



Office for Standards
in Education

Curriculum 2000: implementation

HMI 993
March 2003

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Document reference number: HMI 993

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Introduction

1. This report offers a summary of findings of Ofsted's survey work on the first two years of Curriculum 2000. The judgements are based on visits by eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and 16 additional inspectors (AI) during 2000–2001, and by 13 HMI and 12 AI during 2001–2002. They made visits to a sample of 100 secondary maintained schools and 10 independent schools in England (see annex A). From September 2001, the introduction of Curriculum 2000 in further education and sixth form colleges was monitored by full inspections carried out by Ofsted.
2. A total of eight subjects were tracked at advanced subsidiary (AS) and advanced level (A2) General Certificate of Education (GCE): mathematics, English, modern foreign languages, business, art and design, biology, geography and physics and three subjects for the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE): business studies, art and design, and health and social care.
3. This survey involved observations of teaching and discussions with managers, teachers and students. In most cases, schools were visited twice a year to gain evidence of the progress being made throughout each year.
4. In December 1997 the government expressed its belief that the post-16 curriculum in England was too narrow and inflexible and that it must be adapted to enable 16- and 17-year-olds to compete with their European peers. The government noted that many European countries offered their young people broader programmes with a much more demanding schedule. The 'Qualifying for Success' reforms, introduced in September 2000, were intended to encourage young people to study more subjects over two years, while also helping them to combine academic and vocational study. The reforms also included plans to provide new, world-class tests to stretch the most able students. In addition, it was intended that students should develop their competence in key skills, especially those of communication, application of number, and information technology. The government hence planned to introduce:
 - new GCE A levels, set at the same standard as the previous ones, offering candidates the choice of either modular (staged) or end-of-course assessment. In both types, an understanding of the whole syllabus was to be tested
 - a new advanced subsidiary qualification which represents the first half of the full A level and is worth 50% of the marks of the whole A level
 - new, world-class tests – 'Advanced Extension Awards' – aimed at the most able students and designed to attract a higher entry than the existing special papers
 - new GNVQs at A level, equivalent in size and demand to a single A level and graded on a similar A–E scale, with AS-equivalent GNVQs also available in some subjects
 - a new key skills qualification to encourage all young people to develop the essential skills of communication, application of number and IT.

The government believed that there was scope for young people to broaden their studies with no loss of depth or rigour and to take on more demanding programmes at the age of 16.

Commentary

- Despite considerable initial difficulty, Curriculum 2000 has been incorporated into the work of schools and colleges without loss of the rigour and depth traditionally associated with advanced study. The difficulties of implementation observed in the first year of this inspection remained, but were less prominent in the second year. In particular, teachers' confidence in teaching the new specifications has grown considerably, although more training and support are needed. For most young people, the added breadth resulting from the new arrangements has been, at best, modest.
- In the schools and colleges inspected, the work improved over the two years of the inspection. Teaching was almost always expert, well planned and enthusiastic, and given greater clarity of focus by the quality of the A2 specifications which were found to be helpful and supportive. Most schools and colleges had a clear strategy for the implementation of Curriculum 2000, and managed it well. The introduction of the new qualifications caused a reduction in the amount of time available for individual subjects in Year 12 in just over a third of the schools in the sample. In general, this did not adversely affect the quality of teaching but, combined with the increased load of assessment, it led to a narrowing of focus. Perhaps inevitably at this stage, many teachers felt that they had little opportunity to go beyond the immediate demands of the specifications. In spite of the time teachers and students spent completing assessed assignments, use of the results of assessment to set learning targets and to monitor progress remained irregular.
- Standards of achievement in the schools and colleges inspected remained high and, in most respects, rose over the two years of the inspection. Owing to generally good guidance, the majority of students were placed on courses which were well matched to their aspirations and prior attainment, and were well aware of the demands of those courses and enthusiastic about their experience of post-16 education. Retention and pass rates were rising and during lessons students demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of their chosen subjects. Most were successfully addressing the additional demands of A2 courses and were developing at a high level the skills of analysis, critical thinking and evaluation of information, as appropriate to the subjects studied. They had a good command of both the subject content and the conceptual processes needed to make independent progress at the level required. They knew where to obtain information and how to use it.

