

Basic Skills.
Participation in steering groups
for the Basic Skills strategy
Ad Hoc advice and overview of
the effectiveness of provision
across the various strands of
post-16 provision



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate
For Education and Training in Wales

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BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Estyn Position Paper on the Wales Basic Skills Strategy 2003 – 2004 and the Effectiveness of Post-16 Basic Skills Provision

Introduction

1. Estyn's annual remit from the Welsh Assembly Government asked for ad hoc advice on the effectiveness of basic skills provision across the various strands of post-16 provision. After consultation with the Welsh Assembly Government, this remit was extended to include advice on the effectiveness of the Wales Basic Skills Strategy. This position paper builds on findings gathered during the earlier stages of the Strategy in 2002-2003.
2. The Welsh Assembly Government has also commissioned an external agency (York Consulting), to carry out an evaluation of the Strategy. This is due to report in July 2004. Estyn is represented on the evaluation steering group that is led by York Consulting.
3. This position paper is in two sections. The first section covers the work of the Basic Skills Strategy in pre-16 provision. The second section combines an evaluation of current standards in post-16 basic skills provision and the work of the Basic Skills Strategy in post-16 provision.
4. In the report on post-16 provision, many of the improvements described are wider than the Basic Skills Strategy, although the Basic Skills Strategy might have contributed to their development.
5. The Basic Skills Strategy was designed to run from April 2001 to March 2004. The Basic Skills Agency has been responsible for the overall implementation and management of the strategy and the Assembly funding allocation. However, in connection with the strategy, all those responsible for education and training in Wales have been required to make basic skills a priority by ensuring that mainstream work is designed to embed best practice in relation to basic skills in line with the Welsh Assembly Government's document 'The Learning Country'. This includes the strategy for basic skills as an important contributor to the raising of standards of achievement for children and adults in Wales and sets challenging targets for learners and institutions.
6. The Basic Skills Agency has itself commissioned evaluations of parts of the Strategy, such as the promotional campaigns, the Quality Mark in primary schools and the Language and Play Programme. The Language and Play programme is a significant area of work covering all LEAs and involves working with the parents of pre-school children. The programme is not covered by this advice. Similarly, at the time of writing, there are developments in the post-16 sector, such as the new Tripartite Award, that are not included in this advice because it is too early to comment on their impact.

7. This paper has drawn on the following sources of evidence:

- visits to and discussions with providers;
- meetings with Basic Skills Agency staff and with managers of the National Support Projects);
- analysis of relevant documents;
- work-based training inspection reports on Foundation for Work;
- further education inspection reports on Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages;
- the New Deal inspection report *The Quality of Additional Basic Skills Support (September 2003)*;
- visits to LEAs and schools;
- feedback from college general inspectors and district inspectors;
- classroom observations; and
- discussions with learners.

Main findings: pre-16 provision

8. The good features include:

- the careful way in which LEAs use funding to address the individual needs of pupils who are under-performing;
- the support and guidance given by the Basic Skills Agency through their continuing engagement with schools and LEAs;
- the way small amounts of money are used well to maximise improvements for both pupils and staff;
- the opportunities taken to extend successful programmes more widely in schools, so that more pupils and teachers benefit; and
- the work of learning support assistants who are undertaking very focused work with individual pupils.

Recommendations:

- address the continuing difficulties caused to LEAs by funding being made available at too short notice;
- ensure that there is an appropriate balance between literacy and numeracy in the work delivered under Strategic Intervention Grant funding;
- review the number of initiatives presented to LEAs in order to rationalise them where possible; and
- continue to develop opportunities for learning support assistants to advance their career prospects.

Main findings: post-16 provision

9. The good features include:

- the quality of materials, training and support provided by the National Support Projects;
- the number of employers signing up for The Employers' Pledge;
- the grades awarded to Foundation for Work programmes, which include basic skills delivery;
- the overall quality of primary basic skills in further education;
- the use made of the Basic Skills Development Fund to encourage teachers to integrate basic skills support into their teaching;
- the overall improvements in the quality of individual learning plans across all providers; and
- the improvements in strategic planning for basic skills within organisations.

