

EVALUATION OF THE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MECHANISM

A research project for the Further
Education Funding Council

Final Report

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND UPDATE

In August 1998 the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) was asked by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) to carry out an evaluation of the Additional Support Mechanism (ASM) and to identify what additional guidance might be of benefit to the sector. The evaluation was carried out between September and December 1998 and involved a postal survey to all Further Education (FE) colleges, detailed telephone interviews with 10 institutions, an expert seminar, preceded by a brief questionnaire and a review of available statistics and literature.

The main conclusion was that the Additional Support Mechanism was highly regarded and well used. It enabled institutions to meet the needs of individual students who had requirements for additional support without their being financially disadvantaged. It was most effective where students had 'easily distinguished' support requirements such as sensory impairment, dyslexia or learning difficulties and some forms of basic skills support.

Features which were particularly valued were:

- the clear link between funding and individuals' needs
- the way in which the mechanism promotes an inclusive approach
- the flexibility of the mechanism to respond to a wide range of circumstance
- the symbolic role of the mechanism which signals a commitment to institutions and learners that funding for support reflects individual learner's requirements, rather than institutions framework for delivery

There was overwhelming support for the mechanism, but some concerns were expressed about the operation of the mechanism and a number of areas in which further clarification would be desirable.

The principal areas of concern were:

- the inability to claim the full costs of equipment in the first year
- the level of the threshold for full time students which could act as a barrier to the effective provision of support
- the fact that claims did not reflect the expenditure actually incurred as a result of the bands (*update: this concern will be addressed, subject to consultation*)
- restrictions on the provision and development of additional support by the overall capping on college growth (*update: this concern has already been*

addressed)

- problems in claiming for students with mental ill health, or young people with emotional & behavioural difficulties (*update: this concern will be addressed in the guidance*)
- claims for groups of students who required basic skills or ESOL support
- that it was inappropriate to ask students to sign their additional support costs form (*update: this concern is subject to consultation*)

Areas in which further clarification was needed:

- circumstances in which the ASM could support provision made for groups,
- a range of models with cost ranges for the most commonly provided types of support
- a range of models for claiming administrative support

In conclusion, there was strong support for the ASM and it would be ill advised to abandon or radically alter it although there are a number of areas where further improvements might be considered.

POSTSCRIPT

Since this report was written, there have been many proposed changes to the FE context. Readers are reminded that the report was completed before the Learning and Skills Council was proposed.

The FEFC has also taken steps to address issues raised in this report. Circular 00/02 provides further information. It describes how the Tariff Advisory Committee (TAC) recommends that the number of bands be increased to reflect better the actual expenditure on additional support for individual students. In response to the widespread concern that students are required to sign the additional support costs form. The TAC has recommended that the sector be formally consulted on a proposal to change the arrangement.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and context

Since the incorporation of Further Education colleges, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has demonstrated a strong commitment to funding additional support. For the first eighteen months, their allocations were based upon historic local education authority contributions. With the introduction of the recurrent funding methodology, used by the FEFC since 1993, there is a specific provision of funding to assist institutions to provide additional support to individual students who are assessed as requiring it. Additional support is defined by the FEFC as:

“ any activity that provides direct support for learning to individual students, over and above that which is normally provided in a standard learning programme which leads to their primary learning goal. The additional support is required to help students gain access to, progress towards and successfully achieve their learning goals. The need for additional support may arise from a learning difficulty or disability or from literacy, numeracy or language support requirements.”¹

The aspect of the FEFC funding methodology which applies to this additional support will be referred to, within this report, as the additional support mechanism (ASM).

In July 1996 the FEFC established a group to carry out a fundamental review of all aspects of the funding methodology. It concluded that in broad terms the existing methodology had worked well and considered that the existing methodology was the best available among the alternatives. It identified however a number of issues for further consideration. These included an evaluation of the additional support mechanism. In July 1998 FEDA was commissioned by the FEFC to undertake the evaluation of the additional support mechanism and to identify what additional guidance might be of benefit to the sector.

2.2 Students receiving additional support

In 1996/7 120,628 students in England benefited from the additional support arrangements. This was approximately 3% of total enrolments. 4,000 are in external institutions and the remainder in colleges. The great majority were in general FE colleges; sixth form colleges account for only 5,000 students and specialist designated institutions 4,000².

Most students, 60% of the total for whom additional support funding was claimed are on full-time courses while 40% attend part-time. The proportion of expenditure on full-time students is even greater since 50% of full time students attract support in Band 2 and

1 Funding Guidance 1998/9, FEFC,

2 See Table 1, Appendix 1

above compared with only 13% of part time students.

Of the students receiving additional support, the level of programme of 33,000 or nearly 28% was unknown. The remaining students appeared to be evenly distributed between levels one, two and three – each of which account for just over a fifth of total enrolments. This distribution does not correspond to researchers experience of patterns of learning support delivery in colleges. This difference could be explained through consideration of the 33,000 students for whom level is unknown. 11,000 were on Open College Network courses and 22,000 were on other courses³. Researchers expect the 22,000 would include students with learning difficulty on programmes at entry or level 1 which do not lead to a national qualification. 1,500 students receiving additional support were recorded as being on courses at level four or five or HE. Overall researchers feel these figures need interpreting with care.

2.3 The operation of the ASM

The evaluation showed that the sector broadly welcomed the commitment of the FEFC to funding additional support and strongly supported the ASM. However, the evaluation results showed that the sector had concerns with elements of the definition of additional support and with the application of the ASM. For example the use of the expression **standard learning programme** was seen as useful, but was perceived to lead to differential interpretation and practice. Researchers recognise that a standard learning programme varies from institution to institution depending on the context and the way in which the curriculum is delivered. This makes it difficult to define precisely.

The issues that arose in connection with the operation of the mechanism, suggested that a more formal evaluation might be necessary. Successive minor amendments have been made to improve the effectiveness. However some issues remain unresolved. In addition, some institutions appeared not be taking full advantage of the opportunities it provided. There was also an underlying perception and some anecdotal evidence of significant variations in practice between institutions dealing with apparently similar cases. There was a need to collect evidence on a more systematic basis on the use of the ASM and the views of college practitioners about its effectiveness and how it might be improved.

In carrying out the evaluation, issues emerged which relate to college application of the ASM. These included:

- the internal allocation of additional support funds by individual colleges
- the delivery of additional support
- the impact of the ASM upon delivery.

The report explores those issues relating to the effectiveness of the ASM and its impact on delivery of additional support. It identifies other issues that relate to additional support in broader terms (for example the impact of unit “capping” upon additional

3 See Table 1 : Additional support 1996/7, Appendix 1

support since the withdrawal of DLE funding).

3. AIMS

The research project had two major aims. The first aim was to report to the Funding Council, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the additional support mechanism as perceived by institutions and as identified by researchers. The evaluation needed to include:

- an analysis of how institutions were using the mechanism and an assessment of the impact the additional support mechanism has had upon access and support for students
- an analysis of the variations in the application of the mechanism and the degree of consistency between institutions and their response to like circumstances.

In the context of a broader wish by the FEFC and the sector colleges, that wherever possible the funding methodology should be simplified, researchers have sought to examine any proposals for change against the criteria of transparency and simplicity wherever possible.

The report was intended to identify areas where further clarification or guidance from the Funding Council appeared to be desirable and areas where changes in the mechanism itself would be of benefit.

A second aim of the project was to produce a comprehensive guidance document for colleges and other interested parties on best practice in the implementation of additional support arrangements. The intention was to supplement the formal guidance issued by the Council on how to claim and to provide worked examples and suggested approaches which would be of assistance both to practitioners and auditors.

This report identifies areas in which guidance is needed and makes specific recommendations on where and how the council might clarify the formal guidance it gives. The guidance publication is a separate document. It is not reproduced in full within this evaluation report, although its main elements are identified and reported here.

4. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was informed by a number of distinct approaches. The consultants worked closely with FEFC officers and sector practitioners to draw out common themes from the following elements:

- **an expert seminar**

A representative group of practitioners, FEFC officers and FEDA researchers were asked to assist the development of the evaluation process. The seminar was preceded by a brief questionnaire to a small sample of experienced practitioners who were asked to

- identify the strengths and weaknesses of the ASM
- identify areas of apparent difference in interpretation
- suggest improvements to the ASM
- identify the need for guidance in its use⁴.

The seminar asked participants:

- to consider the effectiveness of the ASM
- to discuss if and how the ASM might be improved
- to provide advice on the national survey
- to identify areas where further guidance is needed.

- **a review of research**

Research recently carried out by FEDA and others⁵, was reviewed to look for:

- patterns of use of the ASM
- problems experienced by practitioners
- approaches to costing additional support
- the impact of the ASM upon delivery

- **an analysis of statistical data**

Data made available by the FEFC was analysed to identify broad patterns of additional support funding⁶. Researchers used this information together with broader data about geographical spread, size and type of college in order to place research findings in the context of the national data. This was used to set the sampling frame and to identify differences across the sector and within the research.

4 See Appendix 2, Expert seminar questionnaire

5 See Appendix 3 which lists sources of research reviewed

6 See Appendix 1

- **a postal questionnaire survey⁷**

This was sent to each FE institution in England which requested respondent views and their experience of the application of the ASM. The survey sought detailed responses to key issues identified in desk research and through the expert seminar.

The postal survey did not seek to identify further the strengths of the ASM. Detailed information was collected on:

- patterns of additional support claim
- the impact of the ASM
- students for whom the ASM was not working
- costing approaches and ranges
- specific difficulties with the ASM.
- improvements suggested
- guidance required

- **a series of ten intensive telephone interviews⁸**

Interviews were undertaken with practitioners in a sample of colleges to explore their current approach to claiming and evidencing additional support funding units and their experience of areas of difficulty. Interviewees were asked to explain how they might approach costing claims for small groups, discrete provision, 1:1 support using broadly defined case studies as a context. In addition respondents were asked a series of questions about their experience concerning the threshold, the unit cap, the requirement for student signatures and administrative costs.

7 See Appendix 4, Postal questionnaire.

8 See Appendix 5, Case study exemplars and additional questions used in the telephone interviews

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

5.1 Introduction

The five evidence sources were reviewed separately to draw key themes from each source and then compared to seek similarities and differences. At each stage, wherever possible, information was collected from a representative sample of the sector as a whole. Colleges of different types, size and region participated in the expert seminar and the telephone interviews. The postal questionnaire was, of course, dependent upon the level of response from different parts of the sector. However the institutions returning questionnaires were broadly representative of the sector as a whole. There was a slight skew away from general further education and tertiary institutions to sixth form and agricultural colleges. Regionally, there were slightly more respondents from the West Midlands and the South West and slightly fewer from Greater London and Yorkshire and Humberside regions compared with the actual distribution of colleges.

Whilst each of the sources of evidence confirmed the key themes identified below, there were some apparent inconsistencies between them in a small number of instances and some issues only emerged in detailed questioning of practitioners. These have been noted as they arise.

The findings are presented below under a series of headings and sub headings which indicate the key issues and responses. In each case, the evidence is presented and the source(s) given. In consideration of each aspect, researchers have drawn together evidence from the expert seminar, the postal survey, the interviews, research studies and their own experiences as appropriate. A commentary is provided on the findings and issues and possible options for the Funding Council are identified.

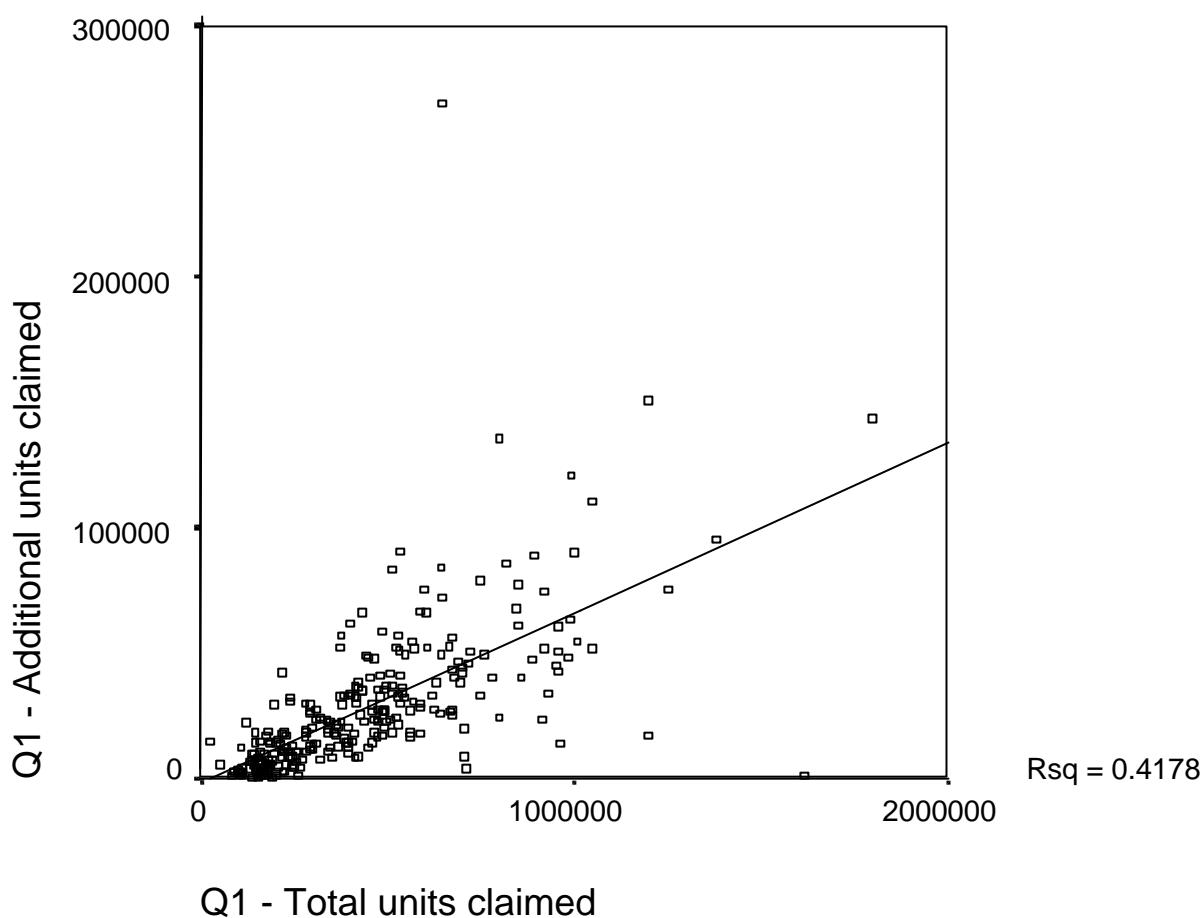
5.2 Use of the ASM

The additional support mechanism commands wide support and is used in the majority of colleges. This support was demonstrated by the high level of response to the postal survey, with 294 college returns. In addition, participants at the expert seminar and interviewees all expressed strong support for many aspects of the ASM.

