

**An assessment of the management of key skills
teaching in the post-16 further education sector**

Kevin Richardson

Ed.D Thesis
University of Leicester

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Ed.D Thesis**

**‘An assessment of the management of key skills teaching in the post-16 further
education sector’**

**By: Kevin Richardson
Supervisors: Dr Janet Ouston and Dr Mark Lofthouse
Submission date: August 2002**

Abstract

This thesis reviews management practices from a practitioners perspective in relation to the provision of key skills teaching in FEFC funded post-16 colleges in the period 1992-1999. In particular it focuses on issues associated with practitioners experience of managing change in response to changing educational policy.

Data was obtained via a survey of 38 colleges in the West Midlands region followed by case study work in four colleges.

The findings reinforce concerns raised in the literature that colleges have had difficulty in managing the teaching of key skills and have been influenced by policy prescriptions from NCVQ (QCA from 1998) and the FEFC regarding ‘best practice’.

It is concluded that colleges have adopted a variety of pragmatic approaches that have been applied inconsistently and compete with other college services. To be effective colleges need to focus more clearly upon the needs of the individual learner through the development and application of tools that clearly identify key skill support needs. Consideration needs to be given to redefining ‘learner support’ in order that a set of coherent services can be provided so that all aspects of learner support and student progress can be tracked and effective intervention and support can be provided.

A model is proposed which seeks to illustrate the relationship between the management of key skills teaching and related services, and is designed to promote the provision of a range of flexible learner support services.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ALBSU	Adult Learning and Basic Skills Unit
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
ASDAN	Award Scheme and Development Accreditation Network
BSA	Basic Skills Agency
BTEC	Business and Technical Education Council
C&G	City and Guilds of London Institute
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CPVE	Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education
CTL	Course Team Leader
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DoE	Department of Employment
DVE	Diploma in Vocational Education
Edexcel	Examining and awarding lead body (formed in 1996 through merger of BTEC and the University of London Assessment Council)
ESF	European Social Fund
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FEU	Further Education Unit
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency
MA	Modern Apprenticeship
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NEC	National Extension College
NETT	National Education and Training Targets
NT	National Traineeship
NTI	New Training Initiative
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications Curriculum Authority
SCAA	School Curriculum Assessment Authority
SEAC	Schools Examination Assessment Council
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
TSA	Training Services Agency
TUC	Trade Union Congress
TVEI	Training and Vocational Education Initiative
YOPS	Youth Opportunities Scheme
YTI	Youth Training Initiative
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

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Contents

	Page
Chapter 1:	
Introduction	1
Key skills: the policy context	1
The emergence of key skills	2
YTS and core skills	3
The Technical and Vocational Training Initiative (TVEI)	3
GNVQ and core skills	7
Policy developments (1997 and 1998)	9
The purpose of the thesis	11
Specific objectives	12
Research questions	13
Summary	14
Chapter 2	
Literature review	15
Introduction	15
Definitions of key skills	15
Summary	24
The economic rationale for key skills	25
Summary	31
The management of curriculum change	32
Summary	49
Organisation and management issues	51
Summary	62
Links to the objectives of this research	64
Chapter 3	
Research methods	67
Introduction	67
A consideration of the options	68
Research in educational settings	70
Research tools	74
Research instruments	78
Summary	93
Chapter 4	
Survey findings	94
Introduction	94
Organisational structure	94
Key skills client groups	95
College policies	96
Student admissions	98
Course management	104
Key skills assessment	111
Internal verification	113
Learning and physical resources	114
Summary	116

Chapter 5	Case study findings	123
	Case study 1	123
	Case study 2	132
	Case study 3	144
	Case study 4	154
	Summary of case study findings	164
Chapter 6	Analysis of findings	170
	Introduction	170
	Theme 1: College organisation	171
	Theme 2: Student admissions	181
	Theme 3: Course management	190
	Theme 4: Key skills assessment and internal	
	Verification	197
	Summary	201
Chapter 7	Conclusions	205
	A way forward?	214
	A model for the management of key skills teaching	215
Appendix		226
References		250

List of Tables and Figures

Chapter 1

Table 1: Hierarchy of qualifications, p.8

Chapter 2

Table 2: Core skills 1990-1996, p.23

Chapter 3

Table 3: Research approaches and tools, p.79

Table 4: FEFC funded institutions by category, p.79

Table 5: Analysis of enrolments by category of college 1998, p.80

Table 6: Number and category of college by FEFC region, p.80

Table 7: Qualification aims in the FEFC sector, p.81

Table 8: Further education colleges as a percentage of total number of colleges and enrolment data, 1998, p.83

Table 9: West Midlands general further education colleges – survey respondents, p.84

Table 10: FEFC sector details linked to the survey, p.85

Table 11: Percentage of provision in case study colleges by programme area, p.89

Table 12: Analysis of interviewees in case study colleges, p.91

Chapter 4

Table 13: Analysis of key skills provision, p.95

Table 14: Analysis of additional key skill client groups, p.96

Table 15: Categories of key skill entitlement students, p.97

Table 16: Analysis of provision of ‘additional’ key skills, p.98

Table 17: Analysis of staff who undertake initial screening in a college p.99

Table 18: Analysis of times when initial screening takes place, p.99

Table 19: Categories of approaches to the tracking of extra key skills support, p.101

Table 20: Analysis of the providers of learning support, p.103

Table 21: Analysis of ‘tracking systems’ used to highlight extra support needed, p.103

Table 22: Analysis of how key skills are delivered, p.104

Table 23: Analysis of times when key skills are assessed, p.105

Table 24: Analysis of postholders responsible for integrating key skills into programmes, p.106

Table 25: Analysis of how key skills are planned to be integrated into assignments, p.107

Table 26: Analysis of how it is decided which tutors should be involved in drafting assignments to ensure coverage of key skills in GNVQ programmes, p.108

Table 27: Analysis of how the three ‘mandatory’ key skills ‘delivered’, p.109

Table 28: Analysis of how additional key skills are ‘delivered’, p.110

Table 29: Analysis of the role of key skills assessor, p.111

Table 30: Analysis of key skills most difficult to assess p.112

Table 31: Analysis of the times of when internal verification is undertaken, p.113

Table 32: Analysis of role of member of staff undertaking internal verification, p.113

Table 33: Analysis of learning resources used to support key skills, p.114

Table 34: Analysis of ‘venues’ that house key skill learning materials, p.114

Table 35: Analysis of learning resource centres and the support of the management of key skills, p.116

Chapter 5

Table 36: College pseudonyms, p.123

Figure 1: College organisation chart (Rivers college), p.152

Chapter 6

Table 37: Data themes, p.170

Figure 2: Stages in the data analysis process, p.171

Table 38: Summary of related duties of key skills specialists, p.175

Table 39: Analysis of duties undertaken by key skills staff, p.176

Table 40: Analysis of key skill resources and associated venues, p.178

Table 41: Analysis of categories of staff undertaking initial screening in a college,
p.181

Table 42: Analysis of timing of initial diagnosis, p.182

Table 43: Roles of staff involved in the initial assessment process (case study
colleges), p.182

Table 44: Analysis of roles of staff tracking and monitoring of learner support, p.184

Table 45: Analysis of where learner support takes place, p.185

Table 46: Analysis of the role of staff undertaking learning support, p.186

Table 47: Analysis of roles of staff who ensure key skills 'coverage', p.192

Table 48: Analysis of key skill 'deliverers' (case study colleges), p.193

Chapter 7

Figure 3: Model for the management of key skills p.215

Chapter 1: Introduction

Key Skills: The policy context

Key skills have emerged, developed and been applied in a post-16 sector which has itself spanned a variety of possible objectives of which 'not all are explicit, are often combined, overlapping or contradictory' (Silver, 1990, p.114). At various times the notion of core/key skills as either a unifying element/common theme in the post-16 curricula framework or as a panacea for the perceived problems faced by employers has been promoted by both policy makers and employers alike.

Vocational training has a chequered history in England, and the responsibility for vocational education and training fell by default to the further education (FE) sector. *The Education Act*, 1944 attempted to provide a statutory basis for this provision, declaring that county colleges should be set up in each Local Education Authority (LEA) to offer compulsory day-release schemes for 15-18 year olds in employment.

The history of key skills cannot be separated from the history of schooling and much of the debate in the 1990s was based upon historical issues, which surrounded 'secondary education' and the basic and enduring social distinctions in our society. These social distinctions McCulloch suggests are summarised as:

'The longer term resilience of three forms of education and schooling that have been associated with the needs of different groups in society'.
(McCulloch 1998, p.4)

The three forms of education, which McCulloch refers to, are:

- 'Liberal' education for a small elite group based on the public schools and high status grammar and voluntary schools of the Victorian era.
- The technical and vocational education for skilled workers and the junior technical schools of the 1920s.
- The secondary technical and modern schools of the 1940s and 1950s where a broader relationship with industry and commerce was fostered.

These three strands, academic, technical and 'modern' are often referred to as the 'tripartite system' of English education and represent the platform from which post-16 vocational education, and indeed key skills have emerged and pathways carved.

Post-war education became a subject of policy debate in the 1950s, and the title 'technical' education not 'further education' was used and the focus was clearly on the needs of the economy. Wolf (1998, p.47) asserts that:

'Governments and students operate under a legacy of the highly bifurcated systems of the nineteenth century. This involved low-status mass education ending at about 14; and a very high-status academic pre-university system, which concentrated overwhelmingly on classics and mathematics.

In the mid 1970s the Government agency The Manpower Services Commission (MSC) began to fund ad hoc schemes of work preparation or work experience for young people who had left full-time education and failed to obtain employment. The type of training provided through the MSC was both college and work-based. The 'new FE' as it became known for a short time provided:

'New schemes (which) were concerned with social and life skills, and basic and generic skills, which would be relevant to a range of jobs and would, it was hoped, help young people to cope with changes in an uncertain labour market'. (Bailey, 1998, p.29)

The emergence of core skills

The concept of a 'core entitlement' of knowledge and skills as reflected in the Further Education Unit (FEU) paper *A Basis for Choice* (1979) was further developed by Kenneth Baker (DES, 1989) in a speech in which he argued for a broad based post-16 education. This speech in the view of Coates (1991) suggests represented the beginning of the modern definition of key skills. The education Baker (1989) referred to would aim for competence built on knowledge and understanding. A central feature of this 'new strategy' was the idea of a core curriculum for further education.

YTS and core skills

The 1981 White Paper, *A New Training Initiative: A Programme for Action* brought with it The Youth Training Scheme (YTS), of which Jonathan (1987, p.90) says:

‘The hallmark of the YTS, which is claimed by its designers to be its central element, is the Core Skills programme. A collection of 103 ‘skills’ which are generic and transferable, can be learned in quite diverse contexts, and as well as equipping young people for an unspecified range of occupational roles’.

So, ‘...it is suggested that the core areas...that provide the content for YTS’ (NCVO, 1984, p.10), a statement that encouraged Jonathon (1987, p.92) to comment:

‘If core skills is indeed the meat common to a range of incidentally varying sandwiches, or whether it is an opaque packaging device which simultaneously permits variety and inhibits quality control’.

The Technical and Vocational Training Initiative (TVEI)

Of the many aims of the TVEI steering group (TVEI Review, 1984) the following terms are of relevance in relation to the 14-18-target group where vocationalism and core skills are concerned. In the criteria it stated ‘...vocational education is to be interpreted as education in which students acquire generic or specific skills with a view to employment’. This resource-rich initiative, labelled ‘...vocationalism on the hoof’ by Holt (1987, p.56) embraced the resource-poor schools and colleges in the post-16 sector as a result of the funding it provided. In terms of ‘reform’ TVEI was influential in terms of highlighting the vocational route in schools and at the margins in colleges, and in raising the profile of the value of generic skills and their acquisition.

It is clear that the past 25 years in the education sector have been characterised by an on-going re-assessment and evaluation of the pivotal role government plays in shaping the nature of the provision. Priorities that are perceived to be central to the needs of the economy in relation to international competitiveness have tended to shape the post-16 education sector for much of the post-war period. Any research must place key

skills in the context of the overall competence based education and training movement, or as Burke (1989, p.1) calls it 'the quiet revolution'.

This 'revolution' and the implied need for 'a skills revolution' (Gleeson, 1998, p.86) has in effect fuelled government policy from the DES, and from 1996 the DfEE. This was primarily as a response to the perceived needs of industry (CBI, 1989, DoE, 1991, 1994), which tended to be in relation to fears associated with international competitiveness. As a result, successive Governments have sought to establish partnerships with employers and the education sector to:

'Facilitate access to relevant training and vocational education throughout working life for every member of the workforce, at every level from entry level to top management'. (DoE, 1988, p.15)

The influence of 'new vocationalism' (Hyland, 1994, p.75) has been both widespread and pervasive. As a result clear linkages exist between the growth of competence-based education and training and the demands and expectations that employers have of the education sector. At various times 'new' vocationalism and 'new' further education has seen the launch of vocational preparation and pre-vocational education, basic skills and work-related training, cores, competencies and modules. In the 1980s there were changing concepts and policies, reviews of contents, levels, and assessment and curricula as well as newly expressed enthusiasms and resistances.

Within the learning and skills agenda of the White Paper, *Competitiveness: Creating the Enterprise Centre of Europe* (DfEE, 1996), there is a section dedicated to key skills and it is suggested that '...employers demands for key skills are clear and consistent' (1996, p.43). It can be seen that successive White Papers have focused on the relationship between international competitiveness, economic recovery and the role of the country's education system. In 1997 the DfEE's *Review of Labour Market and Skill Trends* effectively summarises the themes that are perceived to shape the labour market in relation to:

- Matching labour supply to demand
- Relative unemployment rates (between regions)
- Identifying and articulating employers' skill needs

- Information and guidance needs, and
- The relevance of the curriculum and the responsiveness of providers.

It should also be noted that the creation of the DfEE both illustrates and symbolises the way in which central government has come to view the links between the education and employment sectors of the economy. In effect it could be seen to reflect the instrumentalist approach of the CBI (1989, p.5) focuses on key skills and reviews them in relation to:

- Technological change
- The move from manufacturing to service sector employment
- The increasing importance of certain general skills for the effectiveness of employees in a wide range of jobs.

The report confirms the importance and relevance of key skills in the curriculum from the employers' perspective. It also suggests that 'the Government has already taken measures to improve the UK's performance in key skills' (CBI, 1989, p.83).

It also welcomes the recommendations of the Beaumont Review (1996) for the:

'...further strengthening of the role of key skills in NVQs and of the Dearing Report's (1996) recommendations with regard to the monitoring by inspection bodies of key skills provision in education and training institutions'.

Since the White Paper *Employment for the 1990s*, (DES, 1990), the regionalised framework of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) has linked TEC funding to business plans that were aimed at supporting National Education and Training Targets (NETTs). These targets focused on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in a manner which Hyland (1993, p.25) suggests represents:

'A perfect symmetry between contemporary vocational education and training and policy, practice and the objectives of the NCVQ'.

The emphasis, as shaped by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) from its inception in 1986 and the subsequent publication *Criteria and Procedures* (NCVQ, 1989), has been on developing and promoting more flexible programmes. Certification has been linked to performance and competence and a

minimum of prescription regarding delivery mechanisms and assessment. This has meant that traditional models and perceptions of education and training have been challenged and re-evaluated. As Mitchell (1989, p.55) notes:

‘It was suggested that the whole process should start from the other end’ i.e. establishing the needs of a given ‘job’.

The situation has emerged whereby the current system of 16-19 education and training is characterised by divisions between:

- Academic and vocational courses
- Competence and knowledge-based conceptions of learning
- Modular and non-modular curricula
- Continuous and terminal assessment
- Part time and full time provision
- Schools and colleges
- State and independent institutions

This summary of the position in the late 1980s effectively encapsulates the challenge for policy makers and reformers as they continued to search to reshape and improve post-16 education and training in England. As such, education and training policy remains the subject of much political and educational debate and discussion. As Higham et al, (1996, p.1) suggest:

‘Policy making is not a linear, formulation - implementation process, but one that involves complex processes of reinterpretation and recontextualisation at different levels’.

GNVQ and core skills

GNVQs were first proposed in the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (1991, DES) to meet the need for qualifications which could:

‘Cover broad occupational areas and offer opportunities to develop relevant knowledge and understanding, gain an appreciation of how to apply them at work’.

‘Be of equal standing with academic qualifications at the same level’.
(DES, 1991, Vol. 1, p.19)

Hyland (1984, p.103) effectively summarises the policy environment that conceived and then produced GNVQs when he stated:

‘The policy process through which much of recent educational reform has been effected – top down, non consultative, backed up by assertion rather than research offer a paradigm example of the way in which contemporary policies are developed and established in practice’.

The policy process has been described as ‘impromptu’ and driven by what the DES required, which was a qualification that would cover broad occupational areas and offer opportunities to develop relevant knowledge and understanding.

Sharp (1997, p.20) is of the view that it was not surprising to see core skills incorporated into GNVQs,

‘By the 1990s they (core skills) were widely regarded as essential elements for vocational qualifications and there was increasing pressure to include them in academic qualifications as well’.

The seemingly growing importance of core skills did indeed lead to their incorporation and three (NCVQ Approved) were viewed as ‘mandatory’ within the GNVQ framework, these were:

- Communication (mandatory)
- Numeracy (mandatory), later renamed Application of Number
- Information Technology (mandatory)

- **Personal Skills** (two were NCVQ accredited in 1993)

This qualification in itself represented one specific attempt to bridge the academic-vocational divide by promoting the notion of enhanced general vocational skills as well as keeping a young person's options open with respect to progression to university. The hierarchy of qualifications included NVQs alongside more traditional qualifications as indicated in the table overleaf:

Table 1: Hierarchy of academic and vocational qualifications

Level of Qualification	General	Vocationally related
5	Higher Level Qualifications	
4		
3	'A' level	Advanced GNVQ
Advanced level		
2	GCSE Grades A-C	Intermediate GNVQ
Intermediate level		
1	GCSE Grades D-G	Foundation GNVQ
Foundation level		
Entry level	Certificate of Educational Achievement	

The result of this national initiative has been the marked growth of NVQs, and of GNVQs in the early to mid 1990s, and via the Dearing Review of 16-19 Qualifications (1996), for which a range of recommendations was forthcoming relating to:

‘...ways to strengthen, consolidate and improve the framework of 16-19 qualifications’. (Dearing, 1996, para. 1.1).

This work also included an assessment of the value of key skills in 16-19 education and training and also the recommendation that they become an integral part of the

Modern Apprenticeship initiative (launched in 1995) and of the proposed National Traineeships.

The Dearing Report (1996) recommended that the term 'key skills' should replace 'core skills' within the national policy and development framework. From this time NCVQ and Lead Bodies such as Edexcel, The City and Guilds of London Institute and The Royal Society of Arts began to use the term 'key skills'. Previously they were more likely to use the alternative terms as used in association with BTEC/Edexcel National Certificate and Diploma courses i.e. 'common' or 'core skills'.

Today the term 'key skills' is increasingly used in by employers, colleges and by policy makers to define those generic skills that individuals need in order to be effective members of a flexible, adaptable and competitive workforce. As a result of the work of the NCVQ (1995, 1996), and the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA, 1998) on NVQs and key skills in particular, the post-16 sector received a series of recommendations, prescriptions and guidelines on how to 'manage', 'deliver' and 'assess' key skills at student, course, candidate and at an institutional/centre level.

Policy developments (1997 and 1998)

Action in 1997 and 1998 in respect of the development of Key Skills was taken on a number of fronts. A single key skills qualification, aimed at 16-19 year olds, covering the key skills at levels 1-3, was piloted (through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and is now available across all post-16 qualification pathways (GCSE, 'A' Level, GNVQ, NVQ) and related programmes, such as Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and National Traineeships (NTs).

Policy makers now view key skills as an important aspect of the 'gateway' element of the Government's welfare reforms within the 'New Deal' initiative for the medium to-long term unemployed, as well as being part of any post-gateway education and training. In addition the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) committed itself to develop and promote good key skills practice and commissioned a variety of research projects to support effective key skills management in colleges.

In the influential reports *Learning Works* (FEFC, 1997), the DfEE response to the Kennedy Report *Further Education for the New Millennium* (1998) and the DfEE Green Paper *The Learning Age* (1998, p.8), the DfEE was to continue the theme of 'learning' as the key to prosperity, and notes that:

'To achieve stable and sustainable growth, we will need a well educated, well equipped and adaptable workforce'.

Kennedy (1997, p.16) also suggests that:

'The Government should state its aspiration for all to achieve a level 3 qualification including key skills to provide for the platform for the creation of a self-perpetuating learning society'.

Key skills have been developed in a changing and challenging policy context. Furthermore, they have been defined, refined and applied in a variety of ways, by a host of bodies, and it is within this context that this research is grounded.

Vocationalism and aspects of core and then key skills provision have emerged from an essentially elitist English education system where the needs of the few have been well served at the expense of the majority. The working class child has grown up in a system whereby technical and vocational education started life in the school sector in the 1930s and then in the post war period took a more central role as the needs of the economy took precedence. The history of key skills indicates that the post-war period can be reviewed in six phases.

Phase 1: The creation of junior technical schools in the 1920s.

Phase 2: The Education Act, 1944 and the creation of Secondary technical schools in the 1940s and 1950s.

Phase 3: The 1956 White Paper and the subsequent investment into building colleges.

Phase 4: 1960s, Economic Growth and the challenge to tripartism.

Phase 5: 1970s and 1980s, Economic Decline and Government Intervention.

Phase 6: 1984 - 1992, the formal emergence of the competence based training (CBT) movement and the introduction of GNVQs.

The convergence of both an agenda to reform post-16 qualifications as a result of the 1991 White Paper: *Education and Training for the 21st Century* and the subsequent introduction of core skills into GNVQs effectively completes the picture in relation to this research.

It is also linked with an overarching vision that the academic/vocational divide and the tensions that surround it can, in part be addressed by the application of some form of 'core skill/core curriculum' of 'transferable skills' that would benefit the individual, society and the economy as a whole.

The purpose of the thesis

The purpose of the thesis was to investigate how practitioners in general further education colleges, since incorporation in 1992 up to and including 1999, have responded to the relatively new phenomenon of 'key skills'. The primary focus was to investigate how practitioners have sought to operationalise choices with regard to the management of teaching of key skills. In particular it was designed to reflect how college policies relating to key skills have been implemented, and reviews the middle-management perspective of the management of key skills teaching. It takes into consideration the work of Dearing (1996) who recommended the introduction of a national framework of qualifications.

This work also acknowledges the drive towards the creation of a coherent post-16 qualification framework that emerges from both *Qualifying for Success* (1997), *The Education Act* (1997) and *The Learning Age* (1998). It could not respond to the reforms prompted in The White Paper, *Learning to Succeed – a new framework for post-16 learning* (1999) or the subsequent Learning and Skills Act (2000) as field work was completed in early 2000.

Issues associated with key skills in 'AS' programmes or the implications of key skills within the Curriculum 2000 framework such as 'end tests for key skills' are not included in this research. However Chapter 7, in the section 'A Way Forward ?' offers suggestions that support a more 'inclusive approach' to the management and teaching of key skills in post-16 education.

In seeking to discuss the perceptions of those charged with implementing key skills policies the decision was made to exclude the perceptions of both those who make decisions, senior managers and those on the receiving end, the students.

It excludes an assessment of a range of broader organisational factors that may have shaped the policy responses of colleges and any review from a management perspective of the relationship between key skills and the broader curriculum. In addition the student perspective of the management of key skills teaching were also excluded. This would have considerably broadened the remit of the research and deflected the researcher from the main focus, that of the management of the teaching of key skills from a practitioners perspective. The findings and recommendations can be considered in the broader context of the management of change and as such provide a platform for further research. This research is designed to add to the body of key skills research through its focus on one specific aspect of the management of key skills teaching.

The thesis also reviews specific institutional responses to the prescriptions in the official literature of the NCVQ (the Qualifications Curriculum Authority, from October 1997) and the guidance from the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) from 2000 regarding 'best practice'.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this research were related to the following aspects of the management of key skills teaching from a practitioner's perspective:

- Organisation structure
- College policies
- Student admissions
- Learner support
- Course management
- Key skills assessment
- Internal verification

- **Learning and physical resources**

The initial thrust of this work was linked to obtaining data regarding the implications of ‘organisational choices’ at a corporate level on practitioners with specific reference to the management of key skills teaching, and the perceived effect such choices have had at all levels in the sector. The focus of the thesis was on the different ways a particular category of post-16 FEFC funded colleges, one that is representative of the sector as a whole, have interpreted and applied the ‘guidelines’ and ‘advice’ provided by curriculum policy makers. The policy makers are represented by the DfEE via NCVQ (and the QCA from 1998). In addition the advice, guidance and support of agencies such as the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) are also considered.

This research represents an assessment of the manner in which practitioners have perceived that institutions have adapted and developed to manage key skills as part of their overall services to their students.

Research questions

The following broad research questions were designed as a starting point for further investigation into key skills through the methods detailed in Chapter 3, Methodology.

1. Organisational structure: where key skills ‘fit in’

This involved a review of management, staffing and organisational issues.

2. Key skills client groups

This was designed to establish which clients the college has elected to serve.

3. College policies

This question sought to establish if colleges had formal policies relating to key skills.

4. Student admissions: initial screening and learner support

This question sought to establish the precise role of any Admissions or Student Services Unit in a college and what role did it play regarding initial key skills screening.

5. Course management

It was important to establish where students receive input and support with respect to key skills. It was of value to assess the quality of the individual learner’s experience

through a review of a broad range of factors that influence and shape course management.

6. Key skills assessment

Who assesses competence with regard to key skills? Was it for example a vocational tutor, key skills specialist, or even some form of partnership arrangement?

7. Internal verification

What were the policy arrangements applied for internal verification and moderation, and when did internal verification take place?

8. Learning resources and physical resources

What learning resources were used, how were they used? In addition what physical resources were available to support 'independent learning'?

Summary

The history and policy context as summarised effectively sets the scene in which key skills have emerged, developed, and 'matured' into what could be called a 'serviceable inventory' for practitioners to apply. Such policies have served to generate a major agenda for change for those managing and working in the post-16 sector to implement and as such deserved further investigation.

Key skills are of major significance in the post-compulsory English education sector as part of the competence-based education and training revolution. To a large extent policy has prescribed, via the NCVQ, how colleges should seek to integrate key skills into post-16 vocational courses or even provide them as 'free-standing' qualifications. Education policies concerned with key skills have represented major challenges for all colleges at all levels of operation as they seek to provide their students with the education and training they value and require. This work focused on one particular strata within organisations and reviews the impact key skills have had to date. It does so on the basis that between policy conceived in overarching terms and the minutiae of educational practice there is the middle ground of intention, which incorporates the ability and motivation to change. This research seeks to review at the organisational level how colleges have responded to such changes with respect to the management of key skills teaching.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the main themes and issues associated with the relatively new phenomenon of the management of key skills teaching. Whilst the international perspective on key skills is acknowledged (FEFC, 1995, FEFC, 1999, Green, 1995), a comparative evaluation is outside of the remit of the research itself.

The chapter is structured as follows:

- Definitions and concepts of key skills
- The economic rationale for key skills
- The management of curriculum change
- Organisational and management issues relating to key skills

Definitions of key skills

The aim of this section is to seek to provide an effective modern definition of core/key skills. It should be noted that the very title ‘core skills’ emerged out of a plethora of initiatives where terms like ‘core curriculum’, ‘core competence’ and ‘common skills’, were sometimes used interchangeably. Oates (1992, p.227) is a particularly influential commentator in this field, and in his development work for NCVQ (Appendix 1), was prompted to make the point that historians:

‘May be amused at the plethora of developments around core skills, transferable skills and common skills. Why the different terms for ostensibly the same things, why have so many initiatives come and gone and why the ebb and flow of enthusiasm for these things?’

Tribe (1996, p.17,) hones in on the first of these sets to suggest ‘they are crucial to the understanding of the aims of core skills’. However, in Beaumont’s (1996) *Review of 100 NVQs*, he stated:

‘There is a widely held belief that core skills are important, but not total agreement about what they are’. (1996, p.15)

Although Tribe (1996, p.22) does concede that ‘...we are now much closer in our quest for the source of these (transferable) skills’, nonetheless in his research he summarises the challenge for researchers and practitioners alike when he wrote that the search for a definition of core skills:

‘Soon demonstrates a diversity of lists and terminologies’. Tribe (1996, p.13)

Both Oates (1992) and Tribe (1996) were writing at a time when the core/key skills debate should really have been ‘over’ due in part to the introduction of GNVQs which effectively formalised their definition and role in the post-16 education sector.

Practitioners, over the past 25 years, have been confused by a range of associated issues linked with ‘core/key skills’. This applies to their ‘application’, ‘delivery’, ‘assessment’ and ‘transferability’. Higham (1997, p.4) for example notes that the term:

‘“Core skill” is used liberally in post-16 education to denote a wide range of curricular components that can only loosely be defined as skills’.

In search of ‘common skills’

The notion of a ‘common skill’ is problematic for Hyland and Johnson (1998, p.165). In their scathing attack on key skills they suggest that:

‘A common error in this area involves making the false move from identifying features common to different skills and, from this, inferring the existence of a common skill’.

Several terms have been used that seem at first sight to cover similar ground, i.e. ‘core skills’, ‘common learning outcomes’, ‘common elements’ etc. According to Oates (1996) in his ongoing work for the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in the period 1979-1983 alone there were 22 ‘key skill frameworks’ (Appendix 2) which included:

- Frameworks which contained implicit listings of key skills (such as skills examined in educational settings and in traditional qualifications), and
- Frameworks designed explicitly to develop key skills.

The notion of the term 'core' itself is also lent to a variety of approaches, core subjects, core modules and common elements in a variety of courses. This has fuelled the confusion about what exactly a common or key skill actually is.

Kypri and Faraday (FEDA, 1998, p.1) undertook research to attempt to define key skills. Their conclusion being that:

'There is no definitive list of core/key skills'.

However they did offer a useful summary of eight approaches taken in England that in effect provided a range of definitions of key skills and a further 12 forms of accreditation of key skills including a brief summary of the assessment mechanisms used.

The Further Education Unit (FEU)

As indicated in chapter 1 the Further Education Unit (FEU, 1979, pp 29-30), in its publication *A Basis for Choice* needs serious consideration. In assessing the work of the FEU, Tribe, (1996, p.13) suggests that the FEU can:

'...lay claim to being the inspiration for core skills' with the following list of a 'common core of skills'.

A Basis for Choice produced a potential solution for the growing confusion of one-year pre-employment courses being provided for the uncommitted school leaver. The specific remit of the work of the FEU was in part for them to indicate their views on:

'The appropriate bases, components and balance of curricula for the target group of individuals, and the associated teaching, learning and assessment methods'. (FEU, p.1, para 4a).

The FEU's idea core curriculum for post-16 students lies within the overarching context of vocationalism in post-16 education, employability and core skills.

Manpower Services Commission (MSC, 1984) and Core skills in Youth Training Scheme (YTS) programmes (1984)

The Manpower Services Commission (MSC) was the agency tasked with addressing youth unemployment and the 'upskilling' of young people. The MSC core skills

initiative was funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the UK Government in four regional projects. Each project worked with 200 trainees and their tutors. Common components were viewed as important in the context of designing a central platform for many youth related skills development programmes. The framework was as follows:

Number	32 skills	in	5 groups
Communication	26 skills	in	3 groups
Problem-solving	22 skills	in	3 groups
Practical	23 skills	in	3 groups
Total	103 skills		14 groups

The model was underpinned by extensive theorisation on ‘skills transfer’ and ‘underpinning competence’.

The prescriptive and complex approach taken by the MSC led to issues of overlap and category confusion and suffered from an inadequately supported implementation strategy, which effectively shortened its operational life. Myers (1992, p.625) in particular suggested:

‘It is underpinned by the belief that if the ‘same skill’ occurs in several contexts then there is scope for transfer of key skill across those contexts. The approach lacks theoretical support and there is little evidence to say if it can be successful’.

It could be concluded that the work of the MSC was of value to those interested in redefining core skills, and even of value in relation to an attempt to map core skills. However, inadequate implementation and limited understanding by ‘end users’ led to their demise as a practical tool in the world on core skill transferability.

Youth training and ‘core skills’

The FEU (1983, p.30) noted that in Youth Training Schemes (YTS) five ‘core skills’ were included:

- Numeracy
- Communications
- Problem solving
- Information technology
- Manipulative dexterity

The youth training initiative was, from a governmental and employers' perspective, was designed to support the concept of a core competence curriculum model for those young people who left school without the perceived 'appropriate level' of skills and qualifications. The underlying assumption being that well qualified school leavers would obtain 'appropriate employment' as the logical outcome of their success in obtaining a requisite number of 'O' levels, and young people who did not succeed would require further vocational 'core skill' training.

Certificate in Pre-Vocational Qualification Education (CPVE)

In 1985 CPVE overtook the work of TVEI with respect to Core Skills. Like TVEI it was a pre-vocational 16+ qualification intended to be a means of rationalising the separate qualifications from competing awarding bodies. Coverage of the core had to be embedded into the three classes of modules – introductory (initial assessment and identification of area(s) of interest); exploratory (exploration of a specific vocational area); and preparatory (development of skills for entry into a specific vocational area). There were five core areas:

Communication and social skills	21 skills in 7 groups
Applied numeracy	9 skills in 3 groups
Problem solving	6 skills in 2 groups
Science, technology and Information Technology	12 skills in 4 groups
Social, industrial and economic awareness	12 skills in 4 groups

Total 60 skills 20 groups

As with the MSC initiative, the ideas were dependent upon those managing the initiative to have a regard for the value of core skills in practice. There was a complex profiling and recording process, with no final summary grade. Both factors led to problems at practitioner level in that the challenges of recording non-mandatory core skills meant that the core skills initiative within CPVE fell into disrepute.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and key skills

The CBI (1989, para 43) went further than just a passing comment on '...the failure of Higginson' that Coates (1991, p.44) referred to above in that they went on to offer their own suggested list of core skills:

- Values and integrity

- Effective communication
- Applications of numeracy
- Applications of technology
- Understanding of work and the World
- Personal and interpersonal skills
- Problem solving
- Positive attitudes to change

In doing so the CBI were seeking ‘...education and training of the right sort’ (Coates, 1991, p.44). The CBI presented an instrumentalist view of core skills and breadth and balance was viewed very much from an employer’s perspective of education.

The CBI’s preliminary definition was reinforced in their 1994 publication *Thinking Ahead* when they endorsed the NCC and later the NCVQ approach to core skills although the main focus for its publication was to seek to influence the higher education sector.

From the NCC to the NCVQ

When Kenneth Baker (1989) spoke of seeking out a ‘core entitlement’ he offered an ‘illustrative list core skills’ for consideration. The list below emerged very nearly intact in the subsequent work of the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). The purposes of this list were stated to be those of enhancement and enrichment of learning in both education and employment:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- Personal relations (e.g. team-working and leadership)
- Familiarity with technology
- Familiarity with systems (e.g. office and workshop procedures, employment hierarchies)
- Familiarity with changing working and social contexts (DES, 1989, paras 24 and 42)

Baker’s (1989) initiative clearly encouraged his successor John MacGregor to take the concept forward, and he referred to core skills as what:

‘...all students need to be equipped to take their place in a modern economy’.
(Coates, 1991, p.45)

He went on to commission further detailed proposals, and these duly arrived from both the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the Schools Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC). The NCC gave consideration to ‘core themes’ designed to provide guiding principles for curriculum design from which six core skills were suggested. These core themes linked back to the notion of a core curriculum suggested by the FEU (1979). Unlike the CBI, the DES began to link the core skills debate with a range of broader questions regarding a ‘Core curriculum’ or ‘Core themes’ and commented on the nature and structure of vocational education and training curriculum’.

The NCC (1990, p.8) definition of Core Skills which followed comprised of the following:

- Problem solving
- Communication
- Personal skills
- The application of mathematics
- Information technology
- Competence in a foreign language

What emerged from this phase of the development of a definition of core skills is a set of competing definitions of what could be termed ‘core vocational competencies’. At all times however the underlying theme was linked to young people needing to be equipped for employment, hence the NCC emphasis on ‘core themes’ to support curriculum design. However the defence of ‘A’ levels by John McGregor as noted by Lawson, (1992, p.90) meant that any core skills initiative at that time could proceed in relation to vocational education and training initiatives only, and for the next few years this would be the case.

Core skills - the BTEC definition

From around this time (1985) the City and Guilds and Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) were attempting to grasp the 'Core skills' nettle through the Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE, 1985, p.8). By 1986 (BTEC, 1986, p.8) formulated what could be called a mainstream post-16 vocational 'core skills'. These were:

- Self development skills
- Communicating and working effectively others
- Information, quantitative and numerical skills
- Practical skills

Colleges which offered BTEC First, National or Higher National qualifications were required to meet (i) overall quality criteria on validity, reliability and utility in designing their assessment schemes, (ii) award skills at pass, merit and distinction. However BTEC did not specify grade related criteria, nor a precise assessment approach.

BTEC went on to re-define these common skills in 1991 (BTEC, 1991, p.5) as follows:

- Managing and developing self
- Working with and relating to others
- Communicating
- Managing tasks and solving problems
- Applying numeracy
- Applying technology
- Applying design and creativity

The objective of BTEC at this time was to encourage 'providers' to integrate these common skills into all BTEC validated programmes, with the support of 'moderators' appointed by BTEC.

GNVQs and core skills

The GNVQ initiative was launched in September 1992 and the following ‘core skill specifications’ were published at five levels. The first three core skills listed below were ‘mandatory’ i.e. the core skills ‘outcomes’ had to be achieved as an integral part of the qualification.

The full list of core skills used as part of all GNVQ programmes emerged as follows:

Table 2 – Core Skills 1990 - 1996

Original idea (1990)	NCVQ accredited key skill units (1992)
1. Communications	1. Communication
2. Numeracy	2. Application of Number
3. Information Technology	3. Information Technology
4. Personal Skills	4. Working with Others 5. Improving own Learning and Performance
5. Problem Solving	Developed but not accredited
6. Modern Foreign Language units	Units developed but not designated as ‘key skills’

Following discussions with 40 key developers and policy makers, the title ‘Numeracy’ was thought to be too closely connected to the basic skills work of the late 1970s and 1980s. ‘*Application of Number*’ was adopted because it emphasised the importance of application and not just rehearsal. Secondly, the *Personal Skills* area was divided into two areas: *Improving own Learning and Performance* and *Working with Others*. The first of these emphasises action planning and reviewing, and with promoting systematic skill transfer. *Working with Others* picks up collaboration and teamwork, which is designed to link employment and education settings.

This, to a large extent summed up the situation in 1992. Core skills were given a ‘modern definition’ and were legitimised by educational policy makers and their ‘agents’, the lead bodies when they were applied in a national qualification for full-time students.

The fact that core skills now resided at the heart of a qualification that was seeking to offer both academic rigour, competence based training, portfolio building and external

testing sent out the message that core skills had been defined. Furthermore they were defined for an 'important' and potentially large national cohort that would go on to use this qualification to progress to 'good jobs' as well as part and full-time Higher Education.

When core became key

One of the more recent outcomes from of the *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 year olds* (Dearing, 1996) was noted by Hyland and Johnson (1998, p.164) when they said that:

'Without any noticeable preamble or explanation, the core areas suddenly became known as key skills'.

Dearing (1996, p.6) refers to 'core skills' in his report, but by Section 7, with reference to '...improving skills for work and lifetime learning' he refers to 'developing the key skills' (Dearing, 1996, p.50) – and a new label was given to core skills, key skills had officially arrived. What we can learn from Dearing's review is that whilst he accepted the existing definition of core skills he was also prepared to acknowledge gaps and criticisms of core skills in GNVQ programmes.

Summary

The literature reviewed establishes that the period 1979-1992 was a very important formative time for core/key skills, a time when definitions were suggested by a variety of interested parties in line with their own priorities. From a policy perspective Baker (1989) started the modern debate, one that the FEU paper *A Basis for Choice* (1989) attempted to grasp.

The critical 'middle period' for core skills was in the mid-1990s, when the NCVQ was formed on recommendation of the DeVille (1986) *Review of Vocational Qualifications*. At this time many of the 'old definitions' of core skills had become redundant by when GNVQs encapsulated key skills within the qualification that policy makers perceived to be the qualification that would play a major role in bridging the academic-vocational divide.

All the frameworks in use up to and including the academic year commencing September 1998 used the QCA approved list of key skills. They are focused on 'training' 'transferability' and 'employability' and this development 'generated remarkably little debate' (Tribe, 1996). Perhaps this was due in part because core/key skills have become increasingly subsumed into the broader vocational imperative in post-16 education. An alternative explanation could be that practitioners in the sector were and remained confused by policy developments that they had little confidence in either maturing or having any impact in the classroom.

What has been demonstrated in this trawl of definitions, in theory at least, is the apparent victory of instrumentalism in the manner in which core/key skills have been defined, refined, prescribed and perhaps even applied in vocational programmes since 1979 through to 1992, particularly in relation to GNVQs.

The economic rationale for key skills

Introduction

The link between learning, skills, competitiveness and aspects of key skills are of central importance to the key skills debate. The theme, as summarised in the 1996 White Paper, *Competitiveness, Creating the Enterprise Centre of Europe* (1996, p.34) is that:

'The quality and relevance of education and training are therefore ever more central to competitive performance'.

The 1996 White paper was the third of such competitiveness White Papers produced by the Conservative Government and it was influenced by both the White Paper, *Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win* (1994) and in the following year the White Paper, *Competitiveness, Forging Ahead* (1995).

This social reality and the development of 'core/key skills' should not be overlooked when consideration is given to the declining level of competitiveness of industry and the perceived level of preparedness of young people for work at the end of their compulsory education. Hughes (1979 p.3) for example serves to highlight a common theme when he writes:

‘School leavers are the fastest growing section of the unemployed, and traditional structures for preparing people for the ‘World of work’ are becoming drastically inappropriate. Young people need to be prepared for a world in which the nature of work itself is rapidly changing, and the system must find ways of opening itself up to these changes’.

The work related further education curriculum

Until the 1970s the further education curriculum was largely the province of examining bodies concerned about specific knowledge relevant to specific occupations. The spur for change in the mid to late 1970s was related to ‘...economic pressures, unemployment and the politics of alternative approaches to work-related post-compulsory education’ (Silver, 1990, p.102). Much time has been given in pursuit of a definition of employment needs and the FEFC spoke of:

‘Improving the learning opportunities and the transition to working life of that 50% of our 16-19 year old population which is not currently being served by our education and training systems’. (FEU, 1981, p.8)

In England Government White Papers (1991, 1994, 1996) acknowledged that decades of failure to invest in Education have potentially pushed the country towards becoming a low wage, low productivity economy. As a result significant aspects of the post-compulsory sector have been highlighted in government policy.

Vocational preparation was seen as the new legitimisation of the essentials of industrial capitalism of which Higham (1998, p.3) suggests:

‘Important skills are the abilities to transfer and adapt ways of working from one context to another and to learn new skills as business practice changes’.

Two White Papers which emerged in the 1980s helped to focus on the pre-vocational education - *A New Training Initiative* (1981) and *Training for Jobs* (1984). The 1981 White Paper, which led to the creation of the Youth Training System (YTS) offered the following key points relating to its aims:

‘To ensure that the school curriculum develops the personal skills needed for working life’ (para12), and in paragraph 24 reference is made the following reference to ‘useful skills’.

Additionally there was reference to the specific skills of numeracy, literacy and communication skills, but not to ‘...the skills employers will want in the future’.

The FEU in *A Basis for Choice* (1979) as summarised earlier in this chapter explored skills and competencies and emphasises activity-based learning at a time of perceived economic and social change and stressed the importance of the applicability of knowledge and skills to practical, employment-oriented contexts. The FEU according to Pring:

‘...set out principles for addressing the problems of diversity in a time of economic and social change. In doing so, it challenged many of the preconceptions about either the educational process of learning and dominated the curriculum of both colleges and schools’. (Pring, 1998, p.118)

Preparation for employment is clear-cut in further education. How broad or how flexible that work-orientated preparation should be is often in dispute, and by definition the role of core/key skills is often disputed. Silver suggests that:

‘The conventional wisdom has asserted the need to espouse general skills that are transferable between occupations in a changing economy’. (Silver, 1990, p.119)

In relation to a broad curriculum reform agenda the CBI (1993, p.11) has perhaps best summarised the economic argument underpinning the contribution core (key) skills could make as part of some on-going reform when they said:

‘As firms must anticipate change, they need employees with a breadth of ability. This means having core transferable skills such as communication, problem solving and personal skills, which are essential in almost any business context’.