Recommendations

- increase the number of staff who have appropriate basic skills teaching qualifications;
- ensure that work-based learning providers have sufficient funds to purchase enough good quality teaching and learning materials;
- increase the amount of learning materials available in Welsh;
- ensure that the National Support Project websites include important materials in order to further raise awareness and disseminate good practice;
- explore ways in which the support and developments initiated by the National Support Projects can be sustained in the longer term;
- review the outcome payments for basic skills qualifications in work-based learning to reflect more fairly the number of learning hours needed to achieve a qualification;
- continue to improve attainment rates in primary basic skills;
- improve the use of data on learning support in order to monitor the impact of learning support on the progress that individuals make in their mainstream courses; and
- review the way that basic skills learning support is funded in institutions of further education to secure adequate core funding arrangements.

Section 1: PRE –16 PROVISION

A. Strategic Intervention Grants

i) The role of LEAs in managing and developing Strategic Intervention Grant work

10. In the second year of the Strategic Intervention Grants (2003-2004), LEAs and schools are focusing appropriately on the under performers and have worked hard to keep the groups of pupils clearly defined.

Literacy

11. The biggest emphasis has been on developing shared and guided reading. In three of the six LEAs visited this year, pupils following the Catch Up (Dyfal Donc) programme have made impressive reading gains. In these LEAs, teachers say that the programme is also helping to develop pupils' speech and spelling skills. Though Catch Up is more established in primary schools, a number of secondary schools are also using similar approaches with the same rates of success. Almost all primary and secondary schools that began by using Catch Up in one year group, usually Year 3 or Year 7, have extended the programme to include Years 3-6 or Years 7-9 respectively.
12. Overall there has been less focus on developing writing skills. However, some LEAs have used strategic intervention grant funding to purchase high quality professional in-service training to introduce a national commercial writing programme, which includes progression from primary to secondary programmes. In some schools, this has had a significant impact by giving teachers the expertise to teach writing skills in subjects across the whole curriculum. As a result, pupils are able to write more purposefully at greater length. There has been some, but less, progress in improving spelling, punctuation and grammar.
13. A good example of extended literacy work is where an LEA has seconded a practitioner to focus on pupils' transition between primary and secondary school. The practitioner works with 6-7 primary schools and 2 secondary schools, using withdrawal support, guided reading and tracking pupils through from Year 6 to Year 7.

Language

14. A few LEAs have concentrated on improving pupils' language acquisition through such programmes as 'Teaching Talking' and 'Let's Think'. These programmes have very successfully improved

the spoken language and vocabulary of pupils with poor language skills.

15. Overall, the links between English as an Additional Language and basic skills work in schools and LEAs are not as strong as they could be.

Numeracy

16. Overall, numeracy has received much less attention in LEAs and schools than literacy, though the work of the Basic Skills Agency in promoting numeracy is beginning to have an impact in secondary schools.

Targeting of funding

17. Some schools have used strategic intervention grant funding to improve the basic skills of disengaged pupils. In one particular school, funding has been used well to purchase basic skills learning materials and 20 hours of Learning Support Assistant time on a fortnightly basis. The additional support has helped pupils learn effectively and represents good value for money.
18. Small amounts of money can generate big effects. With £3,000, a secondary school was able to secure eight non-contact days for staff in the maths department to undertake joint planning with other departments. Together, staff developed a systematic approach to the development of numeracy skills to fit in with topics at various times. Evidence suggests they have gained a lot from a small amount of money; most importantly, they gained time.
19. Whilst LEAs appreciate the extra funding, they continue to experience difficulties caused by funding being made available at too short notice. LEAs and schools do not receive information about funding at the beginning of the year when it is needed and large sums of money are offered later in the year. For example, in March 2004, LEAs were informed that money was available for use in the year 2003-2004. This means that the potential impact of the funding is not fully realised and causes much frustration. Some schools have been unable to retain very good Learning Support Assistants because of lack of information about funding when they needed it.

The burden on LEAs

20. Overall, LEAs appear to be overburdened with separate initiatives and all are trying to achieve greater coherence in their approaches. In one LEA they have reached the stage where they are deciding what works best and concentrating on this, rather than endlessly chase new initiatives. This LEA has restructured so that the advisory service and the basic skills service are now managed together. In

another LEA, the strategic intervention grant work is so closely entwined with the work it was doing prior to the funding, that it may well prove difficult to disentangle the 'value-added' brought about by the strategic intervention grant funding.

ii) The work and impact of Learning Support Assistants wholly or partly funded by Strategic Intervention Grants

21. In most cases, learning support assistants provide very good value for money. Overall, they are a competent and committed workforce and many are undertaking very focused, active work with targeted pupils.

