection.

> **Herefordshire College of Technology** – Transport difficulties have been highlighted and the marketing manager has agreed that students may use the college bus service to bring their children into college for £10 per term. Extending the opening times has reduced traffic congestion as parents do not all arrive at the same time. It also gives the nursery staff a better opportunity to talk to parents.

92 The low charge for transport in the above example reflects the fact that Herefordshire College has spare bus places. The marginal cost is zero and the low charge makes a small contribution to the college's overheads. This is a good example of the benefits

of teamwork – in this case between nursery and student-support staffs. The consolidation of access and childcare use of funds under the learner support umbrella has also stimulated a greater understanding of financial matters between these two departments in a number of colleges.

The Beauchamp College – 'We have set up a pioneering project which to our knowledge is a first, not only in the county but in the country. Childcare is in the 'Space Rocket' and the children (whatever their age) learn about IT. They will be able to progress to school already having had experience of computers, despite not having one in the home, thus putting them on an equal footing with other children. We want the children to feel that they own the computers and therefore own the concept of information and communication technology (ICT). They will become more confident with the controls and mouse, and then work on programs which cover number, colour, letter and shape recognition. As well as exploring a variety of educational software, the children will have access to the internet, email, and video-conferencing facilities to link with other centres locally, nationally and globally. There is also the opportunity for parents and children to interact together within the childcare IT facilities.'

The college targeted courses offering IT skills to the particular groups currently under-represented in adult education. They promoted the courses heavily in an area where there was historically very limited participation in education and training. New target groups were attracted to the programme and increased participation resulted. There was a large increase in the number of daytime and Saturday morning enrolments. Because the project was so innovative, it has raised the local profile of life-long learning. A centre based on ICT, and more especially a themed room, has put the notion of fun into early years learning. The main success is that so many diverse groups have shown interest.

Redcar and Cleveland College – 'We feel a toy library available to childminders in the network will enable and support quality activities in childminders' homes and do so cost-effectively. It would also foster a sense of identity, and possibly a sense of loyalty to the college, and therefore help keep the childcare places secure that were established by the project.'

Tameside College – At North Trafford College quality standards for childminders were established to ensure a comparable quality of childcare in childminder places to that in nursery provision. The standards have been welcomed by the EYDCP as they address quality issues in greater depth than registration requirements. Working in partnership has improved links between childcare staff in the various colleges and led to exchanges to share good practice. Childcare support is closely monitored and is linked to clear attendance requirements. The requirement to demonstrate excellent attendance and the associated follow-up by student services and childcare staff help ensure good retention rates for supported students. In some cases the developmental needs of the child are also taken into account in allocating places. At City College and Tameside College the social services inspection process has piloted the involvement of OFSTED inspectors. In both cases inspectors have been pleased with the educational standards of provision.

Southampton City College – The college intends to respond to the needs of the community. Individuals from ethnic minorities, especially those with strong religious beliefs that involve daily rituals, are happier leaving their children with a childminder who understands these beliefs. Work is continuing to increase further the number of ethnic minority childminders. Visits and discussions in the community at temples and Sikh gurdwaras have been very positive and a small number of childminders (four) are now in training.

Tile Hill College – The fact that the college and its partners were able to respond to identified needs in a flexible way, particularly in the case of a baby unit for lone teenage parents, is an example of good practice which provides students with status and self-esteem, and gives them the motivation to remain on their courses and achieve their learning goals.

Rotherham College of Arts and Technology – 'The mobile crèche has enabled us to be responsive and to take learning with childcare support to more people who feel uncomfortable outside their own community and environment. The project has ensured we have high quality, safe equipment and staff who are aware of health and safety issues. We would not have been able to contact so many new learners within the non-schedule 2 pilot without the flexible childcare facility. The centres have well-equipped, appropriate childcare provision in attractive environments. Strong local partnerships have been established and local people are being employed and trained in childcare.'

Worcester College of Technology – The quality of childcare is being raised as childminders access training to gain appropriate qualifications. Children are being educated and cared for by qualified childminders, thus receiving the best possible provision. Local networking promotes continuity of care. The EYDCP is closely involved with the project offering support and guidance. Network accreditation through OFSTED will allow childminders to offer funded early education places.

Stephenson College – There are benefits for the childminders in meeting as a group because their work often involves them caring alone and in relative isolation. A file of information was collated including a list of the network of childminders, prospectuses from local nurseries, guidelines published by the DfEE and relevant contact numbers. Four thousand pounds worth of funding was also provided to enable all childminders to access training free of charge.

Wakefield community-based centres – The production of a resource-pack for the network members, and the practical support offered by the network co-ordinator, constitute good practice in a climate where the process of registration is quite intimidating. The level of free training provision ensures the quality of childcare provision. The network co-ordinator will work towards the network acquiring NCMA's accreditation 'Children Come First'.