

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

For action

**Responses by
28 June 2000**

Circular 00/12

Quality Improvement

**Proposed Arrangements for Accreditation
and Performance Data for Non-sector
College Providers of Further Education**

Summary

This circular sets out the Council's proposals for extending arrangements to non-sector college providers of further education, in relation to:

- accreditation
- establishing baseline rates of retention and achievement and target-setting
- the publication of national benchmarking data
- the publication of performance indicators.

It asks these providers of further education to comment on particular elements of the proposals and to indicate clearly whether they support the proposals by 28 June 2000.

The circular is of interest to: chief education officers of local education authorities; principals of local education authority-maintained external institutions; independent external institutions; independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; higher education institutions in receipt of Council funding; and dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards.

Where earlier Council circulars are referred to in this document, copies are available on the Council's website or from the Council's communications team.

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Proposed Arrangements for Accreditation and Performance Data for Non-sector College Providers of Further Education

Introduction

- 1 The circular is set out in four parts:
 - 1 accreditation
 - 2 establishing baseline rates for retention and achievement and target-setting
 - 3 the publication of national benchmarking data
 - 4 the publication of performance indicators.

Annex A sets out a summary of which types of institution are covered by each of these four arrangements.

Annex B sets out the principles of, and gives guidance on, recording baseline rates of retention and achievement, and target-setting.

Annex C asks for responses to the proposals outlined below from providers and others with an interest in non-sector college providers of further education.

Part 1: Accreditation

Background

2 In Council Circular 96/12, *Review of the FEFC's Inspection Framework*, the Council sought the sector's views about introducing accreditation. Accreditation was seen as a logical and welcome development for the sector by over 97% of those who responded. The Council's Circular 97/25, *College Accreditation*, consulted the sector on a proposed framework for the award of accredited status to colleges. This was supported by 94% of those colleges that responded. Council Circular 98/41, *Applying for Accredited Status*, set out guidance for those sector colleges with effective systems for management and quality assurance and consistently high quality provision, on applying for

accredited status. The first sector colleges were accredited by the Council in April 1999. By May 2000, a total of 28 colleges had met the criteria for accreditation and been awarded accredited status.

Proposed approach

3 The Council wishes to extend the opportunity for excellence to be formally recognised to all institutions that are inspected by the FEFC's inspectorate. These are:

- independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- independent external institutions
- dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards
- higher education institutions with further education provision that has been inspected by FEFC.

4 Accreditation of provision will not be available to local education authority (LEA)-maintained external institutions, as they are not inspected by the FEFC's inspectorate.

5 The same principles and benefits of accreditation apply to non-sector college providers of further education as set out in Council Circular 98/22, *Framework for Accrediting Colleges*.

6 Arrangements for accreditation will be based upon those for sector colleges, but adapted as appropriate to take into account the scale and scope of these institutions and their different relationship with the Council. Non-sector college providers that achieve accredited status will become accredited by FEFC to provide further education. The institution as a whole will not be accredited, only its capacity to provide high-quality Council-funded provision.

Criteria for accreditation

Criterion 1: the existence of formal and effective control, quality assurance and monitoring arrangements

7 The Council will wish to be assured that the institution has adopted a robust, systematic and rigorous approach to managing its FEFC-funded provision. Arrangements should cover academic, financial and strategic matters. In general terms, institutions seeking accreditation will be asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- arrangements meet the Council's requirements and their own needs
- arrangements are sufficient to manage development and change
- management and quality assurance, and where applicable governance, have been found good by inspectors and that their effectiveness appears to the Council to be sustainable
- support for students and general resources are judged to be at least satisfactory by inspectors.

The Council may need to validate evidence supplied by an institution, in order to be assured that it supports their application for accreditation.

Criterion 2: regular and rigorous self-assessment validated during the course of the inspection

8 The Council considers that a key indicator in accrediting provision should be the institution's ability to demonstrate that it objectively and rigorously assesses its own performance on a regular basis. This applies to all aspects of its operations in relation to FEFC-funded provision.