In one primary school, three learning support assistants worked with 12 pupils who were at level 3 in Year 6 but could do better. In frequent but short, twenty minute to half hour sessions, they provided support in writing, comprehension and literacy using ILT. All 12 pupils achieved at least level 4 and three achieved level 5. The learning support assistants felt empowered and had obviously gained a great deal of professional satisfaction from working in such an effective way with children.

22. On the basis of discussions with staff in the LEAs visited, strategic intervention grant work is more effective in primary schools than in secondary schools. Evidence suggests that this is to do with factors such as school size, the different dynamic of primary classes, small teams working better together, shorter lines of communication and teachers, in effect, providing on-the-job training for primary learning support assistants.
23. A few secondary schools have used their Strategic Intervention Grant funding effectively to extend an already well-developed key skills programme.
24. Strategic intervention grant work appears to be working best where pupils receive manageable 20-30 minute sessions of teaching, for example, through withdrawal work, with a sharp focus. This is strengthened when learning support assistants work steadily and consistently with a small, coherent group for a whole term or a year. Learning support assistants all say that the strategic intervention grant work has succeeded in focusing attention on the otherwise 'ignored pupils'. These are often quieter, more withdrawn and may not have much opportunity to have a close relationship with a teacher or another adult.
25. There is no clear progression route for learning support assistants, which for most of them, is disappointing. Head teachers and LEA officers feel that assistants have an effective contribution to make which is not currently valued in terms of the opportunities available to advance their career prospects. Higher education institutions are

aware of this issue and are responding through the development of Foundation Degrees.

B. The secondary training initiative

26. This initiative got off to a difficult start in January 2003, because of the late announcement of funding. Although the Basic Skills Agency provided good support, many schools and LEAs were unable to use the money effectively at first because of difficult timescales.
27. In all the LEAs visited, sustained working by advisory staff in classrooms is having a more permanent effect in improving teaching practice than in-service training outside of the classroom. LEAs have tended to use the 'modelling' approach to training (where practitioners work alongside staff), and this is generally welcomed in schools. In one LEA, practitioners have been seconded from schools and in another the Strategic Intervention Grant manager undertakes the work.

C. School and LEA views on the role of the Basic Skills Agency and the Quality Mark

28. LEAs and schools are positive about the role of the Basic Skills Agency. In particular, they stress:
 - the importance of the Basic Skills Agency in marketing the strategy;
 - the impact of Basic Skills Agency badging on parents, councillors and local communities;
 - the importance of providing an external view;
 - their local contacts and the engagement with schools and LEAs; and
 - the fact that it is a national organisation with an all-Wales agenda aimed at meeting the particular needs of Wales.
29. The process of gaining the Quality Mark provides a useful self-evaluation for schools that want staff to take responsibility for raising literacy and numeracy standards. However, schools that are already doing well sometimes see the process as a distraction from what they consider to be more important matters. In some schools, where the Quality Mark is prominently displayed, residual scores remain low. Gaining the Quality Mark can become an end in itself, unless a school is committed to continuous improvement as part of its planning.
30. One of the aims of the strategy is for all schools to gain the Quality Mark, but achieving it does not necessarily secure improved standards for pupils. The achievement of the Quality Mark is easy to measure, but its achievement does not guarantee better outcomes.

On its own, it is therefore not a sufficient performance indicator for the success of the Basic Skills Strategy.

Section 2: POST-16 PROVISION

A. Work-based learning

31. In work-based learning, there is no separate occupational area for basic skills but the occupational area 'Foundation for Work' normally includes a substantial amount of basic skills work. This is usually delivered to trainees on Skillbuild, Work-Based Learning for Adults and sometimes New Deal clients. Trainees on level 1 training programmes can also receive substantial basic skills support and this support is available to trainees at levels 2 and 3 on a more limited basis.
32. Of the work-based learning inspections carried out during the last year, four included the inspection of Foundation for Work. The grades awarded for this area of work are all above the quality threshold, with one at grade 1, two at grade 2 and one at grade 3. Overall, the good features include:
 - good levels of individual support;
 - good achievement and attainment of trainees (often including additional qualifications);
 - accurate initial assessment leading to clear individual learning plans for basic skills;
 - opportunities in the workplace to transfer and apply basic and key skills; and
 - trainees fully involved with planning and reviews.Shortcomings include:
 - trainees not always taking enough responsibility for their portfolio work;
 - inconsistencies in the procedures for administering initial assessments;
 - individual learning plans that are too general; and
 - weaknesses in how assessment is explained to trainees.
33. Where training organisations deliver Foundation for Work, increasing numbers of staff are attaining specialist basic skills teaching qualifications at level 3. However, there are still too many who only have initial basic skills teaching qualifications. Developments in this area have been hampered by the lack of a suitable level 3 qualification to take the place of the old Certificate in Teaching Basic Skills (C&G 9285). The Basic Skills Agency is taking the lead in developing this level 3 qualification for basic skills practitioners in Wales. It will not be piloted until September of this year and it is