- The key skills of communication, application of number and information technology were in evidence in students' approach to their specialist studies where they were seen to be relevant, although work was occasionally constrained by a failure to employ graphical or statistical approaches where these would have been appropriate. The separate teaching of key skills for the new qualifications has, however, not been a general success. Many schools and some colleges reduced their commitment to teaching key skills, in part because of uncertainty about the attitudes of universities to the qualifications and in response to poor results in 2001. That was, however, probably a desirable rationalisation which has enabled the better managed institutions to achieve a more sustainable commitment to a level of attainment in key skills that is tailored to students' prior attainment and to the demands of their course of advanced study.
- There was some evidence in the institutions inspected, particularly colleges, of a broadening of the range of subjects on offer. Very few schools added new subjects to the curriculum in response to Curriculum 2000, but they welcomed the opportunity for students to take a greater number of subjects in Year 12. Colleges in particular saw an increase in the numbers of students opting for subjects such as IT, psychology, media studies and art. Because of increased numbers overall, the retention of subjects, such as some languages which attracted relatively few students, was often possible. In that sense, there was some increase in breadth of subjects as a result of Curriculum 2000.
- However, the impact on the curriculum as experienced by the individual student was modest. Most of the students seen, whether in colleges or in schools, were taking four, rarely five, subjects in Year 12, and then proceeding with three A2 subjects in Year 13. In the first year of Curriculum 2000, it was common for Year 12 students to drop one of their subjects, in order to concentrate on the other three, although by the second year, this had become less common. Very few schools or colleges require students to take contrasting subjects and many students chose to do relatively narrow 'suites' of subjects. Moreover, although vocational provision was becoming more widely available, even in school sixth forms, and some AVCE students were taking AS subjects, it was rare to find AS students adding AVCE single awards to their programmes. The range of enrichment programmes in schools has reduced; in most colleges, there has been some expansion in the provision of, for example, sports, community work, work experience and study visits.
- A certain tentativeness in the approach, both of institutions and of students, to the prospect of increased breadth was probably to be expected, given the widespread perception that increased breadth has not been accompanied by reduced demand in the new GCE specifications. Inevitably, most attention in schools and colleges has been focused on putting the new arrangements in place. As that has now been accomplished, further consideration can and needs to be given to the underlying weaknesses that Curriculum 2000 was designed to address. Prominent among these is the excessively rigid division still observable, not least in the guidance given to young people, between the academic world and the world of work. Students, especially in schools, are much less well informed about training and employment routes than they are about academic and vocational options in schools and colleges. As a result, many make their choice of pathway post-16 without a clear map of all the routes available.

Key issues for action identified in 2001 report

Issues to be considered by the awarding bodies and the QCA, as appropriate:

In Ofsted's report on the first year of Curriculum 2000, a number of areas to be tackled were identified. In particular, the following needed to be achieved:

- clearer identification of the standards of performance to be expected from students on GCE AS and AVCE courses
- closer definition of the subject content and skills development to be covered in these qualifications
- reduction in the burden of internal and external assessment
- improvement in both the timing of the publication of specifications and the range and quality of exemplar material
- provision of better training and guidance materials, particularly in relation to quality descriptors and the introduction of key skills.

Issues to be considered by providers:

- improved monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning
- development of a rigorous system for evaluating the effectiveness of the complete Curriculum 2000 programme
- allowing students more time and opportunity to develop an independent approach to their studies
- more frequent reviews of progress with students, and improvement in action-planning and the setting of interim targets
- ensuring that students use their non-contact time to their best advantage by working with the universities and using available information, and making certain that students are clear about the currency of the full range of these new qualifications in relation to entrance.

Key issues for action 2002

Progress on the issues for action identified in the 2001 report is analysed in this report. In all cases, more progress is needed. This report has also identified the following additional issues to be addressed by the DfES, QCA, teachers and education managers, either separately or in collaboration. Action should be taken to:

- improve the development of study skills across subject areas
- write schemes of work that allow teachers to take more responsibility for the content of the courses they teach
- improve the quality and consistency of target-setting
- ensure all students are as well informed about options in other schools and colleges as they are about those in their present school or college
- improve students' knowledge about training and employment opportunities
- make better use of value-added information to both inform and monitor students' progress
- encourage and enable students to 'mix and match' their qualifications, for example, by including contrasting GCE AS subjects in their programmes, or by including AVCE single awards with GCE AS subjects
- improve links between schools and employers
- improve the range, relevance and take-up of enrichment activities, particularly in schools
- establish and consolidate effective arrangements for the development and assessment of key skills, in contexts which are relevant to the students' main programmes of study
- explore the opportunities for improving provision through partnerships and collaborative arrangements with other providers.

Standards

5. Students were observed in their first and second years in school sixth forms and colleges completing advanced-level studies for AS, A2 and AVCE awards. Their levels of knowledge and understanding were generally good or very good in more than half of the courses visited, and at least satisfactory in all but a very few cases (fewer than 5%). The work of the highest-attaining students was impressive. In the small sample of independent school sixth forms included in the survey, students' knowledge and understanding were generally good or very good and at least satisfactory in all cases. In the one course where standards and progress were only satisfactory, the sixth form included students from a wide range of abilities.
6. Most colleges have seen an increase in the retention and pass rates for the new AS qualifications. In some colleges where the introduction of the reforms has been well managed, there have been outstanding results. At one sixth form college the pass rate was 97% with almost two thirds of the results at grades A and B. The second sixth form college demonstrated high pass rates and a significant increase in the value-added scores for the new AS. At one college in the north east there has been a significant increase in subjects with above-average retention and pass rates since the introduction of the new AS qualification. In most colleges, however, the pass rates in AS mathematics are low and pass rates and completion rates on key skills qualifications are also low.
7. In schools and colleges there was usually a strong link between students' GCSE grades and their ability to cope with the demands of the post-16 courses scrutinised. Many lower-attaining AS students drop a subject part way through the year in order to succeed with the others.

Application of knowledge and skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation

8. Successful A-level study includes the ability to apply what has been learnt to new contexts, and to analyse, synthesise and evaluate complex and wide-ranging information. Inspectors judged that AS, A2 and AVCE students on the majority of courses made generally satisfactory, often good, progress in acquiring these skills as they developed their subject knowledge and understanding. In many lessons, these skills were clearly in evidence, although there were a few cases where students' technical and practical skills were insufficiently well developed to facilitate learning at the required depth needed for A level.
9. In the early stages of one very good English AS course, students clearly applied knowledge from their GCSE English literature studies to analyse new texts, and A2 students were competent in discussing, analysing and interpreting the opening scenes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in response to questions put to them by the teacher. Later in the course, A2 students worked hard in developing their understanding of the dense imagery of satirical novels from the eighteenth century and were able to apply concepts such as paradox, satire and irony and show an understanding of narrative voice. The most able students were able to analyse the nuances of the satire, although others needed considerable help from the teacher.
10. In mathematics, both Year 12 and Year 13 students were seen to develop confidence in applying what they had learnt to new contexts, such as understanding different velocity-time graphs or using ratios in trigonometry to determine resolution of forces. In the best courses they are very good at analysing problems and evaluating the results of calculations. They learn to look at problems, understand them and know which rules to apply, and use calculators effectively. The work undertaken does not always require the ability to synthesise, but there were some good examples of the development of these skills in statistics, where students demonstrate an overall view of correlation.