Again in 1989 the CBI (1989, p.25) was of the view that:

‘Core skills have not had significant prominence in relation to subject knowledge or specific occupational skills... Yet it is the core that provides the required breadth and balance’.

The fear for policy makers and reformers alike must surely be one of employers taking short-term solutions, thus reducing the motivation of young people and their

teachers to undertake courses, however they are 'enriched', perhaps even by the 'integration' of key skills.

Linking education and economic prosperity

There is the overarching viewpoint that education and economic prosperity are closely linked, and that educationalists should design and then provide those courses that employers see as necessary to their particular sector. Hughes (1979 p.5), in looking to offer ideas to shape the future, argued:

'The urgency of a constructive contribution of a renewed programme of educational expansion and development in tackling the quite unresolved structural problems of the British economy and of British society generally'.

The influential factors that shape their thinking are those of economic recession and the restructuring of the economy in line with the objectives of the government of the day. This '...end of the liberal consensus and the re-assertion of the economic and vocational function of education' (Hyland, 1991 p.78) in recent times has since been reflected in various DES and DfEE publications. Historical record shows that interest in vocational education increases during periods of economic difficulty. Yeomans, (1996, p.4) states:

'Acronyms multiplied as general policy statements were translated into specific programmes and courses – YOPS, YTS, CPVE, DVE, NVQs, GNVQs – the list is itself evidence of both continuity and flux – the problem remained constant, the means of tackling it ever-changing'.

Of the many 'blooms' (Barker, 1987) that emerged from the late 1970s onwards was an overall policy of 'vocationalisation' as exemplified by the Technical and Vocational Training Initiative (TVEI), the Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) and by the early 1990s the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Young (1998, p.55) links these developments to what he calls 'occupationalism', or more specifically 'behavioural occupationalism' which he says:

'underlies concepts such as transferable skills and skill ownership and the performance definitions of competence associated with NVQs'.

Employers generally view a skilful workforce as one that can adapt to and learn new skills as business practices change. As Higham (1997, p.3) notes

‘It is the additional perception ‘core skill’ as a potential unifying element across the different academic and vocational areas that makes them so appealing’.

According to Oates (1996, p.4), Government policy:

‘...began to recognise the place of education and training within overall economic development, increasing the strategic importance of vocational qualifications, and by pursuing vigorously innovation and increased coherence in vocational qualifications’.

Education in the ‘marketplace’

The new vocational education and training marketplace as signalled by the 1988 Education Reform Act has been noted to parallel the financial flexibility strategy common in many large British companies. Freedland (1988, p.5) suggested that pre and post-16 education and training reforms are striving to raise attainment. Clearly this approach has at its heart the market driven notions of empowering the consumer; the promotion of increased institutional responsiveness and increased employer power. What could be called the ‘imperative to reform’ is linked to international competitiveness in its broadest sense and the overall view that Britain:

‘...must compete in the high technology, high added value markets’
(Whiteside, 1992, p.4).

Britain has experienced a post-war economy for which the consensus collapsed amid mounting inflation, a balance of payments deficit, currency depreciation, rising unemployment and bitter industrial conflicts. As Chitty (1985, p.58) notes:

‘It was unfortunate that the economic difficulties of Western societies in the years that followed 1973 served to challenge the liberal and expansionist beliefs of the 1960s.’

In a discussion paper prepared by the Training Services Agency (TSA) at the request of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) published in 1975, the tension was clearly outlined:

‘It is increasingly important to help young people to develop an awareness of the world of work, and the way in which wealth is produced and used in society. The social environment in a number of schools, with more emphasis on personal development and less on formal instruction, has been diverging from that still encountered in most work situations. With the need to achieve results in conformity with defined standards and to do so within fixed time-limits calls for different patterns of behaviour’ (MSC/TSA, 1975, p.15).

The CBI (1989) and the DES (1989) have both stressed the importance of international comparisons, and both organisations have suggested that Britain compared poorly with its major economic competitors in terms of participation and achievement levels. Coates (1991) refers to the common theme of:

‘The changing nature of employment, which implied a need not only for more education and training, but also for education and training of the right sort’ (Coates, 1991, p.44).

The CBI (1989, p.16) have offered the view that ‘...people have become the key to competitiveness’ and in parallel Porter (1990, p.720) stated that:

‘Britain will not regain innovation-driven status without a world class education and training system encompassing all socio-economic and ability levels’.

These points clearly underpin the views of Guthrie and Pierce (1990, p.180) when they comment on the issue of how to maintain or restore international competitiveness as ‘...currently the most intense force propelling national policy’.

In a society where education and training are seen to play a crucial role in restoring international competitiveness, Finegold and Soskice (1998, p.21) wrote:

‘The role education and training can play is in terms of the transition of the workforce in new industries at a macro-level. At a micro-level where firms producing high quality, specialised goods and services require a well qualified workforce capable of rapid adjustment in the work process and continual product innovation’.

In 1989 the TUC published *Skills 2000* which to a large extent confirmed the CBI's values and views on international competitiveness. It catalogued the lack of qualifications held by school leavers and made unflattering international comparisons, but it does make a passing reference to core skills, without actually naming them:

‘To ensure that...qualifications are relevant without being narrowly job-specific, the NCVQ must ensure that awards involve educationally-based skills - abilities to reason, analyse and apply knowledge in standard and changing situations’. (TUC, 1989, p.21)

The agenda of both the CBI and TUC may in the broadest sense have contributed to the development of government policy, and their priorities may at the macro level be of significance to society and the economy as a whole. They have not formulated strategies specifically related to key skills, although they have noted their importance, but they can effect change at the micro level in time via the ‘vocational curriculum’.

Summary

The driving force for change in the post-16 education sector has to a large extent been the perceived needs of the economy. At various times the CBI, the DES and prominent employers have been critical of the education sector for the quality of the supply of young people into the world of work. This has created pressure on policy makers to design a curriculum that would serve specific needs and help people to be able to cope with change because they had a number of transferable skills.

At the same time ‘vocationalism’ has developed and aspects of the post-16 curriculum have at various times considered and experimented with the core curriculum and core skills as central and ‘bolt-on’ features of specified initiatives. The economic justification for core skills is tied up with transferability. Criticisms tend to be linked to relevance of the vocational curriculum itself – employers have rarely differentiated between the two. Sometimes there has been clarity in both policy and practice in relation to national economic ‘necessities’, but more often than not there has been confusion and competition through the ‘pathways’. This confusion from an employer perspective has led to questions of the relevance of educational provision been put at the door of policy makers and practitioners alike.

The management of curriculum change

Introduction

In this section the process of educational change is reviewed, and in particular the management of curriculum change and the role of practitioners in the change process. Consideration is also given to how key skills have been managed and implemented in the higher education sector in order to highlight the issues, similarities and alternative approaches taken in the post-compulsory education sector.

The change process

‘Change’, or more specifically policy driven change is designed to have a direct impact upon organisations and individuals and the type of change strategy adopted ‘is intimately linked to the kind of strategic planning which is undertaken’ (Levacic, 1997, p.9). The concept of change raises questions regarding targets and outcomes, and the process or journey may be and usually is, therefore far from being linear and far removed from the principles of Taylorism (Taylor, 1911).

The questions that emerge in the first instance are those such as how do we know when a change initiative has been successful? Does it have to a ‘major’ change in order to generate some form of response from those required to implement change and those who the change process is likely to effect? Finally what compromises (Meadows, 1992) have had to be made at an organisational level in order for ‘change’ to be accepted?

The study of change

A study of ‘change’ is normally concerned with the investigation and implementation of ‘here and now issues’ and the problems that arise in practice, (Senge, 1990, Sheehan, 1996). Attempts to judge the nature and extent of changes that have occurred is a difficult and complex task. Further, the idea that change can be managed at all is questionable (Fullan, 1994, FEU, 1993, Meadows, 1992), and according to Handy, (1999, p.292):

‘To ‘manage change’ is wishful thinking, implying as it does that one not only knows where to go and how to get there, but can persuade everyone else to travel there’.

Educational policy mandates and policy developments are designed to bring about change, to ‘improve the quality of pupil learning’ (Stoll and Fink, 2001, p.7). Change is not necessarily a response to policy developments, it may also be in response to a range of other factors. Examples include organisational problems (Bull, 1994), a major curriculum initiative such as the introduction of GNVQs (DES, 1992), or in response to the ‘incorporation’ of the further education sector, on the relevance and importance of which Lumby (2000, p.33) reflects:

‘Times of change as profound as those experienced following incorporation are inevitably deeply disturbing and unsettling’.

Change, that which is brought about by external pressure generates uncertainty within organisations (Carnall, 1997) and brings into play the competing priorities of quality, equity and efficiency which at times practitioners may find difficult to either understand or implement, (Hatch, 2000, Levacic, 2000). New policies, both external and internal can influence resource allocation and in the case of curriculum change such as GNVQs (DES, 1992) prescribe the content of practice. But changes take time and often have unexpected effects and policy makers can be oblivious to the implications that the changes that they seek to introduce have on practitioners. (Elmore and McLaughlin, 1998, Stoll and Fink, 2001). Plus, whilst most proposed change policies and initiatives are made from a rational perspective and are ‘axiomatic to organisational life’ (West-Burnham (1990, p.93). They are often normative in nature and they may initially fail to achieve the outcomes that they were seeking because they ignore the culture of the organisation (Sarason, 1982). This could be in part because they fail to understand the importance of the ‘local characteristics’ at an institutional level that are central importance in the implementation process (Fullan 2001).

Policy driven change and the further education sector

As indicated in chapter 1 and reiterated above, the further education sector underwent a series of major changes in the 1990s when concerns had been expressed about

curriculum content and context and how future educational reforms could be implemented (Raffe, 1984). There was considerable concern about the inadequacy of post-compulsory education and training (Finegold and Soskice, 1998, NEDO/MS. 1984, CBI, 1989). There has also been debate about the 'kind of skills' and knowledge that were perceived to be needed in the future (Finegold et al, 1990) and 'widespread support for in principle at least, for a broader curriculum' (Spours and Young, 1998, p.202). The proposals for a broader curriculum included consideration and then the formal adoption of core skills in one part of the post-compulsory curriculum.

The 1991 White Paper, Education and Training for the 21st Century (DfE, 1991) represented an attempt to set an agenda for change at policy level that included a centralist and system-wide approach to qualifications reform. GNVQs challenged deep seated assumptions about mainstream assessment policy, as Williams (1999, p.251 has noted '...the implementation of GNVQ policy has, however, met with considerable difficulties'. He goes on to suggest that these problems can be classified as follows:

- As a function of the way in which GNVQs were originated
- Associated with the origins of GNVQ policy
- Linked to policy tensions that were to lead to practical difficulties

GNVQs have been successful in terms of growth in enrolments (20% of all full-time enrolments in 1996, DfEE, 1996) and by 1998 GNVQ enrolments outnumbered other vocational qualifications by three to one. However, at the organisational and practitioner level, the change processes in general terms and in this case in relation to GNVQs requires both pressure and support (Fullan, 2001) to ensure that they were introduced both effectively and efficiently. However in due course concern was to be expressed in relation to the following aspects of the qualification:

- Implementation (Ofsted, 1994, SCAA, 1996)
- Assessment (FEFC, 1995, Ofsted, 1996)
- Reliability (FEFC, 1995, Ofsted, 1996)
- Grading (FEFC, 1995, Ofsted, 1996)
- Quality of outcomes (Capey, 1995, Carvel, 1997)

- Completion rates (Audit Commission/Ofsted, 1993)

In some cases this also applied to changes in beliefs as well as practices if key skills were to become an integral part of the new qualification.

Overarching themes in the management of change in further education

The state of flux that the English education system has experienced since the late 1970s has meant that a variety of new initiatives have been introduced to respond to changing patterns of participation. They could be evaluated in isolation or as Lumby (2000, p.81) notes viewed as 'vehicles for social engineering and a means of solving multiple economic and social ills'. The 'interventionist' or 'whole system approach' of successive governments has created a market or quasi-market mentality designed to influence and change every aspect of education (Hodgson and Spours, 1998, Morrison, 1998). This includes curriculum provision in both broad and specific terms and changes relating to either to accommodating or applying key skills. Given the prescriptive nature of change (NCVQ, 1986, DES, 1992), it is important to note the view that policies need to be interpreted and applied at an institutional level by managers 'top-down', and by practitioners, 'bottom-up' (Morrison, 1998). The change process by definition places a duty on managers to understand past experiences and to search for solutions to current curriculum management issues in order to find some level of both development and continuity for practitioners.

Therefore, this intended change, that which is designed to go beyond superficial adoption (Fullan, 2001) has to fit into and operate within dynamic systems where existing initiatives are in varying states of maturity for both the organisation as a whole and the individual. Therefore policy driven change may only be recognised 'when the results of all the small changes have accumulated sufficiently to achieve a major shift' (Lumby, 1998, p.192).

Policy driven change, as reviewed above represents change that is induced (Levacic, 1997.) The 'huge leap' (Drodge and Cooper, 1997) from further education colleges being funded by the LEA to being funded by the FEFC after incorporation in 1992, was intended 'to produce some coherence in the provision of post-compulsory

education and training (Lumby, 1999, p.71). It introduced the concept of self-management (Lumby, 1996) and the adoption of formalised strategic planning processes. The perceived need for 'better colleges' that had been discussed for much of the previous decade prompted changes in the curriculum and established a competitive market for publicly funded post-16 education and training. Commercial reality meant that within the sector 'the core mission was reconceptualised in terms of a market ethos' (Watson and Crossley, 2001, p.113). As a result colleges were prompted to make strategic choices within a formal planning framework and to plan in a manner 'much closer to that undertaken businesses' (Lumby, 1999, p.71) and to take responsibility for the change process (FEFC, 1992, FEU, 1993, FEFC, 1994, FEDA, 1995, Levacic, 1997). In summary the 'business of education' was effectively introduced as the product of the 1991 White Paper, *Education and the 21st Century* and the subsequent Further and Higher Education Act (1991).

The twin pressures on the post-16 sector have been summarised as the governments desire to 'increase participation while cutting costs' Scott (1996, p.28) has generated competition and prompted colleges to obtain a clearer focus on the needs of 'the market' through more systematic techniques of 'local needs analysis'. However the quality of the management of change in a time of 'radical curriculum innovation' (Lumby, 1996, p.338) is less clear than those prescribed changes brought about by the incorporation of the sector. As a result, major new programmes such as GNVQs, which included key skills and by definition the management of key skills teaching, represented major changes in the life of the practitioner that required high levels of skill to interpret, co-ordinate, deliver and assess. The challenge of managing the journey from policy to practice is complex and requires high levels of skill if practitioners are to share both the philosophy and take ownership of the process.

The subjective nature of change

Fullan, (1994, p.117) makes the point that 'educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and as complex as that' and he went on to suggest that 'people do not understand the nature or ramifications of most educational changes' (Fullan, 2001, p.38). A major question emerges at this point – if change depends on what teachers think and if people (staff) do not understand either the nature or ramifications of most educational changes, then any and all forms of the

management of change are problematic. If the key skills initiative represents a form of basic, integrative curriculum driven reform, then such reform will impinge on the working lives of practitioners who deliver a range of vocational courses. If Fullan (2001) is correct then the change process in whole or in part is likely to fail.

If 'people change things' Morrison (1998, p.15) and if people have different concerns and potentially competing views on the change management process (Hall et al 1986, Hopkins et al, 1994), then any proposed change will be time consuming. The initiators of change will have to contend with the dual challenges of ambivalence (Fullan, 2001) and competing views on the change process itself. This is clearly the case if they view their situation and the proposed change as 'real' (Thomas, 1928) and likely to affect them. If the proposed change means that 'learning' needs to take place within the institution at the practitioner level, then the critical aspects of the change process are the planning and development processes (Dalin, 1993). At times policy makers may either fail to give consideration to these factors or the organisations themselves may fail to invest in relevant staff development activities prior to the introduction of a new curriculum initiative. This reality can lead to both overt and covert challenges to both policy driven change and the manner in which, at the individual college level policy is interpreted and applied at the individual college level.

Change is intensely personal, for change to occur in any organisation each individual must think, feel or do something different (Duck, 1993). It can produce emotional responses and reactions that revolve around loss, anxiety and struggle (Cartwright, 1966, Marris, 1975). At an individual level people can be presented with a view that 'old ways', which include familiar tasks, jobs, procedures and structures are no longer applicable (Nadler, 1993). If it is accepted that change, instability and resistance are compelling facets of society (Schon, 1971, Carnall, 1997, Stoll and Fink, 1999), then by definition change represents a more 'natural' state than equilibrium or stability. This 'naturalness' is not an easy concept for individuals to accept, and if changes are accepted in principle other barriers may emerge. As Fullan (1994, p.109) notes:

'...a large part of educational change may be less about dogmatic resistance and bad intentions...and more a question of the difficulties related to planning and co-ordinating a multi-level social process'.

The temptation at a personal level to cling on to stability and continuity may be strong, and as a result the desire 'to keep moving' (Handy, 1999, p.318) may be limited. People may adopt personal strategies to influence the impact of change on their working lives. (Ansoff and McDonnell, 1990, Oliver, 1996, Bennett, 1992).

Experiencing change means 'passing through zones of uncertainty' (Schon, 1971, p.12), where everyone feels misunderstood (Fullan, 2001) and it is questionable whether, at a personal level one can become accustomed to the process even if the education sector as a whole has (Hall, 1990, Fullan, 2001). There is the underlying tension between what is expected and what actually occurs. In relation to the introduction of GNVQs for example Ecclestone (2000, p.555) suggests:

'...there is an invisibility of individuals and constituencies in GNVQ debates making it difficult to delve in the messy obscurity of policy processes' (Ecclestone, 2000, p.555)

There can also be rival interpretations of both the content and emphasis of any proposed curriculum change (Silver, 1990) and. In this context Kenway, (1990, p.24) suggests that 4 broad questions are asked about the change process:

- Why was this policy adopted?
- On whose terms?
- On what grounds have these selections been justified?
- In whose interests? Indeed, how have competing interests been negotiated?

Practitioners may ask such questions about education policy at the macro level as well as of organisational policy changes at the micro level as noted above. Attempts may be made to judge the nature and extent of the planned changes, which have been put in place, and as Lumby (1998) noted this can prove to be a long-term task. Taylor et al (1998, p.152) highlight a further issue for consideration in the evaluation of change:

'...there are instances where apparent changes (in the vocational curriculum) where apparent changes masked underlying inertia...and to what extent have (changes) been attributable to policy intervention'.

The management of key skills in the higher education sector

The higher education White Papers (DES, 1987, 1991) could be said to represent the starting point regarding the modern debate surrounding key skills in the higher education sector. Both papers asserted the need for a body of graduates equipped to deal with the demands of a rapidly changing work environment and to encourage better co-operation and communication. Such 'core skills' were assumed to be transferable to other contexts as considered by Harvey et al (1997) in relation to the concept of 'graduateness'. Although like Quicke (1999) he was a dissenting voice in that he foresaw that difficulties would occur because he felt that a changed vocabulary leads to conceptual or practical difficulties when knowledge and skills are split.

Dunne (1997) considers the role and contribution of key skills in the higher education sector and suggests that they:

'... represent a major strand in the need for reconceptualisation of higher education. They are often perceived as both alien to the traditional knowledge-based culture and suspect in being imposed by those outside universities', Dunne et al, (1997, p.523)

The literature regarding the drive to include key skills in undergraduate courses is illuminating and relevant to key skills research in the post-16 sector. It has its roots in research conducted in the UK for the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR) (1995) which stressed the need for graduates to become self-reliant and able to take responsibility for their own careers. Dearing (1996, Review of Qualifications), Dearing, (1997, Higher Education in the Learning Society) and reflects issues that surround skills debates that are current in higher education (Fallows and Steven, 2000). Regarding the individual approaches taken by HEIs Dearing (1997) stressed that skills are relevant throughout life, not simply employment, and the report required universities to place value on 'good levels of competence in communication, numeracy and the practical use of information technology' (Dearing, 1997, Recommendation 17). The report goes on to recommend that institutions:

'...begin immediately to develop, for each programme they offer a 'programme specification' which identifies potential stopping off points and gives the intended outcomes of the programmes in terms of:

- The knowledge and understanding that a student will be expected to have upon completion
- Key skills: communication, numeracy, the use of information technology and learning how to learn
- Cognitive skills, such as understanding of methodologies or ability in critical analysis
- Subject specific skills, such as laboratory skills (Dearing, 1997, Recommendation 21)'

Given these prompts according to Thomas, (1998, p.108):

'...the perception is that, in the HE model key skills are generally delivered in an ad hoc fashion with little regard for students' performance and achievement'.

He suggests that as a result HEIs have attempted to produce models that are manageable in their own institutions. Fallows and Steven (2000) go further to suggest that the expectation of a single implementation model is unrealistic and that in a competitive age unlikely to emerge.

As a response to the changing skills agenda the DfEE Higher Education Quality and Employability Projects initiative 10 projects have been funded within the Key Skills in Higher Education theme of the Higher Education Development Fund between 1998 and 2000. Within the 10 projects a variety of approaches were taken, a cross-section are reviewed here to illustrate some of the approaches taken to the management of key skills in the HE sector and to illustrate underlying issues:

University of Salford

The objective of the project was to develop a model that would enable key skills to be developed and delivered across the University. It did so with by acknowledging that:

'...the driving force for curriculum change project in higher education lies in the work being done by colleagues within the academic discipline' (Oakley et al, 2000, p.9),

the project sought to:

‘...work at all levels within the institution in order to benefit from discipline focused change which builds on teaching and learning practice, and the work of committed enthusiasts, and from policy driven change which facilitates more effective use of resources, longer-term planning, and the ability to respond to external developments’ (Oakley et al, 2000, p.9).

The focus was at three institutional levels: policy, implementation and delivery. In outcomes terms the University project team recommended that all new courses, and courses being reviewed should include key skills as a condition of approval and that all programmes/modules should be ‘mapped’ against the Dearing/QCA key skills. This approach was designed to put key skills at the heart of the larger organisational teaching and learning policy initiative.

At the implementation level, i.e. the management of key skills teaching level emphasis was given to the ‘mapping’ of key skills, supporting student progress and embedding key skills in teaching, learning and assessment across all undergraduate courses. The approach required the University at policy level to create a network of key skills co-ordinators, supported by faculty working groups to support and advise both staff and students.

In overall terms the extensive key skills mapping exercise helped to define the challenge for the university, and as an outcome of this work more emphasis was given to developing a model for tracking student key skills progression. In addition, through the evaluation of the project:

‘...it became clear that the delivery of key skills will also require the implementation of a number of parallel developments, for instance programme specifications, student personal development programmes, progress files, transcripts and the like’ (DfEE/University of Salford, 2000, p.22)

The overall message was to seek coherence within the initiative and to ensure that the management of key skills forms one part of the development of increased flexibility in curriculum design, delivery and assessment.

Bradford University

Similarly the approach at Bradford University was to use key skills 'as a vital catalyst to cultural change and development within the University' (DfEE/Bradford University, 2000, p.1) with the overall project aim:

'...to enhance student competencies through curriculum development in undergraduate programmes and the pursuit by students of self-directed extra-curricular activities' (DfEE, 2000, p.4)

In common with Salford's approach, the mapping of key skills on existing courses predominated, but the University noted that:

'...it was not realistic to or academically acceptable to expect all modules to offer opportunities for key skills developments' (DfEE, 2000, p.7).

However, the project team found that the Dearing and QCA definition of key skills '...was thought to be too broad' (DfEE, 2000, p.7). Yet persisted in supporting a vision that saw as important the nature and extent of key skills development which students possess on entry to the University and that the initiative will in due course ensure that students will be supported to develop and accredit key skills.

The approach taken was to introduce the Personal Development File (PDF) as a means by which students could monitor, build and reflect upon their self-development. The PDF was in reality a means of recording achievement and encouraging self-reflection and as a means of improving the quality of the student's experience.

Key skills development through the PDF was acknowledged by the project team as very challenging. As a result personal tutors were allocated time to support students with the task of completing their PDFs. PDFs helped to promote one aspect of cultural change, i.e. to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning – to set targets and objectives that link to personal strengths and weaknesses. However the assessment and recognition of key skills 'proved to be the most difficult challenge faced by the project team' (DfEE, 2000, p11). As a result the assessment debate was not fully addressed, but the value of the PDF was fully explored as a unique approach

to encourage, support and develop self-reflection as an integral part of the undergraduate experience.

In summary, the Bradford model was in reality the development and adoption of a tool (the PDF) as a vehicle to encourage the creation of ‘...a truly reflective environment’ (DfEE/University of Bradford, 2000, p.11). They saw as an important the cultural change that PDFs brought to the University to engage students as ‘active participants in the learning process’ (DfEE/University of Bradford, 2000, p.1). As such key skills could be described as the Trojan horse that helped introduce the broader aim of introducing ‘the reflective undergraduate’ and in doing so they avoided answering some of the more challenging issues associated with key skills.

The University of Central Lancashire

The approach adopted by the project team was to develop support and guidance systems to enable undergraduates to focus on and monitor their key skills development through their programme of study. They decided to introduce the concept of a ‘key skills contract’ whereby undergraduates:

‘...would be enabled to reflect and build upon their existing key skills, and choose appropriate routes to address their key skills development needs’ (DfEE/University of Central Lancashire, 2000, p.6).

In common with other Universities there were issues and confusion associated with the differences between ‘basic skills’, study skills’ and ‘transferable skills’. Eventually the project team were able to focus staff on the broad key skills categories identified by Dearing (1997). Using the Dearing (1997) definition of key skills in conjunction with other components of programme specifications, ‘key skills audits’ took place and where ‘overlap’ (i.e. mapping) did not occur, then opportunities for such skills development were designed. The initial learning point for the project team was that it was important to make explicit key skills development opportunities within each component module in a given programme. This required close liaison with the programme teams and investment in staff development across the University.

A progress file was used, similar to that used in the Bradford PDF model, and an 'academic adviser' was allocated to each student. The role of the academic adviser was to provide support and guidance for key skills profiling.

Significant consideration was given to departmental cultures and the varying levels of the perceived resistance to change and competing priorities for both staff and student time. As a result:

'...each department created a system to fit its culture, existing practices and approach to key skills' (DfEE/University of Central Lancashire, 2000, p.18).

The project teams recognised and accepted diverse practices, rather than attempt to promote and manage centrally devised systems and procedures. At the same time it celebrated the availability of web-based learning materials, the guidance and support systems available to students and the manner in which key skills development opportunities were made increasingly explicit within modules and programmes.

In summary the University of Central Lancashire key skills model was essentially voluntarist in nature, flexible enough to accommodate a variety of departmental approaches, and complimented the emerging University Learning and Teaching Strategy which:

'...supported and encouraged to further these developments, to disseminate good practice, and enthuse others' (DfEE/University of Central Lancashire, 2000, p.22).

In doing so the University's approach to the management of key skills was to encourage participation by staff and students alike and to slowly introduce the concept of key skills as an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum.

The University of Nottingham

The University of Nottingham initiative had the twin aims of embedding key skills and to establish ways in which the assessment and recording of key skills could be included within recording systems. Consideration was given to the University's

Teaching and Learning Strategy, which encouraged students to acquire high levels of transferable skills relevant to employment and future learning.

Key skills 'champions' were appointed and discussions held regarding the position of key skills within courses. 'Best practice' was identified and examples of learning materials were provided in a 'downloadable' format for staff to adapt in their courses. This led to individual departments devising several different approaches to developing and then embedding key skills in their own curriculum. This led the project team to conclude that:

'...no single approach has been demonstrated to be ideal, but with further testing and adaption, these models will be useful for other departments embarking on key skills development. (DfEE/University of Nottingham, 2000, p.11).

In contrast, Heads of Department expressed resistance to adopting key skills and one head felt:

'...under pressure to conform to a 'preferred orthodoxy' and to take on board the whole of the NVQ key skills specification rather than developing those key skills which are 'naturally occurring' within modules which make up our degree course'. (DfEE/University of Nottingham, 2000, p.13)

Other heads suggested that 'the QCA NVQ key skills specifications were indecipherable to me' and another noted that:

'Our module profile statements with regard to 'transferable skills' tend to stress the cognitive, e.g. developing logical and informed responses to evidence', and 'critically reading and evaluating conceptually sophisticated sources. It was difficult, therefore, to persuade staff to adopt the generic terminology of the QCA key skills specifications.

In other words, academic staff did not always see the specifications simply as a source of ideas and as a common terminology which might help them to identify and develop the key skills components of their course. They saw them as an implicit threat of external control over the curriculum and a loss of autonomy.

What emerges from the Nottingham experience is that the mapping of key skills within the existing curriculum is a relatively simple task, as demonstrated in other Universities referred to here. Seeking to develop key skills which may not be 'naturally occurring' within the curriculum is a much bigger challenge. One that requires significant staff development, effective communication and the adoption of a range of strategies by skilled change agents that encourage staff to play a full part in the introduction of key skills in mainstream undergraduate courses.

De Montfort University

The whole institution approach taken at De Montfort University had four main aims:

- To provide an initial assessment of individual student's key skills on entry to the University
- To provide guidance and support mechanisms to enable students to improve their key skills profile
- To provide guidance and support to enable students to demonstrate their key skills profile in a record of achievement

In outcomes terms, the initiative led to the drafting of a University key skills policy and the creation of the Student Learning Advisory Service (SLAS) to provide expertise in key skills in line with QCA policy guidelines affecting students studying for 'A' levels or GNVQs. In undertaking this commitment the University noted:

'... there is still some resistance to what might be perceived as the imposition of a national agenda upon higher education...as a consequence the University is in a prime position to take a consistent approach to post-graduate provision' (DfEE/De Montfort University, 2000, p.8).

This comprehensive 'whole University' stance focused initially on student's completing a key skills 'self-assessment' on the grounds of cost and to promote students to take responsibility for their own learning. In developing their own assessment instrument based on the key skills of application of number, communications and information technology (De Montfort University, 1999). This approach was designed to raise the overall awareness of key skills in a higher

education context and to place them at the heart of the University learning and teaching strategy.

In common with other approaches reviewed here, guidelines were developed to help staff identify key skills within their programmes. In parallel, learning materials were developed to support students to identify and develop their key skills throughout the life of their course.

The ambition to establish a University-wide key skills model clearly existed in relation to the voluntary key skills self-assessment, but in terms of completion of key skills the success of the project was limited. Only a small number of students completed the University accredited Certificate of Achievement in Personal Transferable Skills, which required students to collect evidence and submit it for accreditation. As the University reported:

‘...experience of this and the previous scheme demonstrated that, while students were keen to be involved initially, the vast majority found that the priorities of their study, part-time work and personal and social pressures prevailed’ (DfEE/de Montfort University, 2000, p.14).

The response to this major operational issue was to consider the appointment of mentors to work alongside students to support all aspects of key skills self-assessment, the acquisition of key skills and the development of a key skills portfolio. The view being that such an approach:

‘...could then be used as a catalyst for students to continue the collection of evidence of their acquisition of key skills’ (DfEE/De Montfort University, 2000, p.14).

In summary, the De Montfort model, whilst aimed at the whole University first year undergraduate cohort, suffered from the common problems associated with voluntary self-assessment, variable levels of staff commitment and the existence of a range of competing priorities in the life of an undergraduate. On the positive side, the profile of key skills was raised and the need for focused learner support, provided as a central resource was identified within a future framework where the concept of a minimum student entitlement in relation to key skills.

Southampton Institute and Southampton City College

The approach taken at Southampton Institute in 1995, although outside the Higher Education Development Funded projects referred to above is an example of an HE/FE collaborative approach to the management of key skills teaching. The approach, as reviewed by Harvard, Hughes and Clarke (1998) was to collaborate with both the QCA and a local FE college in order to improve on the 'pockets of use of key skills in HE' (Harvard et al, 1998, p.61). The project sought to add value to undergraduate courses through the medium of key skills. This was done in part through the support of the creation and promotion of a 'skills culture' and via a partnership project which had the following objectives:

- To raise awareness of the scope and potential of key skills
- To evaluate their desirability and added value of key skills
- To pilot a range of key skills projects
- To disseminate information and outcomes of key skills projects
- To provide training for participating staff

Whilst it was apparent to the project team from the outset that students did not require in-depth teaching to develop key skills, they did require a support and assessment network and mapping of key skills. Added to this the team identified a range of issues that made the 'portfolio building' linked to the QCA key skills they wished to accredit difficult.

Both the accreditation of prior learning (APL) and 'the portfolio approach' proved to be challenging because 'students had no concept of portfolio building' (Harvard et al, 1998, p.65) even given their experience in post-16 education at the partner further education college.

Staff had a parallel issue in terms of the time required to assess portfolios. The acknowledgement of the time constraints affecting staff the project team led to the team having to design a 'stand alone' booklet. This was pre-indexed against the specifications of the three key skills to help students complete their portfolio's more quickly and to reduce the support time that was to be provided by tutors.

Unlike the other initiatives reviewed here the Southampton partnership concluded that the traditional 'mapping' of key skills through the primary course of study was not realistic because most courses in the pilot group generated 'essay type' answers. Rather than challenge this response the project team elected to develop the concept of 'themed clusters' as a generic vehicle for the delivery of key skills. A themed cluster being a booklet that contained:

- Candidate instructions
- A pre-indexed portfolio
- A series of tasks centred around a specific theme

This approach proved to be more successful because the activities prescribed for each of the six key skills were based on practical tasks of relevance to all students, i.e. around identifying a future career. To help reduce staff input beyond the mapping and initial guidance stages the team are considering adopting the principles of peer-tutoring in a manner promoted by Houston and Lazenbatt (1996).

In summary this ambitious, but logical initiative went some way in acknowledging the influence of key skills within the post-16 curriculum within local FE-HE progression. It acknowledged student familiarity with key skills – but not the potential baggage the student experience brought with them. As a result the project team encountered the dual challenge of attempting to manage progression and in embedding a new initiative in an HE establishment without being able to take advantage key skills mapping and APL. As a result of these and related staff development issues the team were forced to focus on assessing the potential of key skills to enhance degree qualifications as a long term project within the broader vision of the creation of a 'skills culture'.

Summary

In summary, what emerges from both an assessment in general terms of the management of change in the further and higher education sector is that policy driven change is complex and far from being a linear process. The literature indicates that the challenge of defining, introducing and managing key skills in the higher education sector has proved to date to be highly problematic. Policy prescriptions and recommendations by the DFES, QCA, FEDA and Dearing (1996 & 1997) are subject

to challenge and interpretation at both an institutional and individual level. In the case of the higher education sector, the introduction of key skills are linked to overarching organisational priorities such as learning and teaching strategies and the competitive nature of universities.

A common theme for both the further and higher education sectors is that of incorporation and the associated rate of change both sectors have experienced as they attempt to conduct themselves in a 'businesslike' manner. Where they differ in relation to key skills is that the higher education sector is interpreting and applying key skills at the institutional level in a manner that reflects their own history and priorities. However, in some instances the attempt by some universities to create learning opportunities for students to develop their key skills generated 'strong resistance to top-down change' (Fallows and Steven, 2000, p.11).

As a consequence of both the size and complexity of the task and the structure of the higher education sector, a sectoral response to key skills has not been considered. This is partly because the sector is populated by independent institutions with individual identities and aspirations (Fallows and Steven, 2000) as well as being related to the competitive nature of universities. They are developing a range of approaches that represent the generic objective of attempting to achieve some form of cultural change within their respective institutions through encouraging students, in varying ways, to take responsibility for their own learning. In doing so they are reflecting the priorities identified in respective learning and teaching policies and in doing so the higher education sector is reflecting some of the issues reflected by Dearing, (1997).

Whereas in the vocational curriculum of the further education sector the prescribed changes to the curriculum, post-incorporation, appear to represent a normative approach to curriculum content and design. This is best represented by the GNVQ initiative which has its roots in the competence based education and training movement of the mid 1980s. This policy driven change is reinforced by a 'best practice' guide (FEDA, 1998) and related guidelines from 'lead bodies'. Such guidelines reinforce the normative stance taken by policy makers. As such they are designed to shape the management of change process by reinforcing policy prescriptions through case studies and 'exemplars' regarding the management of the

teaching of key skills. It is questionable whether such an approach, however well intentioned, represents much more than a series of descriptive accounts of curriculum change in specific institutions, and therefore only of passing interest to practitioners in general within institutions that have their own unique history, structure, 'market' and three associated micropolitical issues.

Overall the literature clearly shows that when externally (policy) driven change is adopted by organisations a number of challenges arise both at the organisational and individual level. It is clear that however rational the process appears to be people may still have difficulty in understanding, accepting, interpreting and applying the changes being proposed – even when the changes being proposed are generally acceptable to senior managers and practitioners alike. However familiar change may have become in the education sector it still represents some form of challenge to the status quo at both the organisational and individual level. As such in many cases 'resistance to change', whether formal or informal appears to be inevitable. The nature and rate of change in the further and higher education sectors and the emerging centrality of key skills in the post-16 curriculum lead one to assume that managing any form of curriculum change that includes key skills is challenging. It will generate a range of issues and challenges for senior managers and practitioners as they seek to effectively manage the teaching of key skills.

Organisational and management issues

Introduction

This section is designed to draw together what could loosely be termed organisational and management issues or challenges colleges face or are said to have faced on a daily basis in relation to key skills over the past eight years. The literature reviewed identifies links which relate specifically to key skills and in many cases to the categories of questions used in the survey of colleges, and as such serve to support the underlying purpose of this research.

Given the limited amount of research in this field it was necessary to also use literature from the FEFC (national reviews of GNVQs and NVQs) and their curriculum area surveys to identify the main issues and challenges facing colleges. As

noted above this potentially limits the research to an assessment, in the first instance of the perception of how colleges have responded to the challenge of managing the teaching of key skills.

The challenge for colleges is best summarised by the NCVQ who made it clear that it wished to see the core skill units within GNVQs integrated into the teaching of the vocational programme, rather than being taught in isolation from the vocational units. The formal prescriptive approach is as follows:

‘Successful integration of core skill units occurs where core skills are acquired through settings which contextualise the core skills in ways meaningful to students. Students should not see the core skill as something abstract and isolated. They should understand how the skills might be applied in future settings’. (Oates, 1995, p.187).

However, as the FEFC (1998, p.27) pointed out in their good practice guide:

‘There has often been considerable confusion about how best to achieve key skills teaching across all programme areas...some initiatives depend on the vision of one or two individuals. Where they do not receive a positive response from their senior managers, the work inevitably suffers’.

Organisation: Where key skills fit in

Many people have written about barriers to change and in relation to core/key skills. Lawson (1992, p.94) reinforced the view that:

‘There are formidable political and cultural forces (in the sector) that are likely to reduce the impact of core skill reform on the post-16 curriculum’.

Furthermore Woodcock (1998, p.5) feels that ‘Implementing key skills...means picking your way through a minefield of conflicts and tensions’. In the period under review key skills has created a ‘...number of challenges to existing structures and patterns of organisation’ (FEDA, 2000, p.24). Even before this summary comment was made the FEFC was of the view that ‘often there are several unconnected (key skill) initiatives taking place in the institution’ (FEFC, 1998, p.25), and that key skills management is ‘piecemeal’. (FEFC, 2000, p.17).

From the participants perspective conflicts and tensions may emerge in relation to key skills because they do not see themselves as being at college to develop such skills – they want to be an engineer or care assistant or a manager of a local leisure centre for example. The focus on vocational skills may mean that students give less commitment to key skills development.

This ‘demand side’ issue may be further compounded by supply related issues if vocational tutors share a commitment to the vocational element of a given programme to the detriment of key skills. If a vocational team is dependent upon ‘outside help’, i.e. professional support from staff in other departments in relation to specialist key skills delivery and support there may be ‘historical barriers’ that ‘prevent collaboration’. FEDA (2000, p.23) summarise these as follows:

‘The strong identities of subject departments...and of course teams in colleges, can often create barriers between groups of staff, despite official policies or good intentions’.

This ‘cultural barrier’ may be further reinforced if senior managers lack commitment to key skills and this is then reflected in the profile they are given in a college as well in the volume and quality of staff development undertaken in relation to key skills. This does not mean to say that all key skills management is poor, because again the FEFC have noted that ‘much good practice has been uncoordinated and good and bad practice can often be seen in the same college’ (FEFC, 1998, p.1). What has been of concern is that:

‘...internal structures frequently impede the development of a consistent approach to the teaching and learning of key skills across all programmes’. (FEFC, 1998, p.1)

There is very little noted in the literature that links organisational structure and key skills management, but there is a significant amount of comment about key skill co-ordination and management on a day to day basis. FEDA tend to talk of the need for ‘cultural shift’ (FEDA, 2000, p.24) within a college if barriers are to be broken down. This shift is often associated with the central role of the key skills co-ordinator and key skills specialists in relation to the time they have available to do the job. In addition comments have been made about the rapid expansion of key skills in the

post-16 sector which has 'made great demands on a small number of specialists and created pressure on everyone to become an expert' (FEFC, 1998, p.29). The issue of 'time' comes into greater focus if potentially inappropriate staff are allocated key skills duties, as reported in FEDA funded research:

'Where a deficit model exists...those with spare capacity or lighter teaching loads being handed the (key skills) job, morale seems correspondingly low and attitudes towards key skills can be unhelpful' (FEDA, 2000, p.36).

It has also been noted that

'...in some colleges key skill co-ordinators or key skill specialists are rarely able to attend meetings at which course design, assignments and assessment are discussed' (FEFC, 1998, p.30).

This is due to the fact that course design and overall planning and scheduling of courses takes place either towards the end of the academic year or at the beginning of the year. Even in the smallest of colleges it would be difficult for the key skill co-ordinator to play a full part in supporting 'assessment design' unless methods of planning were particularly advanced and well communicated. Given this potential scenario the challenges associated with effective liaison come sharply into focus when the following observation was made:

'Liaison between key skills specialists and vocational teachers is not always as effective as it might be. Sometimes there is tension when vocational teachers maintain they can cover all the relevant key skills, and the key skills specialists have their doubts about their expertise and teaching methods used'. (FEFC, 1998, p.22)

Key skills policies

The fact that policies are in place does not necessarily mean that they will be effectively implemented. However the FEFC, (1998, p.ii) note that:

'Effective key skills teaching and assessment require sound organisation rooted in a clear college policy'.

The point was made that:

‘...many centres had doubts whether they could deliver an integrated approach. Policies often reflected these doubts and tended to be pragmatic but practical, rather than ideal and hard to deliver’ (FEDA, 2000, p.17).

Student admissions: initial screening and learner support

The potential link between admissions, key skills screening and support is an important area for the student. The FEFC for example linked the overall organisation of key skills to that of ‘support’ in relation to GNVQs and commented:

‘Overall, the organisation and support for core skills are lagging behind those given to mandatory and optional units, and their development is proving difficult to cover fully in these units’. (FEFC, 1994, p.21)

This clearly implies that colleges may be focusing on supporting the delivery of underpinning knowledge and skills within the main vocational units, but not giving serious consideration to the on-going challenges linked to core skills outside the classroom. Given this viewpoint the FEFC also noted that ‘...in most colleges learning support is available but many students are reluctant to use the facilities’ (FEFC, 1994, p.18). Whilst learning support and support for key skills may not be mutually exclusive, generic learner support may provide access to specialists who can identify and support a student. Where learner support exists the member of staff involved may be able to refer the student to the appropriate specialist. This comment from the FEFC implies that learning support facilities were not ‘course based’, i.e. this may be a reference to the use or lack of use of centralised support services such as learner support/additional support services.

The whole issue of ‘access to appropriate services’ or ‘access to core/key skills support’ wherever it is based represents a challenge to college managers and tutors alike if they are committed to the provision of an integrated service for students.

Similarly issues relating to initial assessments have been noted by the FEFC that ‘Some staff are reluctant to spend time marking screening tests’ (FEFC, 1998, p.2). This raises questions about roles and responsibilities in relation to initial screening. For example a vocational tutor or course tutor may not be trained or briefed about the value of initial assessment and the instrument(s) used by the college.

Specifically the potential central role of initial assessment appears to have been 'missed' by college managers in relation to an on-going relationship with key skills. FEDA for example noted:

'Initial assessment data should ideally be used first to decide which level of programme a student requires and then to plan the teaching. We found relatively few examples where this was done systematically'. (FEDA, 2000, p.57)

FEDA have identified 11 different sets of initial assessment tools in existence at present, both college and Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) devised, as well as some which had been produced by educational publishers. Added to this was the concern that:

'The ALBSU initial assessment tool is often used to assess numeracy and literacy, but it has its shortcomings (FEDA, 1995, p.84). Even as late as 2000 it was stated by FEDA that 'GCSE attainment levels particularly in Maths and English are used to assess Application of Number and Communications levels'. (FEDA, 2000, p.56).