therefore too early to comment on how the impact of the Welsh version of the level 3 qualification will compare with the same qualification in England.

34. Providers feel quite strongly that the outcome payments for basic skills qualifications do not reflect the amount of teaching and support that takes place compared to payments made for other qualifications.
35. In a few instances, endorsements from careers companies are unrealistic in the time identified to develop a trainee's basic skills. Whilst the provider can go back to the careers company to apply for an extension, occasionally they have experienced resistance to giving trainees more time. However, this is not the experience of the majority. Where there is a Gateway programme, referrals are more realistic, because there is more time to accurately assess the needs of the trainees.
36. There are still examples of individuals undertaking basic skills initial assessments at the point of referral and then being assessed again prior to entering a training programme with a training provider, even though they have not received any basic skills tuition in the intervening period.

The work of the National Support Project for Basic Skills in Training Organisations

37. The National Support Project for Basic Skills in Training Organisations is particularly targeted at work-based learning providers. All providers visited welcome the support and the increased opportunities to attend basic skills training events. This has been lacking in the past. One provider explained that if the training were not free, they would not have been able to send a member of staff to every event, as funding for staff development is limited. Staff particularly appreciate the opportunity to share experiences and ideas at the regional network meetings organised by the National Support Project for Training Organisations. One provider remarked that the meetings were 'a booster', particularly where staff are working in isolation. These meetings have a useful and practical focus on issues, including how to write individual learning plans, differentiation in teaching, model lessons and teaching and learning materials. The National Support Project is encouraging providers to swap teaching ideas and materials, but this has been slow to develop.
38. The National Support Project has developed very useful materials for providers, but these are not currently available on their website for easy access. The demonstration lessons delivered on site for staff, have generally been well-received, although staff with teaching qualifications and prior experience in basic skills do not always find them as beneficial as the network meetings. The team also makes

more informal visits to offer advice and this is helpful in providing feedback on evidence needed to apply for the Quality Mark. Providers state that individual learning plans have improved. Most have attended the core curriculum training and learning plans now refer to these standards.

39. All providers welcome the £1,000 resource pack, although a small minority would have liked it to contain more vocationally related materials. For the majority this resource has significantly increased their basic skills resources. Prior to this, they were inadequate. All providers comment positively on the enthusiasm of the National Support Project team and their responsiveness to queries by phone and e-mail.

B. New Deal

40. A separate Estyn report, *The Quality of Additional Basic Skills Support in New Deal*, was published in September 2003 and it is available on the Estyn website at www.estyn.gov.uk

The main findings of this report are:

- Many clients start from a low base line in terms of their basic skills and many of these make good progress in the time that they are on the programme. Most clients, including those with the greatest needs, leave New Deal able to write their own name and to carry out simple writing tasks and basic sums. For some clients, this represents a considerable achievement.
- The prime objective for New Deal is progression into employment. However it was not possible to establish any causal link between basic skills support and progression to employment, as no information was available from providers or Jobcentre Plus to enable individuals to be tracked.
- In only one of the ten providers visited, do over half the clients attain a basic skills qualification. In four of the providers visited less than one fifth of clients gain a basic skills qualification and in three providers no records were kept of clients' basic skills attainments.
- The best providers have good strategies to help clients develop their skills at their own pace. Most providers offer clients the opportunity to develop their basic skills through dedicated off-the-job sessions and in most cases these are well planned and include a range of appropriate activities.
- In a few providers, the basic skill sessions are poor. There is no effective target setting to help clients progress and they do not systematically develop their skills. In these cases, central

records of clients' progress are poor and clients' own files are not well organised.

