Students with Disabilities and/or Learning Difficulties in Further Education

A review of research carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research

Judy Bradley, Lesley Dee and Fred Wilenius

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Students with Disabilities and/or Learning Difficulties in Further Education: a Review of Research

The Further and Higher Education Act laid particular duties on the Further Education Funding Council with respect to students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The Council has established a specialist committee to review the range and type of provision offered to these students by the FE sector in England, and to make recommendations to Council on the future development of this area of work. As a first step, the Council, on behalf of the committee, commissioned a review of research from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). The full review is available from NFER. This document is a summary of the review and has also been commissioned by the Council on behalf of the committee for distribution to a wide audience.

The review

The search of relevant literature yielded a great number of references. However, it soon became clear that the field is dominated by discourse rather than research, by conjecture rather than evidence, by intuition rather than evaluation. The literature reveals a wealth of exhortation to action, but very little in the way of consensus on the direction this action should take. There are many gaps that could usefully be filled both in relation to fundamental research and to action research in colleges.

The continuum of student needs

Thinking in this area is informed by a variety of conceptual models underpinned by different definitions of what constitutes disability and learning difficulty. In consequence, no clear agreement exists about appropriate aims and objectives for the curriculum, the type of provision that should be made and the way it should be delivered. The dominant role in formulating definitions has been performed, either explicitly or de facto, by service providers and professionals, to the virtual exclusion of people who themselves have disabilities or learning difficulties. The literature suggests that this latter perspective is crucial and must be drawn upon more explicitly if progress is to be made.

At the same time, it must be recognised that disability and learning difficulty are part of a continuum of student needs. It is at present unclear from the literature how far the FE sector is committed to making provision that reflects the whole of this continuum. For example, it must be asked precisely how Schedule II is being interpreted by the colleges and whether it is leading to a limited curriculum offer by emphasising job-specific skills rather than core skills and cross-curricular themes. Given that such an interpretation could result in a learning programme of little apparent relevance to the needs of certain students, this is clearly an area that merits closer investigation.

The pattern of provision

Small-scale surveys carried out over the past ten years have continued to indicate that student recruitment to FE is largely piecemeal and uncoordinated. While individual examples of colleges offering effective provision have been identified, there appears to have been limited success in initiatives designed to facilitate access to appropriate provision for the wide range of students who could benefit from the FE experience.

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The literature indicates that the time is ripe for a comprehensive audit of the nature and scope of current provision. Information on the kinds of additional support that is being provided by the colleges, and in what ways, remains unclear. Previous mapping exercises undertaken in the area are now out-of-date and cannot be relied upon as a source of baseline information. However, it would appear from research findings to date that mapping current provision would not be straightforward. In particular, it would require the formulation and agreement of clear definitions of the student population, as well as a widely understood system for classifying the many types of support and routes to progression possible within the new FE sector.

The role of assessment

There have been major changes in thinking about the nature and purpose of assessment, especially over the past twenty years. These have come about primarily in response to the increasing recognition that learning programmes should be designed to meet individual needs, rather than individuals being expected to fit into pre-existing programmes. The importance of skilled assessment at the initial, formative and summative stages is widely acknowledged as the key to securing appropriate learning opportunities and goals. Yet there has to date been no rigorous evaluation of the theoretical and methodological integrity of the wide range of assessment models and techniques currently operating in FE. This is despite the fact that assessment now occupies a key position in decision-making about funding.

LEAs still have duties to assess needs and the Council has negotiated an agreement with the local authority associations to receive recommendations for students who may need to attend a specialist college. Sector colleges have responsibility for assessing the individual needs of their own students. The literature indicates that in theory at least, the dual role required of colleges in this respect – as purchaser and provider – could lead to a conflict of interests. There is some suggestion in the literature that initial assessment should be carried out by an agency independent of the providing institution, but there is no apparent agreement about which agency or agencies would be best suited to this task or whether another, different arrangement should be explored.

Monitoring quality

While the major task for colleges in the 'eighties was to extend access and develop provision, the advent of the 'nineties brought with it an equal concern about monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision already in existence. There is at present little evidence in the literature to indicate how far the quality models adopted in FE are appropriate for use in evaluating and developing provision for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Neither is there agreement about what could be regarded as constituting value added in this area of work nor about the kinds of performance indicator and associated evidence that could be applied. The development of models for this area is complex since it requires the establishment of strategies and criteria that cover a multiplicity of individual needs and a variety of aspects of provision. Initial and on-going assessment procedures, arrangements for securing curriculum continuity and progression, direct and indirect support systems, and resource allocation procedures are just some of the aspects that need to be taken into consideration.