The great majority of institutions responding to the questionnaire, submitted additional support claims. (280 out of 294 colleges responded that they made a claim⁹). A wide range of units was claimed, with the middle 50% of colleges submitting claims within a range 9,000 - 38,000 units. However, there was a high degree of correlation between the size of total FEFC funding units claimed and the number of additional support units claimed. (see chart 1 below)

9 See Appendix 4, Postal survey, question 1

Chart 1 Correlation of total units claimed to additional units claimed for 1997/8



There was some evidence of cases where the ASM was less well used and some variation in the pattern of claims by institutions of different types. The FEFC circular identifying audit guidance for 1997/8 10 shows national patterns of additional support claim. It indicates that sixth form colleges claim additional support units for a lower percentage of their full time students, compared to general FE and agricultural colleges. This could be caused by a number of complex, interacting factors such as difference in students prior achievement levels, curriculum demands and social deprivation as well as their learning support needs. This was also confirmed by the research where of the 12 colleges eligible to claim who reported no claim for additional support units in the postal survey, half were sixth form colleges, 2 were designated institutions, 3 were small general FE colleges and 1 was a medium sized general FE college 11.

5.3 Strengths of the ASM

5.3.1 Sector support for the ASM

10 Supplement to FEFC circular 98/25 Audit of 1997/8 Final Funding Unit Claim FEFC, July 1998
 11 Appendix 4, Postal survey, question 1

80% of those responding to the postal questionnaire agreed that in most or all cases the mechanism ensured that individuals requiring additional support in order to benefit from FE, were provided with that support. This high level of support for the ASM is consistent with the findings of other research projects (see Leney, Lucas & Taubman,(1998) "Learning Funding"¹².) The same view was also expressed within the open questions on the postal survey questionnaire¹³. The strength of support for the mechanism was further confirmed by a number of practitioners during the expert seminar and telephone interviews who expressed concern that the research might lead to the withdrawal of the ASM. They stated strongly held opinions that the ASM should be retained.

A number of features of the additional support mechanism were particularly valued.

- Practitioners welcomed the fact that funding is linked to individual students and that it was possible to provide the level of resources that an individual needed without financial penalty to the college.
- The responses to the pro-forma used prior to the expert seminar indicated practitioners' recognition of the 'political' importance of the ASM, both internally and externally. Practitioners felt it demonstrated a clear message from the government that students with additional learning needs had an entitlement to support.
- They noted the flexibility of the ASM to support students with a wide range of needs responsively and "on demand".
- Practitioners considered that the ASM had raised awareness of individual student needs within colleges and increased the status of the students and staff.
- They believed it to have played a part in improved retention and achievement, as well as in widening participation.
- The ASM was felt to work best where there was an "easily distinguished need".

In the postal survey 14, a number of respondents spontaneously indicated that the ASM had enabled the development of additional support for the first time. It enabled them to cater for particular client groups for whom they would otherwise not have been able to provide.

"The ASM has been excellent for us. We have helped hundreds of people we could not have afforded to help previously."

"It works extremely well for the 600 + students on discrete programmes and for students on mainstream programmes with sensory impairment."

"By attaching the funding to individual students, it has been possible to provide support in the most appropriate setting – mainstream or in discrete workshops. It

12 T. Leney, n. Lucas and D. Taubman, "Learning Funding: The Impact of FEFC Funding, Evidence from Twelve FE Colleges", NATFHE & University of London, Institute of Education, 1998

13 Responses to question 3 in the postal questionnaire

14 Appendix 4, Question 3

has supported Inclusive Learning.”

The impact was also evident in the returns to question 5 in the survey questionnaire, where respondents were asked to indicate how the ASM had affected their institution.

- Nearly 30% indicated it had provided better resources to students,
- 27% stated that it had enabled the college to develop new approaches
- 22% said it had allowed them to accept students who would have formerly been turned away.

In addition, the postal questionnaire sought to identify college views on the needs with which the ASM had been particularly effective. (Question 3) Respondents answers fell into three broad categories: students’ support needs; forms of support and delivery of support.

5.3.2 Perceived effectiveness of the ASM -Students’ additional support needs

A range of students’ support needs was identified as being well supported by the ASM. Among the most frequently cited examples were sensory impairment (67), dyslexia (65) and specific learning difficulties (20), severe and moderate learning difficulties (38), physical impairment (48). While some institutions had found it possible to provide and claim for these students, fewer mentions were made of emotional and behavioural difficulties (7) and mental health (5). Emphasis was made by several of respondents that the mechanism worked best where the support need was significant and/or regular (10). This view was also expressed by participants in the expert seminar.

5.3.3 Perceived effectiveness of the ASM - Forms of support

The most frequent form of support cited as working well was for basic skills (66), but responses included a very wide range of services including assessment (9), scribes & readers (5), signers (10), personal care (17), exam support & exemption (9), enabling technology/equipment (10) and communicators (8). This indicated areas where respondents are happy with the ASM, but the figures may indicate more about the numbers of students supported in each category. They did not necessarily indicate the strength of the mechanism for example, in basic skills. Indeed the discussions at the expert seminar indicated difficulties in the delivery of basic skills support for students on general (mainstream) programmes.

In a small number of cases respondents indicated that the ASM was effective for forms of support that is ineligible for funding. For example: English (6), Maths (8) and Study Skills support (8), subject support (4), bilingual support (1) and equipment purchase (2). This finding may be explained by the fact that responses were insufficiently specific or detailed. It may have arisen from incomplete descriptions, for example where ‘equipment purchase’ might have referred actually to a claim for its depreciation and ‘study skills’ might have indicated development of underlying learning techniques that were pre-cursors for generic study skills. Equally, these findings may indicate that a small minority of colleges was claiming for support that is ineligible and thus that further

guidance is required.

5.3.4 Perceived effectiveness of the ASM - Delivery of support

Responses indicated a wide range of types of delivery, from discrete provision and 1:1 support, to mainstream, in class support and workshop support. The ASM was considered to work best in 1:1 support (32), discrete provision (18), small group (14), with in class support (10), additional teaching (9), workshop provision (3) and mainstream provision (3) cited less often. One interpretation of these results is that the mechanism was seen by practitioners to be working well for provision that was distinctive or separate and less well in broader inclusive approaches. Alternatively, it may be easier to claim for some forms of provision because they hit the threshold.

There was clearly strong support for the ASM and FEFC would be ill advised to consider abandoning it or radically changing the way it operates. The issue for the FEFC is to seek approaches to the remaining difficulties described below.

5.4 Difficulties experienced with the ASM

5.4.1 Preface

Expert seminar participants, those responding in telephone interviews, and the experience of the researchers all indicated a high level of support for the ASM. It should be noted that when considering the results of the postal survey, the focus on difficulties may appear to outweigh the strong support indicated above. This was not the case, rather that the questionnaire sought specifically, to tease out the areas of difficulty, the impact of the ASM and the guidance the sector required. There were only a limited number of questions which overtly sought detailed evaluation of the strengths of the ASM. It is significant that from the 294 responses only three made no response to question 3, which asked respondents to identify strengths of the ASM.

A further indication of the strength of support for the mechanism can be gauged from the fact that when asked about difficulties a number of respondents spontaneously prefaced their comments with an indication of general support. The commentary below, which identifies a number of areas in which the operation of the mechanism might be improved, needs to be approached in that light.

5.4.2 Overview of difficulties and concerns

The evaluation sought to identify the main needs with which practitioners felt the ASM had been unable to provide adequate support and how improvements might be made to the ASM. The pre-seminar questionnaire (questions 2-4) and the expert seminar itself sought to identify problems with the ASM, student groups for whom the mechanism did not work well, and any specific difficulties practitioners experienced in applying the ASM. These sources indicated a number of broad concerns with the mechanism.

These included:

- concern about the eligibility of equipment purchase
- concerns about the width of additional support bands, the minimum threshold for full time students and the perception of a maximum threshold for students, leading to difficulties in matching income and expenditure
- problems in demonstrating eligibility and in recording and evidencing support for those with mental health and behavioural support needs, in particular
- concerns about the provision and funding claim for counselling services
- concern about the delivery of small amounts of basic skills and ESOL support within groups
- some difficulty with auditors
- difficulty with students requiring flexible or irregular support
- concern about the requirement for students to sign Annex A forms
- difficulty in the cost of assessment for those requiring placement in specialist colleges
- concern at the cost of pre-entry assessment and the delivery of support to those who did not enrol or left before the first census date
- anxiety that the capping of funding units would impact on additional support allocations and thus upon, inclusive learning and widening participation initiatives
- difficulty in interpreting the guidance in relation to generic and additional support

5.4.3 Most frequently cited difficulties

In order to evaluate whether the sector as a whole saw these as the main issues, questions 4 and 6c of the postal survey asked respondents to identify the main needs where the additional support mechanism had been unable to provide funding for additional support. Many of the responses reinforced concerns expressed in the expert seminar. In answering question 4, the most frequently cited cause of difficulty related to capital equipment, mentioned by 61 respondents. In a number of cases this was qualified by referring to specialist capital items perhaps needed for only one student. The major cause of concern appeared to be the inability of colleges in some circumstances to claim either the full cost of an item or to claim in the year in which the equipment was first purchased. As it is only possible to claim depreciation costs, it means that expenditure cannot be reclaimed for several years, if at all, in some cases.

Almost as frequent (53 responses) was a concern about students who needed relatively small amounts of support and fell below the threshold. The telephone survey and seminar confirmed widespread concern about these students. Just over 90% of colleges reported having full time students with support needs which did not trigger the band 1 threshold. The median figure reported was 50 students. There was a wide range of variation in the number of full time students requiring additional support who were below band 1. Half the colleges reported numbers between 30 and 130 students. Significantly, colleges reported having made the provision even though they were unable to claim the cost (Provision was reported as having been made in 90% of cases). This means, however, that there are a further 10% of students for whom funding

could not be claimed and for whom provision was not made.

There were other aspects of the ASM which attracted concern in these opening questions, though at a much reduced frequency, These concerns were about students with behavioural or mental health difficulties (29) those with significant support needs (13) and the impact of the unit cap (9).

5.4.4 Failure to provide support

Some questions in the postal survey sought to identify whether there were particular areas of needs where support was identified but not provided (question 6c). Responses fell into four broad categories:

- student related issues

The most significant level of response was student related. 26, almost 10% of institutions reported occasions when support was provided for a student but they did not take it up. Clearly this was an issue for the college and was not related directly to the ASM. However the impact of the threshold for band 1 for full time students and the difficulties associated with the delivery of low levels of support, may encourage colleges to deliver support in ways that do not provide best practice delivery appropriate to student needs and preferences

- Additional support needs which were assessed but could not be provided within the ASM

For example – the claim was below the threshold (21); equipment could not be bought (14)

- allocations or resourcing issues

10 respondents identified that capping had restricted provision. 18 respondents identified lack of specialist staff as a cause for concern. For example, some reported inadequate numbers of college staff able to deliver dyslexia support and limited external experts to respond to “one off” need such as speech therapy. Institutional or staffing limitations on basic skills provision were also frequently mentioned (20). The latter issue was clearly not a feature that can be directly addressed by the ASM, although participants at the expert seminar indicated that a register of specialist support agencies would be helpful and this could be co-ordinated through regional offices or through underpinning structures of the Lifelong Learning Strategic Partnerships.

- client groups whose needs were not addressed

Those most frequently identified by respondents to the postal survey

were:

- students with very high levels of need (8)
- part-time students (7)
- ESOL students (7)

Less frequently mentioned were:

- students with mental ill health (4)
- those with dyslexia (3)

There is a 'special case' mechanism to deal with students with very high levels of need. The number of responses indicating that these needs are not met suggests that some staff remain unaware of the mechanism.

These and other concerns became clearer in the responses to specific questions in the postal survey, that were designed to elicit precise levels of concern and to detail understanding of the sector's concern about specific issues. The key themes are examined in greater detail below.

5.5 Analysis of key themes

5.5.1 Introduction

A number of key themes emerged early in the research, which were then tested out in greater detail in the postal survey questionnaire and the telephone interviews. These were broadly of three types:

- **Concerns with specific aspects of the ASM**

In the postal survey, questions 7 and 8 considered issues relating to bands and thresholds ; question 9 considered issues identified in the expert seminar where claims were perceived to be problematic ; question 10 looked at issues relating to the impact of the removal of DLE funding on additional support.