Key skills of numeracy, communication and IT

11. In AS, A2 and AVCE courses, the development of students' competence in the key skills of application of number, communication and IT occurs to some extent naturally, as the courses themselves demand. Often, subject schemes of work fail to plan for such development. Key skills may also be studied and assessed separately as part of the key skills qualifications. Overall, there is generally satisfactory, often good, development of these skills within AS and A2 and AVCE courses, where this is clearly relevant and necessary. Communication skills were generally good, following the emphasis on written coursework in many syllabuses and the requirements to develop skills of formal presentations. Students on many courses were seen to engage effectively in formal written or oral presentations of their work. Year 13 students generally develop the ability to present their ideas and arguments clearly and to engage in challenging and sophisticated discussions in class.

12. The majority of students present their written work in a word-processed form to high levels of accuracy and proficiency. Sixth form students generally have good IT skills and it is unusual not to see these skills employed as part of their daily work routine in class and in private study. Students often incorporate charts and diagrams to present data and statistics in their work. There is generally good use of the Internet by A-level students for research and information; students on many courses use the Internet effectively and regularly to access university web sites. They are becoming increasingly skilled at searching appropriate web sites for their subjects, such as business studies or art and design. In less satisfactory work, students download research material and include it in their submissions with scant further attention to the editorial analysis or evaluation of content. The application of number is the least well developed of the three key skills, especially in subject areas where there is no specific requirement for application of number. Some students' progress is slowed down by weaknesses in the application of number, as for example, in one physics AS course where students were very slow to complete calculations; in another example, business studies AS students had difficulty with simple calculations of price elasticity.
13. Many schools and colleges in this survey have reduced their commitment to teaching and assessing the new key skills qualifications during the two years. This is influenced by widespread uncertainties about standards and poor results in 2002, and because of the lack of recognition by higher education admissions tutors of the value of these awards as an entry requirement. These separate qualifications are not popular with most students, many of whom cannot justify the amount of time spent on them. Key skills co-ordinators have found the gathering of evidence across subject areas for the separate assessment of key skills time-consuming and bureaucratic. A small number of schools have continued to make key skills qualifications compulsory for all Year 12 students, continuing assessments into Year 13, and have managed this provision with success. Almost all sixth forms have established what they regard as a manageable commitment to these qualifications, based on experience, and drawing on advice from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. For example, some require all sixth form students to achieve the equivalent of level 2 in the three key skills if they have not achieved GCSE grade C in English, maths or ICT prior to entry to the sixth form, and aim for all students to achieve level 3 in at least one key skill appropriate to their AS or A2 subject interests by the end of Year 13. Alternatively, some schools have chosen to emphasise the separate assessment of IT key skills for all students at either level 2 or level 3, according to ability. A wide variety of approaches has emerged over the period of this survey.

Application of study skills and research skills

14. Inspectors evaluated the extent to which students used study skills effectively in their work, and the extent to which they undertook effective research. Sixth form students usually attend short induction courses and receive course guides with some indication of the range of work required, and the skills needed to attempt it, at the start of the academic year. Most students are skilled at note-taking, and many, in subjects such as English, geography or business studies, are taught essay-writing skills, but it is rare to find regular and formal attention to the development of study skills co-ordinated across subject areas.
15. Sixth form students in general learn to research information from a wide range of sources, although in too many schools the library resources for sixth form students are seriously underdeveloped. In health and social care AVCE and business studies AVCE, there are some excellent examples of both primary and secondary research and an appropriate critical approach to the use of data. For example, in health and care, students consulted a wide range of published materials, including press, journals, texts and information leaflets from statutory bodies. They also visited real care contexts, such as nurseries and homes for the elderly, as a basis for providing primary evidence in their work. Students' use of the Internet is generally well established in many subject areas, but the employment of such resources is quite limited in the sciences or in mathematics. There are good examples of language students seeking and selecting models for their writing from the Internet. Business studies students are regular visitors to web sites, for example, when researching aspects of product development in the markets of the European Union. Art and design students also make good use of the Internet and are encouraged to become familiar with primary sources by visits to exhibitions. In one example, a group of AS students were required to complete a measured perspective study of their homes, of an interior and exterior view, to be developed in lesson time on a much larger scale.