In relation to the 'mandatory' key skills (IT, Application of Number, Communication) in GNVQ courses there appears to be an issue regarding initial assessment in relation to information technology. This was reinforced by the (FEFC, 1998, p.7) and the comment from FEDA from their research in 60 schools and colleges was that:

'Some centres used informal assessment to ascertain competence in Information Technology, but most relied on students having covered it in the national curriculum'. (FEDA, 2000, p.57)

If there are a number of potential issues associated with initial assessment it could also apply to on-going support. If initial assessment is poor then how can colleges offer effective on-going support? This was hinted at by the FEFC when they made the following points:

- It is important that colleges accurately identify the extent of learning support required and that they ensure that they take account of students' skill levels
- There is often a delay between initial assessment of students and arranging suitable learning support
- Few colleges manage to ensure that all students who need support receive it and the number of students who take advantage of the support is often low

- The effectiveness of college's procedures for initial assessment and their success in meeting learner support needs vary significantly (FEFC, 1998, pp.7-8)

Course management

The prescribed approach was best summarised by the FEFC (1998, p.10) where they stated that:

'The development of key skills is most effective when teachers take some responsibility for developing them as part of their teaching and when students see the relevance of these skills to the course they are studying'.

In 1996 the view was expressed that '...large amounts of time (are spent) discussing and planning core skills delivery' (FEDA, 1996, p.31). Conversely in 1997 the opposite was stated:

'It is commonly assumed that key skills are covered by a students' overall learning experience and as a result not enough attention is given to providing the additional support which students require to develop specific skills'. (FEFC, p.19, 1997).

This observation is compounded in the same report, which states:

'In less than satisfactory practice, teachers assume, often incorrectly that students will acquire these skills incidentally as a result of completing the activities that they set them'. (FEFC, 1997, p.18)

The FEFC (1998, p.11) to use their words '...found disparity between curriculum areas in the effectiveness with which key skills were being developed' and saw it as a cause for concern. If this is the case then some very important aspects of key skills management are being missed in the sector. This observation effectively summarises the challenge to co-ordinators who are attempting to organise key skills at course level.

It should go without saying that in order for key skills to be effectively managed at course level teaching staff would by definition need to know something about key skills. However even in 1998 the FEFC expressed its concern by stating:

‘The limited number of teaching staff who have specialist experience both in key skills and knowledge of different areas has made it difficult for colleges to be consistently effective in making key skills an integral part of a students’ life’. (FEFC, 1998, p.21)

Linked to this is the question whether staff actually ‘care’ about core skills. In 1994 the FEFC commented on the failure of some teachers ‘...to recognise the importance of developing and assessing core skills through vocational work’ (FEFC, 1994, p.5). James (1998) has also said that ‘...several teachers spoke as if there was a problem with some of their colleagues who were unlikely to take key skills seriously’. (James, 1998, p.5).

The issue of effective planning is worthy of consideration here. James (1998, p.5) referred to:

‘Teachers (who) spoke of the necessity for collaborative planning of the curriculum for the whole year’ if key skills were to be effectively managed’.

However, Ofsted, in commenting on the early phase of core skills in GNVQs conclude that ‘in many schools core skills requirements were considered late in the course and in several cases not covered effectively (Ofsted, 1992, p.50). Although this comment was, as noted made in relation to schools, evidence over the following six years was to show that the problem did not just apply to the school sector.

The issue was referred to again by FEDA when they said:

‘Some of the problems (of key skills) relate to the simple problem of ‘cramming’ additional teaching into the timetable’ (FEDA, 2000, p.21).

Given this potential malaise it is not surprising that Ofsted noted that:

‘The overall picture of core skills not being applied in their vocational context was disappointing’ (Ofsted, 1994, para.38).

These are significant concerns for college managers particularly when in 1997 FEDA, in their review of GNVQs over the period 1993-1996 used the term ‘variability’ when referring to the quality of ‘key skills management’ (FEFC, 1997, p.31). This ‘variability’ applied to:

- The pattern of delivery

- The highly problematic delivery of core skills
- Core skill assessments did not sit easily into GNVQ teaching
- Colleges queried the integrationist approach associated with core skills in GNVQs

Further to this is the view that 'There may be limited contact between staff teaching key skills' (FEDA, 2000, p.48). This 'variability' and lack of contact between staff may be a common theme in the sector irrespective of the size of institution concerned, and worthy of further examination.

The 'climate' in an organisation, or the commitment by senior managers to key skills can make a big difference. FEDA (2000, p.35) referred to staff 'owning student groups' and of staff having '...traditional attitudes'. In instances such as these the blockages to effective key skills management could be linked to territorialism. Managers with a limited understanding of key skills in terms of the challenges associated with delivering or integrating them could effectively perpetuate or even make the situation worse through taking inappropriate action. Higham (1998, p.11) adds to the argument when he states:

'Not all schools and colleges seem sufficiently convinced of their (key skills) importance...to provide the necessary staff development and resources to enable core skills development to take place'.

Curriculum area reports by the FEFC are also illuminating in relation to key skills management, and they identify a range of management issues as follows:

- Examples of students using information technology in the production of assignments is limited. This sometimes reflects teachers' own inadequacies or their failure to offer students encouragement (FEFC, 1998, p.62)
- Inadequate attention to key skills and their vocational application, especially information technology and number skills, which is sometimes related to teachers lack of confidence (FEFC, 1998, p.38)

- In one third of colleges inspected students were given little incentive to develop their information technology skills beyond the levels they had already achieved on entry to the college (FEFC, 1997, p.18)
- Some staff remain uncertain as to how best to integrate core skills, and numeracy and information technology are sometimes only given prominence when they are needed to complete assignments. (FEFC, 1996, p.19)

Key skills assessment

The assessment of key skills has been noted ‘...in many ways, provides colleges with the knottiest problems’ (FEDA, 1995, p.845). To some it relates to the assessment criteria associated with the course, e.g. GNVQ, (FEDA, 1995, p.22), or in some cases diverse approaches have been used in that ‘...any course teams have adopted their own approach to assessment and this is frequently changed from year to year’ (FEFC, 1995, p.22). Whatever the experience assessment remains a challenge for course teams because of the general concern that evidence of core skills does not always occur automatically.

However as stated by the FEFC in 1995:

‘The development of assessment of core skills gives cause for concern in the majority of colleges inspected. Few colleges have an institutional policy to guide developments’. (FEFC, 1995, p.2).

At an institutional level this represents a significant concern for college managers and practitioners alike. Further research conducted by FEDA five years later remained focused on this topic when they stated that ‘There is a need for centres to have simple but rigorous quality assurance procedures relating to assessment’ (FEDA, 2000, p.59). This suggests that very little had changed in the intervening five-year period.

A number of reports highlight specific points, such as from a curriculum area report in Art, Design and Performing Arts (FEFC, 1996) the observation was made that:

‘Students became bored and disenchanted with (core skill) activities they saw, wrongly, but understandably, as peripheral to their main interests’. (FEFC, 1996, p.20)

This comment was made in relation to the delivery of core skills as 'bolt-on' to the delivery of the vocational element of the course, and as such did not engage the students concerned. A further observation was made about core skills in curriculum area report:

'In most colleges students develop the skills of communication more successfully than those of number, and number skills are often taught separately by specialist staff, in isolation from the vocational contexts'. (FEFC, 1997, p.19).

A different view was proffered three years later:

'With communications there is concern that there may be some complacency. Many practitioners see communications as the easiest key skill to integrate and support...there must be a specialist for each key skill in centres (colleges) that (sic) can support, mentor and advise non specialists'. (FEDA, 2000, p.5).

This is a very important point in that it encapsulates a range of activities in colleges centres, such as 'support', mentoring and advice for staff and students – which in itself generates a series of challenges for college managers.

'Application of Number' has become the key skill much attention has been focused upon. The FEFC have noted 'application of number' is the skill which tends to get taught less successfully' (FEFC, 1998, p.13). Bloomer follows this up with the view that:

'Application of number was frequently referred to as an 'add-on' to the course proper, and was disliked not least for the reason that it confirmed something that many students already knew: namely that they were not very good at Maths'. (Bloomer, 1998, p.173)

What Bloomer and the FEFC have noted is that at various times in a host of different institutions there have been management issues associated with one or more of the key skills. Across all reports the conclusion is reached that the most challenging key skill is that of 'Application of Number', and the problem is compounded for students if no or little attempt is made to contextualise 'number' and or if it is taught in isolation. In addition the literature suggests that mistakes have been made regarding students 'communications' skills, which has at times led communications specialists to question the ability of colleagues to deliver this key skill. Furthermore the key skill

of 'Information Technology' has caused concerns for colleges in that in some cases the staff delivering the subject may not be appropriately trained or knowledgeable enough in the subject.

Summary

The literature points to a number of issues that colleges have faced or may still face be facing in relation to key skills management. In essence they relate to:

- Organisational 'fit' and co-ordination
- Student admissions, initial assessment and on-going support
- Course management
- The 'delivery' of key skills both broad and specific terms
- The assessment of key skills

It is also apparent that the role of learning resource centres and internal verification tend to be considered in relation to whole college approaches and not specifically in relation to key skills. Whilst this is not in itself an issue, concerns have been raised about the quality and consistency of the management of these two important aspects of provision where they impinge on key skills.

The literature indicates that there have been a significant number of challenges for colleges in relation to key skills. National reports and reviews of GNVQ, NVQs and key skills have identified both good, developing and in some cases less than appropriate practice, all of which is of relevance and interest to this research. There remain a number challenges that colleges would no doubt wish to address if they are to provide the integrated service that students are believed to need.

Conclusions and issues emerging from the literature review

The literature reviewed serves to highlight that core skills, and since Dearing (1996) key skills, have had a relatively short but colourful history within the curriculum reform debate. Once Kenneth Clarke sparked off the modern debate about core skills in his 1979 discussion about the linkages between core transferable skills and the perceived needs of the economy and the education sector were broadly established. This debate helped to generate what in time became a series of core skills initiatives,

all of which focused upon defining and in some cases applying core skills across the post-16 curriculum.

Most commentators agree that the FEU took up the cause of core skills in an effective and high profile manner and attempted to promote debate on the merits of a core curriculum within the post-16 framework. Whilst the work of the FEU was well received the concept failed to gain broad support. It was superseded by a less well structured reactive set of short-term initiatives led by the MSC, all of which were seeking to contribute to solving 'youth unemployment' at a time of economic recession.

The overarching economic imperative that shaped the vocational curriculum from the post-war period onwards also fuelled successive government's education policy initiatives, and by the late 1970s the competence-based education and training movement began to make its contribution. By the mid 1980s the reality of world-wide recession, youth unemployment and the challenge of international competition further encouraged the governments desire to address short term issues and the perceived problems associated with the academic vocational divide inherent within the English education system.

The literature indicates that throughout the 1980s core skills were in need of a workable, formal and 'universally acceptable' definition and various initiatives 'included' core skills to a greater or lesser extent (TVEI, CPVE, YT BTEC for example). However it was as a result of the 1991 White Paper, *Education and Training for the 21st Century*, that core skills were guaranteed their centrality in post-16 education when they were included as part of the new GNVQ programme. This 'centrality' became more apparent as this new qualification became increasingly popular across the full range of vocational areas at levels 2 and 3 in the 1992-1998 period.

In the early 1990s colleges had to come to terms with being incorporated bodies and a new funding mechanism whilst at the same time they sought to plan strategically in line with FEFC guidelines which included the major challenge 'to increase participation while cutting costs' (Scott, 1996, p.28). In parallel they were also

required to manage policy driven curriculum change, and GNVQs represented one strand of changes that were designed in part to address aspects of the vocational - academic divide in post-16 provision. Added to this key skills were included as an integral part of this new qualification, which as the literature suggests added greater complexity to an already complex qualification, the credibility of which was under scrutiny on almost a constant basis over the next 5 years.

Links to the objectives of this research

The literature indicates that colleges have been required by the DoE (1991), NCVQ (1996), and the DFEE (1996) to 'apply' core skills as part of the GNVQ qualification and Modern Apprenticeship and National Traineeships. It is since this time that the challenge of managing the teaching of key skills as an integrated part of post-16 vocational courses has developed. Furthermore the challenge for colleges has been either integrate key skills within 'mainstream provision' or to 'make time' to provide further tuition and support to ensure of 'effective coverage' of all aspects of at least the three mandatory key skills of Communication, Information Technology and Application of Number. Added to this was the challenge of supporting part-time students (Modern Apprentices) or those students who wished to take advantage of key skills as 'free standing units' as part of a personal skills development programme. Therefore in general terms in the first instance it was interesting to establish how individual colleges have elected to respond to the challenge of managing key skills teaching both at the corporate and course level. Within this overarching objective it was important to establish, at the practitioner level the underlying issues related to the management of key skills teaching at course level.

Underpinning the research from the outset was the issue that emanates from the literature of organisational fit and the overall level of preparedness of the sector and of individual institutions to embrace core skills. Issues linked to these two points were raised in 1992 were still being asked in 2000, and this may reflect a more significant problem in both the management and design of curriculum reform.

In addition perhaps a more fundamental issue that emerges from the literature for the sector in general is that of the value and reliability of 'initial diagnosis' of a student's key skill needs by colleges. The literature indicates that at best, practice is mixed,

sometimes inadequate, and that the quality of diagnostic tools used in the sector are not always appropriate for the task of assessing a participant's key skill levels on entry to the college or a given course. It follows that the subsequent range of services provided by a college that are based upon some aspect of this initial assessment/diagnosis may be in themselves potentially be ineffective, inefficient and inappropriate for the individual student concerned. As such they provide a poor starting point for practitioners committed to the effective management of key skills teaching, and as such the potential failure of initial diagnosis tools may bring key skills teaching into disrepute. Therefore further research into the management this aspect of key skills was of value.

The literature also indicates that the quality of course management in relation to core skills is 'variable'. What makes the quality of course management 'variable' is open to debate and therefore of interest to this research. There is some indication from the literature that aspects of course planning and the associated integration of core skills lacks clarity and/or the full involvement of 'appropriate staff' such as the key skills co-ordinator or key skills specialists. If this is the case then students may not receive the support they require during the course.

Alongside course management in both general and specific terms, is what appears to be the challenge of the assessment of core skills as part of the GNVQ/MA/NT or 'free-standing' provision. The literature suggests that many colleges find this burdensome. Whether this is due wholly or in part to the level of preparation and planning or associated with a particular problem relating to key skills per se is not clear and is worthy of further investigation. Linked to this issue are implied questions relating to the manner in which internal verification of college quality systems is planned, co-ordinated and managed as part of the overall 'management of quality' in a college. If, for example the quality control systems underpinning internal verification are strong then some if not all of the emerging problems relating to the assessment of key skills may be identified and addressed at an early stage.

The literature has raised questions around these areas:

- College organisation: where key skills fit in
- Student admissions: initial screening and learner support

- Course management
- Key skills assessment

These four areas not only encapsulate the themes with respect to the areas of concern that arise from the literature, but they also act as a basis for the framework from which further analysis took place (Chapter 6). More specifically it would be of value to frame the research around categories of questions or themes in the form of research questions. This would allow the research to focus on the following aspects of key skills management:

- Organisation structure
- College policies
- Student admissions
- Learner support
- Course management
- Key skills assessment
- Internal verification
- Learning and physical resources

As a result of this research it will be possible to identify current practice, understand more clearly the dilemmas and issues faced by practitioners on a daily basis and respond accordingly.

Chapter 3: Research methods

Introduction

This research began with the idea, initially a vague idea that there was an 'issue' or 'issues' relating to the management of the teaching of key skills that would benefit from further investigation. This proceeded to the problem-definition phase where initial idea was clarified. This 'real life' research brought into focus the following broad questions which were designed as a starting point for further investigation:

1. Organisational structure: where key skills 'fit in'

This involved a review of management, staffing and organisational issues.

2. Key skills client groups

This was designed to establish which clients the college has elected to serve.

3. College policies

This question sought to establish if colleges had formal policies relating to key skills.

4. Student admissions: initial screening and learner support

It was important to establish the precise role of any Admissions or Student Services Unit in a college and to review what role such areas of the college played regarding initial screening/key skills needs analysis.

5. Course management

It was important to establish where students receive support with respect to key skills. It was also of value to assess the quality of the individual learner's experience through a review of a broad range of factors that influence and shape course management on a day to day basis.

6. Key skills assessment

Who assesses competence with regard to key skills? Was it for example a vocational tutor, key skills specialist, or even some form of partnership arrangement?

7. Internal verification

What were the policy arrangements applied for internal verification and moderation, and when did internal verification take place?

8. Learning resources and physical resources

What learning resources were used and how were they used in the management of key skills teaching? Also, what physical resources were available to support 'independent learning' in relation to key skills?

Preliminary considerations of methods

Johnson (1994) is helpful in summarising the initial considerations one must review prior to undertaking any research, a relevant aspect being 'access'. Access is important because failure to obtain access at the correct and most relevant level would clearly prevent any relationship developing that in time would normally lead to the type of information flow important to this research. Gaining access requires permission. The emphasis according to Bogdan and Bicklen (1992, p.81) should be to:

'...get knowledge of not only the formal system, but also the informal system'.

As indicated, in the further education sector access can be negotiated via the Principal/Chief Executive of the college so that case study work can be undertaken. A letter can establish if there were any extenuating circumstances that would limit access or reduce the likelihood of obtaining information from the college central to the research objectives. By explaining the research objectives to the most senior person in the organisation one is able to make an initial assessment of the overall level of interest in the research topic and have access approved throughout the college.

A consideration of the options

Qualitative research

Research carried out in the interpretivist paradigm is called qualitative research.

A paradigm being:

'A loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts or propositions about that orient thinking or research'. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p.33)

There are four main approaches or methods in qualitative research – phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, ethnography and grounded theory. Phenomenology can be said to underpin all qualitative research because it focuses on individuals' interpretation of their own experiences. Symbolic interactionism focuses upon the meaning of events to people and the symbols they use to convey their meaning. In relation to this research it was important to allow interviewees the opportunity to describe how their definition of key skills management was arrived at and managed given the competing challenges on their time and the interaction he/she has with colleagues and students alike.

Ethnography is more of method than an approach. It requires the researcher to immerse his or herself into the culture under study, it is in essence '...thick description' (Geertz, 1973, p.14). The ethnographer places an emphasis upon studying groups and communities as a unified whole – no part can be studied and understood on its own. Data collection may vary, but mainstream ethnographers use participant observation as well as unstructured interviews to gather data. Given time constraints and the value of obtaining data from multiple sources this method was considered too 'college specific' to be of value to the sector as a whole.

Grounded theory, in its simplest form emerges out of data grounded in the observation and interpretation of a phenomenon. Given that key skills is a new phenomena in the further education sector, grounded theory does appear to provide the opportunity for interviewees to help construct the picture at a particular moment in time. To a large extent this research was seeking to construct a picture, a 'snapshot in time' of the phenomenon of key skills management in further education colleges in England. As the data was analysed the picture took shape, issues and challenges came to light and conclusions and recommendations could be made.

Quantitative research

'Quantitative research is interested in aggregating data, most of which is assigned numerical values'. Johnson (1994, p.6)

It is essentially positivist, aiming at being scientific, using standard procedures and replicability. Robson (1996, p.304) suggests that:

‘Doing it properly means using methods in a systematic and positive fashion’.

In comparison with qualitative research, this method ‘...tends to give little attention to context’ (Bryman, 1995, p.139) and it often entails fairly static analyses in which the relationships among variables are explored. Quantitative research entails rigorous preparation of a framework within which data are to be collected, and by definition it tends to do less well with the processual aspects of organisational reality.

Research in educational settings

It is important to give consideration to those approaches most relevant to educational settings, given issues of access, time and practicability. Johnson (1994) helps to draw together those approaches of particular importance to educational management, namely:

- Surveys
- Case studies
- Documentary research
- Experimental research
- Action research

A combination of methods might be more appropriate for this research. Given Johnson’s emphasis on education it is important to evaluate the potential of each of her suggested approaches.

Surveys

The term is used very widely, but as Robson (1995, p.49) notes:

‘Commonly refers to the collection of standardised information from a specific population, or some sample from one, usually but not necessarily by means of questionnaire or interview’.

The survey tends to require the support of other research tools, and as Cohen and Manion (1994, p.83) note ‘...typically involves one or more of the following data gathering techniques’.

- Structured interviews
- Semi-structured interviews
- Self-completion or postal questionnaires

In the preliminary phase of any research Fowler (1993, p.4) advises that due consideration is given to the population, sample and question design. It was valuable to use self-completed questionnaires via postal survey given the number of colleges the research wished to embrace, and then to follow them up with semi-structured interviews to obtain further more detailed data.

Case studies

A case study is research dealing with one or more individual cases. It is a form of field research, restricted to a single individual person, unit or set of units such as colleges in this instance, where according to Stevens et al, (1993, p.79):

‘Establishing reliability of data derived from case studies is problematic’.

Case studies are attractive to the educational researcher. They:

‘Probe deeply...to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of a unit’. (Cohen and Manion, 1996, p.106)

Plus, as Bassey (1999, p.58) notes at least there are three types of educational case study that can be conceived:

- Theory seeking and theory testing case studies
- Story – telling and picture drawing case studies
- Evaluative case studies

The last two were of relevance to this research in that interviewee’s reports and descriptive accounts via semi-structured interviews about key skills in their respective institutions were of central interest. Interview based and multi-site case studies carry their own special advantages for the educational researcher compared to

that of participant and semi-participant observation. As Bassey (1999, p.28) suggests:

‘Educational researchers using case study methods are concerned neither with social theory nor with evaluative action...they are concerned with the understanding of educational action’.

The case study approach requires considerable preparation time. On the basis that ‘...it is not possible to study everything’ (Robson 1994, p.154). Given real life considerations such as time and geography, it is useful that the FEFC funded post-16 sector is structured into nine regions. The West Midlands region has similar characteristics to those of the other eight regions (see table 5) Similarity lies in type of provision by programme area and number of learners supported. This similarity also lies in the fact that the West Midlands college’s have a comparable number of colleges overall in relation to the other 8 regions and a similar percentage of general further education colleges within their number.

This research benefited considerably from the case study approach and allowed the researcher to control specific aspects of the research agenda and led to effective comparability of data and commentary on the interviewee’s experience.

Triangulation

At the outset it is important to review the importance of triangulation to the researcher. According to Cohen and Manion (1997, p.233):

‘Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour’.

‘Triangulation’ whether as the result of the application of ‘Multiple methods’ (Robson, 1993, p.220) or the acquisition and analysis of data from the application of one method, i.e. a case study helps in the ‘...reduction of inappropriate uncertainty’, or as Cohen and Manion (1997, p.233) point out:

‘Triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and in doing so, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data’.

This research needed to focus upon using multiple methods, both qualitative and quantitative in order to obtain and analyse data from general further education colleges in England.

Documentary research

This type of research, also known as archival research tends to be used alongside other methods such as interviews and questionnaires. As Bassey, (1999, p.71) suggests:

‘Many qualitative researchers see documentary research as meaningful and appropriate in the context of their research strategy’.

In an educational setting such documents could be organisation charts and diagrams, internal memorandons, policy documents, course files, letters FEFC circulars and papers from ‘lead bodies’ amongst others. Scott (1990) quoted in Johnson (1994, p.112) offers a useful classification of documents where he distinguishes between ‘personal’ papers ‘official’ papers and levels of legitimate accessibility in terms of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ access.

Documents provided in advance of surveys and associated interviews can allow the researcher to refine given questions in the survey and/or help shape the interview itself. However the treatment of documents from official sources, such as the DfES, and documents emanating from bodies such as Edexcel, NCVQ, FEDA etc who are seeking to interpret policy documents - and in some cases promote what they consider to be ‘best practice’ should also be treated critically. Such critical analysis allows the researcher to establish the starting point for the development of organisational policies and form the basis for analysing practice in relation to stated intentions.

In summary documents and their content are useful not only in themselves but

particularly when used in conjunction with other methods of data collection. They proved useful as a vehicle to provide corroborative evidence when undertaking semi-structured interviews.

Research tools

Johnson (1994, p.37) defines research tools as ‘...the means by which different approaches to research are operationalised’. The main tools she identifies for consideration here are:

- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Observation
- Records (documents)
- Commissioned diaries

The research instrument is developed in several steps, always keeping in mind the content area and the nature of the respondents.

Questionnaires

Measurement is a key step in the research process. Within educational research a popular instrument is that of the questionnaire, whether it is a postal questionnaire or self-administered. In both cases respondents read the instructions and write or mark their answers to the questions. Johnson (1994, p. 38) offers four factors that are essential to the effective use of a questionnaire as a research tool:

- Ensuring that the questionnaire will be clear and comprehensible to the desired respondents
- Getting the questionnaire into the hands of the appropriate respondent
- Motivating the respondent to complete and return the questionnaire
- Making effective administration arrangements for the return of the questionnaires

The piloting of a questionnaire is an important part of the overall process. This involves question development, questionnaire development and what de Vaus (1996, p.100) calls ‘...polishing pilot tests’. This three phase approach helps to involve

respondents fully in a process of shaping a small number of specific questions (phase 1), administering the full questionnaire to a pilot group (phase 2) and finally revising and shortening questions and amending the layout of the questionnaire (phase 3). In this research time went into ensuring that the questionnaire was clear and comprehensible, that it was piloted (twice) and that the target population was clearly defined.

Questionnaires and the target population

‘The researcher must define the group of empirical units amongst which data are to be sought’ (Stevens et al, 1993, p.92), and one way of finding out about a group of people is to collect information from everyone in the group. In large-scale studies this is not practicable, given the constraints of time and cost. Even when the population is small, only a certain amount of it is typically accessible to the research project. In the case of this research for example it would mean sending questionnaires to all general further education colleges in England, (288 colleges in total).

The key is to establish the ‘representativeness’ of the sample. In this context the population is the total number of colleges in the post-16 education sector, funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) or more specifically the total number of general further education colleges in England. Without the time to make personal contact by telephone with potential respondents the non-response rate would have been potentially very high, thus rendering the research of little or no value. It was important to find a representative sample from whom reliable data could be obtained.

Finding a sample

If the researcher is happy with the population on which research is to be undertaken, then he/she should seek to sample the population and undertake ‘the search for typicality’ (Smith, 1975, p.105) or as Cohen and Manion (1996, p.135) note:

‘Sampling is closely linked to the external validity or generalisability of the findings of the enquiry’.

Sampling procedures fall into two major categories (1) non-probability sampling and (2) probability sampling. Non- probability sampling methods include carrying out a survey by interviewing the first 50 people you meet on a street. Examples include the way in which radio or TV interviews are undertaken. It is easy to do but the results might not be representative, thus rendering the outcomes unreliable. Probability sampling gives the researcher greater confidence because each member of the population has some known probability of being included in the sample. Robson (1994, p.142) also offers a list of other types of sample, which are used for special purposes.

Sample size

As Cohen and Manion (1994, p.89) state 'The correct sample size depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population under review', and '...it is the absolute size of the sample that is important' (de Vaus, 1996, p.71). Cohen and Manion also go on to say that if the researcher wishes to use some form of statistical analysis on the collected data then a sample size of at least 30 is most appropriate. There was not an issue for this research in that the exact population was known, the structure of the sector was also known and a basis for sampling presented itself.

Interviews

'Interviews are a kind of conversation: a conversation with a purpose' (Robson, 1996, p.228). Interviewing is a very flexible technique, suited to a wide range of settings and is one of the most common methods used in small-scale research. Drever (1996, p.1) advises that 'There are several styles or schools of interviewing, each with rather different aims and based on different principles'. Interviews can be highly structured and formal, at the other extreme they can be highly non-directive, almost conversational in style giving the interviewee the power to determine the course of the interview.

The decision was made to negotiate access as discussed above, to undertake semi-structured interviews which would give space to the interviewees to shape aspects of

the interview, and to follow in broad terms Johnson and Dreviers' advice on how to conduct a semi-structured interview.

Structured and unstructured observation

Structured observation has its place in educational research, but as de Vaus (1996, p.13) asks. 'How do we know of what more general phenomenon a particular observation might be an indicator'? Unstructured observation, unlike its title implies is still a systematic and planned activity, but as Johnson (1994, p.54) notes '...it casts its net wider than the structured variety of observation'. It was considered not be appropriate given the time constraints and the focus of this research. Overall, observation, structured or unstructured, whilst of interest was not viewed as appropriate for this research because it requires significant planning time and reliance on others – something that would have been difficult to organise or to obtain permission to undertake.

Analysis of data

As Robson (1996, p.372) notes:

'Irrespective of whether your study generates qualitative or quantitative data, the major task is to find answers to your research questions, this has a major influence on the kinds of analysis needed'.

In undertaking the data-analysis phase of the research, the empirical observations have been made and recorded. What remains is the task of making sense out of the data and communicating the results. As Robson (1996, p.306) suggests:

'Analysis is not an empty ritual, carried out for forms sake between doing the study and interpreting it...nor is it a bolt-on feature which can be safely not thought about until all the data is safely gathered in'.

Qualitative data

There are many different styles of qualitative research and a variety of ways of handling and analysing data. Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p.154) suggest that there are

two approaches or modes of analysis of qualitative data ‘...one approach is concurrent with the data collection, the other mode involves collecting all of the data before doing the analysis’. Robson (1996, p.377) offers some basic rules for dealing with qualitative data and the following are of relevance here:

- Generate themes, categories and codes for the qualitative data
- There is no ‘right way’ of analysing data of this kind – this places emphasis upon being systematic, organised and persevering.
- Take data apart in various ways and then try putting them together again to form some consolidated picture.

Through summary and coding data collection can be analysed and displayed. The qualitative researcher tends to use matrices quite often, which helps with data reduction. Maps, charts and diagrams ‘...forces you to abstract and select from a large amount of information so that representation can be made on a single sheet of paper’ (Robson, 1994, p.239).

Quantitative data

Once a decision on how to measure variables is made, the next step is to determine how to analyse data statistically. According to Graziano and Raulin, (1996, p.95),

‘The decisions concerning which statistical procedures to use are made in the procedure-design phase as an integral part of the research design and not ‘tacked on’ after data collection’.

Research instruments

Up to this point key issues in educational research have been considered. It is the objective of this section of the thesis to identify and rationalise the research instruments, and to present summary data prior to a full analysis of the responses received. As identified above it is important to use a balance of methods in order to elicit detailed information and data. The research instrument selected is summarised in the table below:

Table 3: Research Approaches and Research Tools

Range	Research Approach	Research Tools
Breadth	Survey	Postal questionnaire
Depth	Case Study	Documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews

The survey

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funds the activities of the publicly funded Further Education sector. In the FEFC publication Funding Allocations 1997-1998 (FEFC, 1998, p.4) it states that the Council primarily funds:

'...colleges incorporated under sections 15 and 16 (of The Further and Higher Education Act 1992), that is, general further education colleges, sixth form colleges other than those that are voluntary aided, agriculture colleges, art and design and performing arts colleges'.

In total the FEFC funds seven types of institution, which receive a given percentage of FEFC funding linked to the size of their eligible activities, as follows:

Table 4: FEFC funded institutions by category

Type of institution	Percentage of total funding by type of institution
General further education and tertiary	81%
Sixth form college	11%
Higher education institutions	2%
External institutions	3%
Specialist designated institutions, Art, design and performing arts and Agriculture and horticulture	3%

Adapted from FEFC Funding allocations 1998-1999. FEFC, Coventry

The FEFC entered into a 'funding agreement' with 453 colleges in 1998 and a further 283 external institutions. As identified above five major categories of colleges received 97% of FEFC funds, and External Institutions 3%. As indicated by the FEFC the external institutions are usually small organisations delivering comparatively small amounts of largely adult education and associated provision.

Table 5: Analysis of enrolments by category of college 1998

Types of College	Number of Colleges	Percentage of Enrolments by type of College
Agriculture and horticulture	32	2%
Art, design and performing arts colleges	9	1%
General further education and tertiary colleges	288	89%
Sixth form colleges	110	3%
Specialist designated Institutions	14	5%
Totals	453	100%

The FEFC is structured on a regional basis and each region has a designated number of colleges within its region. There are 9 regions; they are listed below in relation to type of college:

Table 6: Number and category of college by FEFC region

FEFC Region									
FEFC Type of Institution	EM	ER	GL	NR	NW	SE	SW	WM	YH
Agriculture and horticulture colleges	4	3	1	2	3	6	5	6	2
Art, design and performing Arts colleges	-	-	-	1	1	2	2	1	2
General further education and tertiary colleges	24	23	45	19	39	38	31	38	31
Sixth form colleges	5	8	12	8	27	24	2	13	11
Specialist designated institutions	1	-	9	-	-	2	-	1	1
Totals	34	34	67	30	70	72	42	59	47

Key to regions

EM – East Midlands

ER- Eastern Region

GL - Greater London

NM - Northern Region

SE - South East

SW - South West

WM - West Midlands

YH - Yorkshire and Humberside

As the statistics above indicate, the largest category of FEFC funded institutions are general further education and tertiary colleges, (288 a total of 453, 64%). Given the very nature of the provision in a general further education college, they would provide a balance of full and part-time vocational courses as indicated in the FEFC Directory of Colleges (FEFC, 1999).

Employer – led part-time study is part-time study (full-day, half-day and day and/or evening) study organised for and/or paid for by the employer. Whereas independent part-time study, is as the title suggests, paid for by the learner. The table below lists students' qualification aims in the FEFC funded education sector:

Table 7: Qualification aims in the FEFC sector

Awarding Body	Percentage pursuing a QCA accredited qualification aim
BTEC*	14%
RSA*	7%
City and Guilds*	17%
University/College**	2%
GCE A/AS level*	12%
GCSE	8%
Professional qualifications	9%
Unspecified examinable	8%
Unspecified non-examinable	21%
Other specified qualifications	2%

Source: Statistics of education, DFEE, 1997-98

The single asterix next to the name of some of the awarding bodies indicates that the awarding body offers qualification outcomes in which key skills can be or are 'delivered' as a part of a given qualification. This indicates the optional nature of key skills.

Other relevant background information on the sector and the population concerns the FEFC definition of 'programme areas'. These are:

- Science (inc Maths & IT)
- Agriculture
- Construction
- Engineering
- Business
- Hotel and Catering
- Health and Community Care
- Art and Design
- Humanities
- Basic Education

Given that the purpose of the research relates to the management of key skills in the broadest sense of the term, and the list of eight broad questions stated in Chapter 1, it was appropriate to select general further education colleges for the survey aspect of this research. The FEFC West Midlands region was chosen as the location of the research. Thos region is typical of England, and, in addition, was well known to the researcher. The West Midlands is representative of the population under review in terms of:

- Comparative size (in terms of annual enrolments)
- Number of general further education and tertiary colleges (as a percentage of total provision compared to that of the other eight regions)
- Breadth and relevance of provision being delivered in the region

Table 8 below shows the FEFC West Midlands region in comparison to the other eight regions in terms of size in relation to general further education colleges.

Table 8: General Further Education Colleges as a percentage of total number of colleges data, 1998.

FEFC Region	Total Number of Colleges	GFE & Tertiary Colleges	GFE & Tertiary Colleges as a %age of Colleges in the region
East Midlands	34	24	71
Eastern Region	34	23	68
Greater London	67	45	67
Northern Region	30	19	63
North West	70	39	56
South East	72	38	53
South West	42	31	73
West Midlands	59	38	67
Yorkshire and Humberside	47	31	66

Source: FEFC, Directory of colleges 1998

Personal contact was made by telephone to identify the correct person to a) discuss the broad aims of the research and b) to seek their personal support in either completing the questionnaire themselves or arranging for its completion by the most relevant member of staff in the college. This was a very time consuming task but invaluable given the importance of obtaining a high response rate to the survey in due course. Given the details of initial contacts in the table below it can be seen that the key contact ranged from the college principal in two cases, through to the college examination officer in one instance. In the majority of cases the initial contact in a college had a curriculum, learning resource management or specific key skills role.

As with all survey research of this kind, the caveat must be that a person's job title does not always reflect the job they do on a daily basis, their position in a given organisation or if they played a key role in the completion of any subsequent questionnaire.

Table 9: West Midlands GFE Colleges – survey respondents

Number of College	Contacts Position
1.	Head of Dept and Learning Resources Manager
2.	Curriculum Projects Manager
3.	Curriculum and Quality Assurance Manager
4.	Curriculum Manager
5.	Director of Academic Resources
6.	Curriculum Area Manager
7.	Curriculum Co-ordinator
8.	Head of Faculty
9.	Examinations Officer
10.	Principal
11.	Curriculum Director
12.	Head of Training and Business Development
13.	Head of Vocational Studies
14.	Director of Resources
15.	Head of Science
16.	Vice Principal
17.	Curriculum Manager
18.	Associate Director
19.	Divisional Director (English and Communications)
20.	Principal
21.	Learning Resource Manager
22.	Campus Co-ordinator
23.	Learning Resource Centre Manager
24.	Acting Principal
25.	Key Skills Co-ordinator
26.	Director of Curriculum
27.	Director of Curriculum
28.	Administrative Co-ordinator Key Skills
29.	Key Skills Supervisor
30.	Lecturer
31.	Deputy Principal
32.	Key Skills Manager
33.	Flexible Learning Manager
34.	Key Skills Manager
35.	Programme Area Manager
36.	Head of Department
37.	16-19 Curriculum Manager

Survey contacts: All West Midlands General further Education Colleges (38 Colleges), Above table excludes author's own college)

Survey sample

In selecting a sample of colleges in the sector the following summary data was used:

Table 10: FEFC sector details linked to the survey

Total number of colleges in England (population)	453
Largest type of college (General Further Education College)	288 (64%)
Number of GFE colleges in the FEFC West Midlands region (GFE colleges in the West Midlands)	38 (67%)
National average of GFE colleges in the sector	65%
Percentage of FEFC funding allocated the GFE Colleges	89%

Adapted from FEFC Directory of Colleges 1998

Generating a questionnaire

As mentioned above the decision to use a questionnaire as the major instrument for gathering data was viewed as important particularly given the range of information required for this research. The range of questions used was shaped by the literature review, including national surveys associated with key skills and the issues and concerns of the author.

The questionnaire was designed over a three-month period and Principals of 12 general further education colleges (not in the West Midlands region) were contacted by letter asking if they would be happy to complete and critically evaluate the pilot questionnaire. Of the 12, seven agreed and of these six duly completed and returned the questionnaire in the agreed time (three weeks). Comments were received about the length of the questions, the relevance of others and the level of detail required and written explanations sought by the researcher. This led to the re-drafting of some aspects of the questionnaire, the reduction in its overall length and some questions were made clearer what information was being sought from the respondent. The questionnaire was reviewed at this time with due regard for its usefulness in relation to both the analysis of quantitative data and written responses in order for it to be the focus of the doctoral thesis by early 2000. In addition FEFC sourced data provided information on each college, by region in relation to:

- Address and contact information
- Current years funding allocation

- Total enrolments, including
 - further education enrolments
 - higher education enrolments
 - full-time equivalent enrolments
 - attendance by mode of study
- Provision by programme area (10 programme areas)

Generating questions

Initially the questionnaire was divided into eight discrete sections or themes, each one relating to a particular aspect of key skills management. In total 35 individual questions were asked.

- Questions 1-4 relating to 'where key skills fit in' required a yes/no response
- Question 5 regarding 'key skill client groups' was as above, but with space for further client groups to those noted to be added as required
- Questions 6-10 regarding 'key skill policies' required a yes/no response but with space for further client groups to those noted to be added as required to the response to question 8
- Questions 11-18 were about 'initial screening and learning support'. Questions 11 & 12 were cafeteria style questions (questions with options to be selected) with space for qualitative responses, questions 13-15 were required simple yes/no responses, but questions 15-18 had space for qualitative responses.
- Questions relating to 'course management' 19-21 were cafeteria style questions with boxes for further qualitative responses, but questions 22-26 were of the yes/no variety with boxes for qualitative responses.
- Questions relating to 'key skills assessment', questions 27-29, were a mixture of yes/no and cafeteria style with boxes for qualitative responses
- Questions linked to 'internal verification' (questions 30 & 31) were of the cafeteria variety with boxes for qualitative responses
- questions linked to 'learning and physical resources, questions 32-35 were of the yes/no type with space for a further qualitative response.

The yes/no type of responses would be relatively easy to analyse in terms of frequency of response and each college's response can be compared. In addition the

descriptive responses where offered can be recorded for each college, analysed and compared. A balance of quantitative and qualitative data was sought from the questionnaire with the objective of building a profile of current management practices of key skills in the dominant type of college in the FCFC funded post-16 education sector.

Survey arrangements

The names and addresses of all 37 general further education colleges were available to the researcher. The key to securing completion and return of the questionnaire was to make personal contact by telephone in the first instance with the each college. This was time consuming but a very cost – effective and rewarding strategy. It generated access to the correct person, sometimes straight away, but invariably personal contact was made and an explanation about the nature of the research given. In the vast majority of cases rapport was established due to the potential respondent's interest in his or her role and (hopefully) the manner in which the request for support was made.

The questionnaire (Appendix 3) was posted to each respondent in January 2000 with a covering letter restating the nature and broad objective of the research, and a reply paid envelope was enclosed. The response rate was excellent. Thirty Four of 37 colleges contacted responded - 92%. In total all 34 responses arrived within 4-6 weeks, (the last response was received in late April 2000) and in most cases without the requisite follow-up letter or telephone call. Of the colleges that did not respond, one respondent was not available due to a long term illness, one key contact's job changed at a time of college merger and one elected not to respond and did not reply to my follow-up telephone calls. Each respondent was sent a letter thanking him or her for their time and patience in completing the questionnaire with a promise to share the results of the research with them in due course. Results were entered on a spreadsheet and the qualitative responses were recorded next to each question and then extracted for comparative purposes.

The aims and purpose of case studies

The responses to the survey, (34 colleges responded, 92%), provided a starting point to consider a case study approach. It was considered relevant to select the case study approach in order to:

- Follow –up responses to the questionnaire
- Compare approaches to key skills management
- To triangulate organisational data. This would be useful given that one respondent would have been likely to have completed the questionnaire.
- To understand key skills in context
- To view, compare and in due course comment on ‘facilities and resources’ linked to key skills
- To undertake semi-structured interviews with an appropriate range of staff so that they can describe their ‘history’ and ‘role’ in the key skills story in their institution
- To obtain further documents where available relating to ‘key skills management’
- To assist in the overall evaluation of key skills management in colleges.

The stages in organising four case studies

Four colleges were chosen from the 34 who completed the questionnaire, (Appendix 3). The four selected were viewed as representative of the region as a whole in terms of their size (in relation to the number of FEFC funded ‘units of activity’). Profiles of each case study college are provided in Appendix 4. Each accredited qualification delivered and supported by an FEFC sector College is allocated a ‘unit value’. As a result of the FEFC’s consultation process as detailed in FEFC Circular 96/28, *Funding Methodology: Review of the Tariff for 1997-98* Colleges receive a funding allocation from The FEFC which is represented in:

- A Funding Allocation (£)
- A total ‘unit’ allocation - based on the Average Level of Funding (ALF) of each institution

Each of the selected colleges, Buckley College of Arts and Technology, Hills Technical College, Rivers College and Victoria College of Arts and Technology (all anonymous for the purposes of this research) had a unit allocation of over 400,000 units. The range in the West Midlands region was 118, 000 – 706,000 units for all colleges, with the regional average being 428,000 units a college. The Average Level of Funding (ALF) per unit of funding for the four case study college's 1997/98 was £17.90. Each of the case study colleges delivered education and training across the range of FEFC program areas. The program area agriculture was virtually non-existent in all four colleges, and in the case of Hills College of Arts and Technology hotel and catering courses were not offered as a result of a local agreement with another further education college. The full range of provision is shown in the table below:

Table 11: Percentage of Provision in case study colleges by programme area

Programme Area	Name of College			
	Buckley College	Hills College	Rivers College	Victoria College
Sciences	8%	8%	10%	11%
Agriculture	0%	0%	0%	1%
Construction	6%	13%	6%	9%
Engineering	2%	20%	15%	17%
Business	13%	13%	16%	12%
Hotel & Catering	4%	0%	5%	3%
Health and Community	13%	8%	8%	12%
Art & Design	11%	5%	5%	6%
Humanities	20%	22%	32%	27%
Basic Education	0%	10%	2%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Adapted from FEFC Directory of colleges 1998

Stages in the case study investigation – data collection

Once potential case study colleges were identified a letter was sent to each respective Principal seeking permission for access to undertake case study work in their college. Contact had already been made in respect of the access for the initial survey work, and a copy of thanks forwarded on completion and return of the questionnaire. In

addition at the time initial contact was made with the nominated college contact, the question of possible involvement in a case study analysis of key skills in their respective college was made. In total the possibility was informally discussed with 8 colleges. Once accepted by the four colleges the following procedure was adopted and adhered to:

1. A letter was forwarded to the primary contact in the college confirming the objective of the case study and requesting relevant documents.
2. An interview date was agreed by telephone.
3. Each college forwarded a letter confirming arrangements for the day, and in some cases listed the personnel available for interview as well as confirming the availability of the documents requested.
4. Discussions on issues of confidentiality were conducted in each college, and no case study college has been identified.
5. Interviews were conducted at each of the four colleges using the guidelines as described in Appendix 5. Each college adopted a different approach as follows in terms of the number and range of personnel they elected to provide for interview. The researcher deliberately did not make specific requests to see key staff other than the nominated 'key skills manager/co-ordinator/project leader' who had completed the questionnaire.
6. The facilities and resources used for key skills were viewed as part of two tours of each college, one guided, one alone.
7. Further documentary evidence was provided or requested during the visit.