- **Concerns about differential practice in costing and internal allocation**

There was a high level of perceived inequity in claims and concern by individual institutions that they received an appropriate share of additional support funding, or used similar staff hourly rates. In the postal survey questions 11-15 sought to consider approaches to costing. More detailed questioning was undertaken in the telephone interviews, using broad descriptors of clients to identify approaches to costing. Concern was expressed in all areas of data collection about the internal allocation of

additional support funding. While this is not generally a matter for the council, there will need to be evidence that resources claimed through the ASM are allocated appropriately to meet the identified support needs.

- **Areas where additional guidance was required**

Participants at the expert seminar group and question 20 of the questionnaire explicitly sought the views of practitioners on the guidance required by the sector. However the need for additional guidance could also be inferred from other responses in the expert seminar, the postal questionnaire and the telephone interviews.

5.5.2 Concerns with specific aspects of the ASM

a) Banding and Thresholds

The majority of respondents to the pre-expert seminar questionnaire and the expert seminar participants suggested that the banding used for additional support claims could be a cause of difficulty. Particular difficulty was identified with the Band 1 threshold for full time students. In addition, concern was expressed about the width of some of the bands and the difficulties in ensuring that overall income and expenditure on additional support were in balance. The postal survey therefore sought to explore this area more systematically. The responses to a number of different questions confirmed that significant numbers of colleges experienced some difficulty with banding.

When asked directly whether the FEFC should introduce more and narrower bands, 52% said yes, 27% said possibly and 21% no. A quarter of respondents agreed with the suggestion that there should be no bands with a further 33% responding "Possibly", however 42% rejected the idea. A substantial number wished to see band zero extended to full-time students. (90% "Yes" to the direct question with a further 9% "Possibly").

When asked an open question – "What improvements would you make?" 33 identified the abolition of bands and the claiming of the actual costs incurred. A further 12 identified the introduction of narrower bands.

In response to the open question asking respondents to describe the nature of the problems experienced, twenty six respondents identified the bands as being too broad with a further twenty nine respondents identifying specific bands which were too broad.

When asked to identify problems with specific bands (question 8) 15, 33% experienced problems with band 0; 19% with band 1 and 13% with band 3. There was also some

15 Response rates to this question were low, with approximately sixty per cent identifying problems with one or more of the bands.

evidence of concern about band 7 (8%). Review of the comments asking respondents to identify the detail behind their experience seemed to indicate that problems with band 0 were almost exclusively related to support for large numbers of full time students falling into this band. In addition most respondents expressing concern about band 1 expressed this as full time students falling short of the band. One can therefore infer that up to 46% of colleges considered the ASM did not work well for students requiring small levels of support. When asked a direct question about extending band 0 to full time students, there was overwhelming support, with 90% of respondents supporting this.

Most concern in relation to band 3 relates to band width. It is likely that this is a commonly used additional support band. Its breadth means that the balance between income and expenditure is difficult to achieve. The main concern with the top support band was that the upper limit did not cover the highest levels of support. This may reflect the fact that some staff do not understand that they can make exceptional claims through the regional office. This indicates a need for further guidance. (The limited awareness of the opportunity to approach the FEFC regional office, may be explained by the removal of this facility in 1997/8 and its reinstatement in 1998/9, when the new bands to £18,800 were introduced.) Elsewhere in the postal survey there was some indication that unit capping differentially affected band 7.

A number of respondents gave calculations which explained their concern about the mismatch of income and expenditure. Clearly one solution to income and expenditure imbalance might be a restatement of additional support units attaching to bands. This is planned for 2000-01. There was an assumption that the unit boundaries of each band (multiplied by a standard ALF) should match the indicative cost range for each band. As long as support is provided on the basis of need rather than on the basis of the funding methodology, there will be gains and losses in each band which will tend to balance each other out.

However, there seems an underlying sense from analysis of the responses in the evaluation, that matching income and expenditure in every case was expected. There was some lack of recognition that there would be some cases where the cost was below the midpoint. In some responses, however, colleges entered an overall income – expenditure analysis, which indicated that their total income from the ASM did not match the cost incurred. The table below identifies the mid point of the cost range and the income at an ALF of £17.00, indicating the potential imbalance between income and expenditure that concerns the sector.

Table 2 Income-Expenditure balance

Band	Cost Range	Cost mid point	Units	Income @ £17.00	Difference inc - exp
0	£ 170-£ 500	£ 335.00	19	£ 323	(£ 12.00)
1	£ 501-£ 1000	£ 750.50	42	£ 714	(£ 36.50)
2	£ 1001-£ 2000	£ 1500.50	83	£ 1411	(£ 89.50)
3	£ 2001-£ 4000	£ 3000.50	166	£ 2822	(£ 178.50)
4	£ 4001- £ 5600	£ 4800.50	266	£ 4522	(£ 278.50)

5	£ 5601-£ 8800	£ 7200.50	400	£ 6800	(£ 400.50)
6	£ 8801-£ 13600	£ 11200.50	622	£ 10574	(£ 626.50)
7	£ 13601-£ 18800	£16200.50	900	£ 15300	(£ 900.00)

(Brackets indicate a deficit)

This concern about income and expenditure balance was expressed in some of the telephone interviews. Clearly narrower bands might tend to lessen this difficulty. Half the telephone interviewees suggested removing the bands, with one suggesting that a move to setting a minimum threshold and then relating costs to units on a sliding scale.

The narrowing or removal of bands need careful consideration. If costs were being incurred across the bands, narrower bands might just inflate the overall units allocated to additional support without any additional services being provided. Narrower bands would then have a tendency to shift a number of students up one band, without any additional expenditure being made. However, anecdotal evidence gathered from participants at training events on funding issues, indicated that a number of colleges aimed support costs at just above the threshold, despite the audit guidance. In addition there appeared to be topping up of the support assessed as necessary to ensure that students “hit the band”, although some people indicated that they tried to make this “not too obvious” in their claims. The responses from a small number in the postal survey suggested that a few institutions may not be acting within the spirit of the methodology:

“Students with learning difficulties .. tend to fall in the middle of band 3 and it is a very large jump to fall into band 4. It is difficult to bring spending just to the lower end of band 3 to keep within budget requirements.”

“Large gaps in banding leads to construction of support in ways which are not necessarily student led.”

Problems relate to all bands as indicated:

“All bands- as there is pressure to reach thresholds and go no further.”

“This band (band 1) requires students who are on the full time courses to access a larger amount of support than they actually need.”

One can interpret this as a broad aim by institutions, to match income and expenditure, or even maximise income by always aiming their costs at the lower half of the band. The problem is reported to be more acute in the higher bands as there may be fewer students to balance each other out and higher “losses” to incur.

Despite the aim which some colleges acknowledge, to hit the thresholds, in practice this may not always be the actual outcome. Some responses (11) to question 6c in the

postal survey indicated a concern that colleges were having difficulty matching income and expenditure, especially in the broader bands. (Question 8)

“We are often on the borderline of band 1 and 2 and play safe, choosing band 1 – then we find we do not recover our costs.”

“Most of our students come within these bands and they are so wide that a student who comes near the top of the band loses us money. Colleges should be reimbursed for full costs.”

“Students often fall in the top 25% of a band.”

This might imply that in practice college costs were more evenly spread across the bands. If average additional support costs are investigated, they may tend to hit at or near the middle of a band. It should be noted that researchers experience from funding training events indicated that some practitioners were confused about the income from their funded ALF and internal allocations of resources. (Some respondents in the questionnaire may have calculated income at an internal allocation rate, lower than the college ALF. There was some anecdotal evidence from some participants at training events on funding, that internal allocation to additional support was at the DLE rate of £6.50, rather than at the college ALF. The imbalance between income and expenditure would then be much greater).

Nevertheless, this pattern of response suggests that some colleges allocated only the income received for additional support units to the delivery of additional support. Consequently, where there was an imbalance between income and resources required, the support was not delivered in some colleges as a result. Fewer students were supported as a result or individuals received insufficient support. There was some evidence of “rationing” of support provision in relation to individual students by a few colleges.

“Students were given additional support but not as much as we felt was ideal.”

“No student was refused entry, but some have been guided elsewhere; some students have not received all the support they needed.”

Detailed analysis of a representative number of additional support costs pro-formas would be necessary to establish to what extent the practitioners’ perception of mismatch between income and expenditure was in fact justified. This could also establish robust evidence of the pattern of costs indicated on the forms. (It is likely that evidence from auditors has already indicated that claims may fall in the lower half of the band, given recent audit guidance on areas of concern in claims for additional support¹⁶).

With the current broad bands, where moving up a band may bring a further 100 – 200 units (or £1,720 – 3,440 at a £17.20 ALF), the incentive to adjust support the last few

16 Circular 98/25 Audit Guidance (Also identified in earlier audit guidance circulars).

hundred pound in a band must be enormous. This limitation of support to minimum thresholds of bands and top up support may not always be in the students interest as some respondents indicated. A mechanism which removes bands and pays actual costs would remove the incentive to manipulate costs to hit the threshold.

However, the removal of bands and payment based on actual costs would need careful consideration. There are no other current FEFC approaches where actual costs are paid and it is not immediately apparent how the claim might be made through the ISR as currently structured, where units are the funding currency. It would be possible to convert actual costs to units at a standard conversion rate of either current ALF or convergence ALF. An approach could be to recalibrate to convergence ALF, as planned for 2000-01, and to link units to ALF using a sliding scale above a threshold. It would be desirable to pilot any such proposal in order to identify the technical implications.

In a climate of simplification both these proposals might add complexity to the tariff or to funding claim and audit.

Secondly the proposal to extend band O to full time students seemed to be supported by the responses to specific questions in the telephone interviews, and was strongly supported by respondents to the postal survey. Difficulties in claiming for those with low levels of need included students:

- who are hard of hearing
- with dyslexia who have developed coping strategies but may incur assessment costs and additional exam invigilation
- needing "sporadic" support such as those with mental health needs.

The proposal to extend the use of band O was also linked by some to the provision of basic skills support (see below) and neither should be considered in isolation. In addition, the continuum between additional and generic support must be considered in the context of lowering the threshold for full time students.

In order to establish what college practice might emerge if narrower bands were identified or if the full time student threshold was lowered, a more detailed study or pilot might assist the FEFC in determining the impact their introduction would have upon delivery and overall additional support and the associated requirement for additional tariff and audit guidance. It might be argued that removal of a threshold would remove the distinction between support that should normally be provided as part of a standard learning programme and support that is genuinely additional.

The removal of bands altogether had some support from participants in the expert seminar and telephone interviews. However, as the postal questionnaire indicated there were a large number of colleges who did not agree with this proposal. The FEFC would need to consider how removal of bands and payment of actual costs might be accomplished, but would also need to consult widely in the sector to determine if the survey results were representative of the sector.

b) Uneven patterns of support needs

The expert group suggested that one area of difficulty experienced by many colleges was claiming for students when the need for additional support was uneven across the year. Examples given included programmes which were front loaded, roll-on/roll-off programmes, drop-in workshop provision, “late emergers” and irregular attenders. Just over half of those responding (51%) identified difficulties in cases where support for students was unevenly delivered throughout a programme. 28% of these respondents indicated that they were unable to offer support to students as a result. In many cases this seemed to be linked to a concern that students would not reach the full-time minimum threshold. One respondent in the pre-seminar questionnaire, spoke of having to put large numbers of students “on account” until the threshold was triggered, it never being clear which of these unevenly supported students would ultimately trigger a band. In the meantime records had to be collected for all.

The “late-emergers” and “ro-ro” students are also likely to be affected by the unit capping and internal allocations of funding units. Colleges indicated that there was internal pressure to identify the students most likely to trigger the threshold at the beginning of an academic year. In some cases they were less willing to risk allocation of restricted resources to students who might bring no income. This approach may become increasingly problematic where year round delivery approaches to widening participation and lifelong learning result in unitised and on demand delivery, for example within University for Industry initiatives. Some respondents in the expert seminar questionnaire, indicated this had already caused problems in that there were tensions between provision of short term support which might never meet a threshold and finite budgets and unit targets.

A much higher proportion – 73%- identified difficulties when a student left a programme early. In open responses about early leavers, respondents drew attention particularly to students with high cost or specialist pre-entry assessment and/or initial support. Many identified the inability to re-coup high levels of expenditure for those who then did not enrol or who left before the first census date as a problem. In addition in the expert seminar and the case studies, concern was expressed in relation to those for whom support was “front-loaded.” Clearly in this latter case, manual adjustment of the ISR should be undertaken. However most of those spoken to in the telephone interviews and expert seminar seemed unaware of the facility to make manual adjustments.

The approach to students receiving additional support, who leave before the first census date, is the same as for others not receiving support in that the college cannot claim any units. However, respondents to the postal questionnaire, perceived a difference for students with additional support needs. They felt that the pre-entry assessment process was more costly and the additional support was provided for one individual. By contrast on a core course programme, resources were allocated to a group, such that drop out before the November census would increase unit costs, but could be accommodated by inflating target numbers initially or by redesigning the programme to operate at a lower resource level. It may be difficult to limit further expenditure where a student with additional support is lost and expenditure made for an expensive piece of specialist equipment may be lost. Staff are aware that best

practice, is to ensure that specialist equipment is available as soon as the students starts and it is often necessary to order well in advance. This means that institutions run the risk of the students not enrolling or of learning at an early stage and the expenditure cannot be reclaimed. In addition, the reasons for a student's non-enrolment or withdrawal may be beyond the college's control. There would appear to be sufficient concern among practitioners to consider if an alternative might be found. However it is difficult to see how this might be achieved

without adding complexity to the tariff and to the ISR funding programme.