Quality of teaching

16. Teachers in the institutions visited were usually well qualified in each of the subjects they were seen teaching. Their expertise and, in most cases, experience did much to make possible the rapid implementation of the curricular changes. AS, A2 and AVCE courses are very well taught in most schools and colleges. Nevertheless, teachers have little time and scope to teach beyond the immediate requirements of the specifications, however important they consider that greater breadth to be for the long-term benefit of their students. Teachers generally consider the new GCE specifications to require the same standards of students as the syllabuses they replaced.
17. Most of the teachers interviewed had updated their subject expertise through courses aimed at familiarising them with the requirements of the new specifications and qualifications. Courses run by awarding bodies continue to be well regarded. Most teachers attending courses for AS levels have a positive view of the training they received, but this is not always the case with the training provided for AVCE courses where responses were initially very critical, particularly in respect to guidance on some moderation issues. Fewer teachers have attended training on A2 courses. Many teachers in schools are especially critical of the lack of guidance and support provided for the teaching of key skills. Students expected a far greater integration and co-ordination of key skills than is being currently provided.
18. The range of subjects taught by individual teachers has not increased. Occasionally where a new subject such as media studies is introduced, some English teachers are asked to teach it, and they generally prove able to do so. The competence to teach key skills well is rarer.
19. Teachers' confidence in their ability to teach the new qualifications well has justifiably increased in the second year of AS and AVCE work. Understanding of the standards required for the course is much improved once teachers have completed teaching the specifications for the first time and it is generally now good. A2 courses have been less stressful to teach than AS, although many teachers are still highly dependent on materials from the examination boards to enable them to assess standards at A2 accurately.
20. The planning of individual lessons is effective. Teachers have found the A2 specifications and guidance materials clear and supportive. In the majority of lessons, teachers make their aims clear. These address appropriate subject learning needs and requirements and review the extent to which they are achieved. There is usually a good match between the work undertaken and the assessment criteria. Occasionally lesson planning is perfunctory and the examination specification is used as a substitute for the teacher's or the department's own interpretation of the needs of students in relation to the specifications.

21. Teachers make appropriate demands of students and generally students try hard to meet them. In the first year of the new specifications, some teachers were unsure of the standards that they needed to reach and expected too much of their students in the early stages of the course. With experience, most are now more confident in their own abilities to cover requirements and their expectations are more realistic. Typically the teaching scheme is now a less ambitious document, incorporating a sequencing of the specifications with a strong emphasis on what and when content will be taught and how students' work will be assessed.
22. In about a fifth of lessons teachers were unduly prescriptive, although this was not necessarily due to the new requirements. In these lessons the teacher usually lectured to the class, giving the learners little or no opportunity to ask questions or contribute from their own knowledge. As a result, students tended to become unduly dependent on their teachers at points in the course when they could reasonably have been expected to take more responsibility for their own learning.
23. The extent to which there is a consistent institution-wide policy on assessment varies. Often, teachers follow individual departmental schemes and practices, most of which are fit for purpose, but lack a coherent frame of reference. The assessment of students' work is undertaken regularly. It is generally accurate and the outcomes are reported back to students in good time and in ways that allow them to use the information to improve their performance.
24. Arrangements to moderate assessments vary in effectiveness. Most work well at both a formal and an informal level, but a minority are cumbersome and lead to delays in returning marked work to students. Some teachers use the assessment information on students' attainment well to help plan their lessons more effectively. Most teachers are well aware of the individual strengths and weaknesses of their students, but few acquire or use this knowledge systematically.
25. Few teachers or institutions undertake target-setting or the linking of targets to predicted grades systematically. While most teachers share with their students any predicted grades, the means by which they are arrived at is often obscure. In an increasing number of institutions it follows a formal process of setting minimum targets on the basis of past GCSE achievement and undertaking periodic reviews of students' progress in relation to them. A high proportion of school sixth forms now use value-added measures to inform the target-setting process, but a minority do not, leaving any target-setting to the discretion of individual teachers.

Students' response

26. Students continue to be highly positive about the sixth form experience and welcome the opportunity to become more independent learners. They welcome the opportunity to take more subjects in Year 12 and to defer the choice of three final subjects for A2 until Year 13. Approximately a quarter of Year 12 students changed or dropped one of their AS subjects in the period covered by the survey, and the majority continued with their three best subjects from Year 12 into Year 13. Students are not, however, enthusiastic about key skills, which they perceive as being unimportant in the eyes of university admissions tutors. The new curriculum has reduced the amount of time available for enrichment programmes and extra-curricular activities, particular in small sixth forms. The majority of students are well motivated and show good application to their studies, partly because they generally receive good teaching. Year 12 students are particularly enthusiastic, but at the beginning of Year 13 this enthusiasm is less evident. However, students in their final term demonstrate renewed commitment to their studies and recapture their sense of purpose. In all GCE and AVCE subjects inspected, students had made at least satisfactory progress between the two visits.
27. Students demonstrate their ability to work independently when given the opportunity to do so. However, teachers dominate too many lessons. Year 13 students work more independently, and their increasing maturity enables them to take more control of their own learning. They also see more clearly what they need to do to be successful. Many students in Year 13 devote considerable amounts of time to working through past examination papers on their own. In the best examples of independent work, students make their own contacts with outside organisations to research information they need, frequently by using the Internet.
28. Students respond well to challenging tasks such as designing experiments, testing hypotheses and organising debates. In some schools students ask and answer questions naturally and easily as part of their lessons. However, in a minority of the lessons seen, teachers made insufficient demands of their students. In these lessons students responded to questions directed to them, but did not readily raise questions. There was little evidence of differentiation through questioning. In such instances, the teacher's questions may challenge the most or least able students in the class, but may not always cover the full range. Most students are, however, successfully addressing the additional intellectual demands of A2. The synoptic papers which form a compulsory part of A2 specifications are achieving their aims of requiring students to think beyond the immediate demands of one aspect of the course and to respond to questions by drawing on a wide frame of reference.