- The best programmes are those where providers offer the initial basic skills assessment as well as delivering the New Deal option. About half of the providers visited do this. These providers have a higher proportion of clients attending the initial basic skills assessment and then going on to take up the basic skills support available.
- In most providers, the staff delivering basic skills have good qualifications and experience. However, in several cases, basic skills staff do not link effectively with vocational staff. In some providers, specialist staff not directly involved with in work-based learning, offer the basic skill support but this does not always work well.
- Most providers incorporate assessment and evaluation of their New Deal activities within their overall quality assurance systems and in many cases this works well. A few do not carry out an effective assessment of their New Deal provision. Only one provider formally evaluated the effectiveness of their basic skills provision on New Deal as part of their overall assessment.
- Almost all the providers have either recently achieved the Post-16 Quality Mark for basic skills or are close to submitting applications. This requires a self-assessment of basic skills provision. However, this basic skills self-assessment rarely feeds into the provider's wider, overall assessment. Only one of the providers visited specifically considered their additional support for New Deal clients as part of their self-assessment for the Basic Skills Agency.

C. Further Education

i) Overall trends in Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ABE and ESOL)

41. This section refers to inspection programme area 17, also referred to as primary basic skills. This is the area where learners with basic skills needs enrol to improve their basic literacy, language and numeracy skills. Most learners study on a part-time basis. Eighty three percent of enrolments in this programme area are part-time. The remaining 17% is made up of enrolments from learners studying full-time in other programme areas. This section of the report outlines the changes and improvements in the programme area over the period 1999/00 to 2001/02. There is no verifiable data available yet for 2002/03.

Enrolments

42. Part-time enrolments are currently at 21,600 and have increased steadily over the period 1999/2000 to 2001/2002. The number of full-time students enrolling for basic skills qualifications, has steadily declined over the same period and is currently at 3,400. The pattern of part-time enrolments for the first two years is very similar, with literacy at approximately 53% of enrolments, ESOL at 35% and numeracy at 22%. This is a cause for concern, given that research indicates higher numbers of adults experience difficulties with numeracy than literacy. It might be useful to refer here to a comment in the pre -16 section of this report on page 2, which states that ‘ overall, numeracy has received much less attention in LEAs and schools than literacy...’. This echoes the finding here that the provision for basic skills in numeracy is smaller. Fewer learners follow courses in numeracy, although this does not reflect levels of learner competence in numeracy.

Completion rates

43. In both part-time and full-time provision completion rates have remained at around 84% over the three year period. However, completion rates for part-time ESOL students are generally lower than for the other two subject areas.

Attainment

44. Overall attainment rates in part-time programmes have been increasing steadily from 35% to 55%. The increase in overall attainment on full-time programmes is slower: from 52% to 61%.
45. Part-time successful completion rates have more than doubled in the period, from 21% to 44%. (Successful completion rates are the rates at which students both complete their course and attain the qualification aim.) For full-time students, the rise is from 33% to 49%. The increase in part-time rates of successful completion can be explained partly because better use is being made of short courses, notably of those in family literacy and numeracy. The other likely reason is the increased use of Open College Network units, which allow more flexibility. Outcomes can be achieved over shorter periods of time. This helps to motivate students because it gives them a relatively quick experience of success.

ii) Primary Basic Skills

46. There have been four inspections of ABE and ESOL (programme area 17), since September 2002. In this period, two colleges maintained their grade for the programme area; one improved its grade and one came down a grade.

47. All basic skills programme area grades in Wales are above the quality threshold. The majority have good features and no important shortcomings. However, only one college has an overall grade 1 (good with outstanding features).

Student achievement

48. The achievement of students is good overall and some make marked progress in a short period of time. Occasionally they are not challenged enough. Files are well presented and generally contain a good range of work, which shows the development of skills over time. Where there are important shortcomings in student achievement, these are in the attainment of outcomes. Overall attainment rates vary markedly between colleges. In some cases, there are wide differences in attainment rates for different qualifications within the same institution.