The postal survey and the telephone interviews also indicated concern over the relationship between early leavers and the costing approaches for discrete provision where smaller groups calculations were undertaken, based upon the concepts of "normal" and "actual" group size. The majority of respondents mentioning this, indicated that individual student costs were re-calculated as the group size reduced. It is not clear that this re-calculation is in the spirit of the methodology, where low recruitment or student drop out usually results in a drop in funding. Unsurprisingly colleges expressed concern that they received conflicting advice from auditors on this re-calculation of individual costs within discrete provision. However, the attribution of actual costs to individual students indicates that this is appropriate, but is the source of further bureaucracy.

More explicit interpretation by the FEFC of the "spirit of the methodology" solution to this problem would assist the sector and auditors . FEDA can develop additional guidance indicating where manual adjustment is appropriate, for example where students have "front-loaded support patterns."

c) Student signatures

The Tomlinson Report recommended that students should sign their additional support costs proformas. The rationale was to ensure that students were aware of the resources claimed on their behalf and received the support identified.

However, participants in the expert seminar expressed concern about this requirement, in practice. There was a view that it also was counter to good practice, supporting a deficit model rather than an inclusive approach. It singled out individuals for overtly different treatment, with a badge of remediation. The postal survey confirmed the view that obtaining the students signature on the additional support claim was a frequent cause of problems. 66% of institutions reported problems in this area (question 9) with 10% identifying the withdrawal of the need for a signature as one of the improvements they would make (question 18). Review of responses in the telephone interviews and within the "further difficulties" section of this question, gave a further indicator of the sector's concern that the requirement for a signature was not just difficult, but inappropriate.

"Some students amended it (crossed part out) and some refused to sign."

"We feel uncomfortable asking students to sign for every support period received – especially counselling."

“Students with mental health problems and PMLD are unwilling or unable to sign forms.”

“We spend a great deal of time advising students not to sign documents they do not understand – how can we then ask them to sign a pro-forma which is complex to understand? Our learning plans and support plans can be matched to the pro-forma.”

A solution needs to be found that meets the clear need at audit to identify that costs claimed for additional support have been incurred, whilst ensuring students who receive support are not singled out for different treatment. The use of a signed learning contract is already a requirement and registers of attendance for 1:1 or workshop support, additional support unit staffing records etc., should adequately meet audit requirements. Practitioners could be asked to assist in the development of exemplar recording approaches that met internal record keeping requirements and provided robust, simple audit evidence.

d) Capital expenditure

There are two main aspects to capital expenditure in relation to additional support. Firstly there may be capital expenditure in terms of building adaptation which may include limited expenditure such as for special marking to assist the mobility of partially sighted students through to more major adaptation such as development of ramps and installation of lifts. Secondly, the purchase of equipment for groups or individual students. 70% of respondents reported difficulty in claiming for capital items, confirming both responses to earlier questions in the postal survey and comments at the expert group. In most cases this related to equipment purchase. The postal survey also indicated that where capital expenditure was a problem, in 37% of cases students did not receive the support they needed and in 13% of cases the student could not be accepted. Telephone interviews indicated that this difficulty with capital expenditure differentially affected students with sensory impairment. Subsequent to the data collection stage of this research, new capital support arrangements have been announced which include £12 million for 1999/2002 to provide improved access and facilities.

At the expert seminar and in some responses to the postal survey, respondents indicated the difficulties of demonstrating depreciation claims appropriately, especially where items were shared by a number of students. In addition, several suggested that regional centres for equipment might serve students and colleges better.

Perhaps because calculations were complex to evidence and income would be small, no respondents in the telephone interviews claimed for lift maintenance although some mentioned minibus costs.

17 260 out of 294 organizations responded to this question of which 70% indicated they had difficulties.

In relation to capital expenditure it seems useful to distinguish two aspects. Firstly it could be argued that some ASM capital expenditure should form part of a broader college accommodation and equipment strategy. Thus building adaptation and equipment purchase, where it can be seen as supporting a broad student cohort over a number of years, may be met best through depreciation within the ASM. This would retain the current difference between the purchase of equipment for additional support and for core programme delivery, but would also continue to prevent the ASM being used to underwrite a college's equipment replacement strategy.

The second type of capital expenditure for additional support is that which relates to specific students. Many will have had a "relationship" with a piece of equipment which has been a long term and familiar piece of enabling technology. One often sees such equipment personalised and decorated by the student. In addition college life may make new demands upon a student, which require provision of different or additional enabling technology if students are to have equal experience of college life. There seems to be a logic to this "personal" equipment following the student wherever possible, rather than repetitive purchases by institutions as the student travels through lifelong learning experiences supported by different agencies who suddenly reclaim their equipment as the student moves on.

To address these issues in a simple way, it may be appropriate to allow continuing depreciation claims within the ASM for "wide use" technology such as concept keyboards. Where equipment is required for a specific individual it seems more appropriate that this should be available through local collaborative arrangements, where equipment could be loaned, as required, and could then follow the student. The institution would then identify the loan cost within the additional support costs pro-forma 18. If this is not possible full capital cost should be available to claim in the year of purchase, if the student is not to be denied access. There was clear evidence that this lack of "ring-fenced" capital, disadvantages or denies equal access to individual students, such as those with partial sight. Minor building adaptation might reasonably remain ineligible, with major adaptations being part of specific "one-off" incentive funding as indicated in Council News 49.

e) Withdrawal of DLE

The ceiling on college claims following withdrawal of the demand led element (DLE) was a frequent cause of concern. Participants in the expert seminar indicated that it might work against inclusive learning and widening participation initiatives. There was also anecdotal evidence from funding training that colleges were making decisions about whether to widen participation and support a greater number of unit "neutral" students or to address the inclusive learning initiatives and support fewer "unit rich" students. The expert seminar participants were also concerned that the ASM was being used as a "surge tank" when a college was short of units. When over target, practitioners were

18 Council News 49, suggests that funding will be sought to support these collaborative approaches.

under pressure to ration provision.

Telephone interviewers reported a variety of internal constraints as a result of the loss of DLE, including percentage targets, rationing of 1:1 provision, limited support for the “more expensive” student, limitations on new developments and rationing of support. The researcher undertaking the intensive telephone interviews noted one college’s view:

“This college makes no claim for additional support units. The college has too many units overall and too much administration time would be required for no return The college did not develop additional support initially and although we are keen to respond to widening participation and inclusive learning initiatives, the lack of additional support units limit this. 19 ”

In the postal survey, around half of the colleges responding to the questionnaire indicated that they had experienced problems resulting from this limitation on their potential claim. The postal questionnaire asked respondents to identify if they had not made a claim for additional support units (Question 1). In the 14 cases where institutions had not made a claim, half were because the institution had reached its overall unit target. In addition further investigation was made of the one in forty responses to the questionnaire where respondents felt the mechanism was unsuccessful in ensuring students were provided with appropriate support (Question 2) 20. The most frequent reason for this response was that the college had already reached its unit target and would be unable to obtain additional resources through the ASM.

In a significant number of cases, 49% of those responding 21, it was reported that students had not been accepted as a consequence of this limitation. 53% of those responding 22 reported that some students had not received the support which they needed simply because of the college’s inability to claim additional units. Review of the question (10) asking participants to indicate the impact upon the delivery of additional support, showed that of the one hundred and forty three institutions indicating that the withdrawal of DLE had had an impact, twenty one indicated that support was being rationed, twenty indicated that students with high levels of support need might not be accepted and fifteen limited the numbers receiving support. A further ten respondents indicated it had discouraged new developments and nine indicated it had reduced flexibility to deal with late-comers.

“When the college is up to target, there is little incentive to provide further additional support.”

“Because we have to ask for units before the academic year in which we need

19 Researchers comments on a case study telephone interview report.
20 (Question 2 response – “in no cases” did the ASM achieve provision of additional support for students identified as requiring extra support).
21 16% of the total sample
22 18% of the total sample

them, any student who will need a large number of units allocated to them has to be turned away, because we have no access to additional ASM units.”

“Access to additional support was restricted due to availability of sufficient FEFC units.”

“The continued absence of DLE funding will make it impossible for the college to offer additional support to an increasing number of students. This has significant implications for widening participation and equal opportunities. The RNIB has already expressed its concern to the college.”

Council News 49 indicates that the Council is seeking to identify funding as part of the CSR settlement which would enable colleges to support students with additional support needs above their targets 23. One solution might be to consider the introduction of additional funding for additional support above the college funding agreement. (For ease of reference this will be called additional ASM funding within this report). There was certainly support for this idea at the expert seminar. However such a proposal would need introducing with care. Clearly additional ASM funding could only apply to additional support that was over a college’s target. There is some problem at the moment in identifying what was truly additional.

Colleges are not currently required to identify the percentage of their funding units that will be targeted at additional support. (This is appropriate as the ASM is intended to respond to individual student needs and cannot be fully planned on the basis of a needs analysis and strategic plan). Thus identifying units that derived from supporting more students with additional support needs is not immediately discernible within a college’s application for funding. Nevertheless one would expect a college strategic plan to refer to any proposed major changes to supporting additional students with learning difficulties and disabilities. (For example the development of an additional support unit where no support has been provided in the past; the development of a specialist unit for deaf or partially sighted students would be planned developments). Such developments might be linked to a change in units per full time equivalent student numbers and might be associated with a change in the pattern of student numbers. FEFC regional offices will be familiar with the pattern of previous additional support units claimed. This large unplanned changes to the pattern of unit claim could be identified and an explanation requested in the normal way. This would prevent a college from re-describing existing provision to claim additional funding through the ASM, without actually providing more additional support.

A key criterion for introducing an approach to funding additional support over target, should ensure that this additional resource is attached to additional provision, rather than to support “unit farming” within the ASM. Increased funding units over target for additional support should be designed to add an incentive for institutions to meet the inclusive learning and widening participation agenda, especially where they had little history of additional support claims. It must not be used as an opportunity for colleges to

shift additional support from “core funding” to the ASM, freeing up funds for unmonitored growth. However applied properly it could deliver and underpin some of the new growth targets for FE by adding value to college widening participation initiatives. A detailed study of the impact of any proposed approach to offer increased funding over target within the ASM, could be undertaken with practitioners and college senior staff responsible for strategic or financial management.

f) Basic skills

The expert seminar discussed the issues relating to basic skills at some length. This provision seemed to highlight the difficulties of drawing a clear boundary between

generic and additional support. This can be highlighted in a number of ways. Firstly, given the increasing pressure on resources, colleges have had to look for ways to balance their budgets. Many colleges have addressed this by reducing their overall course hours. This has impacted on curriculum delivery, including upon the provision of generic support. The FEFC Guidance clearly indicates that cuts in course hours cannot be “topped up” by the ASM. However, reduced course hours were identified by some respondents as making additional support increasingly important. Additional guidance could be developed as the new key skills qualifications are defined, as they will help to frame some of the differences between generic and additional support.

In some colleges, large numbers of students required some basic skills support, though in reality this was rarely enough to trigger the full time support band, though support was truly additional. Without attaching the ASM to a small number of students, additional in class support or small group work were difficult to fund, except where students are working towards an individually listed numeracy, literacy or language qualification, in addition to their primary learning goals. In the telephone interviews, many felt forced to identify a small number of students assessed as having the greatest need and claiming support costs for only these students.

The evaluation showed four discernible models used by colleges to deliver and claim support for basic skills and ESOL where significant numbers of students require additional support.

Model 1 was to deliver additional support to all requiring it through additional small group or 1:1 activity delivered outside the main programme. It was then possible to claim for all or the majority of students as they would reach the threshold. It was highly unlikely to represent best practice or to be in the students’ best interest yet it allowed the college to maximise the additional support claim.

Model 2 was to deliver support to students identified as having the greatest need within the main programme and to supplement this with additional workshop or 1:1 support as required. These students were likely to reach the threshold and to receive effective support. This approach was within the spirit of the methodology but left the majority of the students who required it without support. It led to a lower claim than model 1.

Model 3 was to deliver support both within the main programme and outside as required, to all students who needed it. In current approaches to claiming for this model, some colleges claimed only the two or three students with greatest need, whilst delivering to a broader group. This approach was clearly against the spirit of the methodology, but offered the best practice in terms of curriculum delivery. It would lead to the same level of claim as model 2.

Model 4 was to deliver support to a discrete group of students where the costs were higher than those for a “normal group”. This might occur where students were following a GNVQ foundation programme and all students were assessed as having additional needs relating to ESOL. Some institutions believe mistakenly that if the additional costs met an appropriate additional support threshold, additional funding could be claimed.

The model offered best practice where language skills, key skills and subjects skills were delivered in an integrated manner. However distinctions between generic support and additional support may become difficult to draw. The FEFC has stated that this model is acceptable only for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Delivery models which targeted individuals within a continuum so explicitly, particularly if differential records needed to be kept, would seem to be counter to inclusive approaches. Distinctions between generic support and additional support were seen to be most open to inconsistent interpretation across institutions in this area of support.

The postal survey gave some problematic messages about basic skills in that a large number (66) respondents reported that the ASM worked well for basic skills, whilst twenty respondents indicated that it is problematic. Perhaps this can be explained by the interpretation that where the basic skills support works well is in 1:1 or very small group support offered outside mainstream programmes. Where it seemed to work less well, and certainly operated at the margins of the spirit of the methodology was in broader scale in class support.