29. Frequently, the organisation of learning does not allow students to form their own opinions. Students tend to follow the programme that the teacher has set out for them and have few opportunities to influence what they do. In some schools and colleges students are set target grades, agree action plans which identify how the targets can be achieved and attend progress reviews. However, these activities are monitoring devices rather than tools for the management by the students of their own learning. This does little to prepare students for the greater independence they need for exercise in higher education or employment. The best practice observed is where students are presented with assignments and draw up their own plans for the completion of the work. After the teacher has assessed the work, students are encouraged to reflect on what they could have done to make their work better. This helps them to prepare for subsequent assignments with greater confidence.
30. The relationships between students and teachers are almost always very good. Students are aware that their teachers are working hard for them. They value the additional support that they receive outside lessons. Students demonstrate a positive attitude to their teachers, and teachers treat students with maturity and trust. Most students feel comfortable asking questions when they are uncertain about their work. The perceived quality of different teachers has a significant impact on students' subject choices in Year 12.

Guidance and support

Students' success post-16 depends crucially on being placed on courses that suit their talents and aspirations. The advice they receive in Key Stage 4 is of considerable importance.

Quality of guidance in Key Stage 4

31. Students are well informed about the range of courses available if they continue to study in their current school's sixth form. They are less well informed about options in colleges and other providers. Few schools set out in detail the full range of opportunities available to post-16 students in other institutions, and students are much less well informed about training and employment routes than they are about academic and vocational studies in schools or colleges. A key issue is the degree of expertise required by staff advising Year 11 students. Some schools provide in-service training for staff involved in the guidance process to ensure that their knowledge of the new post-16 curriculum and of alternative pathways is up to date. Many schools, however, do not, and they underestimate the complexity of the task involved in advising students of the full range of options open to them and ensuring that they are directed towards courses that they are likely to complete successfully.
32. Many colleges have good relationships with local schools, particularly those that take pupils up to the age of 16. They contribute to school careers education programmes as well as local careers events. In general, schools with a sixth form are less likely to invite colleges to meet their Year 11 students, except those who are not likely to achieve the necessary GCSE grades to enter upon an A-level course. Colleges produce attractive, clearly laid-out prospectuses. Many hold information evenings for future students and their parents, and also 'taster' events. Interview arrangements are generally effective and supportive.
33. Schools typically require five GCSE passes at A*–C for entry onto AS/A2 courses, but some schools, particularly in the independent sector, set higher requirements than that. At the other extreme there are some with 'open access' sixth forms which operate an extremely flexible entry policy. Very few schools apply their entry policies strictly, however, and the majority will take students' personal circumstances and teachers' judgements of students' likely performance into account when making decisions over entry to the sixth form. In one school, students with just two higher-level GCSEs were accepted onto AS courses. However, inspectors judged that the majority of students were placed on courses appropriate for them in the light of their prior attainment.

34. Despite this, the poor results obtained by a significant proportion of students in the first year of AS examinations are leading some schools to set a higher entry requirement of an A or B GCSE pass for students wishing to study specific subjects, usually mathematics, science subjects and modern foreign languages. Entry requirements for students wishing to study AVCEs are broadly similar to those for A2/AS students. For foundation and intermediate vocational courses, schools make judgements about the motivation of students for the courses they wish to study; they rarely impose any specific GCSE grade requirements.
35. In colleges, staff responsible for admissions are increasingly conscious of the need to ensure that students are placed on appropriate courses, and that the number of GCE AS subjects taken by individuals is appropriate, in the light of their previous attainment. As in schools, entry requirements are being adjusted in many colleges. Typically, most general further education colleges allowed students to enter the old GCE A-level programmes with four grades A*–C at GCSE. After the first year of Curriculum 2000, many colleges adjusted this so that students need five or six grades A*–C to take four AS subjects. In sixth form colleges, some higher grades in particular subjects may also be required.

Quality of guidance in Year 12

36. The quality of support for students, once they are on a course, was at least satisfactory in over 90% of schools. The quality of guidance in the first year was judged to be good or better in just under half of the schools visited; it was unsatisfactory in just under 1 in 10 schools. This is an improvement on the position observed at the end of the first phase of the survey. Good provision is made for the relatively few students with learning disabilities who require support.
37. Most schools and colleges provide a well-planned induction programme, occasionally involving residential experience. In the majority of schools, the period up to the autumn half-term break is treated as an introductory phase and some schools allow students to try out a range of subjects in the first two weeks before making a final choice of course. Schools are very reluctant to allow students to change course after this initial period; weight of the AS assessment requirements makes it almost impossible for changes later than a few weeks into the course. Where students do change course – or, more likely, drop from four AS subjects to three – schools have good systems for advising students and discussing the situation with parents and teaching staff. Few schools, however, systematically record this information and use it to track trends and inform their sixth form entry policies. About a quarter of all students changed course or dropped an AS subject after entry into the sixth form. The main reason for this is that students had not been sufficiently well prepared for the demands of work in the sixth form and they found the challenge of taking four AS subjects too great. Such a reduction in breadth nullifies the main purpose of Curriculum 2000 and suggests a lack of commitment to the underlying principles.