Identifying interviewees

The plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews with the manager with overall responsibility for key skills in the college. The interviewer took time to confirm the objectives of the research and consideration was given to the potential of the interviewees to seek to present a good image of their given college. The view was taken that the potential desire of interviewees to present a good image of the college in question would be mitigated by a) the number of interviewees with varying roles per college and b) the structure of the questionnaire.

In all cases further relevant staff were nominated by the college contact. However, even given the agreed structure of each visit there was ample opportunity to broaden aspects of the questioning and to cross reference responses with those in the questionnaire and to view physical resources as well as to request further documents as required. The table below summarises the roles of personnel interviewed at each college visited. Whilst the list of interviewees does not necessarily reflect a given college's organisational structure, it does indicate for example that at Hills Technical College they have an internal verification manager, whereas the three other colleges have a dedicated Learning Resource Centre Manager.

Table 12: Analysis of interviewees in case study colleges

Role of Interviewee	Name of College			
	Buckley College	Hills College	Rivers College	Victoria College
Senior curriculum manager	•	•	•	•
Key skills Manager/ Co-ordinator	•	•	•	•
Course manager	•	•	•	•
Youth Training manager		•		
College internal verification manager		•		
Learning resource manager	•		•	•

Recording and collating interview data

At the outset of each interview the confidentiality of each interviewee's responses was reiterated. It was agreed that each person's response would not be reported to any colleagues in their college, including their line manager or college Principal. With the permission of each interviewee each interview was recorded. However any documents provided to the researcher were with the express approval of the interviewee's line manager in all cases.

The 'main interviews' were conducted with senior curriculum managers and key skill managers/co-ordinators and as such they followed an agreed pattern within the spirit and style of semi-structured interviews along the following themes:

- Historical information about key skills 'organisation'.
- Review of primary managerial/co-ordinator roles in key skills management'.
- Discussion of staff roles in the 'delivery and assessment' of key skills.
- Key skills 'student entitlement'.
- Review of a whole college approach to key skills.
- Review of the range of 'key skill client groups'.
- Key skill support for full and part-time students.
- Explaining 'initial assessment'.
- Support for modern apprentices/national trainees.
- The role of Learning Resource Centres within the management of key skills.

The structure of the second phase interviews differed to those of the main interviews in that each interviewee was effectively a specialist in one particular aspect of 'key skills management', i.e. course manager, course tutor, internal verifier, learning resource centre manager etc. All the key points made by second phase interviewees were transcribed and then reduced to bullet points and entered into a matrix in order to support further comparative analysis.

In addition all four colleges supplied documentary evidence. Although the documents varied in volume, relevance and content they were useful in describing college policies, illustrating the roles of key staff in the organisational structure, and could be cross-referenced against practices highlighted in survey responses.

Process for analysing qualitative data

The qualitative data was initially analysed in relation to the responses given to questions in each of the 8 categories of questions listed in the survey (chapter 5) and from the case study data (chapter 6). The responses to each question were analysed in terms of the number of the same responses from each college that responded to the survey. From this initial categorisation further analysis of the qualitative data was

undertaken through the analysis of data from four sub-themes which served to focus on the relationship between critical aspects of the management of key skills teaching:

- College organisation
- Student admissions
- Course management
- Assessment and verification

This thematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data as presented in chapter 6 has the advantage of being able to analyse both the common factors and different approaches taken in each of the case study colleges and all colleges surveyed.

Presentation of results

Given that the research objective was to explore and review how the relatively new phenomena of key skills teaching was being managed in the sector as a whole, the data obtained from the 34 questionnaires could be presented in a variety of formats as reviewed in this chapter. Interview data, once filtered and put in bulleted matrix format could be compared, analysed and presented accordingly. Survey results related to the case study colleges could then take place and college comparisons between each of the case study colleges could be presented.

Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to review the range of methods available to support an enquiry in the field of educational management and more particularly that of the management of the teaching of key skills. The result was that a range of methods were selected thought most appropriate to the sample of the population selected. The scale and depth of the research, the use of a survey of 34 colleges and case studies of four representative colleges allows for generalisability. Furthermore the results of the semi-structured interviews with key personnel in the case study colleges provides a valuable insight into the manner in which college managers elect to manage the teaching of key skills on an everyday basis.

Chapter 4: Survey findings

Introduction

This chapter deals with the findings of the survey and seeks to present a discussion of both quantitative and data. The results are based on questionnaires received by late April 2000. This chapter will review responses both as a set or family of responses where it is appropriate to do so, or individually as required. It will present summarised qualitative data in the same manner, and describe specific and overall findings to the survey

The method of data presentation is as follows:

1. The aim of each of the eight categories of questions is summarised and the questions listed.
2. The responses to each question are categorised in terms of number of responses replying and results are expressed as a percentage of the total number of responses.
3. Where qualitative data is sought and provided the results are categorised and the category of response are quantified
4. A commentary and description of the summary data is provided for each question or family of questions

Section 1: Organisational structure, where key skills fit in

The four questions in this section to which there was a 100% response were designed to obtain data on the internal management systems used to support the management of key skills. They were designed to draw out the linkages between four aspects of the organisational fit of key skills.

Question 1. Does the college have a key skills unit/section?

Question 2. Is there one member of staff responsible for the overall 'management of key skills' across the college?

Question 3. Does the college have specialist staff dedicated to 'deliver key skills'?

Question 4. Is there a close link between key skills delivery and the provision of learner support?

The response to Question 1 was illuminating in that it identified that only 44% of colleges could respond that they had a clearly defined key skills unit or section, yet

71% did have one member of staff with overall responsibility for the management of key skills (question 2). An even higher percentage, (79%) said that they have staff dedicated to 'deliver' key skills (question 3), and that the link between key skills support and that of learner support was high at 65%.

These findings, indicate that the majority of colleges, (56%) now in the eighth year of running courses in which key skills are mandatory (GNVQs), have elected not to create a separate key skills section. They have selected other organisational responses, but do feel it necessary to nominate a manager who has overall responsibility for key skills. In summary terms the colleges indicated that the link between key skills support and learner support was high. This implies that an individual student should, in at least 65% of colleges are able to obtain further support in the development of the key skills from the providers of 'learner support' in their institution.

Section 2. Key skills client groups

Question 5. Colleges were asked to identify the client groups they supported with respect to key skills.

The responses as analysed in the Table 13 below clearly show that as general further education colleges they had elected to support a broad range of clients.

Table 13: Analysis of key skills provision. (question 5)

Response	GNVQ Level 1	GNVQ Level 2	GNVQ Level 3	'A' level	Modern Apprenticeships	New Deal	Other client Groups
Yes	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	23 (68%)	32 (94%)	22 (65%)	16 (50%)
No	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (32%)	2 (6%)	12 (35%)	16 (50%)
No response	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2
Total	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	32 (100%)

Key skills are a mandatory part of GNVQs, so the response in the first 3 categories at 100% is to be expected. The same should be the case with Modern Apprenticeship provision because key skills attainment is linked to funding. The response at 94 % indicates either a response error on behalf of the respondent or a lack of understanding of the contractual issues associated with Modern Apprenticeship funding. As noted in Chapter 1, key skills are not a compulsory component in 'A' level courses, or of the

Government's Welfare to Work initiative 'New Deal'. Analysis of the additional client groups is shown in the table below:

Table 14: Analysis of additional key skill client groups

Course Title/Grouping	Number of Occurrences
National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)	4 (24%)
Edexcel National Diploma courses	3 (18%)
RSA Skills Profile	1 (6%)
Princes Trust provision	2 (12%)
Access to Higher Education courses	2 (12%)
Higher National Diploma courses	1 (6%)
Degree courses*	1 (6%)
Award Scheme and Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)	1 (6%)
GCSE courses	1 (6%)
Teacher training courses	1 (6%)
Total number of responses	17 (100%)
No response	17

* denotes that one college which has a catering and hospitality provision, they offer a Bachelor of Science course in which they 'deliver' key skills

It can be concluded from this first category of questions that colleges have, in various ways, elected to seek to manage key skills teaching in some way. In addition given that 16 colleges (94%) have elected to provide students with access to a range of accredited key skills teaching in some way for 10 client groups, indicates the value that these colleges provide beyond the needs of a student's primary learning goal.

Section 3. College policies relating to key skills

Whilst it was important to establish whether formal policies existed, it was of equal importance to find out more about the management of key skills teaching - whether

policy driven or otherwise. In addition the issue of ‘entitlement’ and breadth of provision in relation to the two further accredited key skills is raised for the first time

Question 6. Is there in existence a corporate approach to key skills?

Question 7. Does the college have formal policies relating to key skills ‘entitlement’?

Question 8. Which students are beneficiaries of this ‘entitlement’?

Question 9. Are key skills policies implemented across all relevant full and part-time courses?

Question 10. Do GNVQ students have entitlement to the QCA accredited additional key skills?

In the view of respondents there was a difference between a ‘corporate approach’ to key skills and ‘formal policies’ relating to entitlement, with 14% more colleges providing a positive response to the question relating to entitlement. As noted above 50% (16) of colleges were providing key skills for those students for whom they were not a mandatory part of the course (as it is for GNVQ students and Modern Apprentices).

It was also clear that some 13 colleges did not consider that all students were ‘beneficiaries of the key skills entitlement’, leaving the majority of colleges in a position whereby any provision beyond that which was mandatory was not policy driven. The table below shows the response to question 8 regarding which students are beneficiaries to key skills ‘entitlement’.

Table 15: Categories of key skill entitlement beneficiaries (question 8)

Response	All Students	Full-time Students only	GNVQ Students	Modern Apprenticeships
Yes	13 (39%)	12 (36%)	33 (100%)	10 (30%)
No	20 (61%)	21 (64)	0	23 (70%)
Total	33 (100%)	33 (100%)	33 (100%)	33 (100%)
No response	1	1	1	1

The overall range of responses to the qualitative section of this question are significant because it means that at a policy level very specific ranges of students have been identified as potential beneficiaries by the colleges concerned.

Questions 9 was designed as a check on the implementation of policy, and the response that 53% of colleges ‘implement key skill policies across all relevant full

and part-time courses' is a reflection on the actual level of entitlement. Question 10 however extends the questioning to what are defined by the QCA to be the 'additional key skills' or 'softer personal skills' as they are sometimes referred to. This question is designed to establish if colleges do in fact take forward entitlement to include something more than the mandatory key skills. The responses were as follows:

Table 16: Analysis of 'additional' key skills (100% response)

Name of additional key skill	Evidenced in percentage of colleges
Working with Others	71%
Improving own Learning and Performance	74%

Clearly, as the responses indicate, the majority of colleges have elected to not only extend entitlement in the formal sense of the term but also informally, this suggests broad access to the full range of key skills is in existence.

Section 4. Student admissions: Initial screening and learner support

The questions are valuable to this research because they are designed to go beyond 'policy' and 'entitlement' to show how a students on-going key skills are developed, tracked and supported.

Question 11 – Who, in the college undertakes the initial screening?

The responses below indicate that a variety of practices exist in the sector, and some colleges adopt more than one approach. The single most popular grouping of staff that undertake key skills are vocational course tutors. As baseline data this response indicates that the responsibility to identify 'need' and potentially 'extra support' lies with the vocational tutor.

Table 17: Analysis of staff who undertake initial screening in a college (question 11)

Response	Student services	Learner support	Key skills staff	Vocational course tutors	Others
Yes	5 (15%)	12 (36%)	10 (30%)	20 (60%)	9 (28%)
No	28 (85%)	31 (64%)	23 (70%)	13 (40%)	23 (72%)
Total	33	33	33	33	32
No response	1	1	1	1	2

The response 'others' required a qualitative response to illustrate a given college's practice. The most popular response was that a learning support lecturer/team undertakes initial screening (6 responses). Overall the responses to this question indicate the importance of the tutor's role when it comes to initial screening, whether working in isolation or in partnership with specialist staff not linked directly to course provision.

Question 12 - When does initial screening take place?

Question 13 - Does pre-enrolment screening have an influence on the level at which a given student enters the college?

Question 14 – Are 'initial screening results as important to the college as a student's GCSE grades when it comes to deciding or negotiating the level of entry to a given course?

As these three questions indicate, they are designed to identify the potential power of initial screening in a college, when it takes place and to see if there is a relationship between pre-enrolment screening and a student's 'entry point'. The table below provides the summary of responses and shows that colleges adopt more than one approach in many instances:

Table 18: Analysis of times when initial screening takes place (question 12)

Response	Prior to enrolment	After enrolment	During enrolment	At another time
Yes	9 (26%)	22 (65%)	8 (24%)	14 (42%)
No	33 (74%)	12 (35%)	26 (76%)	19 (58%)
Total Responses	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	33 (100%)
No response	0	0	0	1

In this case 'at another time' meant at induction in 12 of the 14 responses. The other two responses being 'for late students it is undertaken by key skills staff' and 'in the first three weeks of a course'. It would be reasonable to link 'after enrolment' responses to those of 'at induction' to summarise that the vast majority of initial screening is undertaken within the induction process period, which can be between weeks 1-3.

The response to question 13 at 39% (13 colleges) clearly shows that when only 26% (8) colleges undertake initial screening prior to enrolment only 39% (3) allow the results to influence the level at which a student enters the college. Or to be more precise 3 of 34 (less than 10%) of all colleges have adopted this approach with screening. However the responses to question 14 at 24% (8 colleges) indicate that initial screening tests are as important as GCSE results in some colleges and may in due course help to explain their rise as a decision making tool for those staff in colleges responsible for student recruitment.

Question 15 – Are there any 'tracking systems' used to ensure that students' requiring the extra support they need actually receive this support?

This question required both a quantitative and qualitative response. The objective of the first part of the question was to establish linkages between 'need' and the service provided. The reason the term 'tracking' is used is to establish if appropriate records are kept relating to progression and achievement.

The response in 91% of the colleges surveyed was in the affirmative. Colleges do use tracking systems to check if students receive the support they need. In terms of the qualitative responses to the question 27 (87%) of the 31 respondents elected to provide a response to show how tracking was managed in their college.

Of the responses 14 colleges commented (generating 11 different responses) on students being tracked by staff together with staff who work in the colleges student support unit, learner support unit or study support centre. In addition 5 colleges refer to tracking being undertaken in tutorial sessions and in tutor groups. 5 colleges commented on the role tutorials play in the tracking of key skills. 6 colleges noted

what have been classified as responses that identify 'room for improvement'. The following table summarises the categories of response to this question.

Table 19: Categories of approaches to the tracking of extra key skills support

Category of Response	Specific Comments
Involvement in internal tracking partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are formal links between 'year managers' and study support centre staff • 'Learning Support register attendance and liase with course managers and audit support • Learning support lecturer attempts tracking alongside Management Information Systems (MIS) officer • Feedback and referral is given by Learning Support staff to staff delivering the unit concerned or to the personal tutor • The answer applies to GNVQ students only. Those who require key skills learner support are highlighted during the college's normal initial assessment procedure • Records are kept on each support session attended. Personal tutors who also review overall progress monitor this. • Paper based systems are used to communicate attendance at learner support sessions to course and personal tutor • The lecturer keeps records of all referrals to the study support centre • Students are referred to learning support manager who will organise appropriate help • Students are referred to learner support • All students are screened. Results are then analysed and support offered
The role of tutorial sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Via the tutorial sessions • Via tutorials, liaison with staff from Student Support Unit • The tutorial co-ordinator checks that students are receiving support
Room for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some schools (department/section) use tracking – we intend to standardise across the college in September 2000 • If the student does not attend little can be done • Systems are in place, attendance records, tutor contact etc. Attendance could be improved • Students are referred and followed up by the team, but in the end they cannot be 'made' to attend • They (tracking systems) are not fully developed, but there are tracking systems in existence • Good record keeping! But we cannot compel them to attend

Overall the responses to this question indicate that a very pro-active range of organisational responses have been made by colleges with respect to the 'tracking' of a students key skills acquisition. In addition the classification of qualitative responses identifies that there are in effect two distinct ways in which tracking is undertaken – as a partnership between tutors and 'learner support' and through the tutorial system.

Question 16 – Where does learner support take place

Question 17 – Who provides learner support

These two questions are designed to establish both the location in which learner support is provided and secondly who actually provides the service. The responses to question 16 highlighted a variety of terms that are used to identify a 'centre' where students attend to receive learner support, these are:

- Flexible learning centres
- Workshop area
- Key skills centre
- Learning resource centre
- Study support centre
- Learning support workshops
- A timetabled classroom
- Learning support unit

Essentially these are centres that exist for the purposes of some form of flexible delivery, and in this instance it refers to the flexible support given to the development of a student's key skills. All 34 colleges responded to this question, and of them 25 (74%) made reference to one or more of the above 'external' centres. In addition eight (24%) colleges made reference to 'classroom based' support for key skills and four (12%) noted that one-to one support was provided either in a workshop of some type or in the classroom environment. Through a mix of workshop, classroom based and one-to-one learner support in a variety of venues, the colleges in the survey had elected to make specific organisational choices and then explain/rationalise them via the survey. There were 32 (94%) qualitative responses to question 17, which as noted above sought to establish exactly who provided this support. The responses can be categorised as follows:

Table 20: Analysis of the providers of learning support (question 17)

Response	Key and/or Basic skills staff	Learning support centre staff	Vocational tutors	Classroom assistants
Yes	12 (38%)	13 (41%)	6 (19%)	1 (3%)
No	20 (62%)	19 (59%)	26 (81%)	31 (97%)
Total	32 (100%)	32 (100%)	32 (100%)	32 (100%)
No response	2	2	2	2

Some respondents offered answers which suggested that a partnership approach existed between Basic Skills and Key Skills staff for example or between Learning Support staff and vocational tutors.

Question 18 – Are there monitoring systems used to ensure that students requiring extra support actually get the support they need?

To a certain extent this question was designed to verify the responses to question 15 regarding tracking. If for example the positive responses were low then it would challenge the validity of the very positive response to question 15. It is also an important question in that it is designed to go beyond ‘tracking’ to encompass the issue of monitoring. It is essentially a question that focuses upon the personal needs of students in relation to ‘extra support’. The response at 91% in the affirmative was emphatic, and as such is exactly the same response as for question 15 regarding tracking.

Table 21: Are there any ‘tracking systems’ used to ensure that a student requiring extra support actually receives this support?

Yes	31 (91%)
No	3 (9%)
Total	100%

Section 5: Course management

Overall the purpose of questions in this section reveal how key skills are ‘delivered’ and integrated and then establish where they are assessed. The first question in this section relates to ‘how’ key skills are delivered, then questions of ‘when’ they are delivered and ‘who’ is responsible for integrating key skills. Aspect of planning, course organisation the management of the delivery of additional key skills are considered.

Question 19 – How are key skills ‘delivered’ for GNVQ students and Modern Apprentices?

The table below summarises the response to this question:

Table 22: Analysis of how key skills are delivered (question 19)

Response	Assignment only	Assignment and Workshops	Independent Learning	Specialist Staff	Separate from Vocational delivery	Claimed by students via assignment	Other
Yes	12 (36%)	30 (88%)	15 (44%)	25 (74%)	16 (47%)	21 (62%)	9 (26%)
No	21 (62%)	4 (12%)	19 (56%)	9 (26%)	18 (53%)	13 (38%)	25 (74%)
Total	33 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)
No response	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

All the responses to ‘other’ method of delivery are listed below. There were 9 (26%) written responses in total, and all are worth listing as examples of alternative ways of ‘delivering’ key skills.

Whilst most of the options are self-explanatory, the option ‘claimed through assignments’ requires some explanation. With this method the students concerned have to claim aspects of a key skill, usually from evidence of skills development from the assignments they undertake. Each key skill is comprised of a set of performance criteria that has to be met, and the criteria can be built into assignments. When an assignment is completed to the required standard aspects of a key skill can be ‘claimed’. The responsibility is the students to seek the relevant quality and quantity of evidence and then claim competence. This method requires significant planning

and teamwork to ensure full coverage of the key skill criteria in the assignment programme.

It can be seen that the assignment and workshop approach is clearly the most popular method of ‘delivering’ key skills (88%), and that specialist staff are used by most colleges for the ‘delivery’ of assignments (74%). Workshops are designed as separate sessions where specific support is provided by tutors usually in a location not associated with the traditional classroom learning experience. It is interesting to note that specialist key skills staff are separate from the vocational units in 62% of colleges. At this point it is not clear if this response conflicts with that of the 88% of key skills delivery is undertaken through workshops and assignments, but taken together it can be deduced that specialists are used to support ‘delivery’ in workshops.

Question 20 – When are key skills assessed?

This question relates to the planning of assessment, and as such is seeking to establish if colleges have one or more standardised approaches to their assessment in terms of specified times in the academic year through to an ad hoc unstructured approach to the task. The table below illustrates the choices made by the respondents:

Table 23: Analysis of times when key skills are assessed, (question 20)

Times when Key Skills are assessed	Number & %
At agreed times	12 (35%)
At student's request	18 (53%)
At assignment submission	27 (79%)
Termly	1 (3%)
Ad hoc arrangements	13 (38%)
Other	2 (6%)

Colleges chose more than one response, but the most popular approach is that of assessing key skills through assignments at 79% (27 colleges), but just over half of the colleges (53%) respond to student's requests for their assessment. It is possible

that colleges operate a dual policy of assessment through assignments supported by students' requests.

Question 21 – Who is responsible for integrating key skills into vocational programmes?

This question is designed to focus upon integration of key skills in GNVQ courses in which the lead body, Edexcel expect to see integration of key skills wherever possible. Lead bodies, i.e. those organisations that are authorised by NCVQ (QCA from 1998) to design competence based courses are not concerned with how a college manages its resources. 'Integration' may be managed in a number of ways. The table below summarises the responses:

Table 24: Analysis of postholders responsible for integrating key skills into programmes (survey, question 21)

Response	Course team leader/ manager	College co-ordinator	No one allocated the job	Vocational tutor	A mixture of CTL* and vocational Tutor	Other Approach
Yes	22 (62%)	4 (9%)	0 (0%)	13 (38%)	16 (47%)	6 (18%)
No	12 (38%)	30 (81%)	34 (100%)	21 (62%)	18 (53%)	27 (80%)
Total	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	1 (3%)

* CTL - denotes course team leader

The responses indicate that on a given course the leader of that course takes overall responsibility for the integration of key skills at 62% (22 colleges), although in 38% (13), the vocational tutor undertakes the task. As discussed elsewhere there are 3 mandatory key skills within a GNVQ programme and it is possible that specialists are used in a variety of ways to assist in the overall integration of key skills. Of the qualitative responses the answer to 'other' 6 colleges provided a range of comments, although in total 10 colleges responded to note that they had additional supportive arrangements in place.

The overall observation of the responses to this question indicate quite a broad range of responses, but the role of the course team in some form of partnership with key skills staff to varying degrees is a prominent feature in the colleges surveyed.

Question 22 – How are key skills designed/planned to be integrated into GNVQs?

This question sought to move on from ‘how’ and ‘when’ to focus on the ‘how’ colleges plan to integrate key skills. Essentially it is a question about the organisation of integration. The table below summarises the responses:

Table 25: Analysis of how key skills are planned to be integrated into assignments, question 22,

Planning integration of key skills	Number & %
Prior to commencement of the course	25 (74)%
Mapped by individual tutors through assignments	17 (50%)
A mixture of both approaches (above)	18 (53%)
Students identify and claim key skills	13 (38%)
Other approach	5 (15%)

It can be seen from the responses that the majority of colleges, 74% (25) plan integration in advance of the commencement courses and that in 50% of colleges key skills are ‘mapped’ into assignments. However the balance of approaches at 53% covers 18 colleges. This indicates that cross college partnerships that include key skills specialists are viewed as important in pursuit of an objective to integrate key skills into the vocational curriculum. It is interesting to note that 38% of colleges make it the student’s personal responsibility to both identify and claim competence in a given key skill.

In summary it appears that the colleges in the survey take integration very seriously. The dominant method of integration of key skills being that of integration through planning prior to the commencement of the course supported by a range of other approaches suitable to the college concerned.

Question 23 – How is it decided which tutors should be involved in drafting assignments to ensure appropriate ‘coverage’ of the key skills specifications?

This question takes forward the responses to question 22 in that it asks respondents to identify decision making in relation to the role vocational tutors undertake with respect to assignment drafting specifically in relation to key skills. As a task ‘the coverage of key skills criteria’ is an added dimension to that of assignment drafting in isolation of other tutors.

**Table 26: Analysis of how it is decided which tutors should be involved in drafting assignments to ensure coverage of key skills in GNVQ programmes
(Question 23. 100% response)**

Role of decision maker(s)	Number & %
Course team	20 (56%)
Course team and key skills staff	5 (16%)
No standard approach exists	2 (6%)
Vocational specialist(s)	3 (8%)
Course team leader	3 (8%)
Named tutor and key skills staff	1 (3%)
Total	34 (100%)
No response	0

The responses received indicate that the course team takes a very prominent role in deciding which tutors should ensure full coverage of key skills in assignments at 56% of colleges. It is interesting to note however the course team only discusses ‘coverage’ through assignments with key skills staff in 16% (7 colleges), and that 6% (3 colleges) do not have a standardised approach, i.e. the approach differs from course to course across the college. If the top 2 responses are added together the result is that in 25 colleges (72%), the course team plays a full role in deciding on which tutors should be involved in ensuring that effective coverage of key skills is demonstrated in course assignments.

Question 24 – How are the three ‘mandatory’ key skills ‘delivered’?

The purpose of this question is to establish, in terms of the ‘delivery’ of key skills whether this is undertaken as some part of the course, on a stand alone basis or in some other way unique to the college concerned. In many ways it is a question about resource allocation (time to deliver key skills), flexible delivery and implicitly the role of the course team in the delivery of key skills. Table 27 below shows the responses of the colleges:

Table 27: Analysis of how the three ‘mandatory’ key skills are ‘delivered’ (question 24)

Response	As part of the overall course	Wholly integrated into the course	A mixture of both responses above	Delivered as stand alone units	Other
Yes	14 (38%)	10 (29%)	28 (82%)	14 (41%)	11 (33%)
No	20 (62%)	24 (71%)	6 (18%)	20 (59%)	22 (67%)
Total	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	33 (100%)
No response	0	0	0	0	1

In the final category the ‘other’ ways that were noted in 32% (11 colleges) are summarised as follows:

- ‘A’ level students receive extra taught hours for key skills
- A mixture of ‘delivered through the course’ and as ‘stand alone units’
- Sometimes GNVQ students are given stand alone assignments to cover key skills
- It varies depending upon the course (5)
- Some teams are very good and delivery takes place, other teams simply assess key skills and other teams ignore it
- As advised by the key skills co-ordinator, within teams
- Named tutors volunteer from vocational teams to work with key skills staff
- Information Technology is delivered separately from the vocational units. Communication and Application of Number are integrated

Of the responses, a mixture of the first two responses at 82% (28 colleges) clearly indicate that the vast majority of colleges prefer key skills to be delivered as part of

the course and with aspects of integration. However it is interesting to note that 42% of colleges (14) provide students with some form of stand alone delivery of key skills. Furthermore 5 of the 11 colleges (55%) noted that the method of delivery depends on the type of course.

Question 25 – Is there a common approach to the ‘delivery’ of all three mandatory key skills across the college?

This question is designed to review consistency of delivery of the three key skill units, Communication, Application of Number and Information Technology. It is a question seeking to establish if a college has one standard approach to their delivery. 32 responses were received and in total only 33% of respondents (11 colleges) said that the approach was common across all courses. This response implies that a number of flexible practices exist in the majority of colleges (21 colleges) for a variety of client groups.

Question 26 – How are the additional key skills (working with others/improving own learning and performance) ‘delivered’ by staff?

This question is testing how the ‘non mandatory’ personal key skills are ‘delivered’, but not to whom. To a certain extent it links back to question 10 regarding GNVQ students entitlement to the additional key skills for which the answers were 71% (Working with others) and 74% (Improving own learning and performance). The responses are shown in the table below:

Table 28: Analysis of how ‘additional’ key skills are ‘delivered’ (question 26)

Response	Through assignments	Through work placement	Additional taught hours	Other
Yes	19 (59%)	14 (43%)	11 (34%)	16 (53%)
No	13 (41%)	18 (57%)	11(62%)	4 (47%)
Total	32 (100%)	32 (100%)	32 (100%)	30 (100%)
No response	2	2	2	4

From the number of responses it can be seen that the majority of colleges do provide students with the opportunity to gain these two qualifications, and that in 59% (19 colleges) they are 'delivered' through assignments. The choice to 'deliver' these two personal key skills through additional taught hours in 34% (12 colleges) is also illustrative of current practices. In addition in 44% of colleges (14) students develop these two skills through work experience. As noted 53% (16 of colleges that responded) identified other ways of delivering these skills.

Given that both these QCA accredited key skills are acquired through the generation of a portfolio of evidence it is interesting to note the variety of ways skill development is developed in order that the portfolios can be completed. The two most popular other ways were in personal tutor contact time and through assignments and work placement, although as shown above there is a significant level of creative approaches used to generate portfolio evidence being applied in the colleges.

Section 6 – Key skills assessment

There are three questions in this section. They are seeking to establish information on key skills assessment and lead into challenges associated with their assessment. In particular information was sought regarding which category of staff assesses key skills followed by two linked questions relating to the potential difficulties in assessing one or more of the key skills. Space was also provided for respondents to explain why a particular key skill posed them difficulties. The quantitative responses are summarised in the table below:

**Table 29: Analysis of the role of person assessing key skills
(question 27, 100% response)**

Roles of key skills assessor	Yes	No
Course tutor only	0	34
Vocational (unit) tutor only	2	32
Key skills specialist only	8	26
Two people	15	n/a
Three people	10	n/a

Overall the results identify that course tutors do not get involved in key skills assessment. Vocational tutors play a significant part in assessment and in 25 colleges (74%) of colleges some form of partnership arrangement exists in that two or three colleagues are involved in the assessment process.

Question 27.-Who assesses a student's key skills during their course or programme?

Question 28 – Do you consider that some key skills are more difficult to assess than others?

Question 29 – If the answer was 'yes' to question 28 please specify which key skill(s) are more difficult to assess?

In response to question 27 the most common response was that of the key skills specialist (79%) closely followed by the unit tutor (71%). This suggests a close involvement of key skills specialists within course teams but also that the unit tutor has established an important role in the assessment of key skills. The response was an emphatic 78% from 32 responses (94% of those that responded) who stated that there were one or more key skills that were difficult to assess. This leads on to the responses to question 29, which are categorised in the table below:

Table 30: Analysis of key skills most difficult to assess (question 29)

Name of key skill	Number of Responses	%
Application of Number	16	47%
Information Technology	9	26%
Communication	5	15%
Working with Others	2	6%
Improving own Learning and Performance	2	6%
Total	34	100%

As stated above, colleges had difficulty assessing more than one key skill in many instances. However as a generic indicator the responses as summarised above indicate, in 47% of colleges (16), Application of Number is the most difficult to assess followed by Information Technology at 26% (9 colleges). In addition the qualitative responses describe a range of situations whereby Internal Verification systems are required to verify what is happening in there own institution. Furthermore there are 3 statements that reinforce the difficulties associated with Application of Number.

Section 7 – Internal verification

There are two questions in this section, one asking ‘when’ and another asking ‘whom’. The importance of this question is to establish timing of the undertaking of tasks and identifying the primary role of the management of the process. Both questions are listed below.

Question 30 – When does it take place?

Question 31 – Who takes responsibility for managing the internal verification process for key skills?

The response to question 30 is summarised in the table below:

Table 31: Analysis of the times of when internal verification is undertaken (question 30)

Responses	Monthly	Termly	Annually	Other
Yes	1 (2%)	18 (53%)	1 (3%)	19 (59%)
No	33 (98%)	26 (47%)	32 (97%)	13(41%)
Totals	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	33 (100%)	32 (100%)
No response	0	0	1	2

Two responses stand out, ‘Termly’ at 53% (18 colleges) and ‘other’. The latter requested a qualitative response. The response to this question describes a situation in the surveyed colleges whereby a range of Internal Verification policies and systems clearly exist. As noted the response ‘termly’ is the most common. In terms of who actually undertakes Internal Verification, it was interesting to note that the colleges responded as follows:

Table 32: Analysis of role of member of staff undertaking internal verification

Responses	Vocational Tutor	Key Skills specialist	Partnership Approach	Other
Yes	10 (29%)	17 (50%)	24 (71%)	8 (25%%)
No	24 (71%)	17 (50%)	10 (29%)	23 (75%)
Total	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	31(100%)
No response	0	(0	0	3

It is not clear at this stage if the approaches described above are a reflection of a lack of commitment to key skills, a reflection of where key skills 'fit' in a given college or just the perception of one member of staff. However they do describe an overall situation that identifies that internal verification is clearly a challenging task and consistency of approach does not exist.

Section 8 - Learning and physical resources

This final section has within it four questions each seeking to obtain separate and complementary information relating to resources. The objective being to establish the level of consideration that has been given to resources for key skills in terms of specificity, location, independent learning and the support of key skills through learning centres/libraries. The responses sought included a balance of quantitative and qualitative data.

Question 32 – Are any specific learning resources used with reference to key skills?

The answer in the affirmative of 85% (100% response) clearly demonstrated that in 30 of 34 colleges specific resources had been purchased to be used to support key skills. The supporting qualitative responses provided the following categories of comments:

Table 33: Analysis of learning resources used to support key skills (question 32)

Specific types of learning resources	Number of occurrences
Purchased from specialist publisher	16 (76%)
Materials generated in-house	5 (24%)
Total responses	21 (100%)
No response	13

Of the materials purchased from specialist supplier's materials from the National Extension College (NEC), Careers, Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC), West Notts College and the BBC were noted by respondents.

Question 33 –Where are key skills learning resources located?

This question is designed to identify actually where colleges house learning materials and by implication the responses provide an indicator as to where support is provided. The question generated a variety of responses, and some colleges noted more than one location. The following table summarises the following categories of response:

Table 34: Analysis of ‘venues’ that house key skills learning materials (question 33)

Venue where key skills materials are based	Number of occurrences
Library/Study centre	6
Learning resource centre(s)/areas	15
Key skill base rooms/workshop	10
Tutors/vocational areas have their own resources in their own departments	5
Learning support centre	2
English/Communication/Maths workshop	2
Within specialist areas	1

As can be viewed in the table above, colleges cited a central resource (Library/Learning Resource Centre) in 21 instances and specialist key skills workshops on 10 occasions followed by library/study centre on 6 occasions. Essentially the responses describe an environment where resources are centrally located in most colleges and these are the venues where the delivery and support take place.

Question 34 – Are there any specific physical resources available to support ‘independent learning’ in relation to key skills?

Question 35 – How do learning resource centres play their part in supporting the management of key skills?

These two questions are linked in that the response to question 34 at 85% (100% response) notes that specific physical resources do exist in the vast majority of colleges. Question 35 is seeking to establish the part such physical resources play in supporting key skills management. It is a searching question in that it goes beyond asking about location and the provision of resources and leads into the ‘management’

in the broadest sense of the term. It was at the respondent's discretion to note what they termed or believed 'management' to be in this context.

Table 35: Analysis of Learning Resource Centres and the management of key skills (question 35)

Role of resource centres	Number of occurrences
No role as yet	2 (12%)
They provide 'drop-in' support and act as a teaching area	5 (30%)
They are a managed research and key skills expertise area	4 (24%)
They are a managed resource base	1 (6%)
Learning support is provided in the LRC	3 (9%)
They act as a key skills workshop	1 (6%)
It is the base for key skills staff	1 (6%)
Total responses	17 (100%)
No response	17

The term 'workshop' is used by colleges to refer to either an organised teaching session for a defined group of students or to a 'drop-in' facility for students from a range of courses. In this instance to differentiate would not add further clarity because the objective of the question was to establish if Learning Resource Centres actually had a 'management' role in relation to key skills. The responses as categorised above describe the management of centres that deliver and/or support key skills in some way. In 13 of 17 responses (76% of colleges that responded), the centres listed undertook some level of responsibility for the management of the learning process which clearly reflects that delivery mechanisms are provided outside of the traditional classroom environment.

Summary: The main points arising from the survey

The survey was useful in helping to describe how each of 34 colleges surveyed sought to manage key skills. Below is a summary, by section of the main themes, points and issues the survey responses provided

Special Note

**Page 117 missing from
the original**

emerges is the limited coverage of the term 'key skills entitlement' as part of overall college policy – only 39% of colleges had a policy that is for all students and only 36% of colleges had a policy that created entitlement for all full-time students. This situation and the challenges associated with it were compounded when it was established that only 30% of colleges had guaranteed an 'entitlement to key skills' for Modern Apprentices. Given that key skills are a contractual obligation for colleges to deliver to and for Modern Apprentices it was surprising to note that this was not formalised in the vast majority of college key skills policies.

What emerges is that key skills policies tend to apply to full-time students only in many of the colleges surveyed and that the additional or wider key skills are applied in the same manner in up to 74% of colleges - again for full-time students.

Section 4: Student admissions, initial screening and learner support

a) Student admissions and initial screening

The question of who in the college actually undertakes the initial screening was reviewed here and the most popular response was that of vocational course tutors (58%). However it is fair to summarise that learner support staff, student services and key skills staff also play their part in a very mixed approach to initial screening in the colleges surveyed. Again it prompts questions relating to internal linkages for post-screening learner support in relation to key skills that are worthy of further investigation.

Given the dominance and importance of the vocational tutors role in initial screening it was not surprising to note that in 65% of colleges screening takes place after enrolment at induction - which appears to be a logical time for vocational tutors to undertake this role. However by definition screening does not play an important role in the selection process in those colleges where it is a post-enrolment process.

b) Tracking and learner support

Colleges do appear committed to the effective tracking of key skills and this was evidenced in the variety of ways (11) it was done and the volume of colleges that responded in the affirmative (91%). Respondents noted that screening took place, progress tracked and then learner support provided. The type of learner support referred to was specifically in relation to key skills and it was provided in up to 8 venues and indicated a high degree of flexibility in the manner in which learner support was provided. In fact 74% of colleges made reference to venues 'outside of the classroom'. This indicated an acceptance of the need and value to supplement the classroom delivery of key skills and by definition the provision of one-to-one support in some cases.

Overall given the 'external nature' of the support it was valuable to identify actually who provided the support referred to by the colleges surveyed. The most popular answer was that of Learner Support staff (41%), but when taken together with Key or Basic Skills staff it added up to 9% - this represents a very significant percentage of those staff providing key skills related learner support. It describes a situation in the sector whereby vocational tutors work in partnership with learner support and key/basic skills to provide the key support services required by students.

Section 5: Course management

Overall the 8 questions in this section were designed to obtain data on how key skills were delivered, integrated and assessed.

a) Key skills delivery

What emerges is the dominant role played by assignments when linked to workshop 'delivery'. 88% of colleges in the survey 'delivered' key skills in this way – and 74% of colleges used specialist key skills staff to provide the 'delivery' required. However the nine written responses received identified that a variety of models are used and that the models used depended upon the skills and experience of the staff available.

This appears to be both a pragmatic and realistic response to the challenge of providing effective key skills delivery.

b) When and who assesses and delivers key skills

Again key skills and assignments are closely linked. In 79% of cases key skills are assessed as part of the assessment of a vocational assignment itself, but consideration must be given to both 'ad hoc' arrangements and at 'students request' which amount to 38% and 58% respectively. This demonstrates a very mixed approach as to when key skills are assessed in colleges as well as reinforcing the role and responsibility the individual learner has in the assessment process.

In terms of who actually undertakes the assessment of key skills then we see the role of the course team leader being reinforced. In 62% of cases it is he/she that undertakes this role with a further 38% of colleges indicating that it is the role of the vocational tutor. In reality the level of expertise that a particular tutor holds may be an influential factor, but it is valuable to be able to conclude that in the vast majority of cases it is a person with a close link to the students learning experience that assesses key skills.

The planning of the integration of key skills is of value to review, and it was interesting to note that in 74% of cases this is done prior to the commencement of the course and that key skills mapping is undertaken by individual course tutors. Added to this respondents noted that the course team decides who should plan the integration in 56% of colleges surveyed. However planning is one thing, delivery is another and in 82% of colleges surveyed they are 'delivered' through a mixture of 'as part of the course' and 'wholly integrated into the course'. However it should be noted that the delivery of key skills as 'stand alone' units (the GNVQ 'mandatory' key skills) has been adopted by some colleges (41%) and this is against the spirit of integration as promoted by NCVQ when key skills were introduced into GNVQ programmes.

The 'commonality of approach' is brought into question and can be reviewed. In fact only 33% of respondents replied that there was consistency of approach across the college regarding the delivery of the mandatory key skills. This is important in that it indicates a potential multiplicity of approaches in any one college – and it would be

easy to assume that the larger the college the more likelihood of a variety of approaches been adopted. Furthermore when the 'additional' key skills are considered a further mixed set of responses indicate up to 13 ways in which these 'wider' key skills are 'delivered'.

Key skills assessment

The three questions in this section are focused upon the challenges associated with assessment, but initially upon confirming exactly who undertakes key skills assessment. The answer to the question of who assesses key skills is that in the vast majority of cases it is the vocational tutor or key skills specialist. The course tutor plays an important role, but mainly in the planning stage as mentioned above. But given the challenge of assessment a variety of responses were given – with emphasis upon a team approach to assessment where a specific individual was not mentioned.

However, in line with information gleaned from the literature review Application of Number (58%) and Information Technology (35%) proved to be the most difficult to assess and the linkages to aspects of course management, in particular the planning of the delivery of Application of Number are worthy of further analysis.

Internal verification

The two questions in this section focused on 'when' and 'who' undertakes internal verification. In summary in the majority of cases it is undertaken termly, and given the range of course provided this appears to be a logical response. However a further 56% noted 'other' as their response and these responses were very much in the 'needs driven' sub category, which is also reasonable given the approach taken by some colleges.

Learning and physical resources

The nature of delivery of key skills generated a variety of associated support mechanisms. Plus, in the vast majority of cases resources were based in classrooms, on the intranet, learning resource centres, and libraries or in a designated key skills

baseroom. However the role of learning resource centres had not been fully defined in many cases and the terms 'drop-in centre' and 'managed research area' and 'key skills expertise area' were used by respondents. What can be summarised from the data is that support, via some form of learning resource centre does exist - perhaps an effective model has not as yet been developed to indicate best practice in this field.

Overall the survey indicated that specific roles exist within colleges to facilitate the smooth running of key skills, and although specialists are employed they are used both centrally and as part of course teams to support a range of students.

This outcome can be policy driven but is not necessarily the case. Furthermore key skills can shaped by policies and/or at the individual course level which means that students can access one or more of five key skills as they require or are advise to as part of an agreement with the course tutor.

The survey also indicates that a variety of methods and categories of staff are employed to assess individual needs in relation to key skills and this represents one starting point from which 'learner support' can and is provided. However survey results indicate that in terms of course management the course tutors and unit/vocational tutor shape the manner in which a students key skills are developed but further significant support is provided by a variety of staff at different times in a number of venues. The level of support sought is also a product of the challenge a student has at a personal level regarding one or more of the key skills and this is reflected in the responses in the survey.