Participants at the expert seminar indicated that some de-coupling of basic skills support from support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities might be appropriate.

Approaches to this would need to be considered very carefully as the postal survey identified a range of delivery models for basic skills and it is not clear if one new approach to funding basic skills support would cover all delivery models. One model of delivery which was not mentioned was the use of basic skills qualifications, perhaps as it is not part of the banding approach of the ASM. Any consideration of a new approach to funding basic skills within the ASM would need to evaluate the use of additional qualifications.

The recent report on basic skills summer schools also identified that students with a wide range of needs were recruited, with few colleges identifying additional support needs in advance. This raised questions for researchers about the availability and use

of the ASM within initiative funding which merit further investigation 24. For example, it is not clear how well the thresholds would operate within a short course programme.

The table below shows load band minima and the percentage of course hours additional support would represent. It illustrates that difficulties could arise with load band 0, as the support delivered would be disproportionate, that is, 56%. At load bands 1 and 2 the ratio appears more reasonable.

Additional learning support and short courses

Assumptions

Band 0 £170-£500
 Approx. additional teaching hours @ £35 5

hrs	Ratio course hrs/ALS
Load band 0 minimum 9 hrs 56%	
Load band 1 minimum 60 hrs	8%
Load band 2 minimum 120 hrs	4%

g) Assessment for placement at specialist colleges

In 1997/8 the FEFC funded 2,034 students to attend 78 specialist establishments at a total cost of £40.7 million. In 1998/9 these figures look set to rise with preliminary figures indicating 2,093 placements at a cost of £45.2 million 25. FE Colleges have an important role to play in assisting with the identification and assessment of students who may benefit from placement at a specialist college. If the substantial investment the FEFC is making in these colleges is to be used to best advantage, assessments need to be timely, accurate and well documented. However the evaluation identified concern about these assessments in all the research evidence sources.

Participants at the expert seminar indicated that college assessments to establish that a student needed to attend a specialist college were both time-consuming and costly. These costs were ineligible for funding through the ASM as the student did not enrol at the sector college. This meant that the college could not seek reimbursement. The postal questionnaire sought to explore this issue in question 15. Around 40% of colleges (114) reported that they carried out such assessments. The total number of student assessments carried out by all colleges reported in the survey was 1,204. The FEFC places about 1,300 new students each year. Some students are assessed by 3 or more sector colleges and some students already on courses at specialist colleges are reassessed each year. The average number of students assessed by an individual institution was relatively low (mean 7, mode 5) and the range was from 1 to 44 students. The total cost for all assessments reported in the survey was £111,564, which indicates a mean of £93.

The responses concerning assessment, made by colleges were not always easy to categorise. The research identified two types of assessment costs which caused problems. Firstly respondents identified issues about assessments for specialist colleges. Secondly, they expressed concern about the high pre-entry costs for students planning to enter college provision. (The latter was an issue where students did not subsequently enrol, or left before the November census, identified above). Despite some variation in the use of the term assessment in responses to question 9, there

seemed to be enough robust evidence to identify a concern that specialist colleges assessments were perceived as an unfair cost for colleges to bear, although the overall sums involved are

small in terms of institutions overall budgets.

Given that some staff perceived inequity in providing a service for which they received no recompense, it is possible that colleges may not undertake the assessments or not undertake them properly. The low average cost per assessment would seem to indicate that in some cases, colleges were not undertaking these assessments adequately. Evidence from other current research suggests that this is an issue 26. The strength of the perception of unfairness was far greater than the actual sums involved, although it should be noted that the costs of this assessment differentially affected particular colleges. For individual colleges an expense of between a few hundred and a few thousand pound might be indicated.

As the Funding Council wishes to improve the placement process, it may seek to find a way of addressing this issue. Should FEFC choose to fund these assessments, there would be an incentive and an effective lever with which to encourage colleges to take the assessment seriously and to improve their practice. The implications of providing a mechanism through which such assessments can be funded requires careful consideration. It will not be possible to claim through the ISR as the students are not enrolled and in any case, most of the costs of the assessment are unlikely to cross the threshold for the bands. Any alternative method will add complexity to the ASM and it may increase the bureaucracy.

h) Audit

The expert seminar participants indicated that there were several sources of concern in relation to audit. This included concern at high levels of bureaucracy, inconsistent advice year on year, and a need for simplification. In the postal survey, fewer difficulties were reported about audit - just over 20% reported difficulties where just under 80% reported none. (Question 9). Analysis of the eighteen specific references to audit in the text responses, indicated respondents do experience problems related to:

- variable interpretation of issues year on year by auditors especially in relation to in class support
- changes in small group and discrete group costing approaches, especially where levels of support varied between census dates
- general evidence requirements. Respondents were not always clear what level of detail was required and in some cases received conflicting guidance
- evidence levels required. Nearly half (7) indicated concerns about the level of bureaucracy.

However most of the issues seemed to relate to general areas where further guidance for auditors and colleges was required and may be best resolved through exemplars of acceptable practice.

i) Mental health, emotional and behavioural difficulties

Participants in the expert seminar indicated that one area where the ASM may be seen to work less well was for students with mental health or emotional and behavioural difficulties. Whilst these two groupings of students have different support needs there are aspects of the ASM which are unclear, that they have in common. Overall responses in the postal survey relating to these students were relatively low with only twelve respondents identifying this as one of the main areas where the ASM worked less well. However when asked to indicate areas where support need was identified but not provided the number of responses referring to mental health and EBD rose to twenty nine.

Tomlinson identified those with mental ill health and young people with challenging behaviour, as two of the three groups of students with learning difficulties and disabilities under represented in FE. Evidence from the Kennedy committee confirmed that participation by those with mental health difficulties was relatively low. The lower level of response in this research may indicate a smaller college population, rather than a lesser difficulty. Issues relating to these students appeared in other areas of the survey including issues relating to irregular patterns of attendance, in class support provision and issues relating to thresholds.

Institutions reported difficulty where attendance was episodic. Although there is provision within the withdrawal mechanism in the ISR to avoid this problem, some institutions misapply the guidance on withdrawal. In these cases, registers and general recording systems would indicate that these students had left, when in reality they planned to continue once they were well enough to learn. This impacts on the ISR and retention data. Where there are significant absences, the student may not reach the ASM threshold for additional support. Anecdotal evidence, evidence from the telephone interviews and evidence from other FEDA/NIACE research²⁷ indicated a level of uncertainty about eligibility of such students under the ASM. In order to ensure that claims are made where this is possible, institutions may need to look more carefully at the guidance and adopt more flexible methods of curriculum delivery and recording attendance. Examples of effective practice could be provided in the guidance. This would need to be backed up by a clear statement in the FEFC documentation confirming that students with mental ill health and emotional and behavioural disturbance are eligible for funding as long as they meet other criteria, as some institutions do not appreciate that they are eligible.

This is an issue that would benefit from further analysis, especially if there is to be an incentive to colleges to address the needs of these students.

27 A. Wertheimer, Images of Possibility, FEDA/NIACE, 1997

j) Counselling

The postal survey and case study interviews indicated that they experienced difficulties in claiming for counselling. They cited issues related to confidentiality and difficulties in signing the additional support cost forms. This suggests that although the FEFC has offered guidance on how to deal with confidentiality issues, this is not widely used. Although the ASM can appropriately be used to claim the costs of counselling, colleges did not commonly do so.

There is a further issue related to the distinction between generic and additional support. It is not possible to state categorically that personal problems, severe enough to warrant counselling, will not impact on those individuals' ability to achieve their primary learning goals. Clearly FEFC would not wish to suggest that all counselling is additional, but a definition that is workable will be extremely difficult to agree. A way forward would be to provide some examples of interpretations made by colleges in further guidance.

5.6 Improvements suggested by respondents

One of the questions in the postal survey asked colleges specifically what changes they would make to improve the ASM. Many of the responses reiterated the issues raised in response to earlier questions or in the telephone survey. These suggestions have been considered in full in relevant sections of 5.5.2 above. (Letters in brackets indicate the section).

- 17% referred to equipment and capital (d)
- 17% referred to no or narrower bands; (a)
- 16% asked to be allowed to apply band zero to full-time student (a)
- 12% of respondents referred to a need to remove the cap (e)
- 9% supported changing the requirement to obtain students' signatures (c)

5.7 Costing approaches

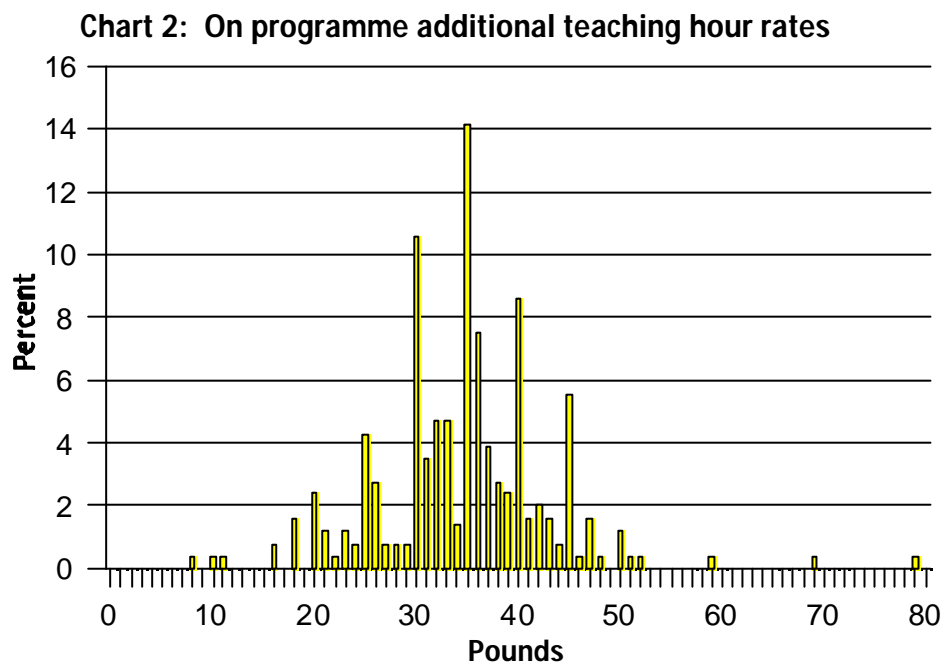
Participants at the expert seminar shared a concern that the approaches to costing used by colleges varied considerably. Questions 11 to question 14 asked respondents to report on approaches used to costing different types of support, with question 15 asking if colleges attracted other sources of funding for additional support activities.

Results from these questions demonstrated that where colleges had direct control over costs, there was a considerable level of consistency. In other areas such as speech therapy and assessments by educational psychologist, the range was much greater, but not normally within the college's control. The range of costing approaches will be considered in turn below.

5.7.1 Costing a tutor hour

Although FEFC costing guidance is clear that calculation for a 'tutor' hours should be

based on staff salaries and on costs and the average of all staff involved in providing additional learning support, there were a range of variations in the approaches taken. In one model colleges had a 'standard tutor hour rate' calculated by adding the salaries plus on costs of teaching/academic staff from across the whole organization and dividing by the number of students. This standard cost was also used for additional support. In another model the actual salaries of all staff involved in the delivery of additional support was used. There were several variations on this model. Some included managers responsible for additional support in the calculation. Other variations apportioned a percentage of the staff members' salary in proportion to the time they spent on additional support. A further approach was to use the mid point of salary scales rather than actual salaries. Despite the variations in approaches to costing, there was a remarkable consistency in the sum arrived at. The mean was £34.50 and median and mode were both £35, with an interquartile range of £30-£40. The chart below clearly illustrates the pattern.



7.2 Other hourly costs

Colleges used the same formulae for calculating the costs of other groups of staff and similar patterns appear. These are shown in Charts 3 to 8 on the following pages. The greater variation in costs claimed for counsellors may reflect the different designation of staff providing the service.