38. Arrangements for guiding and advising students over progression from Year 12 to Year 13 are noticeably less systematic in schools than those in place to advise Year 11 students. This is partially the consequence of the timing of the publication of AS examination results, since the main criterion for decisions made by students about continuing a subject to A2 level is success in the AS examination. The majority of colleges visited have introduced effective guidance to Year 12 students to assist them in making their choices of A2 subjects in Year 13. Some students and teachers are still uncertain about when it is advantageous to 'cash-in' a result, and when it might be in the students' interest to re-take a module. The general assumption in schools is that students who succeed in a subject at AS will continue with that subject to A2 level. If they are still studying four AS subjects at the end of Year 12 they will normally drop their weakest subject and continue with their three strongest subjects to A2 qualifications. Students receive good, informal advice, principally from heads of sixth forms and subject teachers, and schools have taken steps to provide students with advice when AS results are published, even though this might be at a late stage. The majority of colleges have introduced effective guidance to Year 12 students to assist them in making their choices of A2 subjects in Year 13. Students are encouraged to make choices based on their career ambitions and their progress and the estimated results of their AS studies. Most colleges have built in this guidance to the tutorial system during the second and third terms of Year 12.
39. A key area for concern is the time available for teaching AS subjects in Year 12 and beginning A2 work when the AS examinations are finished. The extended length of the AS examination period has substantially reduced the amount of teaching time available in Year 12 and made it difficult for staff and students to cover the ground and take timely and well-founded decisions about further study in Year 13. In most schools and colleges, it is now the policy for AS students to return after their examinations to begin A2 work. It is not a policy viewed with great enthusiasm by all students, although they usually concede that it is to their advantage to start as early as possible on A2 work. Many students point out that until the results are published they cannot always be sure that they will continue with a subject.

Quality of guidance in year 13

40. In the most effective AVCE courses, such as in business studies or health and social care, the skills of independent working, primary research into several contexts, writing at length, and independent research are quickly developed by students, who also learn fast to meet assessment deadlines. These are skills that serve these students well when they move into higher education. These skills are developed more slowly by AS subject groups, who have a more limited, largely classroom-based experience. In the AVCE courses other progression routes to further training in the vocational area or to employment in business or health and social care were quite well developed.
41. Schools generally have well-established routines for advising students over higher education applications and the process is handled efficiently. School staff are well informed about higher education applications and the majority of schools make arrangements for students to attend higher education open days and talk to former students now at university. Students have access to well-resourced careers libraries in schools with a good range of higher education materials. The range of information to which students now have independent access is one of the most striking developments over recent years; they are making noticeably increased and resourceful use of IT facilities to visit higher education web sites, carry out independent research, and take decisions on their own account. In many sixth forms, students receive insufficient independent advice about opportunities for progression to further education, modern apprenticeships or employment with training. Sixth forms pay very close and effective attention to preparing students for applications through University & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) for places in higher education.
42. A noticeable and growing feature is the number of special arrangements made between schools and their local universities to improve participation among students who would not normally have considered continuing into higher education. College students also receive good advice and guidance about higher education applications. In some sixth form colleges, support for progression towards employment is less well developed. Most colleges also support their students well in their applications to higher education. Many have successfully introduced electronic UCAS form application during the last year.
43. The main problem encountered by both staff and students is knowing what value higher education admissions tutors place on AS qualifications when offers of places are being made. School staff comment that attitudes in higher education towards the qualification vary widely, as they do towards other topics such as key skills, and sometimes towards the principle of the modest broadening of sixth form studies that underpins the Curriculum 2000 reforms.

Target-setting

44. More schools than in the past use students' GCSE points scores to set general achievement targets. Well over half the schools visited one of the commercially produced value-added schemes to set targets for students and measure their achievement. It is felt that the results obtained from such schemes have become less reliable since the introduction of the new curriculum and a significant number of students claimed that they were set targets that they felt were too low. The more general weakness is in the use of targets to monitor students' performance, largely because teachers are still not confident about interpreting students' performance against AS or A2 standards, which they feel are not yet sufficiently well established. Value-added data often constitute a basis for monitoring the overall performance of departments within schools. There is little use made of value-added data for careers advice purposes.

Curriculum organisation

45. All but a few schools have a clear idea of the kind of sixth form education they wish to provide within the Curriculum 2000 framework, usually accompanied by an appropriate strategy to develop the sixth form. These strategies vary in their degree of formality and sophistication. Planning is generally effective. Schools have adopted a pragmatic approach, making adjustments to timetables, entry criteria and demands on students on the basis of their experience of the first year of operation. Many schools now offer some vocational provision in the sixth form, most often in the form of AVCE subjects; a minority offer vocational courses at level 2. Few offer level 1 courses. While some school managers feel they do not have the staff expertise to offer vocational studies, there are signs of an increasing confidence in schools, with plans for modest expansion in 2002/03, to offer qualifications such as intermediate GNVQ in IT. By contrast, a minority of schools feel that their chief aim is to provide an academic education, and they have no plans to deviate from this.
46. Most schools seek to provide the range of choice in their sixth form that they feel their students want. Parents' views are also influential, for example, in school decisions to concentrate solely on GCE A-level qualifications. Very few schools relate their curriculum explicitly to local employment needs. Similarly, although schools are good at communicating their sixth form curriculum to potential students and parents, few systematically inform local employers about their provision.
47. Most sixth form students have access to a curriculum which potentially offers suitable breadth. Schools try hard to plan timetables so that students can take the subjects they are interested in, and are generally successful in this, but they provide insufficient direction. Few schools, for example, have policies requiring students to choose contrasting subjects. In some schools, students taking four AS subjects typically choose a fourth subject which contrasts with the other three. However, there is a noticeable resistance to this in schools that do not take the same stance. Many students choose similar subjects, such as a suite of humanities subjects or two English courses. Students aiming for degree courses in medicine, for example, will often take three sciences and mathematics, believing that higher education admissions officers prefer this combination to a broader range of subjects.
48. Most sixth form and tertiary colleges also have a clear vision and effective strategy for the implementation of Curriculum 2000. Students are able to choose from a wide range of subjects and enrichment activities. In many colleges the introduction of Curriculum 2000 has enabled a broader range of subjects to be offered. Many colleges have seen an increase in the number of students studying subjects such as IT, psychology, sociology, media studies and art. Some colleges have retained minority subjects such as music and modern foreign languages, despite low numbers, because they have increased numbers across the board.