In terms of venues, the survey highlighted that colleges now go well beyond traditional classroom delivery to provide a wide a range of clients with flexible access to what could be summarised as 'workshop based learning' to develop their key skills. These centres are playing a part in the overall management of key skills as well as acting as a central resource and research area for key skills. However such flexibility of 'delivery' and management brings with it some challenges in the tracking, assessment and verification of key skill for some colleges. These issues will be explored further in the four case studies.

Chapter 5: Case study findings

Introduction

In this chapter the findings from the four case studies are presented. The rationale supporting the selection of the colleges concerned is described in Chapter 3. The case studies were undertaken between June and September 2000 once the quantitative data from the surveys had been collated. This enabled the responses from the four colleges concerned to be extracted for presentation individually.

The method of presentation of findings in this chapter is as follows:

1. Each case study college is presented in relation to the findings from the interviews with key potholders.
2. Information from the questionnaire is used and included where appropriate along with reference to any documentary evidence provided by the college concerned.
3. A summary of the issues and challenges raised by interviewees is provided for each of the four colleges.

As noted in Chapter 3 each college and individual interviewee will remain anonymous and pseudonyms have been adopted as follows:

Table 36 College Pseudonyms

Case Study Number	Name of College
1	Buckley College of Arts and Technology
2	Hills Technical College
3	Rivers College
4	Victoria College of Arts and Technology

Case Study 1: Buckley College of Art and Technology

Section 1: Organisational structure: Where key skills fit in

The college took a positive stance in relation to key skills as early as 1990 through the establishment of two 'drop-in' centres, which were essentially Maths and English workshops. The interviewee was the college key skills manager, and at the outset she offered the view:

'I think that for me it all started in 1990 with the TVEI initiative, which helped me to 'unpick' the common skills in BTEC courses'.

Students were ‘un-picking core skills’ i.e. identifying the key skills within vocational units, and developing their maths and English needs at the time. When the college became an incorporated body in 1992 they began to give much more attention to basic skills, key skills and ‘languages’. The first form of key skills policy in the view of the key skills manager was the ‘language policy’ because:

‘It was thought that students could not undertake a vocational course if their English was poor – that was the philosophy at the time’.

The college established a key skills centre in 1998. The centre emerged out of a convergence of the language support unit, the college basic skills provision and a key skills provision in order that:

‘Key skills could be delivered in an economic way’. (Key skills manager)

The following comment from the key skills manager suggested that it was not an easy transition:

‘There was a lot of heart-rending stuff that went on in the early days. It was a time of really trying to educate and train staff to try to get them to understand that it was not just about ‘language’. We disbanded our Basic Skills and Language Services – we had them in two different parts of the college and put them under one roof and called it a ‘communications workshop’.

The college merged basic and key skills support under one manager and the term ‘basic skills’ was no longer used in the college, only the generic term ‘key skills’ was used. Within the centre ‘learner support staff’ provide key skills support to a variety of students.

Key skills staff are ‘allocated’ to support three academic faculties and their role as summarised as follows:

‘What I want these people (key skills staff) to do is to go to their (the faculties) programme meetings, explain what we offer and keep tabs on initial assessment and key skills throughout the year’. (Key skills manager)

Students are then ‘sent’ for extra key skills support as defined by the appropriate vocational tutor and the key skills team have a link through the initial diagnostic

assessment, tracking of progress, the support the centralised support they provide to a cross section of students.

Section 2: Key skills client groups

Client groups at this college are ‘all students’ because in principle the college management team views the key skill centre as the main base in the college for learner support:

‘The key skills centre has a number of functions and our primary function is that of learner support’. (Key skills manager)

The response to question 5 of the questionnaire indicated that the key skills centre supported all the categories listed plus students on teacher training courses, which reinforces the general statement made in the interview

Section 3: College policies relating to key skills

The college has had a key skills policy since late 1997, which was viewed in the broadest sense of as a ‘whole college’ policy through which all students have a key skills ‘entitlement’. It was drafted by the key skills manager and an assistant principal. The interviewee confirmed the responses in the questionnaire (questions 6-9) but also said:

‘We have an entitlement policy, but as yet it does not extend to cover the additional key skills for GNVQ students, but other clients do get them – it is not done in a systematic manner yet’. (Key skills manager)

This response was specifically in relation to GNVQ courses and described a situation whereby only the ‘mandatory’ key skill units were being ‘delivered’ across all GNVQ courses.

Section 4: Student admissions, initial screening and learner support

Initial assessment is undertaken by the vocational tutors, as was stated:

‘...but they are using the initial assessments that they have developed over the years’. (Key skills manager)

The role of staff in the key skills unit is to mark the initial assessments, keep a record of the results and the Student Services centre staff, who co-ordinate initial assessment send a copy of the results to the vocational tutor concerned. However in partnership with a local college Buckley college staff are in the process of designing their own initial assessment package for use in the future. The view was expressed that:

‘We have invested a lot of staff time, vocational tutors’ time in developing this model. We are in the process of selling the idea of (a centralised) initial assessment model. Because of the importance of ownership we want staff to be happy with the model we are developing’. (Key skills manager)

Learner/key skills support is not ‘compulsory’ at Buckley college. The notion of student’s needs ‘evolving over time’ was expressed as follows:

‘On initial assessment the assessor/marker makes notes on a persons’ record to say if they need support...Initially, once they have been assessed and where they have really found students well below the required standard the tutor would refer the student to the key skills unit’. (Key skills manager)

The dominant view was that the college did not want to support people who did not need support, so the link between the enrolment process and the initial assessments as undertaken by vocational tutors was viewed as very important. Individual records of all initial assessments are kept by three parties - the student services unit, the key skills centre and the course tutor.

The term ‘referrals’ was used by the key skills manager, and was elaborated upon as follows:

‘Induction takes place in the first week and initial assessment is undertaken and monitored by Student Services. By week two all of the ‘referrals’ are noted by Student Services and my Learning Support officer will work with them to organise to ‘put staff on’ as and when we get requests from tutors – and we’ll support them during the lunch hour’. (Key skills manager)

This liaison role for the learner support officer was viewed as important because, as was commented upon:

‘I don’t want staff sitting about twiddling their thumbs’. (Key skills manager)

This comment clearly implies that the key skills manager wants to timetable individuals and groups in the key skills centre and organise staffing accordingly. The Student Services Unit is the 'first port of call' for new students, and it is from here that the management of 'learner support' commences as a product of a vocational tutor managed initial assessment service, from which a referral system emerges.

The key skills centre was used in relation to initial assessments according to one faculty Head as:

'Key skills' is the common thread. We all use the initial assessments that have been devised in conjunction with the key skills centre and we will refer students to them for a additional support'. (Key skills manager)

In operational terms on a daily basis the interviewee noted that there were some issues associated with the cross-college aspects of initial assessment, which generated the comment:

'I have felt that there has been a big gap between the key skill centre and the faculties, and in the unit we are working with the faculties every day'. (Key skills manager)

Section 5: Course management

Key skills are 'delivered' and assessed by vocational tutors as part of a GNVQ programme. It was clearly not the responsibility of the key skills centre staff. The comment was made that:

'I don't care how they (vocational tutors) deliver (key skills) so long as students have the key skills at the appropriate level'. (Key skills manager)

Therefore no common approach exists for the 'delivery' of key skills in the college as the interviewee confirmed:

'There are different approaches in different faculties but our long term view would be to move towards a consistent whole college approach'. (Key skills manager)

As the response to question 19 in the questionnaire indicated the college approach is one of delivery of key skills through assignments only, supported by additional assignments in communications and application of number if required by the student(s) concerned. A partnership approach does exist through the centralised learner support services given by key skills centre staff, in that:

‘The ‘Application of Number’ co-ordinator is supporting vocational staff to integrate key skills. On some courses where Application of Number skills does not exist then the key skills number specialist delivers this’.
(Key skills manager)

This partnership is ‘needs driven’ in that it has to be requested by a course tutor for it to come into being. When the request is received then the support for integration of key skills and/or the delivery of key skills is given. If no request is received then the responsibility for both the delivery and integration of key skills remains with the course team, or more accurately the vocational tutor.

The key skills manager noted the issue of quality of delivery of key skills, and stated that:

‘Some tutors may not teach ‘number’ all of the time, and some course managers have noted this. I have said to them to name me your number person, tell us who it is and their qualifications – and we will agree with the course tutor if they are qualified to teach key skills’. (Key skills manager)

In terms of the integration of key skills there was a belief that vocational tutors have an expectation that students should have developed certain key skills at school, and that they should not be delivered or assessed at college. In some vocational areas key skills are not being delivered and the ‘key skills evidence’ may not be present within the assignment programme. This potential problem was reinforced by the comment from the key skills manager:

‘I don’t believe in ‘evidence teasing’ because I think that unless you actually develop key skills how can you evidence tease?’ (Key skills manager)

The interviewee explained that ‘evidence teasing’ was a process where tutors would encourage and support students to identify elements or aspects of key skills within

vocational assignments and 'claim competence' when an assignment had been successful completed.

The view was also expressed that:

'We have made a start in making key skills more credible, especially with number. We now advise on some assignments and in some cases do the delivery as well – mainly because I want a qualified person doing the work'.
(Key skills manager)

The overarching management issue for the college in terms of the management of key skills is summarised by the key skills manager who said:

'Student's don't want to come to college for key skills – they come to college to become a bricklayer or an airhostess. So everything on basic and key skills has to be done 'covertly'. (Key skills manager)

Section 6: Key skills assessment

It was evident that different approaches were taken in each of the three faculties but the idea of some form of partnership arrangement between vocational tutors and key skills specialists was in place. Support is provided by the key skills centre manager with the help of a CD ROM 'key skills profiler' (question 27, qualitative response).

The college representative felt that 3 key skills were more difficult to assess than others, (Application of Number, Working with Others and Improving own Learning and Performance), with Application of Number being the most difficult as commented:

'We know and acknowledge that 'number' is a problem – and a big problem, not just in our college but nationally. I have an application of number co-ordinator and a cross –college maths team. Plus in the centre I have 2 maths specialists and a local a project looking at how we can manage maths more effectively'. (Key skills manager)

The view regarding the two personal key skills can be linked back to the comments on the role of the centre and the challenges referred to in 'teasing out the evidence' and the role of the key skills centre staff.

Section 7: Internal verification

The approach taken by the college is defined in their internal verification policy and internal verification is undertaken termly. The additional comment was made:

‘We’re just reviewing our IV policy. Currently the key skills staff are required to work with vocational tutors to IV their courses’. (Key skills manager)

In addition no one individual has a role to co-ordinate internal verification and the related procedures. Question 31 generated the qualitative response:

‘No one does it at the moment for our GNVQ courses, but we are reviewing our procedures’. (Key skills manager)

A fundamental concern was expressed about the internal verification process, which sums up the situation:

‘I personally feel, and I might be wrong because people have different views that the whole IV system is not right. We started addressing the problem but it isn’t going anywhere because we got bogged down on the whole issue of ‘time allocations’ to staff’. (Key skills manager)

Section 8: Learning and physical resources

The college does have multi-media packs and a whole host of what they term ‘other paper based resources’. These resources are based in the key skill centre, but as commented (question 33, qualitative response):

‘...but vocational tutors do have their own resources too – and they have access to and they use the resources in the centre’. (Learning resource centre manager)

The LRC manager confirmed that they do attempt not to replicate resource purchases in that:

‘We are really separate to the key skills, there is some overlap and the students know the difference between the centres’. (Learning resource centre manager)

The LRC is used as a generic ‘drop-in’ centre/library where students can work independently and chose the resources they need – but it does not form a formal part of the cross college support systems associated with key skills.

Documentary evidence

The papers supplied identify the central role of the College Curriculum and Development Committee, which was not referred to by any interview in relation to supporting the development of the college key skills centre. The minutes of the committee, dated November 1997 note the intention to support the drafting of a key skills policy to:

‘Replace the college Language Policy, which was in place prior to incorporation with a key skills policy’. (Head of Faculty)

The college key skills policy as submitted to the college senior management team and the academic board is a very succinct statement which is supplied below in full:

Key skills are the essential key skills required to enable students to complete their vocational course successfully. They are:

- Communication (English)
 - Application of Number (Maths)
 - Information Technology (The ability to use a computer)
1. Buckley College of Arts and Technology will offer qualifications in key skills to every student during their time at the college
 2. Each student will receive an initial assessment of his/her key skills during the induction programme. Students will be informed about the level of the present key skills and the target level required for their programme of study or chosen career path
 3. The college will provide key skills tuition at appropriate levels to all enrolled students
 4. Key skills tuition will always be complementary to the programme of study it accompanies

Source: extracted from the minutes of the college curriculum and development committee minutes, November 1997

In addition the minutes of the academic board identified the processes that the key skills manager went through in order to convert the language policy to a key skills policy over a six-month period. The stages in the creation of the key skills policy were as follows:

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| • All academic staff invited to a briefing session - | early June 1997 |
| • Draft Policy Statement circulated to all staff - | end of June 1997 |
| • Comments received about draft policy statement - | early July 1997 |
| • All comments received and incorporated - | mid July 1997 |
| • Policy presented to senior management team | September 1997 |
| • Policy amended and re-submitted to SMT - | November 1997 |
| • Policy approved by Academic Board - | December 1997 |

Summary

Key skills management at Buckley College of Arts and Technology is led by a key Skills Centre manager from a centrally located key skills centre. The key skills centre emerged out of a language support workshop, a basic skills provision and two further workshops for Mathematics and English. The Key skills policy introduced in late 1997 has effectively helped to promote key skills in the college and with it the role that key skills can play in partnership with vocational tutors.

Key skills management is vocational tutor driven in that students needs are assessed and then they are referred for extra support as defined through the initial assessment process and a tutor's perception of need. The support given by staff in the key skills centre could be generically referred to as 'learner support' and it encompasses basic skills support as well vocationally relevant key skills support.

The LRC/Library is not used for key skills in a prescribed manner other than to provide students with access to a centralised 'drop in' facility, and it does not stock key skills learning/support materials as a matter of course.

Case Study No: 2 Hills Technical College

Section 1: Organisational structure: where key skills fit in

The college has elected not to have a key skills unit or section dedicated to key skills. Instead they have Student Admissions and Support Unit (SASU) that is the base from which learner support is provided. In organisational terms the college has had a major commitment to key skills since 1997. At this time the key skills initiative was established as one of four cross college curriculum projects designed to develop and promote a flexible curriculum framework. As the Curriculum Co-ordinator responsible for this strand of work stated:

'Strategically it was decided that we needed to increase the flexibility of our provision and to look at the development of key skills so that in time we could have more than pockets of good practice'. (Curriculum co-ordinator)

The college appointed a full-time key skills project leader in July 1999, and she works directly to the Curriculum Co-ordinator. The key skills project manager has

established two teams to support the development of key skills practice across the college – the Key Skills Support Network Group and the Key Skills Practitioners Group.

The key skills network group is made up of eight volunteers from across the college staff. Members are encouraged to share good practice, apply and develop the college key skills policy as the key skills project manager said:

‘They are not necessarily the practitioners, they are more like strategic thinkers’. (Curriculum co-ordinator)

The key skills practitioners group is a group of key skill specialists who are based in the academic departments who:

‘...are helping people (staff) to improve’. (Curriculum co-ordinator)

Not all departments have staff dedicated to deliver key skills (question 4). They ‘oversee’ each of the five accredited key skills, review initial assessment tools and advise accordingly on their application and usage. They also support staff teams who are ‘new to key skills’. Again the manager reinforced the point:

‘This team helps us find out what is going on at the ‘coalface’ – and some of them are in the network group as well’.

The links with learner support are quite strong, and in the view of the key skills project manager between the colleges Student Assessment and Support Unit (SASU) and the key skills team based in different parts of the college:

‘There are excellent links at level 2. At level 3 the support tends to come from key skill specialists such as the Maths staff, but maths and application of number are different. There are also links with Basic Skills, which we use, as we need them’. (Student services manager)

Section 2: Key skills client groups

The college supports all categories of students as listed in the questionnaire with the exception of New Deal participants. As was stated:

‘We support mainly full-time students such as GNVQ students and ‘A’ level students as well as MA's and NT's. There has been some discussion with Access but they have gone off at a tangent with key skills – they are not happy with the idea of adult students being externally tested. They see themselves as a unique group’. (Curriculum co-ordinator)

Modern Apprentices have a target NVQ level three outcome and Modern Apprentices have an NVQ level two outcome. (see Table 1, p.6). ‘Access’ programmes are Access to Higher Education courses provided by further education colleges. Traditionally they are designed as one-year full-time courses to prepare adults who do not have the formal entry qualifications for Higher Education courses, for the academic rigours of Higher Education programmes.

In addition it was noted that there was a degree of department/school autonomy within the college. The take up of key skills was in part a departmental/school decision unless they were related to GNVQ courses or part of a contractual commitment in relation to a contract with the local Chamber of Commerce to support Modern Apprentices or National Trainees.

Section 3: College policies relating to key skills

The college does have a corporate approach to key skills, and this was established in 1997. This corporate approach was not incorporated into a key skills policy until September 1999. The key skills policy applies to all students in theory, but the main beneficiaries are GNVQ students, Modern Apprentices and National Trainees.

The Curriculum manager noted:

‘Once the network group was up and running we decided that we should draft a key skills policy – and we are now on our third draft’. (Curriculum manager)

Similarly the concept of a key skills ‘entitlement’ did not exist until September 1999 and this ‘entitlement’ is stated to apply to all students.

The plan to provide GNVQ students with the opportunity to gain accredited additional key skills has been implemented and, as the GNVQ course tutor noted:

‘This is only our second year offering ‘Improving own learning and performance’ and ‘Working with Others’ to GNVQ students. We provide

sheets stating what evidence we are looking for and we log dates when key skills criteria is 'matched'. So as long as they are aware of what evidence they are looking for they should be able to provide the evidence. Next year I am hoping that the majority of students will go for the additional key skills' (GNVQ Course tutor).

This comment was qualified later in the interview with the point:

'I am hoping that next year all bar the few low ability students will go through to realising they have achieved the additional key skills. The more that they are integrated the easier and more acceptable it is to the student – but the planning (for course tutors) is more difficult'. (GNVQ Course tutor).

This comment describes college approach to curriculum management that is seeking to integrate as much of the key skill 'curriculum' as it can into assignments – and this also applies to the additional key skills that GNVQ students might wish to obtain.

Section 4: Student admissions, initial screening and learner support

The value of undertaking effective initial assessment in relation to key skills is of major importance to the college in the view of the Student admissions manager. She did say:

'We need to look at initial diagnostic assessment in a more strategic way. One of the things we believe in is not just bland initial assessment, but initial assessment as something meaningful to the student – and this means by being vocational. Then we need to give them the appropriate support'. (Student admissions manager)

The key skills network team have within their broad remit given consideration to initial assessment, and they see the importance of ensuring that all students undertake an initial diagnostic assessment. The college Youth Training manager made the comment that:

'Every one of the Chamber (of Commerce) MA's has an initial assessment, and we are very conscious that we can't keep on assessing people so we give them one assessment – and it's done through our Student Assessment and Support Unit' (SASU)'. (College Youth Training manager)

Initial assessment and post assessment learner support is managed by SASU. The ALBSU diagnostic tool is used and course tutors mark the initial assessment. In this college the term 'manage' in relation to initial assessment has two meanings. Firstly SASU co-ordinates the initial assessment which means that they provide the material

for the assessment process post enrolment. Secondly, the ALBSU tool is used predominantly by vocational tutors or members of the key skills practitioners group, as was stated:

‘We (the key skills team) can do it, or they (SASU) can do it for us. As a course organiser you have a choice – you can either do it yourself or someone from SASU can come over and do it for you’. (College Youth Training manager)

Initial assessment does not normally influence the college to accept or reject an application from a student. In the case of Chamber of Commerce funded Modern Apprentices the college do consider the potential financial implications of a student not completing the training programme successfully. As the college Youth Training manager noted:

Last year we interviewed 80 potential Engineering MAs and only recruited 4. We used a Chamber of Commerce designed assessment tool and then checked it against the SASU model – the results were about the same. But without doing the initial assessment we would have taken more students, not known of their support needs and a lot of them would have failed’. (College Youth Training manager)

Learner support is provided by staff in the SASU unit either on a ‘one to one’ basis, a workshop basis or within the main programme (as stated in the qualitative response to question 16). The support provided is mainly in relation to numeracy and literacy needs that have been identified as a result of the use of the ALBSU initial assessment tool used. Key skills support is provided in SASU by key skills staff at the request of either vocational tutors or by SASU staff.

The situation regarding the provision of learner support in relation to key skills is mixed. The GNVQ Business Studies course tutor noted:

‘I have somebody in with me from SASU to team teach because most of the students have been identified as needing extra help. We have to do it that way because I know from past experience that they just won’t go to SASU for the support they need. There is a stigma attached to SASU so it is better that we bring them in to the class’. (GNVQ Course tutor)

In addition the tutor noted some of the challenges associated with learner support and the development of a student's key skills:

‘A lot of students who come on to a GNVQ Intermediate programme need a lot of support once the tutor is aware that they need to couple key skills with the GNVQ course’. (GNVQ Course tutor)

From this evidence it appears that some tutors do not see the link between key skills and the vocational course, which, as implied above can lead to operational problems for those staff committed to ensure the effective management of key skills teaching. There is no formal tracking system to support the management of key skills. Course tutors undertake the tracking of key skills progress in the time provided through the tutorial system.

A course tutor commented:

‘Once a vocational tutor has taken responsibility for a particular key skill then they are responsible for the tracking of that student’.
(GNVQ Course tutor)

There is some liaison between SASU staff and vocational teams regarding key skills tracking but it is essentially the responsibility of the course tutor to request their involvement. Similarly the monitoring of progress associated with the provision of extra learner support is undertaken by vocational tutors and as such the identification of need is operated in a varied way across the college. The GNVQ Advanced course manager best sums up current practice:

‘Students need 4 GCSEs to get on the course, and if their English is not good enough, say at Grade ‘D’ I would look a bit closer to see if they could cope on the course. I have 20 students on the course and I have had to send one to SASU for extra help’. (GNVQ Course tutor)

Section 5: Course management

Given that the stated manner in which key skills support is organised in the college it is interesting to note the range of ways key skills are ‘delivered’. The response to question 19 of the questionnaire highlights that they are ‘delivered’ through

assignments, workshops, by specialist staff, separately from the core GNVQ units and even 'claimed' by the student concerned.

The interviews that were conducted generated the following comments:

'Information Technology is easily covered in assignments, and the students have total flexibility in terms of when they claim competence – we don't even map the IT key skills, there are many opportunities for them to see what needs to be claimed'. (IT key skills tutor)

She also suggested that key skills were not integrated, but in many cases they were treated as separate 'skills':

'Key skills material gets put together often in a separate key skills portfolio – so in reality they are put on one side away from the main body of the assessment of the vocational skills'. (IT key skills tutor)

The key skills manager was clear that the plan (as stated in the key skills policy) is always to integrate key skills into GNVQ programmes, and in relation to the additional key skills create the opportunity for the student to generate 'evidence' with the support of the course tutor. This would be done in the time allocated for tutorials. She offered the further point:

'We acknowledge that we can also deliver key skills using separate sessions, and we do for example on the Business Administration 'Return to Work' course. But if there is a main programme with a large primary learning goal then we should have integrated the key skills'.
(Key skills co-ordinator)

The answer to question 25 could be viewed as contradicting the answer given to question 19 in that the response to question 19 noted that there was a common approach to the delivery of the 'mandatory key skills'. This is not the case for all courses. It is the practice only in relation to the college's GNVQ provision. This was made clear by both the key skills project manager, the college Internal Verifier and the GNVQ course tutor.

There was also a varied approach to the timing of assessment of key skills as noted in response to question 20. Key skills for GNVQ students is undertaken at times agreed by the course tutor during the year through assignments, but they can also be claimed by the students when they feel that they are ready to be assessed.

The GNVQ course tutor was concise in her comment regarding who is responsible for the effective integration of key skills when she said:

‘Each (vocational) tutor has responsibility for certain key skills and the key skills are built into assignments. It is updated each year. It is a question in the annual review – ‘has anyone a problem with key skills?’ (GNVQ Course tutor)

This comment reinforced the qualitative statement made in response to question 20, which simply stated:

‘All tutors map their assignments against key skills’. (GNVQ Course tutor)

The approach to the additional key skills was different in that work placements are used to ‘gather evidence’. Tutorial time is used for this purpose and in some instances extra time is allocated (question 26). This also applies to the additional key skill offered to ‘A’ level students.

Section 6: Key skills assessment

The assessment of key skills is undertaken by either the course tutor or vocational tutor as stated in response to question 27 of the questionnaire. The key skills centre manager suggested that it was important for vocational staff to obtain the key skills assessor’s award and that the college was one of the forerunners in the sector in relation to the training of staff to obtain this qualification. The manager went on to confirm:

‘The person who assesses key skills is invariably a member of the course team that is delivering the vocational content. But they can and do call on specialist key skills staff if they need to and it’s usually one of the members of the key skills practitioners group’. (Key skills manager)

The college internal verifier felt that

‘Assessors need to be watched because assessing is a continual processes not something that is done once. I feel that assessment and verification should work much more closely together’. (College Internal Verifier)

In addition the course tutor for the GNVQ Advanced programme was of the view that:

‘Staff find assessment of key skills difficult. They get the students to gather so much evidence because they feel that every performance criteria has a piece of evidence matched to it’. (GNVQ Course tutor)

Overall the college key skills manager does not consider that some key skills are more difficult to assess than others (question 28). One course tutor did say that they had problems with Application of Number – for which extra hours were provided. In addition 3 hours a week are allocated for the delivery of the key skill Information Technology. This describes a situation where potential problems in the delivery of key skill are identified in advance of the start of the course and, through experience, changes have been made.

Section 7: Internal verification

The college employs an internal verification co-ordinator who is also a member of the college key skills network group. She is the person in the group that drafted the college internal verification policy. She described her role as follows:

‘I troubleshoot. I get all the External Verifier reports via the Principal. If there are any problems then I talk with the member of staff who has undertaken the internal verification and assessment. It’s a big job and it’s getting bigger all the time’. (College Internal Verification manager)

Internal verification takes place termly (question 27), but as was stated in response to this question

‘It varies from course to course’. (College Internal Verification manager)

Internal verification is undertaken by the course tutor (question 31) at present, but this is under review.

The internal verification co-ordinator also offered the view that:

‘Internal verification is not given the same importance as assessment, and in some areas of the college it is the specialist key skills member of staff who does both the assessment and the internal verification. Plus, where the key

skills are delivered by someone from another department, such as Maths or IT then it is that person who assesses and verifies’.
(College Internal Verification manager)

The centralised role of the college internal verification manager means that advice and guidance is given to all internal verifiers and through a network of internal verifiers problems and issues are discussed and addressed, however in relation to skills they view was expressed:

‘You need to have a programme of internal verification and to sample all students, all assessments and all types of work – the whole set-up. We seem to have never done that with key skills. It (the practices) just evolved and they did what they did with BTEC and just kept on doing it’.
(College Internal Verification manager)

Section 8: Learning and physical resources

The response to question 32 of the questionnaire stated that there were no specific resources used in relation to key skills. During the interview with the key skills manager it was stated that:

‘Some materials have been developed in the college. There was not a lot to start with, but through my project work some new materials have been bought in’. (Key skills manager)

The issue of location of key skill resources generated no responses in that the majority of key skills resources are housed within departments or schools with a few of them being centrally purchased and located in the college library. As the manager concerned commented:

‘Learning resources are departmental resources, bought or developed by them. There is not a bank of key skills resources that have been purchased by the college – except the NEC material that I purchased through the project’. (Learning resource centre manager)

The interviewee confirmed the response to questions 34 and 35: A limited number of key skills resources were available in the library.

The library/LRC does not play a central role in supporting the management of key skills either in terms of advice, guidance or research in relation to key skills. The emphasis given to key skills management is driven by SASU, course tutors and staff

who are members of the key skills network group or the key skills practitioners group. The implied decision was one of the college has been not to centralise resources.

Documentary evidence

The documentary evidence confirmed the existence of the college key skills policy which stated a) the overall aims of the policy and b) key points relating to policy implementation in from September 1998. The policy was updated in May 2000. The latest draft updates procedures and clarifies existing practice and the promotion of good practice across the college. The key skill policy statement as drafted in 1998 was as follows:

‘The policy of the college is to provide a cross college approach to managing key skills making all 3 main key skills accessible to all full-time students with these built in as a mandatory part of the course structure’.
(Extract from college key skills policy, 1998, p.2)

The updated key skills policy extended entitlement to the three ‘mandatory’ key skills to all students – not just all full-time students. In addition it states that in phase 2 of the implementation of the policy the following specific objectives will be met:

- A staff support network to be established.
- Key skills support for all staff to be provided.
- Dissemination of good practice to be undertaken.
- The development of a common framework for the recording of key skills to be applied.
- The identification of further support will be guaranteed.
- The identification of the support needs of staff will be provided.
- Liaison with External Verifiers was stressed.
- The promotion of Key Skills Assessor Award training will take place.
- Identification of the initial diagnostic requirements of all students will be guaranteed.
- The identification of developments nationally for the delivery of key skills will be undertaken.

The organisational structure as set out in the college self-assessment report confirmed the role of the Curriculum manager in relation to the college 'flexibility projects' and the associated line management of activities relating to key skills.

Papers confirming the existence of four curriculum projects promoting flexibility were reviewed. They confirmed the stated commitment to the development of key skills (Project 3). The paper noted links to the Dearing Report (1996), the Kennedy Report (1998), on widening participation and

'The development and promotion of key skills as a major focus of the college strategic plan, both for the development of customised courses for employers and the need to promote key skills for mainstream students of all ages'.
(College key skills policy, 1998, p.4)

Minutes of meetings of the Teaching and Learning Group focused on 'Special Curriculum Projects: Promoting Flexibility' and confirmed the role of the key skill project manager. The minutes included a report by the key skills project leader noting project objectives, progress to date and the intention to establish small working groups to focus on specific areas within the key skills project.

Papers that had been submitted to the academic board noted national report findings on key skills management in colleges and the need to identify barriers and constraints to achieving progress was noted. Notes from staff development days were provided in which the need to obtain information on key skill resources was a high priority and the need to 'questionnaire all team leaders to establish common links' was highlighted. Key points from papers drafted by the key skill project manager were in relation to:

- Time to access staff.
- Being constantly referred to other staff to obtain information.
- Confusion about the role itself.
- The difficulties associated with the variety of approaches that Lead Bodies take in relation to key skills management.

Summary

Hills Technical College has chosen to view key skills management as one of four 'flexibility initiatives'. It and it has given key skills a high profile through the appointment of a key skills project manager. Significant staff resources have been allocated to the drafting of policies to assist in the embedding of good practice and two complementary teams of staff have been established to develop policy and to spread good practice. Initial assessment is centrally co-ordinated and the linkages with learner support are strong. The college does not differentiate between generic 'learner support' and key skills support. Potential issues associated with the delivery of key skills are being addressed through careful course planning and the allocation of extra teaching hours to certain courses. The assessment and verification of key skills is planned as a course tutor area of responsibility with support available from a variety of specialist staff, including the college internal verification manager.

Finally, the library and resource centres do not play a major role in the college in relation to key skills. The college tends to support the acquisition and development of departmental resources with learning resource management being supported by the key skills project leader or members of one of the two support teams noted above.

Case Study No 3: Rivers College

Section 1. Organisational structure: Where key skills fit in

The management of key skills is linked to the way in which the college is organised. The organisation and management of key skills was ad hoc until 1997. On the appointment of a new Deputy Principal the college approach to key skills was reviewed. Up to that point the interviewee, the Curriculum Manager noted:

'All GNVQ students had key skills built into their programmes but it was haphazard. Key skills were the responsibility of a variety of people in the old structure'. (College curriculum manager)

The Curriculum Manager also commented that:

‘As well as the appointment of the new Deputy Principal we had other drivers in terms of National Education and Training Targets and the drive of the DfEE to see key skills demonstrated in Modern Apprenticeships’.
(College curriculum manager)

In the new structure, established in late 1997, the overall responsibility for key skills was given to the Curriculum Manager supported by a ‘key skills planning group’. The members of which are key skills specialists based in one particular school in the college and the relevant Head of School manages them. The key skills planning group meets formally once a month with the Curriculum Manager but they do not act as a group in the form of a separate key skills unit (question 1) or section.

Each member of the key skills planning group has a full teaching commitment of 24 hours a week. No time is formally allocated for their planning group duties, but as the Curriculum Manager said:

‘Some informal discounting of time against an individual’s teaching load. They do the job because they are asked to and they think key skills are worthwhile. I am concerned that we are not facilitating them as best we can because we are not giving them enough time to do the job properly’.
(College curriculum manager)

The college has key skill staff, who they call facilitators based in the centralised Learning Resource Centre in which there is a close link with learner support services, which are based in the LRC. There are also key skill specialists based in one of the academic departments.

Section 2: Key skills client groups

This interviewee confirmed the response in the questionnaire in that all the client groups listed (6) stated were supported with key skills. In addition in the comments section of the questionnaire (question 5) the respondent noted:

‘All students on full and substantial part-time courses have a key skills entitlement as defined in the key skills policy’.

The key skills 'entitlement' at Rivers College also applied to those part-time courses where attendance was greater than 8 hours per week.

Section 3: College policies relating to key skills

The college has had a key skills policy since 1998, and the practice has been to encourage course managers and vocational tutors who were not used to key skills (i.e. non-GNVQ tutors) to incorporate them into their courses. The interviewee stated that:

'We took cognisance of the general atmosphere at the time and acknowledged that a significant section of the college did not have a key skills entitlement at all'. (College curriculum manager)

The college had a policy writing team made up of representatives of the three GNVQ mandatory key skills deliverers and the Curriculum Manager. The manager of the college's Youth Training agency has recently been drafted onto the team because of the Modern Apprenticeship dimension, and the key skills planning group acts as a reference point for staff regarding implementation of this policy.

The interviewee was of the opinion that:

'We are very good on key skills for GNVQ courses, but no overall management (of key skills) was in place. We felt that there were real issues about some courses not including key skills in their programmes'.
(Key skills specialist)

The interviewee noted that some Heads of Department may have been ignoring the policy that states that all full-time students and students on courses requiring more than 8 hours a week attendance should be taking key skills. In terms of policy and overall entitlement the Curriculum Manager did not know if all managers were committed to its implementation:

'Entitlement' is an option for students, but we are trying to put more pressure on students by saying to course managers that students should have this key skills entitlement rather than making it too optional'. (College curriculum manager)

The policy indicated that 'entitlement' at Rivers College meant that full time students were to be supported to develop the mandatory key skills. It was a reaction to a more relaxed approach in the past. It was not now an option for students to give key skills a lower profile than their vocational studies.

In terms of the 'additional' key skills it was clear that GNVQ students had access or opportunity to both develop and accredit either or both the non-mandatory key skills through assignments and work placements.

Section 4: Student admissions, initial screening and learner support

Initial screening is undertaken by key skills staff and it was confirmed in both the questionnaire and the interview that

'It is normally done during induction, i.e. in the first week of the term'.
(Student services manager)

However whilst diagnostic tools were used there were some concerns about which to use:

'The ALBSU test does not fill the requirements of key skill specialists. The key skills staff seem convinced that 'Skillbuilder' from West Notts College is a better tool for assessing students' actual key skills ability'.
(Student services manager)

The interviewee advised that the college used a 'self devised kit' to assist with initial diagnosis supported by the basic skills assessment kit provided by The Basis Skills Agency (BSA), formerly ALBSU. This tool covers basic numeracy and literacy assessments but not the key skill Information Technology.

In addition at course level 'tests' may be used to identify which students need extra key skills support or a recommendation by the vocational unit tutor to the student to attend the Learning Resource Centre, (LRC) for additional key skills support. Given the responses to the question of initial assessment the interviewee concluded with the comment that:

‘We really need to sort out diagnostic testing across the college...this year has been about getting the policy up and running’.
(Student services manager)

It was reported that no formal tracking system existed to help tutors to establish if additional support for key skills is actually being accessed by the student concerned. The following supporting comment was provided in the questionnaire;

‘Some schools use tracking systems – and we are intending to standardise these for the next academic year’. (Question 18)

However individual tutors monitor if extra support is needed. The primary area in the college for this was the Learning Resource Centre, which is staffed by ‘learning facilitators’. They provide support on both a timetabled and ‘drop-in’ basis. A supporting comment was included in the response to question 17 where the respondent noted:

‘The facilitators (Maths/English/Numeracy and Communications) are employed by the Sixth Form School, (a section of the college). Support for IT is less structured but we are appointing facilitators in this area soon’.
(College curriculum manager)

Section 5: Course management

The overall college approach is one where members of the key skills planning group work with individual course teams to develop key skills through assignments. The integration of key skills was the product of joint planning between key skills and vocational staff, but workshops are used as well as students being required to claim competence in a given key skill or skills. As noted in response to question 23 of the questionnaire:

‘This is discussed at course team meetings when key skill staff are in attendance’.

Arrangements are well established for GNVQ courses but the interviewee, (the curriculum manager), stated that:

'I would not be 100% confident that all course leaders are championing the cause of key skills. Some may be ignoring the policy'. (GNVQ course tutor)

The college also felt that there were no major issues for GNVQ students in terms of course management and they had not increased the course hours to accommodate key skills. In addition the point was made that:

'Some vocational areas have said that the vocational tutors will take responsibility for ensuring that evidence is collected and assessment undertaken for key skills'. (College curriculum manager)

The new key skills policy promoted 'blanket coverage' of key skills for all full-time students, i.e. all full-time students were registered with the lead body (Edexcel). This was in effect a notional commitment by the college that students would complete the three mandatory key skills of numeracy, information technology and communication. However given some of the 'ownership' and management issues already identified the success rate was anticipated to be 'well under 50%', and that 'some students were not putting themselves forward for the accreditation of key skills'. These were real causes for concern for the curriculum manager.

Section 6: Key skills assessment

The assessment of key skills is usually undertaken as some form of partnership arrangement between vocational tutors and key skills specialists. However as reported in response to question 25 of the questionnaire:

'It seems to be that the generally held view that Application of Number presents problems in some programmes. We have worked hard to offer additional support and guidance in this area with the appointment of staff who are aware of these difficulties'.

Given the college's experience of the challenge of key skills assessment, the manager concerned has decentralised the assessors (they were based in the LRC) and attached them to schools, However the operational issues associated with assessment are not common across the college, which gave rise to the comments:

**‘It depends on the interest and ability of the vocational tutors concerned’,
(key skills specialist), and**

**‘It is difficult for some tutors to identify key skill opportunities for students’.
(College curriculum manager)**

Given the commitment to utilising fully the Learning Resource Centre the emphasis was one of providing access to assessment in the LRC as well as in the classroom and in the workplace. The LRC was used for assessment in a variety of ways including:

‘Times are set aside in the week for supporting the development of key skills portfolios’. (Learning resource centre manager)

Section 7: Internal verification

The challenges associated with the internal verification of key skills produced the following comment:

‘Practice does vary – but overall it is undertaken on a termly basis. We are working towards a standard approach’. (internal verification co-ordinator)

Having said this there is a steer from the key skills planning group that the team attempts to co-ordinate the overall approach. But again no time is allocated to the team to either develop their own approach or to undertake internal verification duties. This led the curriculum manager to make the comment:

‘My fear is that we might be being a little superficial and that not enough sampling takes place to guarantee standardisation is taking place across the college’. (College curriculum manager)

The college tends to promote the practice of allocating time to key skills staff on courses ‘new to key skills’, i.e. non GNVQ full – time courses, and those courses that required more than eight hours per week attendance at college’.

Section 8: Learning and physical resources

The college had a wide range of key skills resources, some developed internally, others purchased from specialist suppliers, and although the LRC is the base for key skills learning materials the interviewee commented that:

‘At present, resources are spread around the college. I am hoping to gather all key skill resources in the LRC’. (Learning resource centre manager)

Given the investment in the LRC it was apparent that the managers had:

‘...tried to give communications and numeracy a much higher profile...it is the most acceptable place for students, we wanted and have got a place where students did not feel that they were being sent to’.
(College curriculum manager)

The LRC is the central venue where regular times for additional support are made available – this includes support from key skill facilitators and additional key skills specialists. It also acts as a ‘drop-in centre’ for students who wish to access learning materials and IT facilities independently. The only negative comments made about the LRC were that access was difficult for work-based Modern Apprentices because specific tutor/facilitator support for them was only provided between 5.00pm and 7.00pm. The point was also made that they (MAs) might not feel comfortable in what for them was an unfamiliar environment, i.e. the college itself.

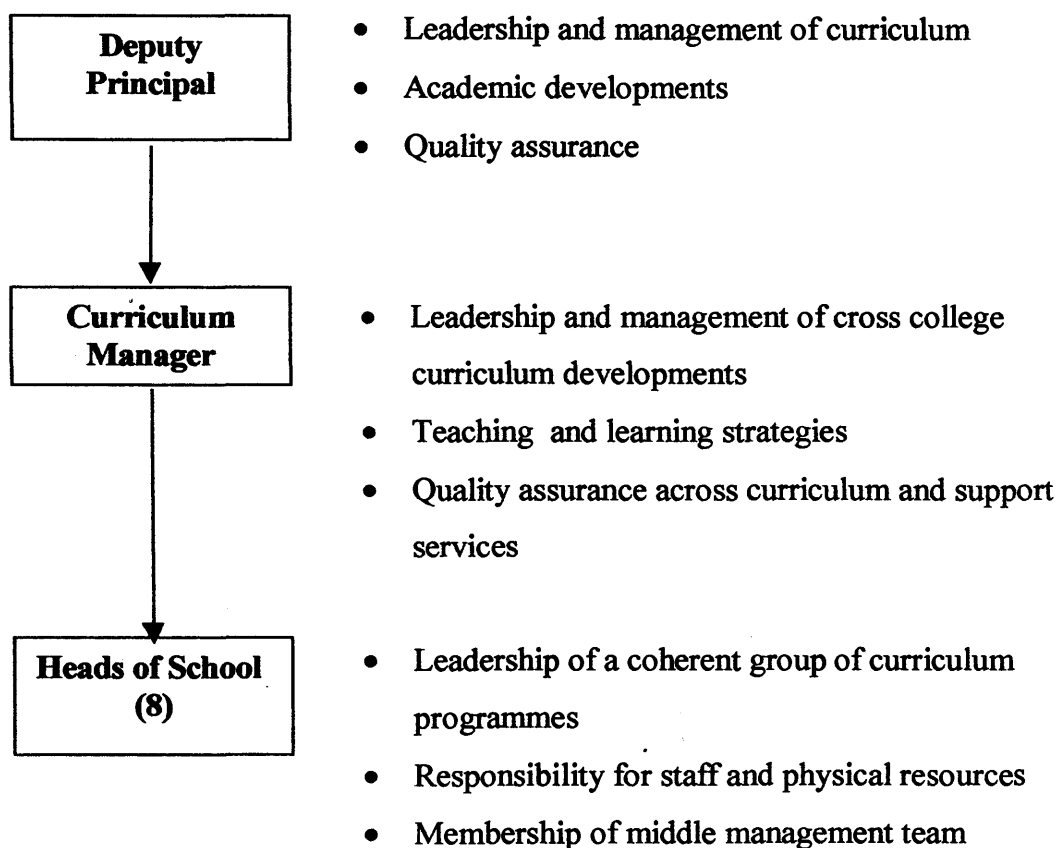
In addition as students needs outgrow the LRC there is the possibility that the college would require:

‘...separate workshops may have to be used for the MAs and NTs – and this would be a backward step’. (Curriculum Manager)

Documentary evidence

The organisation chart (Figure 1) identifies all managerial roles in the college. In addition it confirmed the role of the Deputy Principal in relation to both Curriculum leadership and in terms of his line management of key skills through the Curriculum manager through to eight Heads of School. A further organisation chart identified in detail the specific duties of the Deputy Principal, Curriculum Manager and Heads of School as follows:

Figure 1 College organisational structure



Source: edited from college organisation chart defining roles and responsibilities of the Deputy Principal

The key skills policy contextualises key skills at Rivers college in relation to:

‘Numerous reports from major national bodies, including the DfEE, FEDA and the CBI, which have been critical of the lack of key skill ability amongst students and employees’. (Key skills policy, 1998, p.2)

The policy includes the following points, which effectively summarise overall intentions in relation to:

- Initial diagnostic assessment.
- The active development of key skills.
- The potential to develop key skills.
- The opportunity for all adult students (over 19 years of age) to accredit prior learning wherever possible, to help assess the level of entry to key skills.
- The role of key skill staff.
- Specific internal verification procedures that will be used for key skills.
- Confirmation that responsibility for standards in relation to key skills lies with the curriculum manager.