9 In general terms, providers seeking accreditation will be asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- self-assessment is integral to quality assurance and the management of FEFC-funded provision and is linked to strategic and operational planning, including action to remedy weaknesses in provision
- comprehensive self-assessment is carried out annually and takes into account evidence from both internal and external sources
- at least two annual cycles of self-assessment have been completed successfully.

Criterion 3: the setting and consistent achievement of appropriate targets for institutional performance

10 The Council will wish to be assured that a provider is able to predict its performance accurately and that targets for institutional performance reflect high standards within the context of the provider's strategic development and day-to-day operations.

11 In general terms, institutions seeking accreditation will be asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- targets set for institutional performance are well informed, taking adequate account of local or wider communities and their needs, as well as the groups of learners for which provision is made
- the institution has a good record of providing timely and accurate information to the Council and other bodies
- most institutional targets are consistently met and the reasons for not meeting any of them are fully investigated with the aim of improving performance.

Criterion 4: demonstration that standards of students' achievements are being improved and/or maintained at a high level over a three year period

12 The Council will pay particular attention to the benefits an institution brings to its students in terms of achievements. Levels of student retention and the achievement of qualifications and/or other achievements are considered important indicators of institutional performance. In order to assist providers, the Council has published a range of benchmarking data for student retention and achievement. These are derived from the individualised student record (ISR) provided by sector colleges. The Council also intends to publish benchmarking data for groups of non-sector college providers of further education. National benchmarking data will be used to establish appropriate performance levels which should be met in order to gain accreditation.

13 The Council recognises that measuring achievement can be a complex matter and that many students' achievements are not directly associated with obtaining qualifications. It also recognises that many institutions are pursuing policies to widen participation and working in communities with no strong culture of valuing education. Providers may wish to provide supplementary information, for example relating to value added, which set the achievement of their students in context. Nevertheless, the Council will want to be assured that a provider gives a high priority to students' learning and that this is reflected in measurable achievements of an

appropriate standard which relate to the Council's own benchmarks wherever possible.

14 In general terms, providers seeking accreditation will be asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- the quality of the majority of the curriculum provision inspected during the most recent inspection has been judged as good or excellent, and that no curriculum provision has been assessed as unsatisfactory
- appropriate targets are set for student retention and achievements and that performance is regularly monitored by managers and, where applicable, governors
- against appropriate benchmarks, including those issued by the Council, levels of retention and achievement in most of the provision exceed appropriate national benchmarks for three successive years leading up to the institution's application for accredited status
- there is a clear trend of improvement in both retention and achievement or that high levels of retention and achievement have been sustained
- the institution's performance is generally consistent across all areas of the curriculum.

Criterion 5: effective action is taken to address weaknesses and demonstrate the institution's accountability

15 The link between self-assessment and effective action to address weaknesses is seen as a key factor in ensuring that the standards associated with accredited status are maintained. The Council will wish to be assured that a provider has a good record of improving quality and standards through fulfilling action plans arising out of self-assessment and that it takes into consideration a wide range of views in setting its priorities. It will also wish to be assured that the provider communicates openly and accurately with the community it serves and others interested in its work.

16 In general terms, providers seeking accreditation will be asked to provide evidence which demonstrates that:

- a rigorous and comprehensive approach is adopted to action planning as a result of self-assessment
- actions are regularly monitored and lead to measurable and timely improvements in quality and standards
- in determining how best to improve provision, the views of staff, students, the community and other stakeholders are regularly taken into account
- information provided about the institution, its operations and achievements is accurate and of high quality.

How the Council will reach decisions about accreditation

17 Accreditation is an important development in the relationship between the Council and non-sector college providers of education. The Council's decisions will be based on information provided by institutions and consideration of data and inspection evidence already held by the Council about providers. All institutions seeking accreditation must have been inspected by the FEFC's inspectorate since September 1997. Every effort will be made to minimise the amount of work involved for institutions in preparing applications for accreditation. As far as possible, the Council will wish to use the documents which an institution routinely prepares for managing, monitoring and self-assessing its provision.