¹ Source: survey of Year 12 students carried out by UCAS and QCA in June 2002.

49. Most students in school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and tertiary colleges undertake three or four GCE AS subjects in their first year. Small numbers (2.9%) of students take five subjects.¹ The majority of students go on to study three A2 subjects. In the first year of operation, it was common for students to drop one of their four AS subjects. Changes in timetabling and sometimes in entry criteria for courses have improved the numbers of students completing their full AS programme. In the majority of sixth forms and sixth form colleges, timetables have been modified to enable students to combine general and vocational qualifications. Some AVCE students are taking AS subjects, usually chosen for their relevance to the students' vocational courses. However, very few AS students are adding AVCE single awards to their programme.
50. Most of the timetabling models adopted by general further education colleges allow some flexibility of choice, although students are not yet taking advantage of this in great numbers or in all curriculum areas. In some general further education colleges, Curriculum 2000 has had very little noticeable impact on the scope or structure of provision. These colleges have high numbers of national diploma courses and NVQs, which lie outside the framework. In colleges with more than one site, the ability to mix courses is limited and some colleges have concentrated their 16–19 courses on one site to enable students to have greater choice.
51. There has been very little change in the amount of class contact time required of teachers as a result of the new curriculum. However, the larger group sizes, resulting from students' choices of fourth subjects, have increased some teachers' workload in terms of preparation and marking.
52. Students in school sixth forms do not all have equal opportunities to participate in a good range of relevant enrichment activities. Around 15% of schools in the survey offer no enrichment activities. The majority of schools offering enrichment activities try hard to offer a suitable programme, but there is wide variation in what is available to students. The minimum provision is usually some form of general studies and/or key skills, while the maximum is well-established provision comprising sports, general studies, arts and leisure activities, and community service. In over three quarters of schools, students' participation in such activities had reduced. Students described the difficulty of fitting in such activities along a programme of four subjects at AS level. In a number of schools, students expressed negative views about what was offered, often because they felt it lacked relevance or used up valuable study time.
53. Most colleges have broadened the range of additional activities on offer to students as a result of the introduction of Curriculum 2000. Students have the opportunity to develop their personal skills, take part in recreational and competitive sport, work in the community and undertake work experience. Many colleges offer wide-ranging national and international study visits to broaden the students' personal and educational experiences. Where activities are not a compulsory part of courses, take-up is variable, particularly in general further education colleges.

Management

54. Around one half of the schools visited had no collaborative arrangements in place for the delivery of the new qualifications. Senior managers in a significant number of schools felt that their school was more likely to compete with local post-16 institutions than to collaborate with them. Geographical isolation from other local providers is one of the main factors that works against collaboration, particularly where pupils would have long journeys to neighbouring institutions, thus reducing the amount of curriculum time available for teaching and learning. In most cases collaborative arrangements were established well before the introduction of the new post-16 qualifications. Collaboration is most effective when:
- the institutions are geographically close
 - there are good channels of communication between the partner schools and shared promotional material
 - course co-ordinators from each institution meet regularly
 - joint staff development takes place
 - there is shared teaching and a common timetable is established.
55. Collaboration between groups of schools and their local colleges is less common than that between groups of schools. There are some minor collaborative activities between individual schools and colleges, for example, where a group of school students attend college for a particular course. A small number of colleges are working collaboratively with other colleges, to ensure there is minimal duplication of courses between them, and that students have access to the widest range of courses.
56. Curriculum 2000 has added substantially to the cost of post-16 education. Most of the schools visited made detailed calculations of the cost of their sixth form provision in relation to the income that it brought to the school. Many make judgements about the cost-effectiveness of their sixth form provision as a whole, rather than evaluating the financial viability of running individual subjects or courses, as colleges tend to do. Many institutions have incurred a substantial increase in the cost of examination fees as a consequence of implementing the new curriculum. Some independent schools have raised the level of fees for learners in the sixth form to compensate for the increased costs of the new curriculum.
57. Most schools have not recruited new staff directly as a result of Curriculum 2000; many colleges have. In the few schools that have done so, usually one or two teachers have been taken on to meet the increase in teaching hours. Additional part-time teaching staff have been used to cover the additional teaching hours in some cases. A few schools have taken on more administrative staff as a response of the increased number of examinations. Many of the schools have re-aligned the responsibilities of existing staff to manage the new qualifications, rather than make fresh appointments. Many of these appointments have been to co-ordinate the teaching of key skills. General problems in recruiting staff are exacerbated by the increased demand for teachers resulting from the new post-16 qualifications, particularly in curriculum areas already suffering from a shortage of skilled staff such as ICT, mathematics and science.