Teaching and assessment

49. Overall the quality of teaching and assessment is good. Colleges have responded positively to the new core curriculum for basic skills and this is firmly embedded into programme delivery and design. Training for the new core basic skills curriculum has continued beyond the original timescale because of the scale of demand from post -16 providers. Individual learning plans are generally of good quality and most teachers are planning well for group teaching by writing clear schemes of work. This aspect is new for those teachers who are more used to workshop delivery.
50. Overall, teachers are using a good range of teaching strategies and the best examples are in sessions where the teacher plans a mix of whole class teaching, collaborative learning and time to address specific individual learning objectives. A particular strength in ESOL classes is the use of question and answer to elicit responses and games to develop speaking and listening. ICT is being used well in most classes but there is not always enough use made of specialist software to allow learners to work on their own and consolidate skills. Where there is access to the internet, this is generally used well to encourage research and develop higher reading skills. Much use is still made of worksheets. This is particularly the case in outreach centres where resources are often more limited. However, teachers are using them more selectively and they are generally of a better quality. There are still not enough Welsh teaching and learning materials.
51. Although assessment practice is generally good, there is still not enough evaluative written feedback on students' work. In a minority of cases, assessed work is not signed off and dated. Reviews are carried out regularly, but they are not always detailed enough in order to formulate targets for the next period.

iii) Basic Skills Support

52. With the introduction of the common inspection framework, there is a much sharper focus on the effectiveness of learning support in colleges. Learning support is one element of key question 4 'How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?' The term 'basic skills support' is used here to differentiate between the learning support provided for learners with specific learning disabilities and/or difficulties (for which colleges receive Supplementary Funding), and the support needs of learners who need general support with basic skills and who are not directly funded.
53. In colleges, initial screening and assessment processes are well-established and subsequent referrals to learning support are generally much quicker. This is aided in some colleges by the use of on-line screening. Overall, students are positive about the quality of individual support they receive. In response to the lack of student take-up of learning support, colleges are starting to use a range of models as well as the more traditional methods. These include:
- double staffing in key skill and vocational sessions using a basic skills specialist;
 - offering more individualised support in key skills portfolio sessions; and
 - influencing vocational staff to adapt their teaching methods and learning materials to do more differentiation and take a more inclusive approach.
54. This latter example is particularly effective and is more in evidence since colleges received three years funding from the Basic Skills Development Fund to set up basic skills training for vocational and academic staff and release individuals from some of their teaching to become basic skills champions.
55. The overall weakness in learning support is in the generally poor use made of data to monitor and track the progress of learners receiving learning support. Thus most colleges are not able at this stage to measure the impact of learning support on learning outcomes on mainstream courses. There is no reliable data available for benchmarking. Most colleges are developing on-line tracking systems to improve this situation.

The Basic Skills Development Fund

56. The developing practice in relation to inclusive approaches on vocational mainstream courses is particularly good and is more in evidence since colleges received three years of funding from the Basic Skills Development Fund. Colleges have used this money well to set up basic skills training for vocational and academic staff and to

release individuals from some of their teaching to become basic skills champions.

57. As a result, there is a greater awareness of basic skills issues amongst vocational and academic staff in colleges, although within a single institution, the commitment to basic skills support can vary between programme areas. The funding also helped colleges to set up full-time permanent posts for learning support co-ordinators.
58. The cessation of the Basic Skills Development Fund has hampered further developments. One example of the effects of this loss in one provider is the lack of release time for basic skills champions to continue links with vocational and academic areas. This weakens the role of the basic skills champions within their programmes areas and puts extra pressure on the full-time basic skills support staff. The gains made are in danger of being lost because of the lack of core recurrent funding to sustain the new ways of working.

The funding of learning support

59. There is no systematic link between the numbers of learners identified as needing basic skills support and the funding provided for this area of work. The only current model of funding for this work derives from the 'Widening Participation' factor, which is based on the total numbers of students enrolled in any institution from particular postcodes in areas of deprivation. It is not based on the levels of actual students' basic skills needs, but 50% of its total is earmarked for basic skills support. However, a student's basic skills support needs are 'triggered' by the demands of the qualification they are studying and are not necessarily linked to where they live. There are no plans to change future funding arrangements for basic skill support.
60. The number of colleges achieving the Post 16 Quality Mark for learning support is low. At the time of writing, twelve have the Quality Mark for primary basic skills, but only four have it for learning support.

The work of the National Support Project for Basic Skills Support in Further Education

61. Overall, the National Support Project for Basic Skills Support in FE has been well received by colleges. Evaluation reports indicate very positive feedback on the network meetings. One provider was very impressed with the conduct and content of the network meetings for learning support co-ordinators and attendance at these meetings is good. Another appreciated the on-going support given by the team using e-mail.