18 The process of accreditation will have three stages, closely mirroring those for sector colleges as set out in Council Circular 98/22, *Framework for Accrediting Colleges*, and Council Circular 98/41, *Applying for Accredited Status*. Institutions that consider they meet the criteria for accreditation will be allocated a link inspector. The three stages are:

- stage 1: prior to consideration at regional level, with suitable adaptations for any national providers—preparation by the provider of an accreditation action plan
- stage 2: consideration at regional level, with suitable adaptations to arrangements for any national providers—consideration by the Council of applications with reference to the regional context

-
- stage 3: consideration by the Council's national accreditation panel—consideration of applications for national consistency and awarding accredited status.

Monitoring accredited provision

19 The achievement of accreditation will signal a confidence, shared by the Council and the provider with accredited FEFC-funded provision, that standards will be maintained over the long term.

20 The provider will be asked to share with the Council its annual self-assessment, showing the outcomes of any actions it has undertaken to maintain or improve provision. The Council's inspectorate may visit from time-to-time to monitor the quality of provision. The aim of these visits will be to assist the institution by providing independent assessments of its work and contribute to the Council's overall assessments of the quality of further education.

21 The Council recognises that the circumstances of an accredited provider may change, for example through merger, and that standards may decline for a variety of reasons. In such circumstances, the Council will work with the provider to support initiatives it takes to maintain the standards required for accreditation. If the Council has concerns that standards are declining it may request that specific actions are taken to remedy matters. The Council reserves the right to withdraw accredited status.

Dissemination of good practice

22 Institutions awarded accreditation for their FEFC-funded provision will be able to apply for standards funding to disseminate their good practice. Information about the proposals for the use of the standards fund are set out in Council Circular 00/09, *Standards Fund 2000-01 for Non-sector College Providers of Further Education*.

Part 2: Establishing Baseline Rates for Retention, Achievement and Target-setting

Background

23 The government has made plain its commitment to improving the quality of further education and to raising levels of student retention

and achievement. The process of target-setting and achieving annual targets for student retention and the achievement of qualifications should be central to providers' strategies for raising standards. However, there should be no narrowing of recruitment or neglect of initiatives to widen participation. The Council has requested sector colleges to set targets for retention and achievement that represent an improvement on the baseline figures for retention and achievement from past years. Since 1999, colleges have been expected to report to the Council on their current performance and targets set for student retention and achievement for the following year.

24 The Council consulted the sector on target-setting in Council Circular 98/35, *Draft Guidance on Target-setting*. Some 97% of those that responded supported the principle of target-setting. Council Circular 99/08, *Guidance on Target-setting*, outlined a framework for sector colleges to set annual targets for student retention and achievement rates and requested targets for 1998-99. Council Circular 00/01, *Target-setting in 1999-2000*, gave guidance on target-setting to sector colleges for levels of retention and achievement. Colleges take into account existing position, typical improvements and benchmarking data. Where colleges had improved their performance between 1995-96 and 1996-97, the average was an improvement of 3% in retention and 7% in achievement. Between 1996-97 and 1997-98, in colleges making improvements, there was an average of 4% increase in retention and 9% in achievements.

Proposed approach

25 The Council proposes that non-sector college providers of further education should set targets for retention and achievement on an annual basis. In principle, other providers of further education can benefit from the process of target-setting to help monitor and raise rates of retention and achievement in the same way as sector colleges. Target-setting for retention and achievement should result in plans to sustain performance at the same high levels or remedy weaknesses in provision in order to bring about sustainable improvements in performance.

26 The Council proposes that, as a first step in 1999-2000, non-sector college providers should prepare baseline figures for retention and

achievement rates and submit these to the Council in December 2000. These baseline data will enable providers to identify areas that need most improvement, to set targets for performance in 2000-2001 and also to use them for comparisons in future years.