Chart 3: Hourly costs claimed - Personal Care Assistants

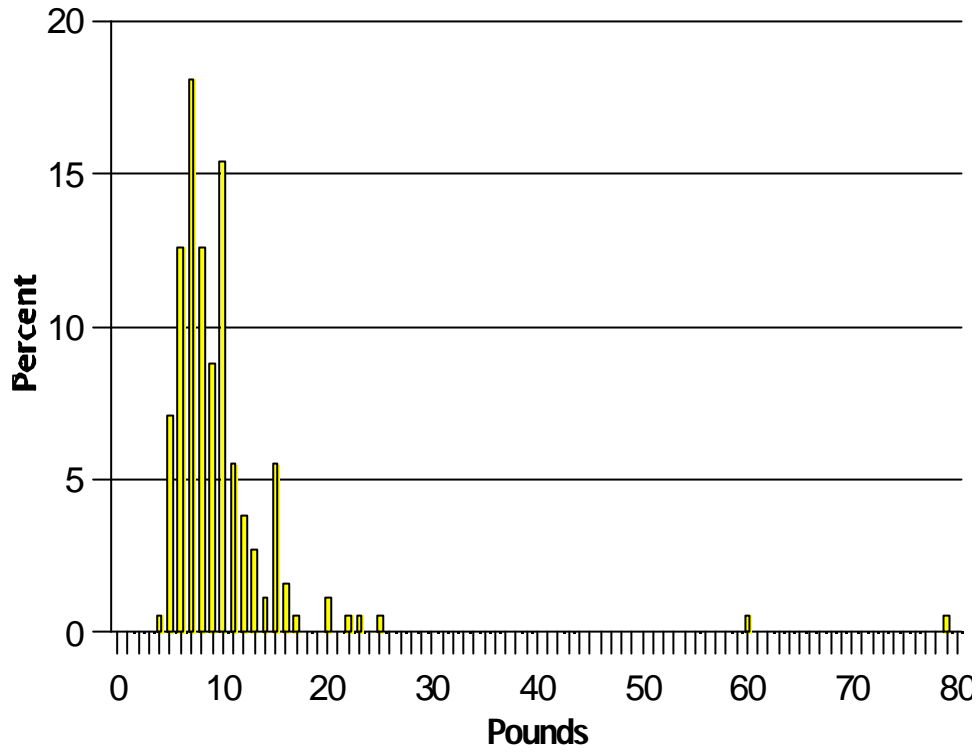


Chart 4: Hourly costs claimed - Classroom support

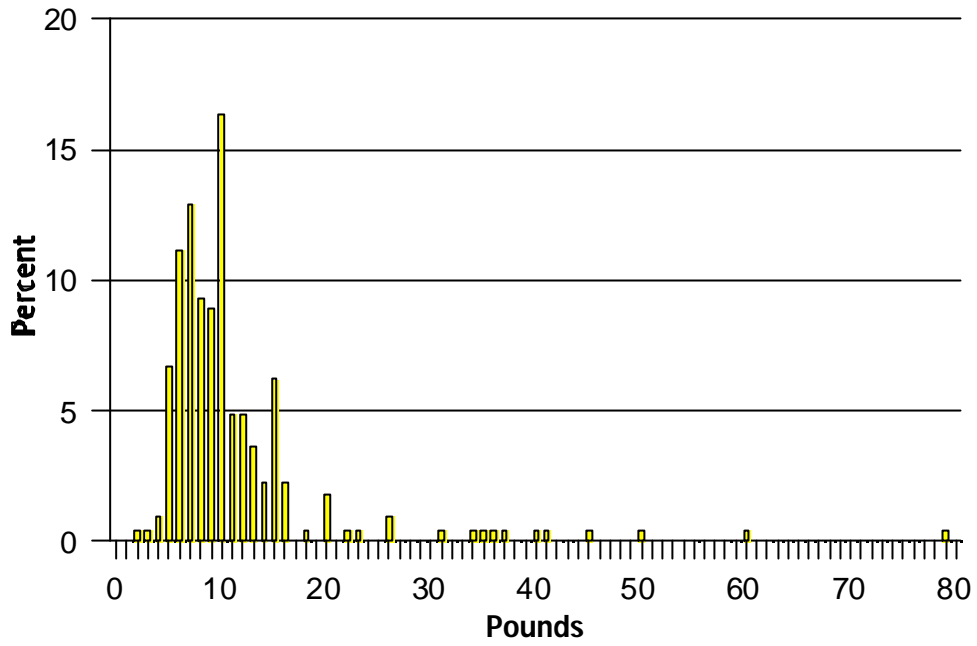


Chart 5: Hourly costs claimed - Communications support

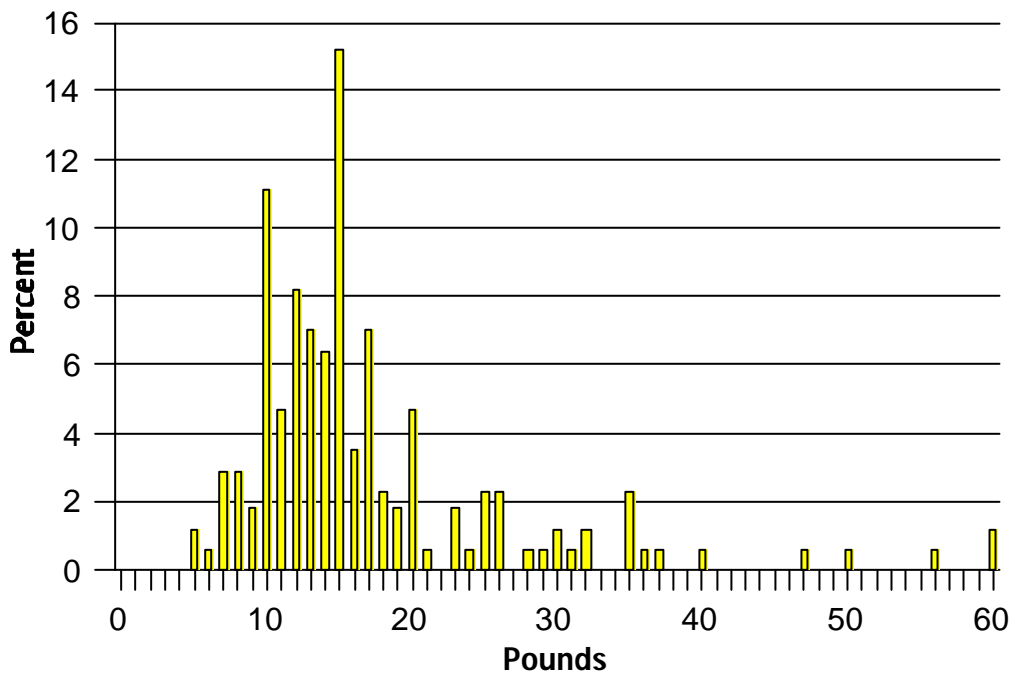


Chart 6: Hourly costs claimed - Teachers for the deaf

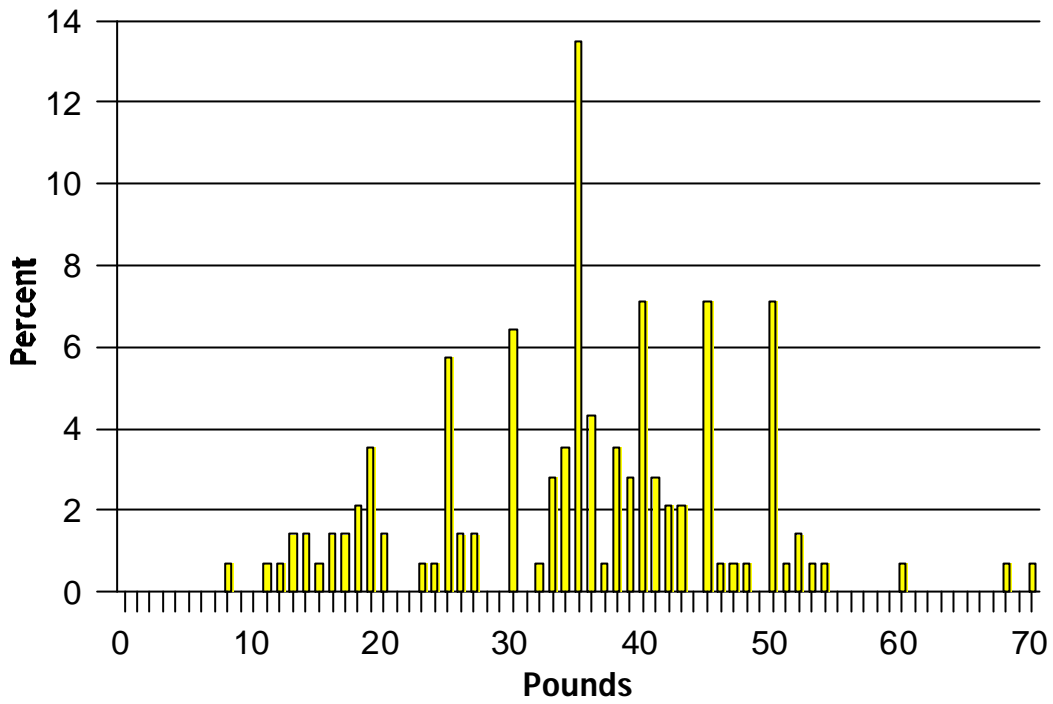


Chart 7: Hourly costs claimed - Teachers of students with dyslexia

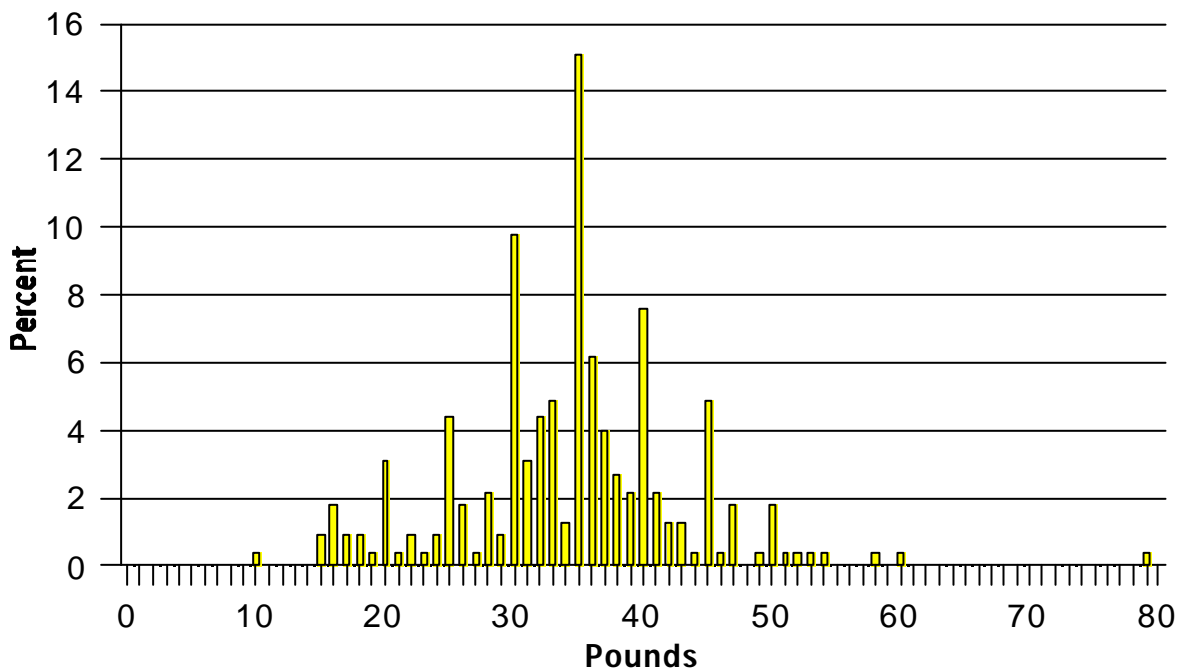
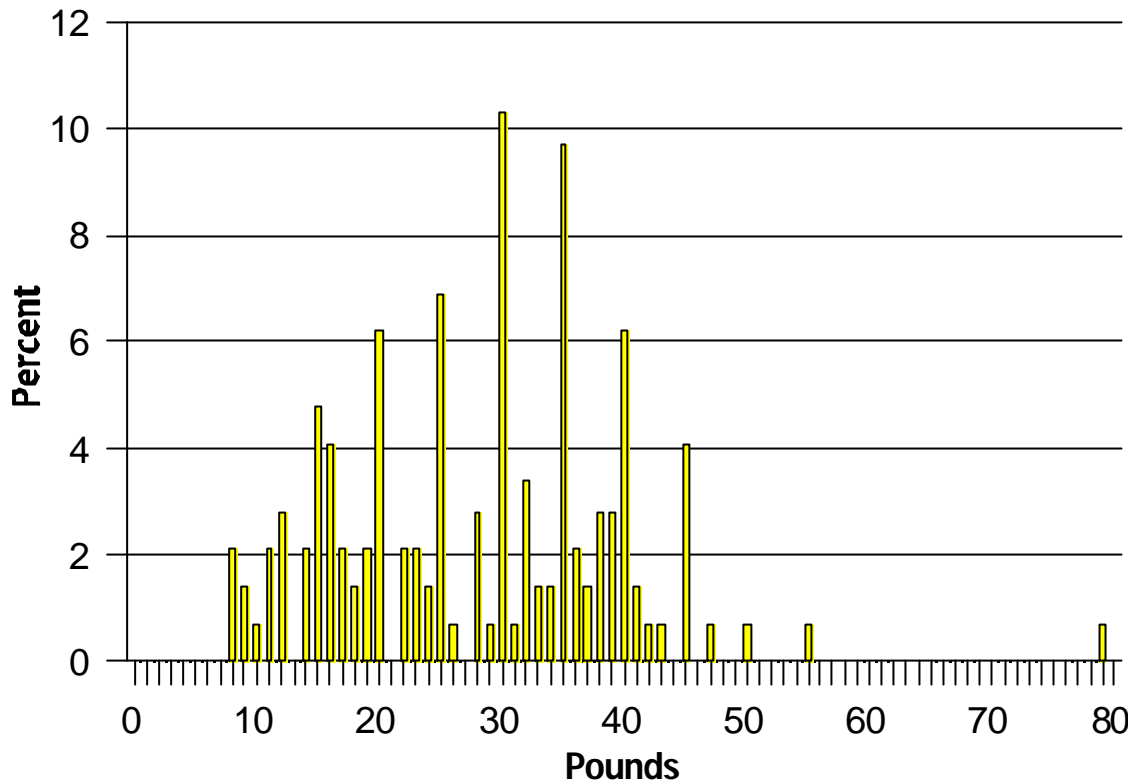