The policy also confirms their intention to enhance performance through key skills as stated in the background information of the policy statement:

‘Key skill ability on entry to a programme should be diagnosed and developed irrespective of level. Enhanced performance in key skills will enable a student to achieve an improved level of performance in their programme of study than would otherwise be the case’.
(Key skills policy, 1998, p.6)

The policies confirmed internal verification as one aspect of quality assurance, which relates to the delivery of qualifications. It also specifies that internal verification provides the necessary co-ordination, quality audits and links with external verification and accreditation.

Summary

Key skills management at Rivers college is co-ordinated centrally by a senior manager supported by a planning group comprising of staff with a commitment to key skills. They performed a variety of tasks linked to key skills as well as having a substantial teaching load.

The college has a key skills policy. The current focus is on those courses new to key skills and to support staff to develop opportunities for students to collect evidence

towards their key skill portfolios. The college is exploring a number of ways to achieve this. The Learning Resource Centre is the main centre in which learner support from key skills facilitators and lecturing staff is provided. The LRC is available and is managed on both a timetabled and 'drop-in' centre basis.

Case Study No 4: Victoria College of Arts and Technology

Section 1. Organisational structure: where key skills fits in

The concept of Learning Resource Centre supporting learning from which key skills developed was introduced in 1993. Up to that time key skills or core skills as they were then known at that time were 'dealt with' according to the senior manager concerned in curriculum areas:

'There was nothing central about it all. We didn't have any key skills workshops, any Maths workshops, English workshops or IT workshops – nothing like that at all, nothing that you could call central support'.
(Curriculum manager)

The college introduced the concept of key skills teaching as a centralised service when it opened its key skills centre in 1997. Structurally there is a Learning Resource Centre Manager who co-ordinates all of the college's LRCs. The LRC Manager is supported by a Key Skills Manager who in turn is supported by co-ordinators with specialist skills in Maths, Information Technology and English. The role of the key skills centre manager was initially funded through a Further Education Development Fund grant linked to the 'mapping' of key skills in the college. The post was redefined and made permanent when the Key Skills Centre was opened.

The college LRC manager noted:

'We are a large college and we have a large provision across a variety of subjects, so we have developed a very flexible model. Key skills staff provide advice and resources to support the delivery, assessment, and internal verification process. We go from one end of the scale to the other for colleagues – we provide nothing at one end through to lots and lots of it at another'. (Learning resource centre manager)

The college has also established a 'key skills group' comprising staff from all curriculum areas in the college as well as key skill specialists. This group helps to co-ordinate staff development relating to key skills and promotes good practice across the college. The key skills centre provides support for the development of all of the accredited key skills and the staff concerned are specialists who work in partnership with the 'additional support' team. This additional support could also be described as 'learner support'. It was summarised by the key skills manager as a service where:

'...staff providing the additional support programme go into a classroom and support students, or the students may come to them individually – that's maths and english support'. (Key skills manager)

Section 2: Key skills client groups

The college provides key skills teaching for all the client groups noted in question 5 of the questionnaire with the exclusion of New Deal students. The main emphasis is to support GNVQ students, Modern Apprentices and National Trainee students. As the college LRC manager noted:

'In theory we support all students, but in practice it's GNVQ and MA/NT students'. (Learning resource centre manager)

Section 3: College policies relating to key skills

The college has a key skills policy that is designed to guide the management of how the key skills centre is managed. It also identifies which students have a key skills entitlement. The policy was drafted by the key skills manager whilst employed on the 'key skills mapping project' and presented to the senior management team for approval in 1998. Up to this point the key skills manager noted:

'There was no central support, no one was looking at key skills centrally at all'. (Learning resource centre manager)

Given the notion of key skills 'entitlement' it was interesting to note that the entitlement only covered GNVQ students, Modern Apprentices and National Trainees

(response to question 8 of the questionnaire). The policy excludes 'A' level students and all other full time students (as confirmed in response to question 9).

With respect to the additional key skills the interviewee confirmed that the provision and 'take-up' was minimal:

'If someone wants to come in (to the centre) and do some free-standing units they could, but in fact it is quite rare for people to do this. We run the odd ones for Access students, but they are mainly Open College Network (OCN) units'.

This response effectively confirmed the college's answer to questions 9 and 10 of the questionnaire.

The key skills manager, in commenting on how she uses her time, said that the 'mapping project' she was originally employed to undertake was still continuing in some areas of the college. However in relation to key skills policy she noted:

'I shouldn't be spending my time mapping now. I should be updating the policy and checking whether it is being implemented across the college'.
(Key skills manager)

Section 4: Student admissions, initial screening and learner support

Vocational tutors undertake all initial assessment in the college. The Basic Skills Agency (BSA) assessment tools were used plus an initial assessment toolkit provided by The British Psychological Society (BPS). At present the college is reviewing the West Notts College 'Skillbuilder' initial diagnosis kit with a view to 'vocationalising' initial assessment. The tutor stated that:

'The BSA assessment material has been around for some time, but we now like the BPS 'kit', it's called The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA). We offer either the basic skills assessment or the foundation skills assessment to all of our students'. (GNVQ Course tutor)

The college's Learner Support Manager takes responsibility for all aspects of initial assessment as the key skills manager confirmed:

'We've got the co-ordinators of key skills, basic skills and initial assessment all together in that group, although basic skills is in a separate department, and they mainly focus on the development of 'the college in the community'. (Key skills manager)

Post-enrolment screening does, in certain vocational areas help to identify both the 'point of entry' and the additional support needs of students. In particular in the vocational areas of hair and beauty and electronic engineering were given as good examples of this practice. As was stated:

'...they recruit but they don't 'classify' or state the 'qualification aim' until the end of the first term – when they have had a couple of assignments in, and in the case of hairdressing when they have watched them cut hair. But in some parts of the college a student can go a long time before their additional support needs linked to key skills are picked up'. (key skills manager)

'Learner support' at Victoria college is effectively Basic Skills support provided by a centralised team who use the results of the initial diagnostic test to assess the level of support required on an individual and group basis. There is a separate 'community based' basic skills team in the college that provides what could be termed 'outreach support services'. This practice causes the college manager concerned some difficulties in relation to key skills:

'I am clear about the key skills and additional support. However I am not clear about the difference between additional support and basic skills. Basic skills and additional support report to two different managers and two different parts of the directorate'. (GNVQ course tutor)

Additional support staff actually go into a classroom to support students – and students can and do use the key skills centre to develop their IT skills. This IT support may be part of their overall key skills development or a separate qualification aim that the student wishes to aim for.

Overall the key skills manager summarises college practices linked to key skills by saying:

- **'We provide a central support service. We improve Maths, English and IT from the centre for the students that need it'. (Key skills manager)**

In terms of tracking a student's progress (question 15) the view was offered that:

'The tutorial co-ordinator checks that the student is receiving the support they need –if the student is not attending the sessions little can be done'.

In terms of learner support, this is monitored by the additional support team or the learner support team who have an agreed interventionist approach, and key skills development and progression is tracked by vocational tutors as part of their course management responsibilities. In turn they may or may not liaise with staff in the key skills centre regarding a student's progress on key skills development needs.

Section 5: Course management

Key skills are 'delivered' in a variety of ways. It was best summarised by the key skills manager who said:

'The balance between vocational tutor, key skills specialist, additional support and workshop delivery (of key skills) varies by programme and vocational area'. (Key skills manager)

The preferred and most common approach is the integration of key skills into the programme concerned. This generates a partnership approach, summarised by the comment:

'We have been doing a lot of mapping exercises with the engineers because they were having difficulties integrating key skills. Together one of my team would sit down with the lecturer concerned and map something that would cover an aspect of a key skill. The staff are a real mixture, from those that are very academic through to basic skills tutors and at times who need help'. (Curriculum manager)

The key skills centre can and does provide staff who deliver and assess key skills for vocational tutors and teams. As was said:

'We service other departments, so when staff from here go out and deliver and assess key skills they report to a manager in another programme area. (Key skills manager)

The response to Question 19 of the questionnaire reinforced the mixed practice approach and the respondent offered the comment:

‘Ideally integration is planned and mapped by the course team. In practice some teams do and some teams don’t. Coverage of key skills through assignments may very well need and get the support of a key skills person’.

Key skills are also delivered by key skills staff in workshops (small groups) that have been put into specific curriculum areas. For example a small learning resource centre was introduced into the bricklaying and plumbing area of the college. In addition the key skills staff currently deliver IT to GNVQ Health and Social Care students, but as the tutor noted:

‘We want to develop the staff and encourage them to deliver the IT key skill – then our team can support other groups to integrate IT’. (GNVQ course tutor)

In terms of key skills delivery the college does have a central resource of key skill specialists based in a key skills centre. Staff are assigned to the centre to support their particular group. Within the centre the key skills staff can act as advisors, deliver, and as part of a team involved in the drafting of assignments that map the mandatory key skills.

Section 6: Key skills assessment

The key skills policy indicates that assessment can be undertaken by a variety of staff, and this is confirmed in answer to question 27 of the questionnaire. The interviewee refers to the ideal situation being one where the vocational tutor undertakes the assessment. But that it is not always the case, in fact they celebrate the diverse approaches that are used. As stated:

‘We also provide advice and resources from here, which then provides evidence for student’s key skills, it is then assessed by the vocational team. So they can use evidence from here to help them, but it has to be double marked. (Key skills manager)

The college has devised an assessment guide for staff to use when assessing key skills. The belief was that it was being used, but in a patchy way because the key skills policy requires 'double marking' to take place to ensure standardisation. As indicated in response to question 28, some key skills were considered to be more difficult to assess than others, these were Communication and Information Technology. The reasons for this were noted by both the key skills manager and the GNVQ course tutor as follows:

'Communication is difficult because the level is hard to gauge'. (GNVQ Course tutor)

'We tried to pull out the (key skills evidence) from the assignments, but it didn't work at all. We just ended up writing new assignments and asking the students to do extra work. So we are now providing more time (timetabled and classroom based) and we are team teaching, with key skills staff'. (GNVQ Course Tutor)

Section 7: Internal verification

The college internal verification policy states that internal verification is the responsibility of the programme area concerned, and this policy was drafted by the key skills manager who stated that:

'My objectives are to establish the effective delivery, assessment, internal verification and accreditation of key skills across the college'. (Key skills manager)

The college has an internal verification group, which has representatives from across the college, and they are seeking to standardise internal verification practices. The approach taken for key skills is the same as that for all other aspects of internal verification, but includes a guide for the internal verification of key skills. This guide was drafted by the key skills manager.

Internal verification however does cause the key skills manager some concern, in that:

'I would like to audit what actually goes on but I would get a lot of 'anti' feeling and my Director won't let me do it. He says that any evidence needed would come from External Verifiers reports that go straight to the Principal –

that and external assessment results'. (Member of the college internal verification group)

In response to question 27 the college manager concerned did not offer a quantitative response, but the qualitative response in the questionnaire was illuminating:

'Ideally it takes place as the key skills are assessed. In practice most areas (of the college) do not have a structured approach'.

Section 8: Learning and physical resources

A range of specialised resources are purchased centrally and used in the key skills centre, but as stated in response to question 32, Maths/English and IT resources are also generated internally. Learning resources are based in the key skills centre and in other LRCs across the college. Many of the key skills resources are IT based, which generated the comment:

'We are committed to using IT as a learning tool in key skills, and we use the college intranet extensively. We are trying to buy more IT software, we are very keen to buy software for the teaching of Maths and English - and the students are very motivated by it (computer based learning)'. (College learning resource centre manager)

In addition LRCs are emerging in curriculum areas such as Carpentry and Bricklaying and Hair and Beauty as part of an overall strategy to develop resource based learning. In addition key skills staff develop learning materials in partnership with programme area managers and vocational teams.

The written response to question 35 summarises the role of the LRCs in the college:

'They provide expertise and resources'.

The expertise comes from key skills staff who play a large and flexible role providing expertise and resources, some of which they develop themselves. These are made available in these centres as well as to the vocational teams.

Documentary evidence

As indicated earlier in this chapter Victoria College is a large institution and the college organisation chart was presented in three parts - the senior management structure, the faculty structure and support staff management structure. In addition the Learning Resources Managers role was faculty based, but also had a major cross-college dimension. The Learning Resource Manager was responsible for 7 separate learning resource centres on two large campuses. It was interesting to note that 'key skills' and the management and co-ordination of key skills were 'pencilled in', i.e. added to the organisation chart - possibly as an afterthought.

Documents were provided that confirmed the overall planning and support available to students to assist with them with key skills. It confirmed the stated relationship between:

- Key skills team.
- Key skills network group.
- The internal verification group.
- Planning and monitoring of key skills.

Papers provided by the key skills centre manager demonstrated a structured approach to key skill management was being sought. The college key skills policy covered three themes.

- Entitlement.
- Implementation strategy.
- Monitoring and review.

In relation to 'entitlement' three points were stated, they were:

1. All full-time and part-time students for whom key skills development is needed are important will have an entitlement to support and assessment in the key skills which are relevant to them.
2. All full-time and part-time students who wish to study key skills will also have an entitlement to support and assessment in the key skills which are relevant to them.

3. A student's key skills entitlement will include initial assessment of existing skills, development of those skills, summative assessment and accreditation.

The implementation strategy confirmed the central role of the programme manager with respect to key skills in the first point (of 10) points in the strategy:

The programme manager is ultimately responsible for all initial assessment, delivery, summative assessment, internal verification and certification of key skills. (College key skills policy, 1998, p.3)

The second point confirms the role of the key skills team:

The key skills team provide programme managers with assistance, expertise and resources to help them devise a strategy for initial assessment, delivery, summative assessment, internal verification and certification of key skills. (College key skills policy, 1998, p.5)

The paper also confirms intent regarding the role and importance of diagnostic testing, that 'mapping activities' will take place to plot the opportunity for key skills development and that:

Initial diagnostic tests will be used to guide the delivery of key skills and also identify those students who need additional support. (College key skills policy, 1998, p.6)

Two further notes were added to the policy paper that confirmed the following:

1. When key skill staff are involved in the delivery of key skills they will act as part of the vocational team concerned. This includes taking part in planning meetings and in internal verification.
2. It was anticipated that Foundation/level 1 programmes would require a greater amount of time to be devoted to key skills and in some instances basic skills. (College key skills policy, 1998, p.6)

Summary

Victoria College of Arts and Technology is a college with what could be termed a tradition of investing in resource based learning. This generic commitment to LRCs has grown to encompass key skills and a centralised and well-resourced key skills

centre was opened in 1997. The development of a key skills policy which included a limited 'entitlement policy' and an associated internal verification policy was undertaken by the key skills centre manager in 1997. The centre is managed by one person who has a large number of staff that provide key skills support as well as for English and Maths. However Basic Skills support is not provided in the centre, it falls within the remit of 'another directorate', and their focus is on supporting basic skills in the community not in the college.

Learner support provision is viewed as an outcome of the initial assessment process and is delivered by a discrete additional support team who have the remit to 'team teach' with vocational tutors as required. Whilst the various teams appreciate each other's role the edges of each area are blurred.

The management of key skills assessment and internal verification is essentially programme area based, but the programme areas receive support from key skills staff as required and on a flexible basis from the key skills centre. This also applies to planning the integration of key skills and their delivery.

The key skills centre along with other decentralised learning resource centres house a large number of resources, many of which are on the college intranet. In addition there is a drive to customise resources to suit the needs of programme and curriculum areas throughout the college, some of which have their own resource centres.

Summary of case study findings

The purpose of this chapter has been served in that the data acquired via the semi-structured interviews has been presented. It effectively describes the perceptions of key postholders of the four case study colleges with respect to the 8 categories of questions in the survey. In addition an analysis of the survey responses provides further detail regarding the stated position on college practice and a full analysis of the key points from each case study college is provided in Appendix 6. However it is useful here to summarise the main issues and themes that emerge from the interviews:

Section 1: Organisational structure

Overall the colleges concerned have, over time, responded to the perceived need to at least accommodate key skills within the organisational structure. 2 of the case study colleges have elected to create a dedicated key skills centre/unit and posts such as key skills manager/co-ordinator to line manage specialist key skills staff.

The history of key skills in the case study colleges has been linked to a variety of initiatives such as 'language support' and basic skills' (Buckley college), 'flexibility projects' (Hills technical college), 'the introduction of modern apprenticeships' (Rivers college) and the 'introduction of learning resource centres' (Victoria college). As a result, the infrastructure that has emerged to support key skills initiatives is unique to the college concerned.

Section 2: Key skills client groups

In principle each case study college promotes the view that 'all client groups are supported', however Victoria college note that in practice only GNVQ and MA/NT students are supported. Both 'basic and key skills support' is provided to specified client groups, (Buckley college) and there is a commitment to provide key skills to Access to Higher Education students as well as to modern apprentices with key skills support (Hills technical college). Rivers college is unique in that it limits its support to client groups who are required to attend college for 8 hours or more per week.

Section 3: College policies relating to key skills

All the case study colleges have policies relating to key skills from 1998/1999, and college stated that the key skills policy had its roots in the 'college language policy' drafted in 1993 (Buckley college). The concept of 'key skills entitlement' is acknowledged at Rivers college, Victoria college and Buckley college. At Buckley college it was noted that 'entitlement is not systematically managed'. Similarly at Hills college it was noted that 'the policy applies to all students in theory, but not in practice'. In addition at Rivers college it was acknowledged that 'the main focus is on those courses new to key skills' and that 'entitlement may still be viewed as an option by some staff and students'.

Section 4: Student admissions, initial screening and learner support

In this section the existence and use of 'initial diagnostic tools' was explored. In each of the case study colleges some form of initial assessment is undertaken but in a variety of ways, at differing times and by a variety of staff (key skills staff, vocational tutors, student services specialist) using different 'tools', some of which were college devised. However in one college it was stated that 'GCSE results are more important' (Hills college), which served to suggest that a student with 'good' GCSE results were treated differently than students with 'poor' GCSE results. The ALBSU tool was used by all four colleges but other tools were being used, i.e. The West Notts college 'skillbuilder kit' (Victoria and Rivers colleges) was being piloted and at Victoria college the British Psychological Society (BPS) Foundation Skills Assessment Test was being used for some students.

The issue of the provision of learning/learner support appears to be a complex aspect of the post needs analysis service. Learner support staffing 'is structured and planned wherever possible' (Buckley college), provided on a 'one-to-one basis, in workshops and within the main programme' (Hills technical college), and 'timetabled and 'drop-in' support provided'. It is an important service to students that depends on a high level of effective communication throughout the college concerned. If there are any issues associated with the initial diagnosis phase of a students life in a college then the potential to manage the manager the service well is compromised.

Section 5: course management

What emerges here is that there is a desire amongst colleges to integrate key skills and that planning takes place, usually at the individual course level in order to support this aim. One of the issues raised relates to who takes overall responsibility to ensure effective integration of key skills. At Buckley college for example 'no common method is used in practice' but they emphasised the role of key skills staff in the planning process. At Rivers college 'the vocational tutor takes overall responsibility but supported by key skills specialists' but at Hills college 'all tutors map their assignments against key skills' but students are then expected to 'claim' competence in key skills on an on-going basis.

Overall therefore there may be issues associated with both the planning and delivery of key skills that are worthy of further investigation and analysis linked to the particular model of key skills management adopted.

Section 6: Key skills assessment

Both the delivery and assessment of key skills have been identified as challenging by all 4 case study colleges. Buckley college for example noted that ‘different approaches are used in each of the 3 faculties’ and that ‘application of number, working with others and improving own learning and performance were seen as being the most difficult to deliver and assess’. At Rivers college ‘application of number was difficult to assess, but Victoria college offered the view that ‘all of the 3 mandatory key skills were difficult to assess’. At Rivers college it was suggested that ‘staff sometimes have difficulty identifying opportunities where key skills can be assessed’, a comment that was supported at Victoria college where it was noted that ‘drawing evidence from assignments was seen as difficult for staff’. Therefore overall that data from the case study college promoted the conclusion that key skills delivery and assessment are linked and that assessment in both general and specific terms was at the very least ‘challenging’.

Section 7: Internal verification

The theme common to all colleges is that they all had a generic college-wide internal verification policy and in 1 of the case study colleges a college internal verifier was in post (Hills college). At Hills college the internal verifier acted as a ‘trouble shooter’, but in all colleges internal verification was seen as the responsibility of the course team. Given that internal verification relates to the verification that adherence to quality control systems it was interesting to note the concerns expressed in each college regarding the level of adherence to agreed internal verification systems.

At Buckley college ‘fear was expressed that no internal verification had taken place at the present time’. At Rivers college there was concern that ‘internal verification is much too superficial’ and that no time had been allocated to staff to lead on aspects of internal verification and to provide staff development or informal guidance to

colleagues. The issue of the quality and consistency of aspects of the management of internal verification was a common theme across all colleges. This leads to a potential concern that even when policies are in place and staff employed to lead their implementation and/or management there may at the very least be inconsistencies in their application.

Section 8: Learning and physical resources

The issue of key skills resources are linked to 'venues' such as learning resource centres and libraries and the availability of the type of resources needed by staff and students. It was clear from the case study colleges that many of the resources used for key skills were devised by staff in the absence of alternative sources.

Given that learning resources were, in many instances devised by college staff they tended to remain with the staff concerned and not shared with colleagues in other vocational areas. Secondly the centralisation of learning materials was in essence a product of the commitment of the college concerned to invest in learning resource centres that were able to act as venues for both learning resources and in some cases as a base from which student support could be provided. It is interesting to compare the case study colleges approaches:

At Buckley college, where they had a key skill centre, key skills learning resources were held centrally – but the college also had a separate learning resource centre that had no links at all with the key skills centre. Hills college elected not to use the learning resource centre and did not have a key skills centre therefore all learning resources were held 'departmentally'. However the Student Admissions and Support Unit (SASU) undertook a central role in initial assessment and on-going learner support and members of the college key skills team undertook a college-wide liaison role. In comparison at Victoria college, where the level of investment in 'resource centres' was high and the college intranet was used to house key skills learning materials that related to specific vocational areas e.g. hair and beauty and carpentry and bricklaying. Finally at Rivers college where there was a commitment to use the centralised learning resource centre they had a major focus on providing communication and application of number learning resources and to provide

additional support for students on both a 'drop-in' and timetabled basis. However it was clear that the learning resource centre was not proving to be accessible to some part-time students who required access after the closing time of the centre (5.00pm). Overall the challenge of providing up to date and relevant key skills learning resources appears to be one that has fallen on the shoulders of vocational tutors in the first instance. Where key skill centres exist significant steps have been made to use the facilities well and flexibly – but the picture is mixed and the challenge is one of how to optimise centralised services in partnership with key skills specialists and vocational tutors.

Chapter 6. Analysis of findings

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to link the main issues identified in the literature review with the findings from the survey and the four case studies. This provided the platform for both the conclusions of this research and for the suggestions of a way forward for consideration by practitioners, college managers and fellow researchers.

The eight themes which formed the basis for research were reduced to four main areas within which the management of the teaching of key skills in colleges can be assessed

These are:

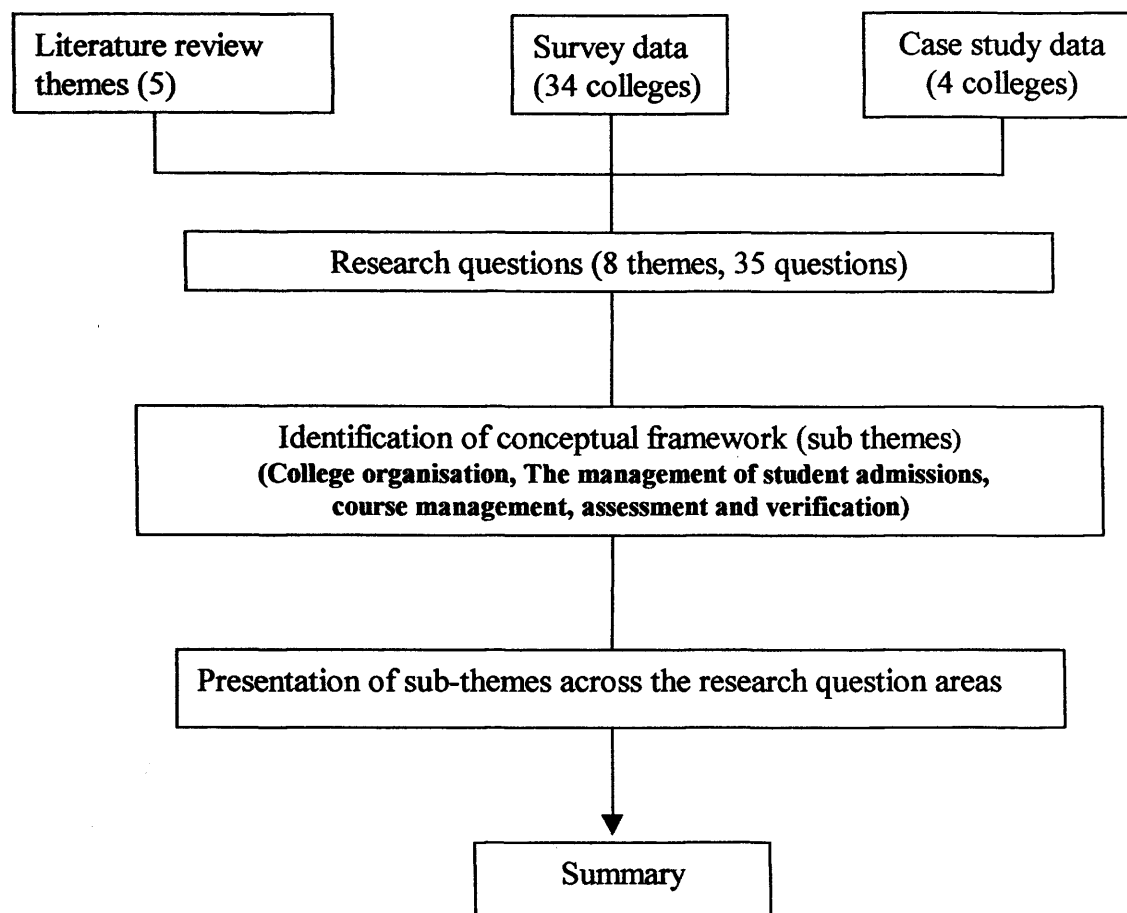
- College organisation.
- The management of student admissions including initial assessment and verification.
- Course management.
- Key skills assessment and verification.

Table 37: Data themes

Sub theme	Categories of question
1. College organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organisational structure• Key skill client groups• College policies• Learning and physical resources
2. Student admissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student admissions, initial guidance and learning support
3. Course management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course management
4. Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessment• Verification

Figure 2 is designed to show how the literature review, survey and case study data are linked to the eight themes (and 35 questions) in the survey.

Figure 2 Stages in the data analysis process



Theme 1: College organisation

The objective of this section was to analyse all data associated with theme as summarised in Figure 1 above.

Policies, structures and the support of specified client groups

Structures and policies are designed to support client groups and the survey to confirm the commonality of client groups. These client groups are predominantly GNVQ students, Modern Apprentices, New Deal clients and 'A' level students with 'other' client groups accessing key skills in some instances.

The survey was also designed to establish at the outset whether colleges have decided to include in their organisational structure a key skills unit or section. The positive responses were in the minority at 44%. This in part may reflect the observation made

by the FEFC (1998, p.25) when they noted that key skills initiatives in colleges ‘...are often unconnected’.

A key question to consider is to what extent organisational structures designed to support key skills actually ensure consistency of key skills management in a college in line with stated policies. This introduces a second question regarding to what extent do ‘informal’ approaches to key skills management actually impinge on the quality of the overall management of key skills – both positively and negatively. Initial data indicated that the majority of colleges (71%) have a manager in place with overall responsibility for key skills. This could be said to indicate a level of ‘seriousness’ or at least understanding about key skills at senior management level, but cannot be viewed in isolation as indicative of the effective management of the teaching of key skills.

The structure may in some cases be little more than a position statement, but at least the structure could be said to demonstrate intent. The question posed however was whether ‘intent’ via structure was then reflected in the effective management of key skills. Or if as FEDA (2000, p.24) point out there are ‘...often several unconnected (key skill) initiatives taking place within an institution’.

In all four case study colleges it was stated by interviewees that in or around 1997 changes were made to the organisational structures which at the very least ‘accommodated’ key skills. In each of the four colleges concerned there was an acknowledgement that key skills should be managed in a more effective manner as members of staff with an interest in this aspect of curricular management promoted the case for change.

In each of the case study colleges comments made by college representatives identify motivation to change and they demonstrated that organisationally each case study college concerned has ‘made progress’ towards establishing models that they considered to be effective. This reflects the positive point made by the FEFC (1998, p.30) where they note that evidence of good practice is where ‘...there is senior management support for the development of key skills’. It has been established that middle managers were in place, they had clear roles in the organisation and teams of

staff working with them to undertake a range of specific tasks across the college and/or in specific departments or schools.

Policies and entitlement

This research indicated that key skills policies are invariably linked to an 'entitlement' model of some sort, and they are designed to reinforce the structure that has been put in place to help in the management of the teaching of key skills in relation to a range of 'client groups'. Survey data indicate a strong commitment to an explicit 'corporate approach' (79% of colleges) and the existence of 'formal policies' (88% of colleges). Reports of previous research noted that policies were '...pragmatic rather than ideal and hard to deliver' (FEDA, 2000, p.17). Pragmatism was reflected in both the survey and in the case studies in that in response to the question of 'which students are beneficiaries to this (key skills) 'entitlement'' (Question 8), the answers varied considerably and reflected the stance noted by the FEFC. Of the 12 colleges offering a qualitative response the vast majority were pragmatic in terms of their definition of the term 'entitlement' in that they were selective as to which students 'qualified' for this entitlement in relation to key skills.

At a policy and entitlement model level none of the college staff interviewed in the four case study colleges reflected the concerns of Woodcock (1998, p.5) where he said that '...implementing key skills means picking your way through a minefield of tensions and conflicts'. The notion that policies that state a commitment to key skills entitlement are limited either by default or design implies an acceptance of the reality that Woodcock refers to. This meant that in some cases students can be disadvantaged in varying degrees through the way key skill policies are designed and the entitlement model implemented. This point will be reflected upon later in this chapter and chapter 7.

Staffing the structure to support key skills

Organisational structures and college policies need staff to implement them if they are to be successful. In each of the 34 colleges surveyed organisational choices had been

made, and these choices were described in detail in each of the four case study colleges.

The literature reviewed indicated that a number of challenges exist for the key skills specialist including the concern that ‘...those with spare capacity’ (FEDA, 2000, p.36) become the key skills specialists in some colleges. Conversely, it was stated that the sector has ‘...made great demands on a small number of specialists and created pressure on everyone to become an expert’ (FEFC, 1998, p.29).

Each college has to a certain extent been shaped by its history, its Principals, past and present, its management team and its overall ability to access, harness and use the staff available. Added to this ‘special projects’ have in some cases attracted external funding or competed internally for funding for specific posts. This was the case at both Hills Technical College and Victoria College of Arts and Technology. At Hills College managers bid internally for funds to support key skills development. Key skills became one of four cross-college flexibility projects. At Victoria funds were applied for and obtained via the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) managed Further Education Development Fund.

The case studies were illuminating in that they describe ‘history’, the motivation to change as well as highlighting the challenges and blockages to change for those committed to and involved in the management of the teaching of key skills. Some of this data reinforces the issues highlighted in the literature review, and in other cases challenges it as follows:

- Rivers college, for example has a key skills manager and four key skills specialist – but no key skills centre or unit.
- Hills college has a key skills project leader, a group of key skills specialists - but no key skills centre.
- Victoria college has a key skills co-ordinator, key skills specialists and a key skills centre.
- Buckley College has a key skills manager, key skills specialists and a key skills centre.

The real issue was related to the staff, the roles that they play, the challenges they face and how these challenges influence their overall level of effectiveness. The survey results indicated the following duties of key skill specialist as noted in the table below:

**Table 38 Summary of related duties of key skills specialists
(survey colleges)**

Response	Initial screening	Assessment of key skills
Yes	10 (30%)	27 (79%)
No	24 (70%)	7 (21%)
Total	34 (100%)	34 (100%)

Furthermore evidence from the qualitative data indicated that three other roles are undertaken:

- Ensuring of key skills ‘coverage’ in assignments.
- Responsibility for internal verification.
- Responsibility for key skills integration.

The case study interviews were helpful in that they confirmed the survey data in terms of the initial screening role of key skills specialists at one college, and in three colleges they undertook a key skills assessment role.

The case studies indicated that key skills specialists/practitioners have a variety of other duties. For example in all four of the case study colleges specialist key skills staff were employed, but only in one of them did they undertake initial screening and in two of them they actually delivered the key skills as part of their teaching contract.

Table 39: Analysis of duties undertaken by key skills staff (case study colleges)

Role of key skills staff	Buckley College of Arts and Technology	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College of Arts and Technology
Key skills manager/co-ordinator/project leader	•	•	•	•
Key skills specialists employed	•	•	•	•
Specialist staff deliver key skills	•	•	•	•
Teaching 'remission' provided for key skills specialists		• Some team members are managers with time allocated for key skill duties		
Internal verification duties undertaken	•		•	•
Staff development duties (key skills college leader)	•	•	•	•
Provider of accreditation of prior learning (APL) advice		• one member of the team provides this service		
Undertake Initial assessment duties			•	
Assess key skills	•		•	•
Further support provided in key skills centre, LRC/Study centre	•			•

In relation to the literature reviewed the data analysed indicated that the role of a key skills specialist is at the very least 'challenging'. The survey results also suggest that the role is both varied and demanding with little 'non-teaching time' available to the committee/network or key skills practitioner to undertake the range of duties linked to the post – even where the duties concerned are formalised. The point made by the

FEFC (1998, p.22) that ‘...liaison between key skills specialists and vocational teachers is not always as effective as it might be’ rings true in this research.

Organisational structure, learning and physical resources

The central platform for the effective management of key skills is the organisational structure of the college and the associated staffing. Added to this are issues associated with both physical and learning resources. In the case of the physical resources this relates to location and usage, and in the case of learning resources this also relates to type, quality and usage.

The survey results noted that ‘a wide range of resources were used’ and that ‘some were purchased externally and other were college devised’. This reflected the range and quality of resources available at the time. Their location also reflected the organisational structural choices made by the college concerned or were forced upon a given college through lack of space at that time.

The challenge to colleges was to create effective linkages between the ‘key skills’ structure and the internal provider of learning resources. In one college it was stated that ‘the Learning Resource Centre and the workshops within the LRC are the focus for key skills – this seems to be working well’. In another the comment ‘resources in the key skills centre and library are not being used to their full potential to deliver key skills.

The survey results (questions 32 and 34) strongly suggest that specific learning resources exist for key skills (85%) and that such resources are made available to support independent learning (76%).

The survey results from the case study colleges allowed linkages between organisational structure and learning resources to be explored further as summarised in table 40:

Table 40: Analysis of key skill resources and associated venues (case study colleges)

Name of College	Specific resource	Location	Role of LRC/library
Buckley College of Arts and Technology	Multi-media packs other paper-based materials	Key skills centre staff have own resources	Resources not being used to their full potential
Hills Technical College	Limited resources	Held in departments	Very limited key skills resources available
Rivers College	A range of resources used	Resources are spread around the college	LRC and workshops are the focus for key skills
Victoria College of Arts and Technology	Maths/English/IT resources are purchased	Some are in the key skills centre, some in the vocational areas	They provide expertise and resources

The case study interviews provided answers with more depth with respect to structural issues:

- At Rivers college the new LRC is used extensively because the maximum hours for any full time course is 15 hours per week. Referral to the LRC is the norm, and key skills facilitators provide support. They acknowledge that the challenge to support part time students in this way (Modern Apprentices) is significant one, and that they need to change their approach towards the delivery of key skills through the LRC for such students. Where space availability in the LRC is an issue a 'workshop approach' is adopted in designated classrooms in which facilitators provide support.
- At Hills college the notion of LRC based key skills delivery has not been considered. The emphasis was on school based support and school based learning materials, with delivery supported by a strong key skills network as one of four special projects in the college. Independent learning in relation to key skills was not supported but it was under review.
- At Victoria college they have a number of LRCs and an extensive and well-staffed key skills centre at the heart of the college. In addition specific programme areas

have access to key skills resources through the IT network and mini LRCs that house key skills resources on the college intranet. These resources have been developed internally and many of them are vocationally specific. Independent learning is supported by both the learning and physical resources with both centralised and decentralised support available to the learner.

- At Buckley college of arts and technology the key skills centre acts as the main college base for both learning resources and support. It has a long history as a centre for the provision of language support (ESOL) and English, Maths and IT. There are very few linkages between the key skills unit and the library and very few key skills learning materials are located in the library. There was no tension, but the clear separation of responsibilities meant that the library undertakes a traditional role and offers no support to the key skills student.

Overall it was evident from the data concerning organisational structure and resources that roles and linkages are poorly defined and that practices are highly varied across the four case study colleges. Whilst the literature reviewed does not focus at all on the use of physical and learning resources in relation to key skills it was important that the relationship was explored. However as the FEFC (1998, p.31) noted:

‘Where there are limitations on funding there (needs to be) plans to make more effective use of existing resources, improve organisation and co-ordination, and make better use of staff skills’.

Questions about college funding and the funding of key skills initiatives were not asked directly in either the survey or in the case study interviews. What was inferred from this analysis was that funding issues do effect the model that was put in place by colleges and this applies to both staffing levels, the time made available to staff and the investment in and the effective use of physical and learning resources. Structures, roles and resources are all interlinked and the effective management of key skills was dependent on the creation and maintenance of internal systems and relationships that optimise services to students.

At this stage it is fair to suggest that no one model has emerged that could be considered 'best practice' for other colleges to emulate. Secondly the level of investment in a college's IT infrastructure and physical layout and investment in developing their own learning materials or in the purchasing of learning materials are important factors that impinge on the likely effective management of key skills.

These issues and challenges noted are all related to effective management and delivery and support. In the diverse models reported in the survey and the four case studies it was evident that there are many implications for colleges to consider if they are committed to the effective use of learning centres (LRC, workshops, study centres).

Summary

In this section the theme of the effective connectivity between structure, roles, and resources has been analysed. What these findings mean in relation to the literature and the issues, challenges and implications for colleges are both illuminating and relevant.

The commitment to develop effective structures has been demonstrated by the appointment of managers and specialist staff to specific key skills roles. The role of key skills specialist was both time consuming and very demanding. As a result the probability of key skills being at the very least 'difficult to manage' is high. Added to this was the effectiveness of what has generically been termed resource-based learning – whether it was deemed to provide either 'supported' study or independent learning opportunities. There are indications of what the FEFC might consider to be good practice, but it was patchy and inconsistent even in a specific college.

What is clear is that the effective management of key skills requires an agreed minimum level of resources to support its overall level of effectiveness. Key skills management models that do not consider whole college resource issues will experience persistent problems.

What the analysis indicated however was that the vast majority of colleges made statements of corporate intent emanating from colleges, but that the level of

‘connectedness’ between policy and practice was ‘mixed’. This poses questions as to how resource-based learning can be developed to support students who require access to resources and support outside the traditional classroom environment.

In summary, organisationally colleges have created mechanisms to support key skills. These platforms would, however, benefit the learner more if there were more effective linkages within colleges in relation to the use of learning resources and supported self-study.

Theme 2: Student admissions

In this section all the data linked to student admissions, initial screening and learner support was analysed.

Initial assessment

The initial assessment of student’s key skills needs is an important function that can provide evidence of the need for on-going provision of learning support. As FEDA (2000, p.57) noted ‘...we found relatively few examples where it is done systematically’ which prompted further analysis through this work. As the responses to question 11 of the survey established, the most frequently reported group of staff who undertook initial assessment linked to learner support needs were the vocational course tutors (58%). It takes place after enrolment in 65% of colleges. These results were similar in the three of the four case study colleges.

Table 41: Analysis of categories of staff undertaking initial screening in a college, (question 11, survey colleges)

Response	Student services	Learner support	Key skills staff	Vocational course tutors	Others
Yes	5 (15%)	12 (36%)	10 (30%)	20 (60%)	9 (28%)
No	28 (85)%	31 (64%)	23 (70%)	13 (40%)	23 (72%)
Total	33 (100%)	33 (100%)	33 (100%)	33 (100%)	32 (100%)
No response	1	1	1	1	2

It was clear that a range of staff undertake this task, and this in part could be said to reflect the concern expressed by the FEFC (1998, p.2) that ‘some staff are reluctant to spend time marking the tests’. What was evident is that in those colleges that provided qualitative responses the roles of the postholders were varied, and that in some cases it was a shared task. As the questionnaire replies indicated, it was not merely a question of who undertakes the task, but also when and how it is undertaken. This second point is important when consideration is given to ‘accepting’ a student on a course, and at what level. It also has implications for the type of post-screening support that is to be provided, as well as where and when it is provided. The table below provides an analysis of when initial screening takes place:

**Table 42: Analysis of timing of initial assessment
(question 12, survey colleges)**

Response	Prior to enrolment	During enrolment	After enrolment	At another time
Yes	9 (26%)	8 (23%)	22 (64%)	14 (45%)
No	25 (74%)	26 (77%)	12 (36%)	19 (55%)
Total	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	34 (100%)	33 (100%)
No response	0	0	0	1

Initial assessment is rarely used to assess which level of a given course a student should attend and may reflect the concern expressed by FEDA (2000, p.57) that ‘in relatively few cases is this done systematically’.

Table 43: Roles of staff involved in the Initial Assessment process (Case study colleges)

Name of College	Who undertakes the role?	When is the task undertaken?
Buckley College of Arts and Technology	Vocational tutors	After enrolment
Hills Technical College	Vocational tutors	After enrolment
Rivers College	Key skills staff	At induction
Victoria College of Arts and Technology	Vocational tutors	After enrolment

As well as questions about who assesses new students, and when, the process of assessment is also important, given that in the literature, FEDA (1995, p.84) reported that 'the ALBSU initial assessment tool is often used to assess numeracy and literacy, it has its shortcomings'. FEDA, (2000, p.57) also noted that 'most centres relied on students having covered IT in the national curriculum'. Initial assessment of IT was usually viewed as an informal process, and not adequate for assessing future support needs.

By drawing together qualitative data from the four case study colleges the following analysis was examined to establish if initial assessment worked. What was clear was that even given a consistent approach to initial assessment, overall effectiveness was brought into question because there was no diagnostic tool widely used to assess a student's level of Information Technology skills. The ALBSU test was used in the majority of colleges surveyed but was designed to assess numeracy and literacy needs – not key skills levels. This reinforces the concerns of the FEFC (1995, p.84, 1998, p.7) and FEDA, (2000, p.56) that issues of '...what is being assessed and how it is undertaken need to be taken into consideration'.

Case study data indicate that policies are in place but confirm the concerns expressed in the literature. Given these concerns there are a range of implications for effectiveness and on-going support. Whether in the first instance this support was associated with basic skills needs was not a major issue. The issue was one of whether key skills needs are effectively supported during a student's progress towards attaining their primary learning goal. What stood out at this stage was that there was evidence to suggest that the aspiration to provide effective initial assessment of needs does, as the FEFC (1998, p.7-8) suggest, 'vary significantly'.

Initial assessment and learner support

Initial assessment represents the starting point for those staff committed to provide on-going support. It was important that further analysis was made of the type of support given, how progress overall is tracked and how on-going 'interventions' are made to support the individual student.