27 LEA-maintained external institutions and independent external institutions will be asked to record baseline figures for retention using data derived from the individualised student record (ISR) and using kite-marked software. These providers will want to compare their performance against national benchmarking data for sector colleges that are published by the Council and the national benchmarking data for external institutions that are due to be published by the Council in autumn 2000.

28 Higher education institutions will be asked to record baseline figures for retention and achievement using their ISR-type data derived from Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) data returns.

29 Independent specialist colleges will be asked to record broad 'one-line' figures based on the learning goals and progression plans set out in each student's learning plan. Progression goals may vary widely and include progressing to study in further education or to living and managing support arrangements in long-term residential care. The Council recognises that overall retention rates are usually very high for residential students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in independent specialist colleges, and that where students do leave before completing their studies, this is often due to ill-health. Institutions will be requested to submit 'one-line' overall base-line retention rates and achievement rates, in relation to students' learning goals. They will also be asked to provide figures for the number of students who achieve their progression goal, as set out in their learning plan. The Council recognises that institutions will need to identify a clear progression goal for each student funded by the Council.

30 At this stage, it is not appropriate for dance and drama schools to be asked to set targets for the FEFC, as they are only just beginning to be inspected and make returns to the Council.

31 The guidance at annex B sets out the principles and the proposed frameworks for recording student retention and achievement rates.

Part 3: Publication of Benchmarking Data

Introduction

32 The Council publishes national benchmarking data for sector colleges based on data derived from the ISR. National benchmarking data provides an important source of data against which institutions can compare their performance. Some non-sector college providers of further education already make good use of these national benchmarking data, but the Council recognises that it would be valuable to have more precise comparators for their type of further education institution.

Proposed approach

33 The Council proposes to publish national benchmarking data for LEA-maintained and independent external institutions using data derived from the ISR in autumn 2000. Both types of external institutions will be grouped together and benchmarking data will be given for:

- those with a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas*
- other external institutions.

34 The Council also intends to publish national benchmarking data for further education provision on offer in higher education institutions based on data derived from institution's HESA returns for their further education provision. Details of the categories that will be used are set out in annex B in the references to the framework for target-setting by higher education institutions.

35 At this stage, the Council does not intend to publish national benchmarking data for independent specialist colleges or dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards. Dance and drama schools are being inspected by FEFC and making returns to the Council for the first time this year.

* as defined in the index of local deprivation by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Part 4: Publication of Performance Indicators

Introduction

36 Performance indicators have been produced by the Council for sector colleges since 1995-96. They enable providers to compare their performance with other institutions and for the Council and others to monitor changes in performance in each provider and on a national basis over time.

Proposed approach

37 In response to the Fryer report on external institutions, *External Institutions' Review Group: Final Report of the Review Group, 1999*, the Council will publish performance indicators for these institutions in autumn 2000. The same five performance indicators will be used as for sector colleges. These are:

- achievement of funding target
- change in student numbers
- in-year retention rates
- student achievement rates
- contribution to the national targets.

38 The Council proposes to publish performance indicators for higher education institutions for 1999-2000 using the same five categories.

39 At this stage, it is not appropriate to publish performance indicators for other non-sector college providers of further education. Dance and drama schools are only just starting to make returns to the Council. Performance indicators are unsuitably determined for independent specialist colleges, for example, these institutions are not funded using the Council's funding methodology and they do not make ISR returns.

David Mawle

Summary of Application to College Types

	<i>1 Accreditation of FEFC- funded provision</i>	<i>2 Establishing baseline rates for retention, achievement and target-setting</i>	<i>3 Publication of benchmarking data</i>	<i>4 Publication of performance indicators</i>
Independent specialist colleges	✓	✓	X	X
Independent external institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dance and drama schools in receipt of DfEE awards	✓	X	X	X
Higher education institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓
LEA-maintained external institutions	X	✓	✓	✓

Guidance

Introduction

1 The guidance set out below applies to all non-sector college providers of further education apart from dance and drama schools, which will not be asked to submit data because they have only recently been funded by FEFC and are just beginning to make returns.