62. Overall, colleges have found workshops for frontline staff very useful and the input to governors practical and clear. As a result, in some colleges, more non-teaching staff are attending basic skills training. One college found that the focus meetings at the start of the consultancy did not provide them with any new information. This same provider would have preferred some negotiation in the content of the workshops as they felt they did not best fit their needs. Another found it helpful to have student feedback using an external agency. The National Support Project, in partnership with colleges, is producing good practice materials, which distil much of the discussions over the last two years and will help to further disseminate good practice.
63. There is work to be done in a few colleges to bring together the basic and key skills teams but this is well underway in most colleges and the National Support Project for Basic Skills Support in FE is helping in this respect. The combined work of the National Support Project for the Post 16 Quality Mark and the National Support Project for Basic Skills Support in FE is providing colleges with clear guidance and direction resulting in better planning at a strategic level and specific targets for improvement.

The work of the National Support Project for Basic Skills in the Workplace

64. The National Support Project for Basic Skills in the Workplace has made good progress so far in reaching its targets. It is being successful in encouraging employers to sign up to the Employers' Pledge. However it is of some concern as to whether such a small team will be able to continue to build on this success. At the time of writing, fifty-two employers have signed the pledge and between them they employ over 88,000 people. This includes six county councils, three NHS Trusts and eight colleges. Forty-four action plans have been received and 32 of these have been approved. Five employers have received the plaque. Providers that have attended the initial training to accredit individual staff to deliver basic skills in the workplace, have found it demanding but useful. It is difficult for these providers to sustain the important development work with employers because there is no direct funding for this.
65. All employers receive guidance and support from the National Support Project when writing their action plans. For some this has been a particular challenge and they have had to resubmit them. In these cases, discussions with accredited staff in the local FE college or LEA, has been beneficial.

The work of the National Support Project for Voluntary and Community Organisations

66. The National Support Project for Voluntary and Community Organisations started in autumn 2002 and has made significant progress in a short amount of time. The operational plan is ambitious with appropriate targets. In the early stages the project team has rightly concentrated on raising awareness with managers of voluntary and community organisations. There is good representation on the National Support Project advisory group and the National Support Project co-ordinator attends an all Wales working group on informal learning convened by ELWa. This has enabled them to establish very useful contacts with voluntary organisations that have wide networks of their own.
67. The National Support Project is raising awareness and promoting good practice through training events, writing good practice guides, sponsoring volunteers to access basic skills training in their regions, awarding project grants and contributing to national conferences e.g. Communities First. An excellent newsletter is available on the website, which includes attractive learning materials. Many voluntary organisations work with hard to reach groups and many of these groups are going to have basic skills needs. The National Support Project team is small for what is clearly an expanding area of work. Future funding will need to be secured in order to sustain the work started by the National Support Project.

The work of the National Support project for the Post-16 Quality Mark for Basic Skills

68. To date 37 post-16 providers have achieved at least one Quality Mark and there are another 20 applications pending. Some providers will apply for more than one Quality Mark, depending on their range of provision. The Basic Skills Agency have a target of 64 providers to achieve at least one Quality Mark by the end of 2004 and evidence suggests this is achievable if current applications do not need substantial revisions before being accepted. Between April 2003 and January 2004 the National Support Project for the Post-16 Quality Mark received 580 contacts (some are multiple contacts from one organisation) and made 41 advisory visits. In this time the team also delivered six regional training events. Of the 107 attendances, 58 were from work-based learning, 33 from further education and 16 were LEA or voluntary organisations. It is encouraging to see a healthy interest from training organisations.
69. Every opportunity is taken to promote the Quality Mark, for example delivering an input at another National Support Project's conference, and the team are very responsive and accessible through the use of e-mail and telephone. Feedback from providers about the support and training provided is positive. The team is seeing measurable

improvements in individual learning plans, basic skills action plans and strategies. However, staff qualifications remain an issue and many providers are not in a position to offer basic skills training in-house. Colleges state that there is little or no funding for growth in basic skills. It is a requirement of the Quality Mark that applications contain targets for growth, particularly for hard-to-reach groups.

The National Support Projects continue to be well-managed. They have robust systems for monitoring and evaluating their work and all are active across the regions of Wales. Overall, they are responding well to requests for delivery and documentation in Welsh. They make good use of each other's expertise and meet regularly to combine resources and reduce overlap. The National Support Project websites are informative but it is not always possible to access important materials from the websites, which would help to raise awareness further and disseminate good practice.