Chart 8: Hourly costs claimed - Counsellor



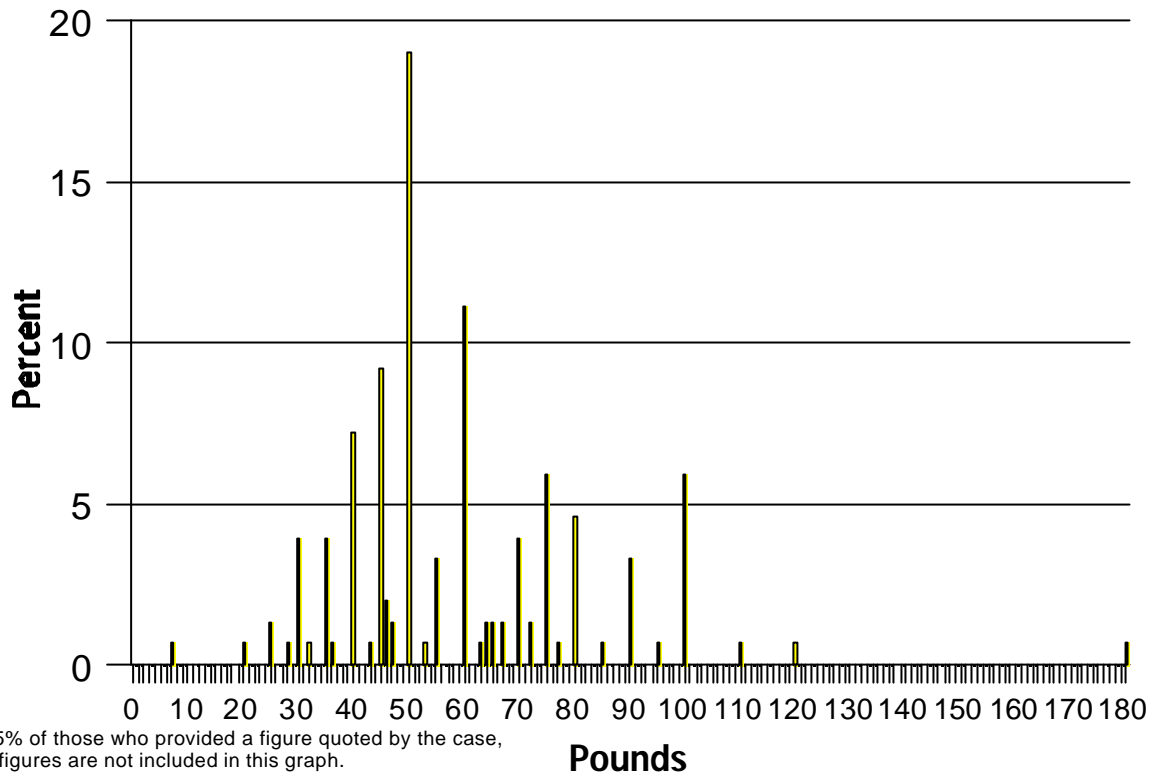
5.7.3 Educational Psychology

The postal survey asked colleges to provide an hourly rate for educational psychology services. In many cases, the figures given were estimates as these services were not charged at an hourly rate, but were based on a set fee for an agreed range or level of services. For example, there may be a flat rate for the assessment of dyslexic students which includes writing a report for examination concessions, rather than an hourly rate. In other cases, other elements of provision such as advice and support for staff were included within an overall package. 25% of respondents gave an overall figure rather than an hourly cost. As a result, the costs given should be regarded as no more than an indication of the likely range. The difficulty of identifying and comparing costs for educational psychology services was confirmed by FEDA research into external support services 28. The results need to be considered in the light of these factors.

About half of the respondents indicated that they claim for educational psychology services. The chart below indicates the range. The mean was £59, both median and mode are £50 and the interquartile range is £45 - £71.

28 FEDA Research Project, RPM 132E Purchasing specialist support from external agencies.

Chart 9: Hourly costs claimed - Educational Psychologist



Where there is a direct charge for a service for a single students, the additional support mechanism allows colleges to claim the actual cost. Where the college purchases a package of support, the most common approach to costing is to divide the overall charge for the service between the students who receive it. There are no implications for the ASM, but colleges need to ensure that they are receiving full value for the educational psychology service package provided. They may find it useful to benchmark with other colleges and compare service levels and charges.

5.7.4 Speech therapy and physiotherapy

Fewer colleges claimed for speech therapy (30) and physiotherapy (11). The mean was £31 for speech therapy and £33 for physiotherapy. There was a mode of £40 for both. The chart illustrates greater variation in costing than for other groups of staff.

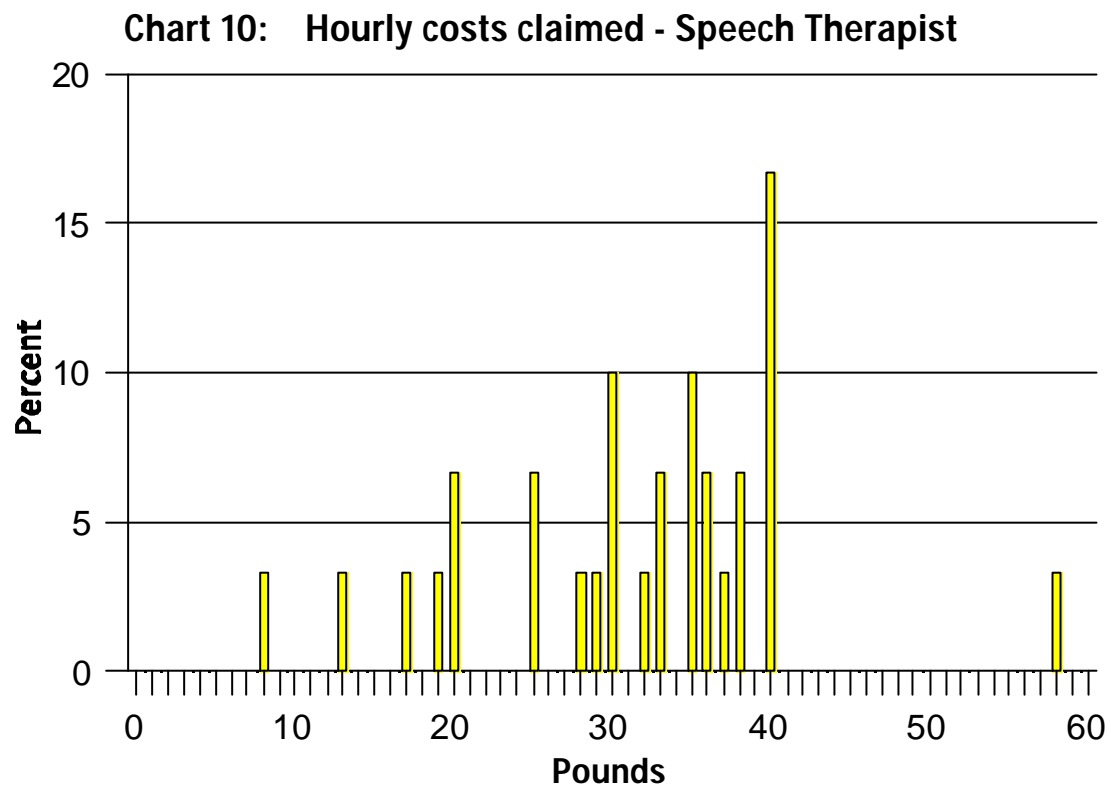
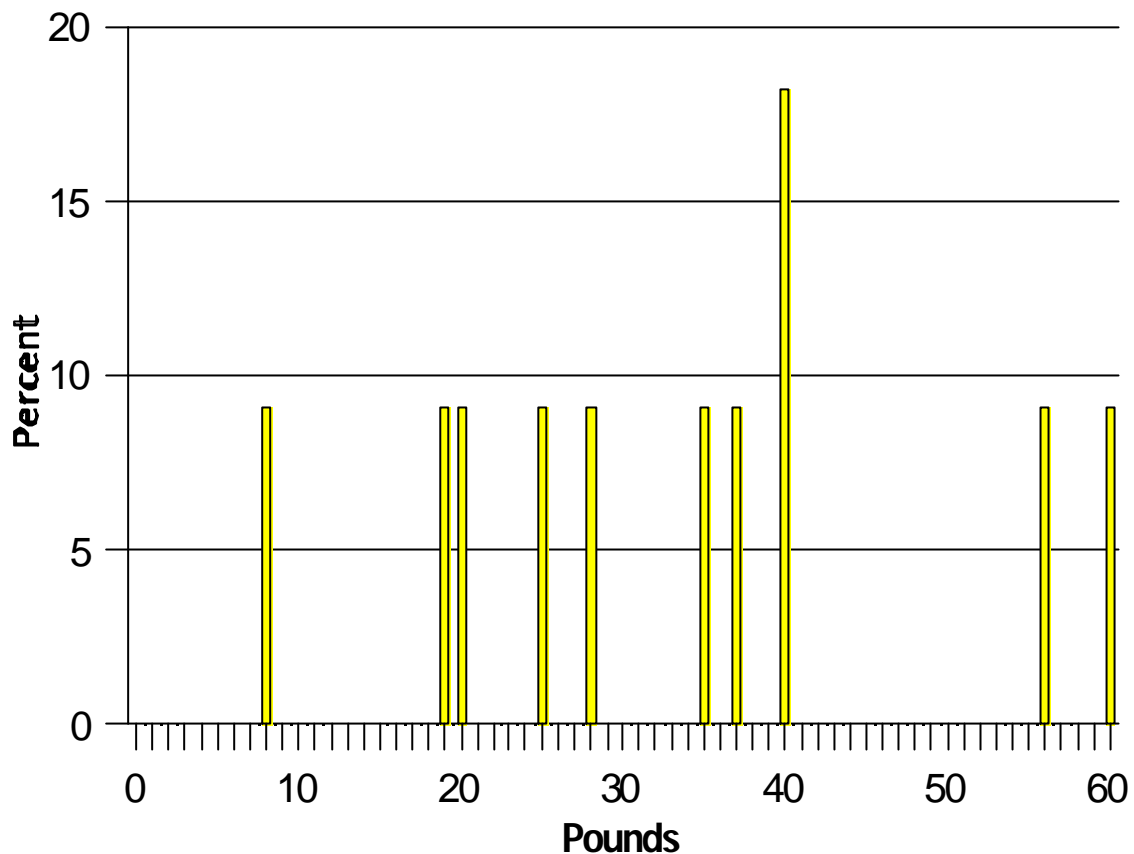


Chart 11: Hourly costs claimed - Physiotherapist



There is a range of possible interpretations for the apparent variations. As with educational psychology, it is likely that the hourly rate may include other services, such as liaison with or briefings for tutors. It was also possible that the nature of therapy and the status of staff providing therapy might have differed. For example, assessments and reports were likely to be carried out by senior therapy staff, for whom higher hourly rates might have been charged. Once the student had been assessed and the programme set up, it might have been delivered by a therapy aide, for whom a lower rate might have been charged. The ASM allows colleges to claim the actual costs involved for individual students. This is appropriate as colleges may have no control over or ability to influence the charges made.

In relation to speech and physiotherapy there is a further issue about eligibility. The funding guidance states clearly that therapy may be claimed where it is necessary to enable a student to achieve their primary learning goal, in practice it is extremely difficult to make a direct link. Evidence offering a range of case studies may be more helpful than attempting to produce a definitive definition.

5.7.5 Calculating the additional costs of discrete groups

The most commonly used formula to calculate the cost of a small discrete group was in accordance with the funding guidance, that is by subtracting the average teaching cost per student on a standard programme from the teaching cost per student on a discrete programme. Based on the questionnaire and interviews, the main variables where colleges used this formula were:

- how to decide on group size
- whether to recalculate group size when numbers attending change.

The figure used for average group size for a standard programme varies. 16 is the most commonly used, with the majority falling between 15 and 20. In some cases, the number of students was generated automatically from MIS and in others it is calculated by dividing total students by total programmes. Some colleges used software that automatically generates a chart of additional costs for any size of group. In practice, the range of additional costs per student hour varies, from £1.34 to £5.55 per hour, but the variation reflected costs quoted for different sized groups.

Practice also varied as to how to decide the size of the discrete group. Although it should be based on the ideal or target size, one approach was to take the average size of the group from the previous year, another approach was to take average attendance from the current year and a third approach was to take actual numbers enrolled. Some colleges recalculated their claims when the group size changed, others did not. In all cases, colleges auditors had approved the approach taken, yet it was likely that significant differences in claim would emerge depending on the approach taken. It is also interesting to note that interviewees' responses to the case study of a discrete group also varied markedly. When given the same scenario and asked to estimate into which band a student in a discrete group of 6 would fall, the responses ranged from band 2 to 4, with the majority on band 3.

There was insufficient evidence to suggest that costings for discrete groups although variable, were outside the spirit and letter of the mechanism. The provision of worked examples in the guidance may help practitioners and auditors to review their approaches.

One area of uncertainty was revealed in relation to discrete groups. The guidance states that this may only be applied to courses for students with learning difficulties. However some college staff mistakenly believed that where a group size was reduced because all the students required, for example language support, the same formula could be applied.

FEFC has stated that it applies only to courses for students with learning difficulties.

Where students are on a main programme for basic skills or ESOL, the small group size is reflected in the cost weighting factor of 'C'.

5.7.6 Administrative costs

Findings from the postal survey and FEDA research on basic skills 29 provided evidence that what was included in the calculation of administrative costs varies, and the method by which the costs were attributed to individual students. The variation in approach and sums claimed was wider than for any other form of costing.

The aspects of support which colleges included under the umbrella of 'administration'

differed from college to college. Most commonly included were:

- examination arrangement
- liaison and meetings
- the production of materials such as Braille
- collating information, recording and tracking additional support.