Principles

2 Broadly, the same principles apply as those for sector colleges. These are that:

- baseline figures recorded should be used to achieve the objective of raising levels of student retention and achievement each year, or maintaining them at a very high level
- arrangements apply to all FEFC-funded students
- retention and achievement figures should be recorded for each course or curriculum area, and then aggregated to form the overall figures for the institution
- figures should specify levels of retention and achievement
- for those institutions using ISR-derived data, the format of figures should match that of the national benchmarking data published by the Council. See *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, September 1999
- collecting the figures and reporting on performance, both within the institution and to the Council, should fit in with the normal cycles of management and quality assurance and internal reporting arrangements
- recording and analysis of baseline figures for student retention and achievement should involve teachers and relevant support staff as well as managers
- baseline figures for student retention and achievement and arrangements for monitoring future performance against

these are approved by senior managers and, where institutions have arrangements in place, by governors or management committees

- proposed baseline figures should be submitted to the Council
- figures for retention and achievement for the 1999-2000 teaching year should be submitted to the Council by the beginning of December 2000; there will be a facility to update returns until the beginning of March 2001
- the Council will analyse individual provider's targets and aggregate these for different types of non-sector college institution
- although the Council will not require providers to inform it of the details of course or programme-level data, providers are expected to keep full records of these in order to use them for setting targets in future years at course or programme-level, and to use as evidence for self-assessment and inspection
- providers are encouraged to set targets for student retention and achievement at course or programme level for the 2000-01 teaching year based upon baseline figures for 1999-2000
- senior managers, and, where these are in place, governing bodies or management committees, should satisfy themselves that appropriate attention has been paid to setting targets for areas of poor performance and that adequate resources have been assigned to support their achievement.

3 Arrangements for submitting targets for retention and achievement by non-sector college providers will be reviewed by the Council during 2000-01.

Format for Recording Student Retention and Achievement Figures and for Institutions to Set Targets for their own Use

4 The Council wishes to establish a simple format for institutions to record performance for the 1999-2000 teaching year. The forms below are designed so that they can be used at course or programme-level by staff, and subsequently be aggregated by managers to gain the overall record of performance for their Council-funded provision in 1999-2000. An additional column has been included so that institutions can choose to use this for setting targets for student retention and achievement for 2000-01. At this stage, provisional targets set by institutions for their own quality improvement purposes for 2000-01 do not need to be submitted to the Council.

Table 1. Format for recording student retention and achievement levels for LEA-maintained external institutions, independent external institutions and higher education institutions using ISR-derived data and kite-marked software

Name of institution

			<i>16-18</i>		<i>19+</i>		
<i>Qualification type</i>	<i>Level</i>		<i>1999-2000 outcomes</i>	<i>For institution's own use, 2000-01 targets</i>	<i>1999-2000 outcomes</i>	<i>For institution's own use, 2000-01 targets</i>	
Long	1	No. of starters					
		of which level X					
		No. of students retained					
		Retention rate (%)					
		No. of students achieved					
		Achievement rate (%)					
	2	No. of starters					
		of which level X					
		No. of students retained					
		Retention rate (%)					
		No. of students achieved					
		Achievement rate (%)					
	3	No. of starters					
		of which level X					
		No. of students retained					
		Retention rate (%)					
		No. of students achieved					
		Achievement rate (%)					
	X	No. of starters					
		No. of students retained					
Retention rate (%)							
No. of students achieved							
Achievement rate (%)							

			<i>16-18</i>		<i>19+</i>	
<i>Qualification Level type</i>			<i>1999-2000 outcomes</i>	<i>For institution's own use, 2000-01 targets</i>	<i>1999-2000 outcomes</i>	<i>For institution's own use, 2000-01 targets</i>
Short	All	No. of starters				
	levels	of which level X				
		No. of students retained				
		Retention rate (%)				
		No. of students achieved				
		Achievement rate (%)				

GCSEs

5 Providers should record GCSE achievements for grades A*-C. The exception is where the qualification aim for a student is for a lower grade, for example a basic skills student may be aiming to achieve a grade D at GCSE in mathematics or English.

