

FE Issues 2005-2006

Introduction

Most colleges have been affected by some reduction in their LSC funding allocation this year. This has largely come about due to the shift from what is seen as low priority (mostly adult) provision to the focus on 16-18 provision, level 2 and Skills for Life. We have moved from a Widening Participation agenda to a priority-focussed agenda (to support, eg the Skills Strategy and Agenda for Change). Many colleges are embarking on new build developments but changes in LSC capital funding means that most of this has to be met by colleges themselves – by releasing assets and borrowing. It is not possible to use growth to fund capital investments as growth in one area of activity has to be met from within the overall funding allocation.

The Tomlinson report has had little impact on the sector, although there have been a lot of partnership activities between FE and the secondary sector. Examples of this include the Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) which is aimed at offering a blended vocational programme to 14+ students – usually by attending college one day a week.

The most significant developments in 2005, which will continue to be important in 2006, centre around:-

- Inspection - in particular changes to the English system via the Common Inspection Framework
- LSC funding cuts to the JISC
- The Centre for Excellence in Leadership taking up the issue of eLearning and leadership
- The creation of the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA) and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) from the Learning Skills Development Agency (LSDA)
- The growth of interest and adoption of Moodle
- Research findings from Becta

Inspection

September 2005 saw the first round of college inspections in England under the new inspection regime, the Common Inspection Framework. English FE colleges are inspected by Ofsted and by ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate) and the key differences are the shorter notice periods colleges now have of an impending inspection (minimum of 3 weeks), the focus being squarely on teaching and learning with the majority of an inspector's time spent observing teaching, and the introduction of the 'lighter approach' inspection to those colleges that have a record of good performance. The basis of the inspection will be the college's annual Self Assessment Report which will also be the focal point of the Annual Assessment Visit by the HMI allocated to the college. Colleges are graded 1-4 (1= outstanding; 4 = inadequate) against five key questions:-

1. How well do learners achieve?
2. How effective are teaching, training and learning?
3. How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?
4. How well are learners guided and supported?
5. How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

For further information regarding college inspections see:-

England: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/colleges/>

Northern Ireland: http://www.deni.gov.uk/inspection_services/index.htm

Scotland: <http://www.hmie.gov.uk>

Wales: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/>

LSC funding cuts to the JISC

On the ILT/eLearning funding front, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) reduced the level of its contribution to the JISC budget by 27.3%, whilst Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland funding bodies continue to fund the JISC as previously. The possible result of this, though not much in evidence to date, will be that English FE colleges will not have the same access to development opportunities and other activities that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will enjoy. Again, English FE Colleges no longer

receive ring-fenced ILT funds and colleges are having to rely increasingly on their own general budgets for ICT spend.

2004-2005 saw a concentration of activity in the Adult and Community Learning sector – with institutions benefiting from JANET connectivity upgrades and a programme of activities and support to help them develop eLearning strategies.

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL)

CEL has introduced a number of initiatives to support the sector's leaders in understanding the strategic importance of eLearning. CEL is working to deliver priority 5 of the DFES eStrategy which aims to:-

- Promote effective use of ICT through existing monitoring mechanisms
- Ensure leaders are equipped to lead the adoption and effective use of ICT
- Support leadership collaboration on the strategic role of e-learning

A number of support programmes have been developed and are being rolled out to the sector: - eQuIP, eExplorer and Connect. In addition, eLearning is being integrated into CEL's programmes to ensure that college leaders get to experience eLearning for themselves.

Learning and Skills Development Agency ; Quality Improvement Agency and the Learning and Skills Network

At the end of March 2006, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) will evolve into two separate organisations. Its policy and strategic work will develop into the Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning (QIA) - responsible for quality improvement across the FE sector. LSDA's existing programmes, research, training and consultancy work will continue as normal via the Learning and Skills Network (LSN).

Further information can be found on the following websites.

LSDA: <http://www.lsda.org.uk/home.asp>

QIA: <http://www.qia.org.uk/>

LSN: <http://www.lsda.org.uk/lrn/>

Moodle

In the last 12 months there has been a surge of interest in Moodle from the sector. Moodle statistics for the UK show an incredible 646 course sites in the UK!

According to a 'quick' survey done by Peter Trethewey of Bromley College (December 2005) VLE usage in the FE sector looks something like the following:-

VLE	No. of Colleges
Learnwise	6
Blackboard	17
WebCT	6
Moodle	32
Fretwell Downing LE	2
Teknical	2
Bodington	1
Plone	1
Fronter	1
Serco Virtual Campus	1
Bluespheres Create	1
In house VLE	2

There is lots of evidence of some intensive usage of Moodle and it would seem that the figure of 32 is probably now on the conservative side. In preparing this update I contacted the ILT Champs List and received the following information:-

- 12 out of 45 colleges in the Yorkshire and Humber region are now using Moodle.
- In London 17 colleges (32%) have adopted Moodle - this compares with Blackboard : 10 colleges (19%); and WebCT: 5 colleges (10%).
- In the West Midlands 23 out of our 53 colleges use Moodle. About 10 of the remainder are likely to switch in the next year.

Becta Report

Some points worth noting from the report *ICT and e-learning in Further Education: the challenge of change* (Becta, September, 2005):-

- Blended learning has become more widespread.
- Since 2003 there has been little movement in the skills and confidence of teaching staff to use ICT with learners (there had been improvement between 2000 and 2003).
- UKERNA has been rolling out a phased programme of bandwidth upgrades of JANET connections to FE and 6th form colleges (to 4Mbps or 10Mbps).
- The median ratio of FTE students per internet-enabled computer was 4.7:1 (a decline from 2003 when the ratio was 4.1:1).
- College intranets and networks continue to be extensively used for learning.
- Commercial VLEs were used by 75% of colleges in 2005 compared to 59% in 2003.
- Only 25% of colleges with a VLE say that it is linked to the college's MIS.
- ICT remains more widely used for learning support and independent learning than for formal delivery.

Watch this space in 2006...

Finally, it is worth mentioning two key reports which were published in 2005 and are due to make an impact on the sector – in fact, the Foster Report recommended the merger of ALI and Ofsted and that has already been acted upon.

DFES eStrategy: Harnessing Technology : <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/e-strategy>

Foster Report: Realising the Potential: A review of the future role of further education in colleges - <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/furthereducation/fereview/>

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