58. Generally, the introduction of the new curriculum has led to a reduction in the teaching time allocated to subjects, and this has contributed to the narrowing of focus already referred to. A variety of approaches to make the provision more cost-effective are seen. Larger group sizes in some subjects are common. Many schools with two teaching groups for an AS subject reduce this to one larger group for the A2 subject in Year 13. One school, which normally gives five hours teaching time weekly to each A-level subject, reduces this to three hours per week for subjects with low recruitment. Few schools have joint lessons for Year 12 and Year 13 learners. Where this is the case, it is more common for AVCE courses. Some schools report that they no longer offer subjects with low recruitment, such as religious education. Most schools have a commitment to continue to offer all AS subjects into A2. This has resulted in some very low class sizes in Year 13, for example, just one learner taking A2 Latin in one school.
59. The management of the new qualifications is satisfactory in most schools and colleges and was judged to be good or very good in over one half of the schools visited. Senior managers generally have a good overview of the provision and strategic decisions are taken in the light of thorough and ongoing review of the provision. Subject management is generally effective, with several schools reporting that the management of the new curriculum is calmer after a somewhat hectic period in the first year of its implementation. The majority of colleges have welcomed the reforms of Curriculum 2000. Most have revised their curriculum policy to accommodate the requirements of 'Qualifying for Success'. Senior management teams have been involved in constructing the curriculum offer and overseeing the planning and initial implementation. Models in sixth form colleges allow for a broadening of subject choice.

Annex A: schools involved in the survey

Maintained schools

All Saints Catholic School and
Technology College, Dagenham

Arthur Mellows Village College,
Peterborough

Beaverwood School for Girls,
Chislehurst

Belper School, Belper

Benfield School, Newcastle upon Tyne

Bennett Memorial Diocesan School,
Tunbridge Wells

Benton Park High School, Leeds

Beverley Grammar School, Beverley

Biddulph High School, Stoke on Trent

Broughton Hall High School, Liverpool

Buckingham School, Buckingham

Bushfield Community College,
Peterborough

Chew Valley High School, Bristol

Clyst Vale Community College, Exeter

Coopers School, Chislehurst

Cowley High School, St Helens

Driffield School, Driffield

East Barnet School, Barnet

Eastbury Comprehensive School,
Barking

Eltham Hill Technology College for Girls
Eltham, London

Ernest Bevin College, Tooting, London

Exmouth Community College, Exmouth

Feltham Community College, Feltham

Fitzharrys School, Abingdon

Fullbrook School, Addlestone

Garibaldi School, Mansfield

George Abbot School, Guildford

Guildford County School, Guildford

Guthlaxton College, Wigston

Hastingsbury Upper School and
Community College, Bedford

Hatfield High, Doncaster

Heath Park High School, Wolverhampton

Hendon School, Hendon, London

Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre
Tenterden, Kent

Howden School, Goole

Ken Stimpson Community School,
Peterborough

Kingsfield School, Bristol

Longsands College, Huntingdon

Longslade Community College, Leicester

Lord Lawson of Beamish Community
School, Chester Le Street

Lytham St Annes High Technology College,
Lytham St Annes

Mangotsfield School, Bristol

Market Rasen De Aston School,
Market Rasen

Mascalls School, Tonbridge, Kent

Medina High School, Newport,
Isle of Wight

Mill Hill High School, Mill Hill, London

Mill Hill School, Ripley

Millom School, Millom

North Bromsgrove High School,
Bromsgrove

Northgate High School, Dereham

Norton Hill School, Bath

Notre Dame Catholic High School,
Liverpool

Ossett School, Ossett

Our Lady's Catholic High School, Lancaster

Outwood Grange School, Wakefield

Park House School, Newbury

Pimlico School, London

Prendergast School, London

Queen Elizabeth's Mercian School,
Tamworth

Queensbury School, Bradford

Rainhill High School, St Helens

Saffron Walden County High School,
Saffron Walden

Saints Peter and Paul Catholic High School, Widnes

Sandown High School, Sandown

Shenfield High School, Brentwood

Sir Bernard Lovell School, Bristol

Somervale School, Bath

Spennymoor Comprehensive, Spennymoor

Sprowston High School, Norwich

St Crispin's School, Wokingham

St Cuthbert's High School, Newcastle upon Tyne

St John's Roman Catholic Comprehensive School, Gravesend

St Margaret's Church of England High School, Liverpool

St Peter's School, Huntingdon

St Wilfrid's Catholic Comprehensive School, Crawley

St Wilfrid's Catholic High School, Pontefract

Sutton Centre Community College, Sutton-in-Ashfield

Tapton School, Sheffield

Tendring Technology College, Frinton-on-Sea

The Armthorpe School, Doncaster

The King's School, Devon

The Meden School, Mansfield

The Ravensbourne School, Bromley, Kent

Thomas Tallis School, Blackheath, London

Trinity School Belvedere Church of England Voluntary Aided, Belvedere

Turton High School, Bolton

Vale of Ancholme School, Brigg

Wednesfield High School, Wolverhampton

Wellsway School, Bristol

Westwood High School, Leek

Wheatley Park School, Oxford

Wilmslow High School, Wilmslow

Windsor Girls' School, Windsor

Wood Green High School, Wednesbury

Woodhouse High School, Tamworth

Wymondham High School, Norfolk

Wyndham School, Cumbria

Independent schools

Bolton School Girls' Division, Bolton

Cokethorpe School, Witney

Hull Grammar School, Kingston upon Hull

Merchant Taylors' School, Crosby

Queen Anne's School, Caversham

Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne

Seaford College, Petworth

St Albans High School, St Albans

St Albans School, St Albans

The Stamford Endowed Schools, Stamford