Level X qualifications

6 Some provision is recorded in the ISR on qualifications where the notional level is not available from the qualifications database. These are mainly qualifications which institutions have recorded using generic qualification codes. The majority are notional level 1 qualifications, but some are at higher levels. There are two ways of recording these qualifications on the return. Where the notional level of the qualification is known internally within the institution, then these qualifications should be included at the appropriate notional level with the number of starters identified separately in the 'of which level X' row of the form. Where the institution is not able to reassign these qualifications to an appropriate notional level, they should be included either in the 'Level X' part of the form or with all other short qualifications if they are of fewer than 24 weeks in length.

Kite-marked software

7 At the time of publication, 12 software suppliers to the sector have software kite-marked by the Council which can assist external institutions and higher education institutions with analysis of their historical ISR or ISR-type data derived from

HESA. Some suppliers are also developing tools to assist providers when setting targets. Following a meeting between the Council and the kite-marked software suppliers in July 1999, the Council has provided the following information to these suppliers:

- guidance on pseudocode for 1998-99 and 1999-2000
- guidance on the inclusion of ISR returns
- guidance on standard reports to be produced by kite-marked software
- guidance on how to report on qualifications of unknown notional level.

The information provided to these suppliers is available on the Council's website under 'data' and then 'analysis and benchmarking' and 'kite-marked software'.

Using benchmarking data

8 Providers that use ISR, or ISR-type data derived from HESA, are asked to refer to the definitions set out in the Council's annual benchmarking data publication, *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98: Retention and Achievement rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, September 1999. This will ensure that the approach to recording baseline figures for retention and achievement for 1999-2000 will be consistent.

9 In considering what targets for retention and achievement to set to help them improve performance, institutions will want to take into account a number of different factors including national data where they are available. The most

recent benchmarking data for further education is available as a summary in the Council's publication *Benchmarking Data 1995-96 to 1997-98: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, September 1999. Although national college data will not be directly comparable for other providers, some, and in particular those for general further education colleges and those

colleges with a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas, provide useful comparators. Managers and course tutors will want to use national benchmarking data for specific qualifications. These are available in spreadsheet format on the Council's web site under 'data' then 'analysis and benchmarking'.

Table 2. Format for recording student retention and achievement levels for independent specialist colleges for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Name of institution

		<i>Age of students</i>	
		<i>16-18</i>	<i>19+</i>
1999-2000	No. of starters		
	No. retained		
	Retention rate (%)		
	No. achieved their primary learning goal		
	Achievement rate of primary learning goal (%)		
	No. achieved their progression goal		
	Progression goal (%)		
2000-2001 (for institutions to complete for their own use to help raise standards)	Planned no. of starters		
	Planned no. retained		
	Target retention rate (%)		
	Planned no. achieving primary learning goal		
	Target achievement rate of primary learning goal (%)		
	Planned no. moving to progression goal		
	Target rate for progression goal (%)		

Responses to Consultation

(Reference Circular 00/12)

Please photocopy, complete and return this form to Bettina Bullock at the Council's Coventry office by 28 June 2000. E-mail contact details appear on the front of this circular. Early response would be welcomed.

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All paragraph references are to the main part of the circular. Please indicate your broad support for each proposal by ticking 'yes'. Space has been left for comments – please keep these brief.

1 **Accreditation** (paragraphs 2–22) Yes No

Comments

2 **Target-setting and guidance on recording baseline rates of retention and achievement** Yes No
(paragraphs 23–31, and annex B)

Comments

3 **Publication of national benchmarking data** Yes No
(paragraphs 32–35 and annex B)

Comments

4 **Publication of performance indicators** Yes No
(paragraphs 36–39)

Comments

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