Survey results indicated that 91% of colleges had tracking systems in place to ensure that students requiring extra support would actually receive the support they needed. The same percentage noted that they had ‘monitoring’ systems in place to ensure that the required support was being given and progress made. An analysis of the qualitative responses to this question identified a wide variety of individual practices designed to support an interventionist approach. The responses also indicated the type of internal linkages that individual colleges have in place:

Table 44: Analysis of roles of staff tracking and monitoring of learner support (question 15, survey colleges)

Role of member of staff who tracks students key skills progression	Number of occurrences
No formal system used	1 (5%)
Course based	16 (80%)
Inconsistent college approach	1(5%)
Learning support officer	2 (10%)
Total number of responses	20 (100%)
No response	14

These responses confirm the importance of the course tutor in the initial diagnosis of key skills need, both in terms of who does the initial diagnosis and who actually undertook the tracking of student progress. There is also a question about on-going interventions and where they are provided throughout the year. The responses to this question are inevitably linked to the structures and roles undertaken in each of the (34) colleges surveyed. The table below provides the summary data in relation to the place where learner support takes place:

**Table 45 Analysis of where learner support takes place,
(question 16,survey colleges)**

Base where learner support is provided in the college	Number of Occurrences
Key skills centre*	2 (7%)
Learning resource centre*	10 (37%)
Learning/Student support unit*	1 (3%)
Dedicated workshops*	8 (29%)
Tutorial sessions linked to the course/ In course time	3 (11%)
In additional support session	2 (7%)
Total number of responses	27 (100%)
No response	7

*can be a centralised service depending on the college concerned

Staff who provided the support to the learner outside of the traditional classroom environment played an important role in a student's life. They hold a variety of posts and provide a range of support – and in many cases they were not all specifically key skills related. The table below provides an analysis of the titles and types of staff roles that are associated with providing learner support that is linked, directly or indirectly with key skills. They range from specialist key skills staff through to classroom based learning assistants:

Table 46: Analysis of the role of staff undertaking learning support (question 17, survey colleges)

Role of Staff	Number of Occurrences
Key skills staff	5 (17%)
Key skills facilitators	4 (14%)
Learner support staff	7 (24%)
Learning assistants (in class)	2 (7%)
Basic skills staff	4 (13%)
Additional support team staff	3 (10)
Vocational tutors	4 (13%)
Total number of responses	29 (100%)
No response	5

It is interesting to note that the interventions are undertaken by learning assistants through to key skills staff and vocational tutors, and that basic skills needs are catered for in some colleges under the umbrella of learning support. What this might mean is that colleges overall are developing generic support services for students, after undertaking initial assessments. Furthermore these services were included as part of the support for key skills, although the linear relationship between the identification of need and the provision of key skills related learner support was not always in evidence. The case study colleges describe specific linkages and challenges associated with making the link work that demonstrate some of the challenges associated with the provision of this service:

- Rivers college emphasise the LRC as the place to obtain learner support linked to key skills. Problems related to capacity within the LRC were noted and responded to, and some part-time students (Modern Apprentices) do not have access at times to suit them – but a consistent LRC learner support model is being pursued. They operate a simple, disciplined model within a tightly defined policy.

- At Hills technical college the responsibility for learner support is closely linked to the initial assessment function – both of which are managed through a centralised Student Assessment and Support Unit (SASU). Although a policy is in place it is not strictly adhered to. At times members of vocational team undertake the initial assessment and then organise on-going support. The relationship between SASU and vocational tutors is close and post initial assessment support is agreed between both parties. However ‘learner support’ is very much defined in relation to the ALBSU literacy and numeracy assessment tool which means that support is given to develop basic skills alongside the development of vocational knowledge and skills. The key skills support needs are met within the course itself with referral to SASU during the year at the discretion of specific tutors.

In addition blockages were noted. The key skills manager suggested that:

‘...vocational lecturers are reluctant to let go of teaching hours (to key skills or learner support specialists. (key skills manager)

and that access to support students could be problematic because:

‘...a lot of lecturers are territorial and frightened of job losses’.

However, sending students to SASU was the exception rather than the rule and even where needs are clearly identified students:

‘...did not like being sent to SASU for further support’. (course manager)

These comments serve to underline a point made in the literature that:

‘...in most colleges learning support is available, but many students are reluctant to use the facilities. (FEFC, 1994, p.18)

The approach taken at Victoria College of Arts and Technology was one whereby the ALBSU initial assessment test was seen as limited. There was clarity as to its value for different levels of students and how the process could generate additional support.

What might be termed ‘the differentiation of need’ was clear: Maths, English and basic skills support is provided from one central location – that is for college based students.

The key skill centre provides ‘drop-in’ learner support and the key skills manager

referred to having 'a lovely mix of staff' who can and do provide a broad range of services for staff and students. The supplementary comment was offered that:

'...before we had the key skills centre we were only doing 'bits' of the job. It is almost a focus now for students to go to, and the staff are qualified to provide a range of services.'

Given that there was a clear acknowledgement of the link between key skills and learner support, there was a concern about additional support and basic skills provision. The concern was linked to the fact that the line management of basic skills (including additional support) and that of key skills plus learner was by two different senior managers. Basic skills and 'additional support' had a community based focus whereas key skills and learner support was focused on supporting college-based students. This generated further discussion and negotiation about accessing and using appropriate staff.

What was demonstrated in this college was both the value and dilemma of providing a range of services for a mix of client groups where the services provided can appear similar to the recipient, but very different to the college managers and those actually supplying the service. It is not merely a question of definition of a particular service but also how, where and when it is provided – its breadth could be considered to be both its strength and its weakness both in the effective use of resources and in its application.

If this experience is compared with Buckley College of Arts and Technology, differences shaped by the history of key skills can be considered. At Buckley College key skills started life as a 'language support unit' where support for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was delivered. It then provided English, Communications and Mathematics support, and over time key skills came to the fore and the concept and practice of referral to a centralised unit was established.

Given the voluntary multi-purpose nature of the key skills centre, this college views key skills services as 'needs driven' and the learner support provided is shaped by results of the initial assessment carried out by vocational tutors. What was in place

though were close links with both the three academic faculties and the centralised 'Support for Students Unit'. It was the role of the key skills manager to make the staff of the centre available to support students from the faculties both on a structured (timetabled) as well as on a drop-in basis. The links at management level were designed to encourage students to see the key skills unit as the 'first point of call' for post-enrolment and post-initial assessment support.

Summary

Effective linkages after initial assessment to a range of key skills learner support services are of central importance if a college wishes to provide a worthwhile and efficient service to students. The data analysed in this section reinforces the concerns as expressed by FEFC and FEDA, but also highlight the pragmatic nature of 'learner support' and that the variety of roles are in place to support both the general and specific needs of students.

There were a variety of staff involved in providing initial assessment services for example. The most realistic time to undertake this is used – at induction, but also after enrolment. However the commitment to undertake initial assessment is 'let down' by the overall inappropriateness of the dominant assessment tool, that of the one provided by ALBSU, which is limited to assessing basic skills needs, (literacy and numeracy), and does not include an assessment of Information Technology needs.

This concern was expressed explicitly by all the case study colleges but they all used the ALBSU approach, even though FEDA, (2000, p.54) noted that 11 initial assessment models were available nationally.

Given that learner support was provided in study centres, LRCs, dedicated workshops and key skills centres, it is understandable that a cross-section of postholders would provide the services required. A wide variety of services are provided to the student, some of which are classroom based and include 'team teaching', and some services could be described as not necessarily 'key skills specific'. In fact what emerges from the data is that support for key skills is largely vocationally based and provided in the

classroom (which is the preferred QCA model). What is provided 'elsewhere' is accessed on a largely voluntary basis (from a student's perspective), many of whom do not take full advantage of the services provided because of the concern that they '...did not like being sent for support' (Hills Technical College), a concern also expressed in the literature.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 focused on the potential for good practice and how FE sector colleges have at times fallen short of the ideal model. Whether this 'failure' to attain high standards is because as James (1998, p.5) noted that '...teachers spoke as if there was a problem with some of their colleagues who were unlikely to take key skills seriously' is not clear at this stage. What the data does indicate is that from initial assessment through to learner support the journey is a complex one for colleges and students alike. This has led to a situation in many instances where the temptation to provide a generic and/or competing set of services within a given organisational structure in several locations across the college is the outcome. The question remains, however, as to whether this aspect of the management of key skills teaching is both effective and efficient.

Theme 3: Course management

The previous two themes explored structures and support systems, which in effect sets the scene for what happens at course level. The third theme is that of course management. The emphasis here was upon obtaining and analysing data regarding how key skills were delivered, when they were assessed, and to establish who took responsibility regarding their integration into the student's overall programme. It also focuses upon the additional key skills of 'working with others' and 'improving own learning and performance' to establish if they were treated in any different way, and to find out why this is the case.

Key skills in the course context

The FEFC (1997, p.31) used the term 'variability' when referring to the delivery of key skills. Variability in relation to this theme relates to the pattern of delivery. This

included the highly problematic delivery of key skills and the fact that the case study colleges questioned the integrationist approach.

In the first instance it is useful to refer to the QCA position as stated in the literature:

‘Successful integration of core (key) skills units occurs...through settings which contextualise the core (key) skills that make them meaningful to students’. (Oates, 1995, p.187)

This ‘...application in context’ (Dearing, 1996, p.50), was the main challenge for practitioners. The view being that the more effective the integration, then the less likely it is, in theory at least, for extra time to be required to be allocated to a course in order that students can develop their key skills to the appropriate standard. Furthermore this ‘extra time’ may be provided by separately from the existing provision by key skills specialist or facilitators, be delivered in classrooms, learning resource centres or in tutorial sessions etc. If this happens the intention to integrate key skills integration may be diluted.

The data strongly suggest (88% response) that assignments plus group workshops were the most popular method of key skills delivery and that the intention was that key skills are assessed through course assignments with the course team leader and/or vocational tutor take responsibility for their integration. This ‘planned integration’ (74%) was undertaken by the course team and reflects the model of how key skills ‘should’ be managed by colleges. However the data indicates that in the majority of cases (67%) there was no uniform practice in a single college of delivering the mandatory key skills and in relation to the ‘additional key skills’ the approach is even more varied as the survey results showed.

There is a contradiction in the survey responses, in that at one level a commitment to a chosen planning model exists, as driven by college policy and supported by senior managers, (answers to questions 19-22). At a later point in the survey the majority of colleges (67%) indicated that in fact there was no one common way in which the mandatory key skills are ‘delivered’ – this was reinforced by three out of four of the case study colleges. This leads to an assumption that multiple and potentially complex models and relationships exist in colleges and that consistency and perhaps

‘effectiveness’ in relation to the delivery of key skills is neither practicable or possible – in effect a gap between rhetoric and reality.

This hypothesis was worth testing through the qualitative responses and case study data. Initially though the table below provides an analysis of how it was decided which tutors should be involved in drafting assignments to ensure appropriate coverage of key skills in assignments:

Table 47: Analysis of roles of staff who ensure key skills ‘coverage’ (Question 23, 32 responses, survey colleges)

Role in the College	Number of Occurrences
Course team	13 (41%)
Course team leader	4 (13%)
Course team and key skills specialist	7 (23%)
No systematic approach	2 (6%)
All tutors (independently)	3 (9%)
Key skills team	1 (3%)
By negotiation	2 (6%)
Total number of responses	31 (100%)
No response	3

The top three responses indicated that 24 colleges in the survey have chosen to encourage the course team to take the lead role in the planning of coverage of key skills.

Key skills practice at course level

In terms of course management models that are designed to include key skills an analysis of the interviews carried out in the case study colleges provides the following data from interviewees relating to who actually delivered key skills:

Table 48: Analysis of key skill ‘deliverers’ (case study colleges)

Key skills delivery	Number of Occurrences
Course team	9 (50%)
Course team and key skills specialist	4 (22%)
Key skills specialist	5 (15%)
Total number of responses	18 (100%)
No response	16

These results were interesting in that 13 interviewees reinforced the partnership nature of key skills delivery in colleges. However a range of other issues emerged from the case study colleges associated with this prescribed approach that challenged both policy and practice.

Considering the implications of the application of policy in relation to the delivery of key skills, the interviewees noted a range of initial blockages. These are summarised below:

- ‘...there are some gaps in our (whole college) approach’. (key skills co-ordinator)
- ‘...I am not sure how we cover key skills’. (course manager)
- ‘...it appears to be working, but it is a bit sketchy’. (key skills co-ordinator)
- ‘...we need to set up mapping exercises to help course tutors’. (key skills co-ordinator)
- ‘...we need to carry out an audit at the beginning of the year’. (key skills manager)
- ‘...we are moving towards a whole college approach’. (key skills co-ordinator)
- ‘...some staff feel that students should be better prepared at school, so they don’t set out to support a student’s key skills’. (key skills co-ordinator)

‘...some course team members just put key skills on one side’. (key skills co-ordinator)

As noted above, given that planned integration is the QCA recommended model and the most popular model reported in the survey, it was interesting to note the following comments from the surveys completed by managers with overall responsibility for key skills in their college:

‘...we encourage students to ‘claim’ their key skills’. (2 instances)

‘...extra hours are allocated to students and staff to ensure coverage’. (2 instances)

‘We bring in key skills specialist to deliver key skills (5 instances)

‘...one lecturer has had to re-write all of her assignments to cover key skills’. (faculty manager)

‘...some staff are reluctant to discuss their key skills support needs outside of their team’. (faculty manager).

This could be said to reinforce the concern of the FEFC (1997, p.18) where they noted:

‘...some staff remain uncertain as to how to integrate core skills...and they are only given prominence when they are needed to complete assignments’.

It does however confirm the view of the FEFC (2000, p.35) that staff

‘...own student groups and they have traditional attitudes’.

The key skill ‘Application of Number’ came in for specific comment as follows:

‘...we set aside time for the delivery of Application of Number’. (course manager)

‘...we just can’t write Application of Number into course work, we need to do it separately, but we do use the key skills centre as the common thread’. (course tutor)

This latter two points echoed Bloomer (1998, p.173) where he noted that:

‘Application of number was frequently referred to as an ‘add on’, and the concerns of the FEFC (1997, p.19) who stated that ‘number skills are often taught separately by specialist staff, in isolation from the vocational contexts’.

The FEFC (1998, p.13) also went on to say that 'Application of Number is the skill which tends to get taught less well'. All of which appears to confirm current practice as does the survey which noted that 78% of colleges find Application of Number 'more difficult to assess than other key skills'.

Taken as a whole these comments might be said to represent the reality of key skills delivery in colleges. They might also indicate that whilst college policy sets the context, it was course managers who take responsibility for their student's progress. They live with the daily reality of the 'intent to integrate' and act accordingly depending upon the circumstances they face and the resources available to them at any one given time. Such practices do in reality suggest a number of implications for policy makers in that whilst the rationale supporting an integrationist approach is well grounded DES (1991), DfE (1993), Sharp (1997), the integration may be beyond the capabilities of those in colleges with curriculum management responsibilities.

As the data indicate Colleges have to manage in a pragmatic manner, which at times can undermine, and, in some cases contradict, given specific key skills policies. Furthermore there is evidence to suggest that the delegation of responsibility to the course team can work against the best interests of students and prevent the type of key skills intervention that would benefit them.

Added to these comments was the view in two of the case study colleges that:

'Employers do not want key skills, just the vocational qualification'. (Victoria college and Hills college)

This comment was made in relation to employer sponsored 'day release' training and reflected a primary concern with the vocational content of the college provision, the primary learning goal. This serves to support the defensive approaches of some course teams. As FEDA (2000, p.23) noted 'course teams can often create barriers between groups of staff, despite official policies or good intentions'.

Summary

The literature suggested that key skills delivery is 'problematic'. As Woodcock (1998, p.5) noted it '...means picking your way through a minefield of conflicts and tensions', and the FEFC (2000, p.17) and key skills management has been viewed as piecemeal. Specifically in relation to course management, and of the delivery of key skills overall the data suggest that policy prescriptions are highly visible but are invariably challenged and/or undermined by the day to day realities of college life.

The survey data also reflect the intention to integrate key skills and offers models for their effective delivery. The case study colleges, however, support the view that approaches to the delivery of key skills are diverse and inconsistent. The latter point reflects the dominant view in literature that the NCVQ (QCA) notion of integration is fine in theory, but potentially flawed in practice.

The implications are that policy and practice may rarely meet, and the fact that there was no common way of delivering key skills prompted further analysis. The data suggest that structures were in place to support models that practitioners implicitly accept, but do not necessarily use. It is fair to conclude that rigid structures are only likely to work in colleges that are relatively small, have a narrow curricular offering and have a staffing level that ensures planned integration is supported by key skills specialists across the college – as prescribed by the FEFC (1998).

This section has reinforced the importance both the value of course teams and key skills specialists in the planning of the delivery of key skills. It also served to explain the reasons why course managers do not apply their own policies consistently on a day to day basis as highlighted in the literature review. This has serious implications for policy makers if the vision of an integrated approach to key skills is to be effectively pursued.

Theme 4: Key skills assessment and internal verification

It is important to analyse the assessment of key skills and their internal verification (IV) in relation to key skills management because they help to establish roles, responsibilities and highlight specific issues, some of which are noted in the literature review. FEDA (1995, p.845) called the assessment of key skills 'the knottiest of problems' and the FEFC suggested that 'many courses have adopted their own approach to assessment and this changes from year to year'. It has been asserted that 'the assessment of core/key skills gives cause for concern in the majority of colleges inspected' (FEFC, 1995, p.2). Five years later FEDA, (2000, p.59) stated that '...there is a need for centres to have simple but rigorous quality assurance procedures relating to assessment'. This led to the hypothesis that the sector is failing to address such important issues associated with key skills management which needs to be tested.

The survey data indicate that in 79% of colleges it was the key skills specialist who undertakes the assessment of key skills, followed by the unit tutor at 71%. This data confirms that presented earlier regarding the range of duties of key skills specialists. The survey also generated a range of responses associated with the assessment of key skills, which can be summarised as follows:

- Responsibilities are spread as widely as possible in line with the college's key skills policy.
- A specialist tutor who is part of the course team assesses key skills
- It is agreed at the outset – please do not ignore internal integration. Key skills are part of the overall course planning process.
- Study centre staff do this job on behalf of the course team.

Taken overall the data indicate a range of practices as noted by FEDA (1995, p.22) as well suggesting a number of demands on colleges at various times throughout the year.

Given this data, it was interesting to note that 78% of the colleges surveyed indicated that one key skill was more difficult to assess than other key skills. In 58% of colleges the hardest key skill to assess was Application of Number followed by Information Technology, although in the case study colleges it was Communications (50%) that

was the most difficult to assess. The case study data implies agreement with the FEDA (2000, p.5) view that communications is not at all easy to assess.

The data suggest that key skill assessment can be, and in many cases is a difficult task to perform. This reflects the points made by colleges above in relation to course management, i.e. that some key skills are difficult to integrate into courses and difficult to deliver. With respect to 'application of number' the hypotheses that colleges do in fact treat it as an 'add on' (Bloomer, 1998, p.173) can be extended to its assessment.

The case studies illustrate that key skills specialists are involved in the delivery of key skills, usually as part of a team centred approach. Yet the literature suggests that that 'number skills are often taught separately by specialist staff' (FEFC, 1997, p.173) and that 'application of number is often taught less well' (FEFC, 1998, p.13). The data reinforces the point by suggesting that not only is 'application of number' difficult to deliver but is difficult to assess

This implies that some key skills are delivered and assessed in isolation. An analysis of the case study findings provided confirmation of the issues raised in the literature in terms of the challenges associated with the assessment of key skills. The following summary of comments were made:

'A member of the course team assesses the key skills, but we do call on specialist staff where appropriate. In Business Administration there is someone co-ordinating key skills but they also draw upon my specialist staff to assess key skills'. (Buckley college)

'We (the key skills centre staff) service other departments. We go out from here to deliver and assess key skills and when we do this we report to the appropriate programme manager'. (Victoria college)

'...we (the key skills team) only assess the key skills in the faculty we are linked to. For example I do it for business studies because I am the tutor linked to the Business Studies GNVQ'. (Buckley college)

'...we have had to set up an extra session for the GNVQ Leisure students. A member of the (key skills) team gives them an extra hour a week because some of the Foundation students we get are very challenging. That's why we

have an exterior taught input and do not send them down to the key skills workshop'. (Hills college)

'...in the main communications is integrated and assessed as such. We acknowledge that we have a 'number' problem – and a big problem. I have two posts for 'number'; I need the staff to send into classes'. (Rivers college)

It was not clear if this comment reflects the concern by FEDA (2000, p.5) that '...with communications there is a concern that there maybe some complacency'. Nonetheless a choice was made to view one key skill, application of number, as more difficult than others, and then to focus on addressing issues associated with the key skill concerned.

As set out in chapter four, this aspect of key skills management indicated that key skills were internally verified termly (53%), but also at a variety of other times depending on the course, existing procedures and the maturity of the college.

Internal verification is that part of the quality management process in colleges that establishes, usually on a sampling basis, that college procedures have been adhered to. With regard to key skills, internal verification would be undertaken to verify standards of assessment, that appropriate records have been kept etc. Courses are subject to external verification by the appropriate lead body at least twice a year. The external verifier, as representative of the lead body has the responsibility for moderating standards, again on a sampling basis, and as such is required to establish if appropriate internal verification and course records are in place and may sample assignments to verify academic standards. The survey questions were designed to establish when internal verification takes place and to establish exactly who undertakes it.

The management of internal verification was investigated further in the four case study colleges, and an analysis of the qualitative data provided the following results:

- In Rivers college, the key skills team lead on internal verification. Over the year they have conducted regular 'sampling' of assessments across all courses. They started with those courses that were relatively new to key skills. The course tutors

concerned had limited time to undertake such duties and they have no time allocated to undertake the role.

- Hills technical college have a college internal verification co-ordinator who summarises her role as that of ‘trouble shooter’. There was an acknowledgement that systems differed across the college but a desire to seek adherence to the system that had been introduced. An implied part of the role was that of staff development and on-going support for new staff and this was referred to in different ways three times during the interview.
- At Victoria college of arts and technology the initial emphasis was upon drafting an internal verification policy for all GNVQ courses to adhere to. The adherence to the policy however was challenged on five occasions by the key skills manager as follows:

‘...the staff just tick the box, they give it the nod. Staff say that key skills are verified as part of the GNVQ – they say it is an integrated process, but I do not believe them’.

‘...it works best with Business Admin courses because the external verifier is ‘a beast’. They spend hours internally verifying. It works well and the quality of key skills is very high’.

‘...We just do not have the staff to get the standards this high across the college’.

‘...there are gaps, and I have to say that I have at times contacted the external verifier to ask him to check on Mechanical Engineering and our Childcare courses’.

‘I don’t approve of the emergency signing off sessions at the end of the year. I have said that my team will help colleagues ‘en masse’ if necessary – but I won’t be party to signing off students at level 3 when they are at level 2 in practice’.

- At Buckley college of arts and technology Internal Verification was referred to as ‘...a gap in our provision’ (key skills manager) which the interviewee thought

could be addressed if key skills staff, based in the key skills centre, were given a lead role in the process. The view was expressed that:

‘...I am interested in internal verification, the quality of what is going on. Staff are very curriculum driven with their own stereotypical way of doing things. Engineers for example tend to give less of an emphasis to communications skills and I think that a good IV process would bring this out and we could then do something positive to improve standards’. (key skills manager)

This comment can be viewed as a concern about a lack of involvement both in the process and existing standards, as well as a comment on where this particular manager feels that the management of key skills teaching can be improved. It reflects a perceived gap in the overall management of key skills teaching and an understanding of the limited role key skills plays in the curriculum provision by some tutors.

Summary

The aim of this section was to analyse the data available in relation to the literature reviewed. The results make it clear that many formal and informal practices exist that both support the effective management of the assessment of key skills and the internal verification process. This confirms the FEFC view (FEFC, 1995, p.22). However as the literature indicated and the case studies reinforce, there is a strong suggestion that at present both the assessment and verification process are complex tasks and that the volume of assessments is high, and this militates against overall effectiveness. It is difficult for managers to know with confidence that policies and procedures are being carried out to the required standard on a consistent basis. The fear of a ‘tick the box’ culture was expressed in one college. This supports the view of the FEFC (1995, p.2) that the assessment of key skills is a ‘cause for concern’ and that ‘the need for simple but rigorous quality procedures relating to assessment’ (FEDA, 2000, p.59) are needed.

Overall from the analysis of this theme the following questions arise. Is it possible and practicable for the assessment of key skills to be managed in a manner that generates a consistent approach at the right standard or level? Secondly can simple but rigorous procedures be put in place to ensure effective internal verification takes place?

The conclusion might well be that 'gaps in our provision' is the most realistic description of the colleges in this research. If this is the case, then this aspect of the management of the teaching of key skills, may benefit from a tightening of procedures and in some cases their introduction.

At present there is evidence to suggest that both staff and students will be likely to lose confidence in the assessment and internal verification process, and in key skills teaching if current practices continue. As the data and literature indicated time, skill and the availability of staff to ensure that effective practices that are in place are limited. This could mean those poor practices may continue.

Summary of the four themes

The colleges surveyed and the case study colleges had all made conscious decisions to seek to manage key skills in a specific way. Organisational structures had been altered; staff were in post and lines of communication agreed. What was in place could be said to be both broad and variable 'coping' mechanisms that provided a base from which other support services for staff and students could be developed. From a key skills managers perspective some structures appeared to be more effective than others. Key skills staff had a variety of duties, at times they provided a centralised service in, for example a key skills centre or unit but in many cases they provided services throughout the college and in a variety of locations.

Key skills staff were supported and, at times worked alongside, large numbers of staff who had duties such as initial assessment, the provision of learner support and basic skills support, the delivery of vocational content on courses, key skills assessment and the internal verification of provision.

Intervention strategies have also been considered, and they indicated that intervention to support a student's key skills needs was being provided in the classroom by specialist tutors as part of an integrated planning process. It was also being provided through extra support sessions by specialist tutors and in many instances by

‘generalists’ who provided support for basic skills needs (numeracy and literacy), again both in the classroom and in other locations.

What was apparent was that, in the majority of cases, intervention was based on a needs assessment as defined by an initial diagnostic tool. But this tool appears inappropriate for the task of assessing key skills support needs. Furthermore little consideration was given to the low attainment levels at key stage four in the case study colleges. The ALBSU assessment tool helped in some cases and could trigger support services linked to basic skills needs. The use of diagnostic tools to support IT needs was acknowledged to be minimal. Students who required support above that provided for basic skills were dependent upon other informal mechanisms.

The pattern that emerges is one where needs analysis and intervention is mainly course tutor/team driven. It is at this point the key skills team can play a part, either as a referral service or part of a centralised support service that may be independent of basic skills support/additional support services depending on the size of the college concerned. The models reviewed indicate that linkages between faculties/course teams are at times planned but are also in many cases quite informal. In the more formalised model need is defined by course tutors and staff are allocated from a central base to support students and assist in the mapping and tracking of progress. Evidence to support the effectiveness of this model is mixed.

In the informal model ‘need’ is also defined at course level on an on-going basis and students are referred to key skills or other staff for support. This referral, and implicitly voluntarist model provides students with access to support in a variety of locations. It is provided by staff who in many cases are providing support for students with basic skills needs through to key skills (at level three) for students undertaking a whole range of vocational courses. This model is more likely to be general in nature and lacks the vocational emphasis required unless the relationship between those providing key skills support and course teams is such that key skills are integrated.

The data indicated that within agreed structures key skills are ‘managed’ in a variety of ways and the level of effectiveness is variable and inconsistent, sometimes in the same

institution. Competing priorities and ill defined needs assessments appear to compound the challenge for colleges to provide an integrated service, and traditional blockages and the dominance of the course team can at times converge to reduce the effectiveness of centrally driven plans and priorities.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Overview of findings

The purpose of this research was to investigate how general further education colleges, in the period 1992 to 1998 have responded to the relatively new phenomena of key skills, and in particular the management of the teaching of key skills. The eight initial areas of interest detailed in chapter 3 were refined to become the four sub themes as stated and analysed in chapter 6. These were:

- College organisation
- The management of student admissions
- Course management
- Key skills assessment and verification

Confirming history

The literature indicated that the search for a definition of key skills had proved to be challenging (Oates, 1992, Tribe, 1996, Beaumont, 1996, Higham, 1997 and Kypri and Faraday, 1998). The lack of clarity as to what key skills actually were was to prove of relevance in this research as staff at all levels sought to manage the teaching of key skills. What is clear from this work is that there is a significant gap between a perceived general valuing of key skills by teaching staff compared to the practice of their effective management and teaching of key skills at course level.

At the corporate level there is a tacit acceptance that key skills are important and policies have been put in place that reflect changes in educational policy. This initial response has influenced organisational structure to some extent but the linkages between organisational policy and practice are inconsistent and reflect the problems associated with the management of change in general (Fullan, 1994, Handy, 1999), and of the management of educational change in particular. In the vast majority of instances this had led to misinterpretation and compromise (Elmore and McLaughlin, 1998, Stoll and Fink, 2001) at the practitioner level and varying and inconsistent practice both between and within individual colleges.

Given the issues and challenges of incorporation (DES, 1991) and the management of curriculum reform (DES, 1992, Williams, 1999) it is not surprising to conclude that the effective management of key skills teaching has suffered. The management of key skills teaching 'on the hoof' is now commonplace, and the point made by Yeomans (1996, p.4) regarding GNVQs that 'the problem remained constant, the means of tackling it ever changing'. is equally applicable to the management of key skills teaching.

Preliminary conclusions

As detailed in Chapter 6 the data was considered thematically and an analysis of the survey and case study data undertaken. Each of the four sub-themes represented broad aspects of the key skills services and were therefore relevant to the management of key skills teaching in any given college. They are not mutually exclusive themes, and their relationships have been explored in detail. The case study colleges provided evidence of a significant range of issues and challenges, which can be considered alongside the literature and the results link closely to the four sub-themes identified above. The most significant conclusions are presented below:

- An organisational structure that effectively supports key skills management is of central importance if the overall college approach to key skills is to be effective. This is not the case in many instances, and reinforces the views of FEDA (2000). Commitment to key skills by senior managers makes a difference, but it has to be on-going and linked to effective resource allocation and management. The conclusion is reached that effective key skills management requires all relevant stakeholders to know what key skills are, understand the implications of appropriate policies and understand their role in the management of key skills teaching. In practice this objective remains an on-going cause for concern within colleges. These findings reflect the views of Lawson (1992), Woodcock (1998), FEFC (1998) and FEDA (2000).
- There is evidence to suggest that quality assurance procedures to support the assessment of key skills are not robust. There is evidence from this research to support the conclusion that this aspect of key skill management are less than

satisfactory and in part this has led to inconsistent practices developing at individual course level. This confirms the concerns of FEFC (1995) and FEDA (2000) that consistency in the manner policies are applied. This can, and has in some instances, led to a breakdown in confidence in the credibility of key skills in the minds of vocational tutors and students and reinforces some of the negative perceptions of key skills noted in the literature (Lawson, 1992, Woodcock, 1998, FEFC, 1998, FEDA, 2000).

- There is an issue with systems and resources to ensure that stated intentions are delivered, such as the delivery of a key skills 'entitlement'. In some instances key skills staff did not have the time to attend meetings with vocational tutors and to liaise with each other regarding the management of key skill teaching. The data indicate that where time to implement systems is limited then a number of problems have occurred. As noted in all case study colleges a breakdown in communications has occurred and policies and procedures are by-passed by practitioners. Furthermore learning resource centres/study centres are not well resourced (learning materials and staff) to support the stated level of resources and support in the college key skills policy. In practice the data indicate that key skills learning resources are 'owned' by vocational tutors in many instances and that resource centres are under resourced, marginalised or in some cases unclear of the role that they are expected to play. This undermines the work of some managers who hold responsibility for the management of key skills teaching. It is concluded that in the case study colleges the linkages between such services were formalised but not adhered to, or informal, and at times inadequate to support the needs of practitioners.
- A full commitment to undertake effective initial assessment of the level of key skills a student arrives at college with is vital if appropriate support systems are to be provided. Evidence from the survey and case study colleges supports the view that the initial diagnostic tools currently in use, as reviewed by FEDA (1995, 2000) and FEFC (1998) are inadequate. This issue is further compounded by the fact that in many instances broad assumptions are made regarding student's key skill levels upon joining a college based on their success or otherwise at key stage

four. As a result few arrangements are made regarding key skills and other forms of on-going support. Such support that is provided comes in a variety of guises and is 'delivered' in a variety of locations by staff who have specific skills linked to key skills, but, as the case studies indicate, this is not always the case. As a result key skills support needs are at times overlooked and generic numeracy, literacy and 'additional support' provided instead. Although this support may be welcomed by some students, it is not relevant for the majority and can lead to other problems. Students may fail to attend 'support sessions' when they are 'referred' by a vocational tutor and the credibility of key skills and levels of attainment suffer in the minds of both staff and students.

- Course planning needs to give full consideration to key skills, both in terms of assignment planning to integrate key skills, and to provide appropriate delivery mechanisms (classroom based, free-standing, integrated, resource centre based one-to-one) so that students view key skills work to be of value, as noted by FEFC (1996). There is evidence that some vocational staff are not convinced of the importance of key skills, which confirms a point made by Higham (1998). There remain significant issues surrounding the integration of key skills that led to the conclusion that the concerns of the FEFC (1994) and James (1998) are justified where they note teachers failure to recognise key skills and that in some instances they do not take them seriously. The role and responsibilities of course teams are many and varied and this research indicates that this does lead to problems because of the lack of 'completeness' of the overall and specific key skills service.

In summary, the overview of findings indicates that the management of key skills teaching is less than effective. The rate of change, pressures on practitioners and growing range of potentially competing 'services to students' has led to a partial, but significant breakdown between intention as stated in college policies and the day to day reality faced by practitioners. Key skills have been introduced in a piecemeal manner after over 25 years of policy changes and confusion of how to best serve the needs of the economy and the associated competitiveness agenda. As a result of such pressures practitioners have attempted to make sense of the reality they have been face with and developed a range of equally inconsistent pragmatic ways to manage key skills in their respective organisations.

Conclusions from the four sub-themes

To support this preliminary conclusion further comments on each of the four sub themes below demonstrate how general further education colleges have responded to and managed key skills teaching.

College organisation (structures, policies, staffing and the use of resources)

The dominant view from the colleges surveyed was that a corporate approach to key skills was in place (74%), so too was a key skills infrastructure in the form of designated postholders with responsibility for key skills. They were seeking to implement a given key skills policy (88%). Whilst a full range of client groups are noted to exist, in practice it was the GNVQ, 'A' level, Modern Apprentice and New Deal students who received key skills teaching and associated support. This leads to the conclusion that, in practice, colleges have taken a conservative approach to key skills teaching and are responding to needs where they are obliged to do so and that they do so with mixed levels of effectiveness. In practice only 39% of colleges had policies in place to support all students, and the survey results reinforce the commitment to GNVQ students. The problem that emerges is that key skills postholders had a complex range of tasks to undertake, sometimes in a departmental capacity and at other times in a 'cross-college's capacity. Such arrangements serve to reinforce the conservative models described in the literature which underpins the 'limited by design' (Rivers College) policy model where the staff concerned were severely time constrained in terms of what they could achieve.

A problem also exists where 'informal arrangements' regarding the provision of time by those managing key skills specialists were made, so that the staff concerned could undertake their key skills duties. Models that depended upon joint planning of key skills 'delivery' and support were essentially voluntarist in nature given the time availability issue and on many occasions the voluntarist model was failing the learner.

What emerges is a set of contradictions that divide intent from reality, where practitioners are 'comforted' that the structure has at the very least been adjusted to accommodate/support key skills. Nonetheless it is ineffective in many instances. Yet

specific postholders are expected to support stated corporate approaches to key skills while powerful institutional factors prevent them from influencing and developing good practice.

It can also be concluded that the utilisation of learning resource centres and/or key skills units/centres was highly variable and in some cases there was no formal link or relationship between the library/learning resource centre(s). The creation of key skills centres (Buckley college, Victoria college) whilst representing a positive choice in organisational structure terms were expensive to establish and staff, but were wholly reliant on staff understanding what the role of such centres was. In both colleges such centres had a range of tasks indicating a convergence in the services expected, required and/or provided. In itself this is not a major problem if the use of such a resource is planned well. If the staff concerned were appropriately qualified and linkages with course teams well established and regularly reviewed then positive steps to develop the service can be made. In practice, roles and responsibilities were poorly defined and centres have become the repositories for generic learner support, which includes both specific and non-specific key skills support. Such centres employed lecturing staff as key skills specialists who did not necessarily deliver key skills as part of their core activities, but they also employed 'key skills facilitators'. These facilitators provided key skill centre/learning resource centre based support. The level of influence and involvement in joint planning key skills facilitators had within college-wide key skills planning was often very limited. The way that these staff worked reinforced the deficit model of key skills teaching and support which writers acknowledge is of least value to the individual learner.

In one case study college, as a result of the curriculum model that was being used, the level of expectation of the key skills facilitators in the learning resource centre was very high (Rivers college). This proved to be ineffective at times, particularly for part-time students, in that it put a strain on resources and was not as flexible in the provision of support as planned

The challenge of establishing and maintaining effective links with vocational tutors is common across all case study colleges irrespective of their internal management

model. The case study colleges provide the detail that confirms the analysis of the survey data.

It can be concluded that key skills policies are in place, but even when they are limited by design, which in effect excludes some client groups, they are only partially effective. The management of 'entitlement' is at best pragmatic and in some cases inadequate. This applies to all aspects of staffing, including the semi-structured and voluntarist nature of the utilisation of key skills centres/learning resource centres.

The management of student admissions (initial screening and learner support)

The conclusion is reached that to ensure that support is both adequate and appropriate, the diagnosis of need of each student has to be effective and undertaken as soon as is practicable. Survey data and evidence from case study colleges indicate that the dominant diagnostic tool, that provided by ALBSU (now the Basic Skills Agency) is inappropriate for the task of diagnosing key skills level of competence, as noted by FEDA (1995), FEFC (1995, 1998). Given that the assessment of Information Technology levels is very rarely undertaken by colleges on a structured basis leads to the conclusion that colleges just do not know how to assess IT levels and/or make general assumptions about levels of competence. In many instances on-going learner support tends to be generic and not needs driven, which links back to the inadequacy of initial assessment practices and the on-going dominance of vocational aims and the influence of the course team.

The consistent use of the dominant ALBSU initial assessment tool leads to the conclusion that colleges do not fully understand the difference between key and basic skills and/or that it is used with some reluctance in the perceived absence of more effective.

What can also be concluded is that learner support, however well organised, mapped and tracked as it is at Hills Technical College, provides services that are at times well targeted, but designed to address 'entry level/level 1' key skills, but predominantly basic skills. The problem of support for Information Technology may appear less pronounced because all learning centres are predominantly IT driven and house

networked PCs. However, in practice the lack of initial assessment of IT means that support is more likely to be generic than vocationally based as noted above.

What can be seen is a situation where course tutors are very selective about whom they accept on a course in order that issues of learner/key skills support are minimised. Therefore potential Modern Apprentices are rejected by colleges and 'problems', i.e. extra support, is minimised through the selection process. Such practices reinforce the conclusion that initial assessment is not valued by tutors and as a result they avoid it where they have the opportunity to do so. Furthermore in many instances key skill support is less than welcomed by vocational staff. As a result they do not make full use of the services available to students and because, in some instances they do not want to 'let go of teaching hours' (key skills manager).

Course teams legitimise the external nature of learner support through the course planning process, but it is fair to conclude that course team members do not always know what support is actually provided to their students or what is available across the college.

Overall the very nature of the initial assessment tool and the less than adequate linkages between course team and the providers of key skills related support indicates both a gap in provision as well as the provision of inappropriate services to students. This is of significant concern in relation to the management of key skills teaching.

Course management (key skills delivery, integration and aspects of their assessment)

As analysed in the previous chapter, course management refers to those aspects of key skills management that apply as part of the course team planning process. Colleges initially plan to work in a particular manner, but for a variety of reasons this is not the case in practice. This confirms the 'variability' comment made by the FEFC (1997, 1998) when they refer to the delivery of key skills. The FEFC view was reinforced in the case study colleges where key skills managers spoke of colleagues not being interested in how key skills were delivered and stating that different parts of the college had different approaches to key skills teaching, integration and assessment.

Although course teams are 'encouraged' to consult and use specialists in some instances, the research confirmed the view of FEDA (1996) that course teams do not take advantage of specialists on many occasions. The case study colleges identified that a wide variety of practices exist in any one given college, as suggested by FEFC (1998), Woodcock (1998), and such practices are not challenged. However there is evidence to conclude that in certain situations a course tutor's experience encouraged him/her to plan to use such specialist input and retain such input throughout the year. There is evidence to conclude that such input is via some form of 'bolt-on' provision and not integrated. This service is provided outside of an agreed integration policy. Interviewees also reported that vocational tutors do not take key skills seriously, as noted by James (1998), which as the case studies showed leads to problems for students completing courses where key skills coverage is left until the end of the course.

With both key skills 'coverage' and 'delivery' being controlled by the course team, sometimes as part of an agreed plan, but on other occasions as a defensive mechanism, key skills staff play a marginal role in some colleges. As a result, the type of support provided outside of the classroom can and does at times become confused with other forms of support.

A further problem exists when colleges find that some key skills are more difficult to deliver than others are, as with application of number which was noted by FEFC, (1998). At times additional sessions are planned to provide extra support for such skills. However the literature, survey and case study data indicate that at various times all of the three mandatory key skills are difficult to deliver. Yet the manner in which this issue is managed is at the very least haphazard and inconsistent between vocational areas and courses even in one given college. Therefore it cannot be concluded that colleges are comfortable with the teaching of key skills, and this has sometimes led key skills to be marginalised.

Key skills assessment and verification

The conclusion is reached that assessment remains the knottiest of problems for colleges as noted by FEDA (1995) and FEFC (1995). Colleges acknowledged that key

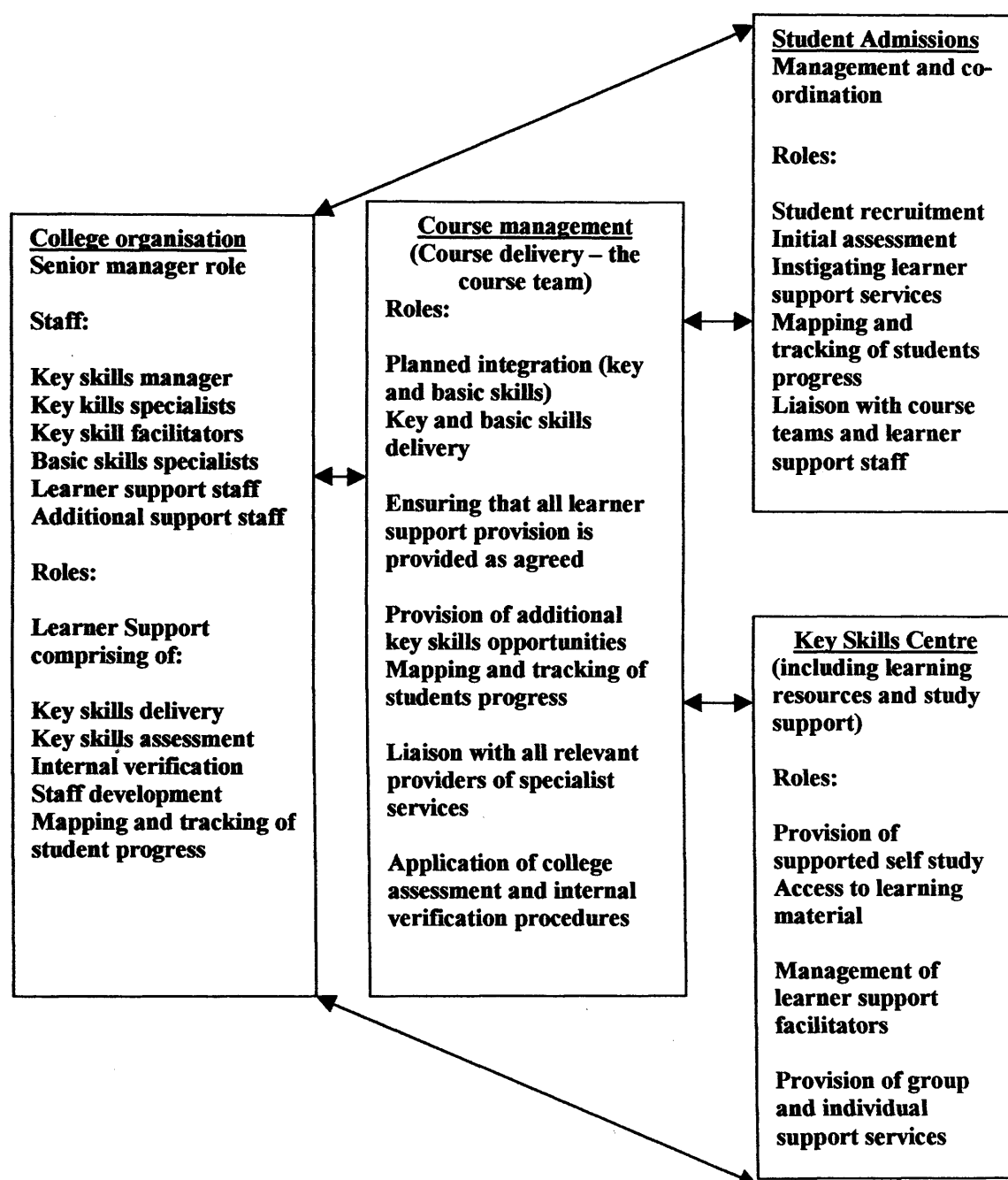
skills assessment is difficult in broad and specific terms and that key skills assessment and verification can, at times, be overlooked. The issue has been 'avoided' in some instances as colleges 'blamed' a given key skill. However the problem is not key skill specific, it is more to do with planning, co-ordination and staff development. The concerns expressed in the literature about diverse approaches to key skills assessment (FEFC, 1995) are confirmed in the case study colleges and through the survey data where the limited development of institutional policies is reflected in the manner in which key skills assessment is undertaken. This finding contradicted the survey data completed by middle managers, which indicated that, both the vocational tutor, and key skills specialist played a major part in the assessment of key skills. The conclusion is reached that there are too many inconsistencies in the data to suggest that good practice exists at institution level, but there are examples of good practice at course level. Moreover, the case study data was particularly convincing in that interviewees in all four colleges commented upon the variety of practices in existence and a concern that procedures were not being adhered to across the college.