Some colleges described the costs they claimed in terms of the staff who provided or organized support and the percentage of time that was devoted to additional support. Staff commonly included were:

- administrative/clerical assistants
- learning support managers/co-ordinators/organizers
- technical staff
- examinations staff.

Despite the length of the list of items included within administration, none appeared to be ineligible within the ASM although some items such as assessment and examinations arrangements might appropriately have been included under other headings on the additional support costs pro-forma. Fewer than 5% of those responding to the questionnaire specifically stated that they did not claim administrative costs at all.

The basis for calculating the costs and the approach to claiming also varied. At one extreme, colleges claimed no separate costs for administration but included them in the hourly rate for tutors, and in some cases, other support staff. Where the hourly rates of teaching staff at these colleges were given, they were understandably often slightly higher than the mean/mode of £35, at around £37. At the other extreme, the staff costs of all those providing 'administrative' support in its widest sense were totaled and divided between the students for whom claims were made. The range of the totals given was £8,500 - £35,000. Clearly other factors such as college type and size, and numbers of students receiving support affected the final sum claimed.

The majority of colleges applied a flat rate of some sort. Some of these were claimed as a single figure per student. The range was £12-£301, with clusters around £40 and £100. Alternatively, 3 or 4 hours at £6-11 for 'clerical'/'technical' administration and/or hours at £20-£40 for 'professional' administration were claimed for some or all students. Several colleges added a percentage to the overall claim of 5% to 30% with a mean and mode of

10%. The range of approaches to allocating costs varied from a flat rate for students for whom an additional support claim was made to an individual, itemized claim for each. Some colleges varied their rates for full time and part time students. Other colleges included only those above a specified threshold. Some colleges had differential rates by form of support need i.e. visual impairment, hearing impairment, learning difficulties, physical disability and others had two costs, one for learning difficulties and disabilities and the other for basic skills/ESOL.

Although there was an apparent wide variation, it would appear that the ASM was generally being used appropriately, although differently, by colleges. This apparent variation was likely to have fuelled the perception of different costings, although as been demonstrated, the sums involved do not compare like with like.

Workshops

College staff reported difficulty in claiming for additional support delivered in workshops. The main issues were tracking and recording the use students made of support and the threshold. Most colleges who commented on this issue considered that they under-claimed because it was complicated and time consuming to do so, unless a 'swipe-card' system was in operation. A further difficulty arose from the definition of what was genuinely additional and what should be provided as part of the generic entitlement. Guidance needs to stress that much of the support delivered in workshops will be generic and to offer models for tracking, recording and claiming, where effective ones exist.

Calculating and claiming for additional support

Approximately 25% of questionnaire respondents used some form of software to calculate costs. 42 colleges reported that they use MIDAS and the majority of these consider that it was a very helpful package although some recognized its limitations. The main criticism was that it did not interface directly with the ISR. These colleges would have the same process for calculation although the unit costs they input into the programme may have varied. A small number of colleges had developed their own software which they considered to be effective. Many colleges produced charts, scales or 'ready reckoners' of costings and reduced class size rates from which they made manual calculations. There is a concern that some colleges may be devoting too much time to detailing costs. For example, one response indicated costings of 8 minutes per week per student. This could lead to a perception that the ASM is overly bureaucratic and the frequently reported anxiety about administrative burden. Guidance could helpfully provide examples of an appropriate level of detail and effective mechanisms for both manual and IT based approaches.

Auditors

The postal survey responses and case study interviewees all reported that their practice had been approved. As previously stated in this report, where difficulties had arisen, many of the problems were related to the amount of detail or evidence required.

5.8 Guidance

There was a widely held concern about the potential range of variations between colleges and that others might be making substantially greater claims. This was evident in the expert seminar and case study interviews. It accorded with other research³⁰ and

³⁰ Similar disparity between perception of unequal claims and actual claims were found by Leney, Lucas & Taubman in "Funding Learning" and by the University of Brighton in Research Report for

evidence from participants at events in which funding issues were discussed. In the telephone interviews, respondents sought reassurance that their approaches were acceptable and warmly welcomed the opportunity to discuss the issues with someone else. The earlier findings in this evaluation indicated that although there were indeed apparent differences in approach, the perception that others were “farming” units was not well substantiated.

It is sensible to respond to concerns that are genuinely held. The most appropriate ways are to provide a range of models of acceptable approaches within the guidance and to offer colleges the opportunity to benchmark and discuss issues and concerns.

Through an analysis of the outcomes of the different strands of research activity, a range of areas for guidance has been identified. These cluster around four groupings:

- definitions
- costing and eligibility
- recording and tracking
- delivery of support

Issues where further guidance was sought are listed below. Some of the issues identified were not directly related to the ASM, but arose from the ways in which individual institutions choose to allocate their resources or how the curriculum was delivered.

Definitions

Clarifying generic/additional support

Evidence to justify additional support

Definition of learning difficulties and disabilities (to include mental ill health and emotional and behavioural difficulties)

What cannot be claimed e.g. links, TEC funded programmes, HE

Agreed “norms”/benchmarks and what may be claimed

National benchmarks on additional learning support/retention

Claiming and eligibility

Formula on how to cost a tutor hour

Formula for on costs

Claiming for withdrawn students

Manual adjustments

Claiming for discrete programmes and formulae for costing small groups

Recalculating discrete group rate when someone joins/leaves

Claiming for in class support

Claiming support delivered in open workshop

Claiming for counselling

Claiming for study skills/key skills/advanced groups

Claiming for personal care and physiotherapy

Claiming management/administration/liaison/transition planning costs, before and on programme

Claiming for pre entry assessment & pre provision

Claiming initial assessment

Costing Educational Psychology/specialist college assessment

Claiming for equipment (capital and revenue costs)/depreciation/training on use

Claiming for learning resource packs/special materials

Claiming for students with non-standard attendance or programmes patterns

Building work

Transport

Clearer guidance on literacy, numeracy & language support/ESOL

Claiming for complex disabilities/boundaries discrete provision and additional support

Claiming for additional support on franchised programmes

How to deal with non standard Sept/July courses & census dates

Claiming appropriate no of units not under-claiming

Internal allocation of additional support resources

Adequacy issues

Recording and tracking

Evidence required and recording/tracking
Simplified/agreed audit evidence base
Simple pro-forma for tracking
Standardized assessment pro-forma
Recommended/standardized diagnostic tests
Assessment for specialists colleges – level of detail required
Importing claims into ISR directly
Guidelines for auditors
Counselling and confidentiality issues
Checking & measuring effectiveness
Tracking – workshops
How long to keep records
Forecasting – what factors to consider and how to deal with significant variations between actual and estimates

Delivery

Sharing good practice
Appropriate physical environments
Demonstrating link between ALS and retention
Register of sources of specialist assessment/delivery good practice/ equipment suppliers for more obscure conditions/items
Curriculum practice

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Support for the ASM

A major conclusion to emerge from this evaluation is that the additional support mechanism is widely used and well regarded. Its focus on the needs of individual students enables it to cope with a very wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities but there appear to be areas in which systematic difficulties are encountered.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that the essential features of the ASM be maintained as a means for ensuring that institutions can provide individual students with the support needed.

6.2 Thresholds and basic skills

A major concern identified by institutions would appear to be those students, particularly full-time students, who require relatively small amounts of support and do not trigger the threshold. The complexity of this issue requires a more detailed study to identify the impact of any changes.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the FEFC consider further study to identify the student support that would be claimed if the threshold for full time students was lowered and to consider the likely impact upon delivery and ASM claims.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that the FEFC should give further consideration to the real and strongly expressed concerns about the threshold, particularly as it relates to in class basic skills support.

6.2 Unit capping

A further cause of difficulty which was widely reported relates not to the mechanism itself but to the overall funding context. It is clear that some institutions and some students have been disadvantaged by the capping of college unit totals following the withdrawal of DLE. To limit the capacity of institutions to meet the specific identified needs of students in this way seems to

run contrary to the spirit of the methodology. (Subsequent to this evaluation, arrangements have been made to address this issue).

Recommendation 4

Moves to protect growth which arises solely from the operation of the ASM from the general capping of units are relatively cheap and will be widely welcomed. It is recommended that the FEFC define the situations under which this growth funding should apply, and determine the mechanism through which growth may be funded.

6.4 Capital equipment

There is clearly significant concern in the sector about the difficulty of providing specialist items of capital equipment. In part this can be addressed through guidance; the arrangements for calculating depreciation seem not always to be fully understood. There is equally however a real difficulty concerning expensive items that may only be required for one student.

Recommendation 5

It would be better value for money for such items of individually allocated equipment to be acquired on a collective basis, through local collaborative arrangements including leasing equipment. The sector should determine at local level how this might best be achieved, perhaps through local learning partnerships.

6.5 Student signatures

There is widespread concern within the sector and from students receiving additional support that the Tomlinson recommendation to sign an additional support costs form is inappropriate and difficult to implement.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that the requirement to sign additional support costs forms is removed. FEFC should consider an alternative document such as the learning agreement. The guidance to the sector should include exemplars that provide robust audit evidence to substantiate that delivery had occurred and that the costs claimed were justified.

6.6 Bandwidths

There seems to be both a strong argument and strong support for increasing the number of bands used in the mechanism and thereby making them narrower. Whilst there is some support for basing payment for additional support on actual costs it is difficult to see how this might be accomplished. There is greater support for introducing more and narrower bands, although this would add complexity to the ASM. However there is evidence that student support is being identified on the basis of band thresholds rather than need (and this is likely to continue), Narrower bands would moderate the impact upon students.

Recommendation 7

The FEFC should consider the options to address bandwidth, including the use of a sliding scale. Trials should be undertaken to determine the impact of any changes upon delivery to the benefit of the student.

6.7 Assessment for specialist college placement

There is a perception of inequity in the of lack of reimbursement for college assessments for student entry to specialist colleges. However the level of actual cost is relatively small and the costs of developing a system of reimbursement disproportionate. Nevertheless, concerns about the effectiveness of such assessments needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 8

The FEFC should consider whether some method of reimbursement to FE colleges for undertaking of assessment for specialist colleges would improve the quality of assessments.

6.8 Mental ill health and challenging behaviour

There appear to be some impediments caused by misunderstandings or rigid

college systems, that affect the delivery of support to students recovering from mental ill health and for students with behavioural and emotional difficulties. If the FEFC wishes participation to be widened with these groups, these need to be removed.

Recommendation 9

The Funding Guidance should refer explicitly to these groups of clients, identifying their eligibility for funding through the ASM, given that they meet other criteria.

6.9 Calculating costs

There are concerns about perceived variability in calculating costs for additional support. In fact there is a considerable degree of consistency in college claims for tutor hours. In some areas such as costing discrete groups and administration there is greater variability or anxiety that approaches will meet audit requirements.

Recommendation 10

The guidance on the ASM should give exemplars of approaches to costing additional support which are “in the spirit of the methodology”. Colleges should be encouraged to benchmark their approaches to costing and delivering support.

6.10 Generic and additional support

The distinction between generic support and additional support is difficult to define, but is a source of anxiety and differential practice. It is at the heart of the ASM and if claims for additional support are to be robust practitioners need to have a clear understanding of how to interpret the distinction in a range of contexts.

Recommendation 11

The guidance on the ASM should give exemplars of approaches to defining generic and additional support which are “in the spirit of the methodology”. Colleges should be encouraged to benchmark their approaches.

In addition, throughout the document reference has been made to aspects of the ASM which are misunderstood or understood by some practitioners. In many cases the existing guidance is clear, but not always familiar to all practitioners. It is proposed that FEDA will address these in the additional guidance to the ASM which is being developed as part of the evaluation.

7 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In several of the recommendations there is a proposal to undertake further consideration or study. FEEDA feels that in these cases there is enough evidence to recommend to the FEFC that they consider how the ASM might be changed to overcome the problem identified. However in some cases there are complexities and interactions which warrant a pilot study to determine the impact upon college application of the ASM and the likely benefit to the student of particular adaptations to the ASM. (Recommendations 2, 3, 4 and 7)

In other cases the recommendation requires that the FEFC consider the costs and benefits of additional complexity within the ASM. (Recommendations 5, 6, and 8)

Finally, there are two aspects which cause considerable concern and difficulty within the sector. The current FEFC guidance offers some indication of approaches that are acceptable, but these remain unclear. There is a need to tease out these grey areas and to offer appropriate exemplars in the guidance which clarify approaches to these issues that would be considered "in the spirit of the methodology". (Recommendations 9, 10 and 11)

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that the essential features of the ASM be maintained as a means for ensuring that institutions can provide individual students with the support needed.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the FEFC consider further study to identify the student support that would be claimed if the threshold for full time students was lowered and to consider the likely impact upon delivery and ASM claims.

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It is recommended that the FEFC should give further consideration to the real and strongly expressed concerns about the threshold, particularly as it relates to in class basic skills support.

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Moves to protect growth which arises solely from the operation of the ASM from the general capping of units are relatively cheap and will be widely welcomed. It is recommended that the FEFC define the situations under which this growth funding should apply, and determine the mechanism through which growth may be funded.

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It would be better value for money for such items of individually allocated equipment to be acquired on a collective basis, through local collaborative arrangements including leasing equipment. The sector should determine at local level how this might best be achieved, perhaps through local learning partnerships.

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Recommendation 9

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Recommendation 11

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APPENDIX 1

TABLE 1 FEFC NATIONAL STATISTICS ADDITIONAL SUPPORT CLAIMS 1996-7

APPENDIX 2

EXPERT SEMINAR QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX 3

THE POSTAL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX 4

INTENSIVE TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS CASE STUDY PROMPTS AND KEY QUESTIONS

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