The analysis of internal verification procedures linked to key skills also leads to the conclusion that a generic partnership approach was in place in many instances and that the use of agreed procedures was inconsistent and overall poor. If policies had not been in place or variations of college policies had been agreed, then an assessment of diverse practices might have been possible. . The emphasis is on staff development and the dissemination of good practice, with little time available to review current practice. This has led to key skills practitioners having 'suspicions' about the adequacy of current practice and a stated desire to undertake more reviews of such practice in due course. In one case at Victoria College recourse to the external verifier was made in an attempt to promote an improvement in existing practices.

A way forward?

Evidence from the literature, and the research data has supported the development of a number of practical recommendations that would aim to establish an inclusive, whole college approach to the management of key skills teaching. A model, developed from this research is proposed below.

Figure 3: Model for the management of key skills teaching



The model is designed to illustrate the relationships between the management of key skills teaching and other important, potentially competing services to students and is designed to promote the provision of flexible on-going learner support services.

Arriving at the model to manage the teaching of key skills (figure 3)

College organisation

The first move would be to re-state the importance of key skills within the organisation by ensuring that a senior member of staff oversees all corporate and developmental aspects of key skills. Given the practical realities noted in the case studies, consideration should also be given to including at the very least the co-ordination of basic skills, additional support and learner support in order that a generic understanding of 'learner support' is developed, inclusive of key skills.

This approach would require staff at all levels to have a clear understanding of the value of classroom and non-classroom based 'learner support' linked to the needs of the individual and the aims and objectives of the qualification aims of each student.

Staffing the structure

The vital second phase is to establish a staffing infrastructure where complementarity between specialist roles is clear and a convergence of roles and responsibilities pursued by college managers. The importance of a middle manager who reports to the designated senior manager, who has cross-college responsibility for the implementation of the college key skills policy, should not be underestimated. The manager should have a brief that incorporates aspects of quality assurance (inclusive of key skills assessment and internal verification) and a responsibility to undertake internal liaison with managers of basic skills, learner support and centres where key skills support is provided. In addition significant knowledge of a range of curriculum issues and learner support mechanisms would be of value when viewing and managing key skills as a whole college responsibility. Where the student cohort is large, consideration needs to be given to whether this role should be undertaken by two managers.

The use of specialists

As indicated above 'specialists' exist in a variety of guises and as the survey and case study data indicate, at times different services are managed as if they are mutually exclusive. Such exclusivity is at times reinforced through the organisational structure and corporate priorities. The recommendation is one of establishing a core team of key skills advisors/delivers who can play both a centralised and decentralised role in the management of key skills teaching. At a centralised level they can advise on how to integrate particular key skills into the vocational curriculum, assess key skills, lead on specific staff development issues, support key skills facilitators (based in learning resource centres) and advise on the generation of and/or purchase of learning materials. At a de-centralised level, depending on the size of the college, such specialists could spend significant time delivering key skills as part of a vocational team, thus ensuring both integration and the contextualising of key skills and liaising with course managers regarding any further support that might be required. Such staff can also play a role in the mapping and tracking of key skills by acting as the link between classroom based and non-classroom based support systems and also provide very direct models of good practice.

As noted above a convergence model should be adopted. This would, over time help to draw together the services of basic skills tutors, key skill facilitators, learner support staff and key skills staff to provide a seamless 'learner support' function. Such a support service would be provided in the classroom as part of a team-teaching role, in learning resource/study centres and be free of 'labels'. By definition such an approach would be inclusive and needs driven designed around individual needs. It also has the potential to become a service free of 'labels'.

Given historical barriers and current practice, the convergence model noted above could not be established quickly. In practice it could take 2-3 full academic years to embed given current roles and responsibilities, existing organisational structures and associated pay scales. Over time the ownership of key skills would be subsumed into the perceived greater imperative of 'support for students'. Key skills could then play a large part in reducing the stigma associated with students 'being sent' for support, which both case study data and the literature suggests merely reinforces the deficit model that has been seen to fail students in the past.

Learning and physical resources

Without an appropriate level of learning resources and the effective use of a range of physical resources, the management of key skills teaching will be problematic at the very least. The first recommendation in this section is that vocational staff should be encouraged by their line managers and dedicated key skills staff to share their key skills learning resources with staff based in key skill centres, learning resource centres and/or study centres. Access will be improved if such 'college devised' resources are housed on the college Intranet and shared with all those who would benefit from them. Linked to this is the planned purchase of key skills learning materials. The data indicate that it is common practice for departments or schools to purchase their own learning material, leading to duplication. There is value in key skills learning materials being purchased centrally and shared between all learning centres, thus avoiding the practice at Buckley College of Arts and Technology where the college library and key skills centre are totally separate entities and resources are not shared.

A second recommendation, linked to course management, is the planned use of centres where supported and independent study relating to key skills can be undertaken. Where students are strongly encouraged to use Learning Resource Centres (Victoria College and Rivers College), staff in such centres need to be trained and prepared accordingly. The voluntarist model as exemplified in Buckley College of Arts and Technology can be supported if the use of such centres and the staff based within them, have access to schemes of work, lesson plans and assignments that include key skills, i.e. fully involved in the planning process.

The management of student admissions

Initial assessment

In order to provide an appropriate key skills and related support service it is important to assess needs at the earliest opportunity. The recommendation is that such an assessment is undertaken shortly after a student has committed himself or herself to a given programme of study. Any earlier than this time might be seen to exclude students in some way by being viewed as an entry test. Given that the data indicate

that initial assessment tools are not usually used to screen out applicants, (except in one instance at Hills Technical College), they have the potential to identify basic skills support needs, as noted in the survey data. Ideally colleges should either develop a key skills initial diagnosis kit or purchase one such as that developed by West Notts College. In its absence colleges should maintain a commitment to the ALBSU test (or similar) and seek to administer such a tool centrally wherever it is practicable to do so. In reality, given the volume of 'new starters' in any college it may be more appropriate to supplement the centralised approach with that of a course based model.

The ideal model, and one that should be worked towards over time, is the application of an initial assessment tool that can assess both basic skills needs and key skills needs, including Information Technology. Given the difference in the needs being assessed this cannot be achieved in the short term. An alternative would be to apply the ALBSU tool for students for up to GNVQ level 2 and for National Trainees and use the West Notts College model for GNVQ level 3 and Modern Apprenticeship programmes. However such an approach assumes that level 3 students would not have basic skills needs, which is unlikely to be the case in all instances.

Learner support

The key to success lies in the continuity of support made available to each student and the day-to-day management of what is essentially a voluntarist support model. The recommendation is that college admissions staff liaise closely with the new model of 'learner support staff' mentioned above who would then be the conduit with respect to the provision and management of all course and non-course based support services. This requires copies of all records being shared, possibly online, with learner support staff and vocational tutors. Such an approach would cement internal linkages, 'legitimise' learner support from the outset and personalise support services in the minds of vocational tutors, learner support staff and students.

Overall, if the ALBSU test is used to assess levels of numeracy and literacy, and Information Technology levels are not assessed, the emphasis falls back on the new and comprehensive model of learner support as described above. As part of the

overall initial assessment service if development of an information technology initial assessment tool is undertaken and applied this to would help establish a more comprehensive and relevant service.

The success of learner support will then depend upon the level of learner support/vocational team liaison where they jointly identify support needs as an on going service. Whilst this is not an ideal situation it is both realistic, pragmatic, needs driven and requires effective partnership arrangements too be applied and developed on a daily basis.

Course management

Recommendations in this section are related to the level of acceptance of key skills at course level and of the preparedness of staff to include key skills in the course planning process. The data confirms the current dominance of the course team in the management, delivery and assessment of key skills, and the links to a 'limited by design' approach to key skills policy making. In addition the research identified the limited range of key skills teaching provided both in extent and range of client groups. Such approaches were partially reinforced by key skills policies and it is important that the cycle is challenged if, at course level, the situation is to improve.

Such recommendations are closely associated with college organisation and policies relating to resource management, staff development and support for students. One possible model would be for a needs driven approach to ensure that the full range of accredited key skills are made available to students through the allocation of more time for specialist input – particularly relating to the additional key skills. It is recommended that such an approach would need to be considered by senior managers and/or the college key skill co-ordinator in the first instance.

Through joint planning associated with key skills assessment in the year prior to the launch of any new approach the key skills staff could offer a range of ways through which 'evidence' could be gained to support the mandatory key skills. Approaches to support portfolio development could be considered this being the primary route in the acquisition of evidence for the additional key skills. Specialist key skills input could

be negotiated at departmental level and a plan developed for introduction at departmental level.

Assessment and verification

Given the diversity of current practices and the concerns expressed by senior staff in the case study colleges, survey data and in the literature reviewed, there is value in applying more credible approaches to both key skills assessment and the internal verification of college procedures. Procedures applied to an agreed timescale can be flexible enough to support college practices, however diverse they may be. The objective of assessment regimes and verification procedures are to provide frameworks through which standards can be ascertained and moderated.

It is recommended that colleges implement assessment regimes that incorporate key skills as integral parts of the college key skills policy. Within such a policy the key skills team are allocated time to review on a sampling basis twice each term. Such an approach would help college managers and course tutors to re-assert the importance of managers. This relates specifically to the planning of the integration, delivery and assessment in a more formal manner. A similar approach could be taken with regard to the internal verification of college procedures although this could be undertaken on a termly basis. The model adopted by Hills Technical college and Rivers college were encouraging, but were thought to be failing or at least were viewed as inconsistent because the nominated lead person did not have the time to internally verify all aspects of course management. As with Hills College of Arts and Technology this led in part to a breakdown of trust in some instances, and in the case of Victoria college the key skills manager felt obliged to refer some issues to the external verifier.

Centrally driven, robust but flexible policies and procedures are required if confidence in aspects of the management of key skills teaching is to be achieved. This links back to college organisation, the leadership of key skills and the amount of time made available to a range of managers and key skills specialists to implement agreed policies and procedures. The result would be that the overall pattern of key skills management would be moderated and developed within a framework owned by all stakeholders and of increased relevance to the individual learner. Figure 3 overleaf is

diagrammatic representation of the integrated model for the management of key skills teaching.

Strengths of key skills management model

- The strength of the model lies in its acknowledgement of the range of services that students may want or need to access, and its ability to provide access to a comprehensive range of services. This is demonstrated within the organisational structure and through the combining of key skills, basic skills, learner support and additional support staff roles – all of which compliment each other. Over time, for reasons of ‘efficiency’ these services may be converged into one centralised learner support service. Any planned convergence using the term ‘learner support services’ would potentially give greater clarity to the support services provided by practitioners.
- The model promotes the central importance of student admissions services and formally links admissions services to initial screening. Such an approach would ensure that with the application of appropriate screening tools effective needs analysis can be undertaken and learner support services negotiated and agreed with staff and students from the outset.
- Liaison with the course team via student admissions represents a significant advantage for practitioners. Student progress can be effectively mapped and tracked through a centralised service and interventions by specialists can be prompted. This would help to ensure that ‘slippage’ in terms of learner support services is minimised and linked services can be organised and delivered.
- A further advantage of this model is that it ensures that key skills centres and LRCs are at the heart of the management of key skills teaching, in terms of the provision of facilities and learning materials but also of learner support services on a one-to-one and group basis.
- Application of this model is likely to ensure that students get on the right level of their chosen vocational course and access a range of services that ensure effective

progression. The benefit for the college concerned is likely to be improved retention and achievement.

- The model is cost effective and cost efficient. In bringing together a range of staff that may not currently work together and/or understand each others role creates the opportunity for practitioners to learn from each other, work as multi-disciplinary teams and develop increasingly flexible teaching and support practices.
- Finally, the model is relatively simple to apply and as such provides a framework through which quality systems can be introduced to audit the consistency and effectiveness of assessment and internal verification policies

Weaknesses of the key skills management model

- The model may be impractical for multi-site colleges of any size. The idea that it represents an effective organisational structure for the management of key skills teaching may be challenged on the grounds of cost and practicability, i.e. the staffing infrastructure suggested may require additional posts that a given college cannot afford.
- It undermines the role of the course team. This potential weakness relates in the first instance to initial assessment - which in many cases may at the present time be undertaken by the vocational courser team.
- It challenges the role of the course tutor/course team in the recruitment of students, i.e. it implies that central recruitment services should dominate in colleges. Involvement of 'generalists' in the recruitment of students may have a negative impact on recruitment.
- Initial assessment services provided in tandem with the recruitment and selection process at the point of entry might result in colleges losing students. They may lose them to neighbouring colleges who have decided to undertake initial

assessment after enrolment and induction. Any form of 'initial test' however well meant may result in reduced enrolments.

- The reluctance to change. Staff may be established and happy in their current roles. They may not share the desire of senior managers to change structures, roles and responsibilities. Given that for change to take place efficiently participant's need in the first instance to value the proposed change. It may become a long term and expensive objective to introduce the model if resistance to change is detected. This reduces its value of the proposed model in the short term unless through a cost-benefit analysis significant advantages of the model can be demonstrated in financial terms.
- The model takes no account of history, current roles and responsibilities and current rates of pay. The issues of pay levels and pay scales may make the planned convergence model difficult to implement. If, as the model implies, convergence of roles is achievable, then the challenge of converging salary scales may prove too contentious and managers may decide that to attempt to do so would generate industrial relations problems.

Concluding comments

The research has confirmed and extended the findings in the literature by exploring many of the issues faced by practitioners as they sought to manage the teaching of key skills. In doing so it has reviewed developments that have had a direct impact upon key skills in the 1990s - a time of major curriculum change as well as the incorporation of the sector. This has brought into focus the practitioner perspective in relation to policy and organisational changes and the ongoing reform of post-16 education. It has identified and reflected upon the pragmatic but essentially incomplete and internally competitive manner in which practitioners operate and services develop. It also serves to reinforce the gap between intent and reality where key skills policies are concerned. This research celebrates the pragmatic approaches adopted by practitioners in a sector where prescriptions are commonplace and conservatism dominates.

This work stresses the importance of key skills as an integral part of a potentially unifying service which includes initial assessment, learner support, basic skills and what some colleges call additional support. In doing so it makes recommendations to convergence of a range of services that will help to streamline 'learner support' focus on both the initial and on-going needs of the individual learner.

However, as stated in chapter 1 this research is limited by design. It excludes an analysis from both a management and student perspective. The focus was that of general further education colleges in the FEFC West Midlands region at the practitioner level – those staff responsible for the implementation of college policies. By seeking both breadth and depth of analysis both a senior management and student perception of the management of key skills teaching has been sacrificed. The choice limits the findings to this perspective alone. However, if it is considered that the role of the practitioner is of central importance in the management of a new service then this research adds value to existing work in this field.

Appendix

Appendix 1	Key skills in pre and post 16 education and training (1983)
Appendix 2	A few key skills frameworks
Appendix 3	Survey questionnaire
Appendix 4	Case study college profiles
Appendix 5	Case studies: key points for use in recorded semi-structured interview
Appendix 6	Summary of case study interview responses

SCAA control		NCVQ control	
Effected through statutory requirements under the terms of The Education Reform Act 1988 essentially to pre-16 education		Effected through consensual arrangements which are re-inforced through funding arrangements for Further Education, Government training programmes and industrial training	
GCSE Key criteria GCSE criteria GCSE mandatory code of practice National curriculum programmes of study Content: stated in the form of a syllabus, with assessment objectives, grade descriptors and guidance. Role of key skills: currently implicit. Not assessed as a discrete component, only as a 'natural' part of the subject not formally recognised as key skills. Size: each GCSE should occupy 10% of curriculum time Form of assessment: combination of coursework and final examinations: regulation of the proportion of different types of assessment to be used. This ranges in GCSE from 80% final written examinations (maths) to 40% technology. Grading system: eight grade system; A*, A, B, C, D, E, F, G; derived from the aggregation of marks awarded. Central mechanisms for grade boundary adjustment for each assessment occasion. Linkage of grades with National curriculum currently subject to discussion	A/AS Key criteria A/AS criteria A level subject cores Content: stated in the form of a syllabus, with assessment objectives, and guidance. Centralised principles and procedures now established: cores implemented in 1996. Role of key skills: currently implicit. Key skills not assessed as a discrete component: assessed only as a 'natural' part of the subject, not formally recognised as key skills. Size: notional 320-360 hours of study over two years for each 'A' level form of assessment: combination of coursework and final examinations: a minimum of the 30% of the assessment has to be terminal written assessment Grading system: five-grade system: A, B, C, D, E derived from aggregation of marks	GNVQ Key criteria GNVQ criteria Code of practice on external testing Content: all awards are made up of units; all units should comply with the standard GNVQ model Role of key skills: all GNVQs include a requirement to pass the units in key skills: Application of Number, Communication and Information Technology Size: all awards must include a uniform number of mandatory units and optional units. Advanced GNVQ is a two-year full-time programme; Intermediate and Foundation are 1-year full time programmes. Form of assessment: primarily coursework – focusing on assignments and projects; mandatory units carry tests which all must be passed to gain the qualification. Grading system: not based on aggregation of marks; unit evidence must be met and any tests passed, then a 3 grade system – pass, merit, distinction is used. key skills are not graded	NVQs Key criteria NVQ criteria Common accord for NVQs Content: all awards are made up of units. All units should comply with a standard NVQ model Role of key skills: a limited number of NVQs include selected key skill units as additional units Size: different awards can contain different numbers of units NVQs are not tied to a particular location or duration of learning Form of assessment: no fixed regulations regarding the balance of different forms of assessment used for a unit must be valid for the type of performance it demands. Grading system: ungraded qualifications, mastery-based system: evidence requirements of all units which make up the qualification must be met in full

APPENDIX 1 Key skills in pre and post 16 education and training

Appendix 2 A few key skills frameworks

1. A Basis for Choice (1979)

A common core for vocational preparation

2. Assessment of performance unit analysis categories (1974)

An analysis framework for measurement of national standards amongst school children

3. Basic skills accreditation initiative (1989)

To assess basic literacy and numeracy for adults at the lowest levels

4. BTEC common skills (1986)

A framework of skills to be included in all BTEC qualifications

5. Certificate in pre-vocational education (1985)

A common set of modules for a national 17+ vocational preparation qualification

6. City and Guilds policy and practice in certifying general skills (1981)

A variety of certification schemes to assess general skills at different levels

7. Civil service staff reporting and appraisal (1985)

Categories of common skills used to assess performance of civil servants

8. Employment practices in identifying and recording general skills (1980s onwards)

Various approaches to assessing general skills – both in selection and during employment

9. Assessment and certification arrangements within Employment Training (1988)

Assessment processes for ‘transferable’ skills’ within a 6-12 month programme for the adult unemployed

10. GCSE ‘A’ levels & ‘AS’ qualifications and National Curriculum (1980s onwards)

School qualifications and the national curriculum framework, which include a wide range of general skills

11. Hirst’s form of knowledge and HMI’ eight areas of experience (1974)

An analysis of distinctive areas of experience which underpin knowledge and performance

12. Training Agency development work on Management Standards (1990)

Development of higher level standards to form the basis of management NVQs

13. The MSC Core Skills (1984)

Framework of common core skills to be included in programmes for unemployed school leavers

14. NCVQ development work (1989 onwards)

Development of the core skill units (renamed in 1996 key skill units)

15. RSA policy and practice in Schools Records of Achievement (1980s onwards)

A variety of certification schemes to assess general skills at different levels

16. Policy and practice in School Records of Achievement (1980s onwards)

Records of achievement which included achievement in a wide variety of general skills

17. Assessment and certification arrangements within the Youth Training Scheme (mid to late 1980s)

Requirements included recording of core skills and ability to transfer

18. MSC grouping of skills (1975)

An attempt to analyse all jobs using a common set of descriptors

19. London into Work (1978)

Analysis of the skills contents of jobs 'into which less academic young people go' within London

20. MSC Basic skills checklist (1979)

Very detailed listing of skills components (400 descriptors) to be used for task analysis by trainers

21. The Job components inventory (1981)

Listing of skills components organised into 6 'job families', based on empirical analysis of 455 jobs

22. Occupational training families (1983)

Analysis using job functions (rather than skills content) as the organising principle, giving 11 'OTFs'

Section 1 Organisational Structure: where key skills 'fit in'

- **Question 1.**

Yes ☐ No ☐

Yes ☐ No ☐

Yes ☐ No ☐

Yes ☐ No ☐

- **Question 5.**

'A' level students Yes ☐ No ☐

1. The following are the names of the four main groups of people who are involved in the process of creating a new product:

- a. The marketing department
- b. The sales department
- c. The production department
- d. The research and development department

Section 3 College policies relating to key skills

- **Question 6.**

Is there in existence a stated corporate approach to key skills?

Yes ☐ No ☐

- **Question 7.**

Does the college have formal policies relating to key skills 'entitlement'?

Yes ☐ No ☐

- **Question 8** (only respond if you replied 'yes to question 7)

Which students are beneficiaries of this 'entitlement'?

a) All Students

Yes ☐ No ☐

b) Full Time students only

Yes ☐ No ☐

c) GNVQ students

Yes ☐ No ☐

d) Modern Apprentices/National Trainees

Yes ☐ No ☐

e) Others (please specify in box below)

- **Question 9.**

Are the key skills policies implemented across all relevant full and part-time courses ?

Yes ☐ No ☐

- **Question 10.**

Do GNVQ students have entitlement to the QCA accredited additional key skills?

a) Working With Others

Yes ☐ No ☐

b) Improving Own Learning and Performance)

Yes ☐ No ☐

Section 4 Student Admissions : initial screening and learner support

- **Question 11.**

Who, in the college undertakes the initial 'screening'

a) Student services?

☐

b) Learner support manager?

☐

c) Key skills staff?

☐

d) Vocational course tutors?

☐

e) Other (please specify below)

- **Question 12.**

When does initial screening take place?

- a) prior to enrolment? ☐
- b) after enrolment ☐
- c) during enrolment ☐
- d) at another time (please specify below)

- **Question 13.**

Does pre-enrolment screening have an influence on the level a given student enters the college?

Yes ☐ No ☐

- **Question 14.**

Are 'initial screening' results as important to the college as a student's GCSE results, for example, when it comes to deciding or negotiating the level of entry to a given course?

Yes ☐ No ☐

- **Question 15.** Are there any 'tracking systems' used to ensure that student's requiring the extra support they need actually receive this support? Yes ☐ No ☐

If 'Yes' please give details in the box below:

- **Question 16**

Where does Learner support take place?

- **Question 17.**
Who provides learner support?

- **Question 18.**
Are there 'monitoring' systems used to ensure that students requiring extra support actually receive the support they need?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Section 5 Course Management

- **Question 19.**

How are key skills 'delivered' for GNVQ students and Modern Apprentices? (tick more than one response if required)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| a) through assignments only | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) assignments and workshops | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) independent learning (via resource centres) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) by specialist staff | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e) separately from the core vocational units | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f) they are 'claimed' by candidates via assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g) other (please specify over) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- **Question 20.**

When are key skills assessed?
(tick more than one response if required)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| a) At agreed specified times during the course | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) When students feel they are ready for assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) When assignments are presented for assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) Termly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e) On an ad hoc basis | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f) Other (please specify below) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

• **Question 21.**

Who is responsible for integrating key skills into vocational programmes

- a) Course team leader ☐
- b) College co-ordinator ☐
- c) No one ☐
- d) Vocational tutor ☐
- e) A combination of a-d above ☐
- f) Other (please specify below) ☐

• **Question 22.**

How are key skills designed/planned to be integrated into GNVQ's ?

- a) Integration is planned prior to commencement of the course by the course team Yes ☐ No ☐
- b) Key skills are mapped by individual vocational tutors in partnership with other members of the course team and team leader Yes ☐ No ☐
- c) a mixture of (a) and (b) above Yes ☐ No ☐
- d) Students are advised when and how to 'claim' a key skill competence Yes ☐ No ☐
- e) Other (please specify in box below) Yes ☐ No ☐

• **Question 23.**

How is it decided which tutors should be involved in drafting assignments to ensure appropriate 'coverage' of the key skill specifications?

• **Question 24.**

How are the three 'mandatory' key skills 'delivered'? Are they

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) as part of the overall course | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) wholly integrated into the course, therefore they are assessed but not 'delivered' | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) a mixture of (a) and (b) | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) delivered as 'stand alone' units to support the vocational course | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e) other (please specify below) | | |

• **Question 25.**

Is there a common approach to the 'delivery' of all three mandatory key skills across the college ?

Yes ☐ No ☐

• **Question 26.**

How are additional key skills (working with others/improving own learning and performance)'delivered' by staff?

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a) Through assignments only | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) Through work placement | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) Via. additional taught hours | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) Other, please specify below | | |

Section 6 Key Skills Assessment

• **Question 27.**

Who assesses a student's key skills during their course or programme?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) Course tutor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) Vocational (unit) tutor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) Key skills specialist | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) Other (please specify over) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

• **Question 28.**

Do you consider that some key skills are more difficult to assess than others? Yes ☐ No ☐

• **Question 29**

If your answer was 'Yes' to question 32 above please specify which key skill are more difficult to assess by ticking the relevant box below:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| -Application of Number | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| -Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| -Information Technology | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| -Working with Others | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| -Improving own Learning and Performance | <input type="checkbox"/> |

provide more information if you wish in box below

Section 7 Internal Verification

• **Question 30.**

When does it take place during a given course?

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) monthly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) termly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) annually | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d) other (please specify) | |

• **Question 31.**

Who takes responsibility for managing the internal verification process for key skills?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| a) College co-ordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b) Course tutor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c) Other (please specify below) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Section 8 Learning and Physical Resources

- **Question 32.**

Are any specific learning resources used with reference to key skills ?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes please specify below:

- **Question 33.**

Where are key skills learning resources located?

- **Question 34.**

Are there specific physical resources available to support 'independent learning' in relation to key skills?

Yes ☐ No ☐

- **Question 35.**

How do learning resource centres/library facilities play their part in supporting the management of key skills?

Please describe in the box below:

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire

Please return in the replied paid envelope to:

**Kevin Richardson
Vice Principal
Telford College of Arts and Technology
Haybridge Road
Wellington
Telford
TF1 2NP**

Appendix 4: Profiles of Case Study Colleges

Buckley College of Arts and Technology

Buckley College of Arts and Technology is a general further education college serving a large metropolitan area. It offers courses in all FEFC programme areas. It operates from four main sites close to the town centre and uses over 25 community venues.

The college provides a broad range of vocational courses and programmes from entry level, (NVQ levels 1 & 2) through to higher education level (NVQ level 4 and above), and provides special entry programmes for disaffected young people. The college also has a 'sixth form' centre which offers both vocational and general certificate of education courses (GCE 'A' level and GCE advance subsidiary ('AS') subjects. The title 'sixth form centre' is designed to attract full-time students who may consider the centre in favour of a school sixth form. The college is open seven days a week in term time.

The town has a population of approximately 270,000 people. Minority ethnic groups comprise of 9.5% of the population and the borough is in the 10% most deprived districts in England.

In 1998 the college enrolled 10,000 new students, 3000 of whom were full-time students, 20% were aged between 19 and 24 and 52% were aged over 25.

The college senior management team comprises of a Principal, Deputy Principal, Finance Director, Assistant Principal and three Faculty Heads. Curriculum areas are managed by programme managers and the sixth form centre also has a centre manager.

Hills Technical College

Hills Technical College is medium-sized general further education college. It is based on two city centre sites and its student population is drawn from all parts of the city. The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group that typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. Ten of 18 wards within a 3-mile radius of the college are among the 15% most deprived wards in England.

The college offers courses from basic education, through craft, technician and access courses, to higher education and professional updating courses, covering all FEFC programme areas. The college provides a range of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and supports both modern apprentices and national trainees.

The city has historically been heavily dependent on manufacturing industry but over the past 10 years considerable diversification has taken place. However unemployment remains higher than the West Midlands average and there are pockets of very high and long term unemployment.

The college works with a wide variety of partners including two local universities. There are 19 secondary schools in the city and three other further education colleges.

The local education authority provides a community education service and there are many private training providers.

In 1998 the college enrolled 11,500 students, of who just under 10,000 were on FEFC funded courses. Of these 83% were aged over 19, 39% (of the 11,500 students) were full-time, 14% were on day-release courses and 13% on higher education courses. The proportion of students from ethnic minority groups was 18% compared with 12% in the city's population.

The college is divided into six schools covering arts; business, management and continuing studies; construction and the built environment; engineering; languages and teacher training; and science and health studies.

Rivers College

Rivers College is a medium sized general further education college that draws its students from both the local town and the outlying rural area. It is situated on two sites, one of which is in the heart of the town.

The college offers courses, which range from basic skills and entry level through to higher education. The curriculum is divided into eight schools of study: art and design; business and professional studies; community care; construction; information technology and computing; leisure and hospitality; and sixth form and continuing education. There is also a section in the college which provides supported learning. As part of a review of its services the college has developed and extended its community education provision in the town and in outlying areas.

Unemployment in the area is relatively low at 3%, however in the wards closest to the college unemployment ranges from 6.1% to 9.8%. The college is one of five further education colleges drawing students from the area and also there are a significant number of private providers.

In 1998 the college enrolled just over 10,000 students of which 23% were full-time students. Of the 10,000 students 5.7% were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Victoria College of Arts and Technology

Victoria College of Arts and Technology is a large college based on two sites. It also has over 100 satellite centres that serve local communities across the city. The college's catchment area is economically deprived. Wages in the area are 20% below the national average and 24% of the college's students live in wards designated by the FEFC as 'deprived'.

The college offers courses in all 10 FEFC programme areas and has developed a wide range of student support services. The college works in partnership with the local education authority (LEA) to provide adult education through a 'college in the community' initiative.

The educational achievements of young people in the city are below the national average (36% of school leavers achieve 5 GCSE's at Grade C or above, compared to 46% for the country as a whole). In addition the college has acknowledged that it needs to make an important contribution to the areas basic skills needs (40% of people between the ages of 16 & 60 years of age have low or very low numeracy skills).

In 1998 the college enrolled 28,606 students of which just under 4000 were full-time students. 4% of the student population were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Appendix 5

Case Studies: Key points for use in recorded semi-structured interview

Name of College:

Section 1: Organisational Structure: Where key skills fit in
Section 2: Key Skill Client Groups
Section 3: College Policies relating to key skills

Section 4: Student Admissions, Initial Screening and Learner Support
Section 5: Course Management
Section 6: Key Skills Assessment

Section 7: Internal Verification
Section 8: Learning and Physical resources

Summary of Issues raised by interviewees

Appendix 6: Summary of case study interview responses

Section 1 Organisational structure			
Buckley College	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in centres in existence since 1990 • TVEI was viewed as the starting point for core/key skills in the college • Key/core skills taken seriously from 1993 • Language support unit and basic Skills workshops disbanded to create key skills centre • Multi-skilled range of staff now based in key skills centre • Centre also provides learner support services • Key skills staff are notionally allocated to one or more of the academic faculties • Key skills staff attend faculty meetings and link with learner support staff to ensure that they can contribute • The centres primary role is learner support • Key skills centre viewed as the common thread by one faculty head • A gap is perceived to exist between key skills and the faculties according to one faculty head 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College has elected not to have a key skills unit • Main emphasis on Student Admissions and Support Unit (SASU) • Major commitment to key skills since 1997 • Key skills is one of 4 major 'flexibility projects' • Key skills project leader in post since July 1999 • Two main groupings of staff in place – key skills support group (KSSG) and key skills practitioners group (KSPG) • KSSG comprises of 8 volunteers from the staff – a strategic planning group • KSPG – key skills practitioners 'helping people to improve' • Not all departments have key skills practitioners represented on either group • KSSG oversee all key skills and review initial assessment tools and advise accordingly • KSPG provide support for staff 'new to key skills' • All KSPG members are trained or training to obtain the Key Skills Assessors Award • Links with learner support are 'quite strong' particularly in relation to level 2 courses • Good links with basic skills team • Sometimes the link between vocational tutors and key skills is poor • Vocational tutors for not always see the link between their course and a key skills requirement • Key skills support is also provided by SASU staff as part of a learner support function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation was haphazard until 1997 • Change driven by new Deputy Principal • Modern Apprenticeship training contract from local Chamber of Commerce obligations prompted change • Government policy driven change to structure (DfEE guidelines) • Curriculum manager in overall charge of key skills • Key skills planning group (KSPG) established • KSPG members enlisted because of their interest in key skills • Key skill specialists based in departments • KSPG act as reference point for staff • KSPG members are based in academic departments • Key skill facilitators are based in the LRC • No separate key skill section or unit exists in the college • No time given to KSPG members to do their job • Belief that they were very good at key skills for GNVQ but not structured to develop key skills until 1998 • Support for IT is less well structured compared to that for Maths/English/Numeracy and Communications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LRCs in existence since 1993 – English, Maths and then IT workshops established • Up until then they were dealt with in separate departments • Key skills centre opened in 1997 • Key skills manager works to College LRC manager • Key skill specialists employed • Specialists in Maths, English and IT also employed • Key skill staff provide advice, resources and delivery skills – breadth of service provided • Key skill centre as a focal point for staff • Key skills team is large (19 staff) • Key skills group – cross college team, co-ordinate staff development • Close link with 'additional support team' who provide learner support • Additional support is viewed as Maths and English support – but not basic skills • Key skills, basic skills and initial assessment are all together in one group for planning purposes • Basic skills is based in another department with a community remit • Key skills centre is in practice a generic centralised support service

Section 2: Key skill client groups			
Buckley College	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All client groups are supported • Plus teacher training courses • Basic and key skills support is provided to a new client group of young people who do not have a job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 5 categories supported • Some consideration of supporting Access to Higher Education students • Departmental autonomy means that coverage of client groups is patchy and inconsistent • Major emphasis on key skills for Modern Apprentices key skill needs due to contractual commitment through Youth Training contract obligations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All client groups are notionally supported (4.5) • KS entitlement applies to all Full-time courses and those Part-time courses greater than 8hrs per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All client groups supported except New Deal • In practice GNVQ and MA/NT students are supported

Section 3: College policies relating to key skills			
Buckley College	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First policy in 1993 was a languages policy • Key skills policy drafted in 1998 • Entitlement policy does not cover additional key skills • Policy drafted by key skills manager and an Assistant Principal • Entitlement is not systematically managed • Faculty decisions tend to be more relevant than college policy, therefore some students do not have the opportunity to gain additional key skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skill policy from September 1999, up to then there was a general but positive corporate approach to key skills • KSPG and KSSG contributed to the development of college key skills policy • Policy applies to all students in theory, but not in practice • Main beneficiaries are GNVQ students, Modern Apprentices and National Trainees • Second year of offering additional key skills to GNVQ students • Students advised on how to collect evidence via their portfolios for additional key skills • Additional key skills for 'A' level students was being supported via tutorials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skills policy drafted in 1998 • College had a policy writing team • 'We took cognisance that significant sections of the college did not have a key skills entitlement' • Fear that policy might be being ignored by some heads of department • Blanket key skills policy may have contributed to poor levels of achievement in key skills • Main focus is on those courses where staff are new to key skills • Policy change was driven in part by the fact that many students did not have a key skills entitlement at all • Key skills entitlement may still be viewed as an option by staff and students • Policy encouraged GNVQ students to seek additional key skills (2) • Policy driven additional key skill opportunities – not compulsory to do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skills policy since 1998 • Policy drafted by key skills manager • Key skills entitlement included in the policy – but limited range of clients are stated. 'A' level students are excluded • Limited take-up of additional key skills • Additional key skills could and occasionally are supported via the key skills centre • Policy implementation is not being reviewed

Section 4: Student admissions, initial screening and learner support

Buckley College	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial assessment is undertaken by vocational tutors Initial assessment tool has been used for many years Key skills staff mark initial assessments Student Services co-ordinate initial assessment College initial assessment model is being developed at present Learner/key skills support is not compulsory Initial assessment results lead to the provision of non compulsory learner/key skills support Initial assessment is undertaken bi-monthly for students Initial assessment is set alongside induction Initial assessment records are shared between Student Services, Key skills centre staff and vocational tutors Key/learner support staffing is structured and planned wherever possible in order to ensure effective utilisation of staff Key skill centre can be and is timetabled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> KSSG advise on the applicability of initial diagnostic tools Initial Assessment seen as important to the senior manager concerned View that initial assessment tool might be ineffective All MA's have initial diagnostic session Some potential MA's are rejected as a result of Initial assessment results – finance driven decision Initial Assessment co-ordinated by SASU SASU provides ALBSU material to tutors if they elect to undertake the Initial Assessment Course tutors mark initial assessment Initial Assessment needs to be more vocationally relevant Post Initial assessment learner support is provided ALBSU tool most popular Learner support provided on a one to one, workshop and within main programme basis SASU staff can and do team teach if asked – GNVQ Intermediate course is the most recent example GCSE results are more important. If they are good then additional learner support is not provided because they do well on the Initial Assessment test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial screening undertaken by key skills staff Initial screening normally done at induction or in first week of the course ALBSU test viewed as not being that appropriate for key skills West Notts 'Skillbuilder' kit is viewed as a better tool Course 'tests' are used College 'self devised' initial diagnostic kit is sometimes used Learner support provided' by learning facilitators in the LRC Timetabled and 'drop-in' learner support provided in the LRC Extra support needs are identified by vocational tutors who then refer students to the LRC 'we really do need to get our diagnosis testing sorted out across the college' Individual tutors monitor if extra support is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ALBSU tool is used British Psychological Society (BPS) tool is used (Foundation Skills Assessment Test) West Notts 'Skillbuilder' kit is being assessed at present College Learner Support manager is responsible for Initial Assessment Key skills is not assessed via Initial assessment – adamant about this ALBSU & FSA used to identify basic Skills needs and additional support needs Post-enrolment screening can in some instances influence point of entry (Hair & Beauty) Learner support is viewed very much as basic skills support in practice Additional support and basic skills are blurred Additional support staff go into classrooms but IT support needs tend to be referred to the key skills centre Course tutor tracks progress Learner support have an agreed interventionist approach Vocational staff can and do at times link with additional support team to monitor progress of their students

Section 5: Course management

Buckley College	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skills are delivered by vocational staff • Key skill manager is adamant that key skills delivery is the responsibility of vocational tutors • No common method in practice • Dominant approach is via integration through assignments • Partnership delivery and integration exists in practice • Support for vocational tutors delivering key skills is provided by the appropriate key skills specialist • Key skills manager has a view that 'key skills evidence teasing' approach is inappropriate – she feels that effective course planning is the only way forward • Key skills staff advise on assignment construction regarding is made available • The covert development of key skills at the design stage is viewed as best practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to integrate key skills as part of overall curriculum management planning as stated in the key skills policy • Coverage organised through planned approach • Vocational tutor takes responsibility for a particular key skill • Whole variety of ways key skills are delivered and 'claimed' • Separate sessions used to deliver key skills sometimes (Business Administration) • 'all tutors map their assignments against key skills' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aiming to support the collection of evidence better in the future in the future • No formal tracking system is in uses, but school models are in use • Conscious decision to track progress of students on those courses new to key skills • KSPG member(s) work with individual course teams • Integration is planned by key skills staff and vocational staff • Some course leaders may be ignoring key skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skills are delivered in a variety of ways • Preferred approach is full integration • Mapping exercises take place to ensure coverage of key skills in assignments • Key skill centre can and does provide staff to deliver key skills • Some teams do not actually map key skills well or even try • Sometimes extra input is required – this means more hours are allocated to the course concerned • Sometimes key skills are delivered in workshops – bricklaying and plumbing are new areas for this • GNVQ Healthcare students receive extra IT tuition from key skills specialist

Section 6: Key skills assessment

Buckley College	Hill's Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skills are assessed by vocational staff • Different approaches are used in each of the 3 faculties • CD ROM is used to help with profiling of key skills • Application of Number, Working with Others and Improving own learning and Performance were seen as difficult to deliver • Application of Number is viewed as the most difficult • Partnership approach to assessment was seen as the preferred model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern about how key skills are assessed, if at all • IT key skills not even mapped • Key skills evidence is put together in a separate portfolio away from the main body of vocational work • Often treated as separate skills • Varied approach towards the timing of assessments • Invariably it is the vocational tutor who assesses • Feeling expressed that assessment and verification should work much closer together • View that staff find key skills assessment difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application of number difficult to deliver and assess • Course hours have been increased to accommodate application of number issues (not related to GNVQ provision) • Some course managers have asked for specialist IT staff to help deliver this key skill • Staff sometimes have difficulty identifying opportunities where key skills can be assessed • Time is set aside to help students develop key skill portfolio's • Additional guidance and support is provided for Application of Number • Key skill assessors have been decentralised – they used to be in the LRC • The person who undertakes key skills assessment is identified by the skills and experience that the tutor concerned may hold • Access to assessment in the LRC is still available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key skill centre can and does provide staff to assess key skills • policy of 'double marking' is applied to key skills assessment – viewed as an enormous step forward • Communications, IT and Application of Number are all viewed as difficult to deliver • Drawing in evidence from assignments was seen as difficult (GNVQ Course tutor)

Section 7: Internal Verification			
Buckley College	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Internal Verification Policy is in existence Current practice is that key skills staff work with vocational staff on internal verification No centralised co-ordination Time to do the job is hindering effective IV in practice Fear expressed that no IV of GNVQ is happening at present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College employs an Internal Verification co-ordinator College Internal Verification policy is in existence IV co-ordinator acts as a 'trouble-shooter' IV co-ordinator supports diverse approaches but within a common framework IV practices do vary from course to course Some practices have evolved and ignore key skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice does vary but generally it is done on a termly basis KSPG attempt to co-ordinate college approach to Internal Verification Focus on supporting those staff who are 'new to key skills' Curriculum manager (key skills) liaises with External Verifier Fear that internal verification is much too superficial Fear that KSPG is being asked to do a lot of work No time allocated to KSPG to do IV leadership and guidance work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College has Internal Verification policy – drafted by college IV co-ordinator IV is the responsibility of the programme area concerned Cross college IV group seeks to standardise approach to IV College has an IV guide for staff Fears expressed about the quality and consistency of approach to IV

Section 8: Learning and physical resources			
Buckley College	Hills Technical College	Rivers College	Victoria College
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources are based in the key skill centre Paper based resources are used extensively Vocational tutors have their own resources LRC is very separate to key skills – resources are not replicated LRC is very much a generic 'drop-in' facility LRC is not part of the formal link with key skills and as such does not play a management role Independent Learning can and does take place in the LRC as with any other library – but not specifically related to key skills resources in the LRC are not being used to their full potential to support key skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific resources for key skills Vast majority of key skills resources are housed in the departments College developed materials are very useful Departmental purchasing policy LRC/Library has a very limited management role in relation to key skills SASU is the place where key skills management and co-ordination is supplemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide range of learning resources were held by the college Learning materials are both 'college devised' and bought in Major focus on providing communications and application of number resources Access to the LRC for part-time students is an issue The LRC is also a base where 'additional support' is provided for key skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key skill centre houses a range of resources Maths, English and IT resources are kept in the key skills centre College has other resource centres across the college LRC in vocational areas do exist (Carpentry and Bricklaying) LRC s house many intranet key skills materials for all staff THE LRCs provide expertise and resources Key skills staff develop and use their own materials – based on the college intranet

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