The research literature indicates that it is only recently that the importance of students' own views on quality has been widely acknowledged. They now form an essential part of the FEFC's inspection framework. The extent to which self-advocacy is developed and supported by the curriculum and the mechanisms colleges use to gather students' views have yet to be fully investigated. The on-going negotiation and review of individual plans may offer a useful mechanism for gauging student satisfaction. There is widespread agreement in the literature that the assessment of quality of work should focus both on process and on product, which suggests a potentially valuable role for individual plans. It would appear that the imperative of outcome-related funding has often militated against the implementation of more appropriate assessment schemes.

Funding matters

Given the importance of securing adequate funding to meet students' additional needs, it is perhaps surprising that so little research attention has been paid to the relationship between funding mechanisms and the quality and nature of provision. The available evidence shows that colleges need to develop sound information systems for calculating funding requirements,

deciding on priorities and monitoring the use of resources, and to incorporate such systems into their strategic plans.

What is clear from the literature is that funding mechanisms must take account of the need for both direct and indirect support. In relation to direct support, concerns have been expressed that outcome related funding might encourage colleges to focus their provision on particular groups of students whose needs are more easily met, or to set student learning targets at too low a level, thereby inhibiting progression. A key issue to emerge from the literature is how a balance can best be achieved between meeting both students' individual needs and the expectations of an externally validated programme. It has been suggested that, for some students, a gap may be identified between their actual learning support needs and what can be afforded. It is important to establish whether such students are enrolled but inadequately supported or whether colleges simply refuse them admission.

Under the new funding mechanism, colleges receive funding which reflects the costs of providing for individual students whose need for additional support has been assessed. This approach is designed to ensure that colleges receive sufficient funding to assist them in providing appropriately for each student. However, it is too early yet to conclude how efficiently this approach is working and how far it is facilitating access for the widest population of potential learners. Indirect support, such as curriculum and professional development, does not attract specific funding from FEFC, although colleges have the central role in deciding how resources are used internally.

There is as yet no specific evidence on the priority being attached by colleges to the funding and development of indirect support systems for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, nor on the impact of any initiatives undertaken in this area.

Learning support

Patterns of direct and indirect support are undergoing change in response to recent initiatives in, for example, open and flexible learning, or in response to new groups of learners and to changes in the FE curriculum and in internal and external funding mechanisms. In the absence of detailed information on the pattern of learning support, it is not possible to say whether

such support makes a difference to participation, retention and completion rates or to student achievement. While it is generally assumed that support is a critical factor in ensuring student success, it is not possible from the research literature currently available to identify which of the different aspects of support are most significant or how such support is best delivered.

Much of the evidence argues that the expertise and experience of staff within a college are key factors in determining the opportunities for access, participation and achievement that the college can offer. The last comprehensive review of the professional development requirements of FE staff was carried out under the auspices of the (then) DES in the late 1980s. The extent to which the recommendations of that review were followed up has not been investigated. However, it is likely that recent developments in the scale and nature of FE provision will have caused new needs to arise. Recent evidence from NATFHE indicates that colleges have been unable to meet the range of professional development needs identified, though little information is available on what these needs are and how appropriate training programmes might best be resourced and delivered.

Support for transition

Issues associated with transition between a range of educational contexts have been the topic of a long-established research tradition. While very few studies have investigated the support offered to adult learners, the particular challenges faced by young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties have been a focus of particular concern. The importance of preparing young people for transition while still at school has been highlighted by numerous national and international studies, as has the part played by close school-college liaison in providing continuity of support, curriculum planning and delivery.

The literature suggests that a multiplicity of positive and negative factors influence decisions about post-school placement. Included among these are: the degree and pattern of individual disabilities and/or learning difficulties; school tradition; school-based courses designed to prepare leavers for transition; availability of link courses; the availability of funding; the accessibility of sufficiently detailed information on the range of post-school options available; the quality of guidance received; the level of

interagency liaison and collaboration; and the views held and roles played by parents, carers, professionals and other significant individuals. A clear exposition of the relative importance of these factors is not yet available from the research literature.

The literature indicates that interagency collaborative working is generally assumed to be a good thing, particularly (but not exclusively) at points of transition. Yet there is little information on its precise benefits to individuals, or indeed on whether collaboration at a systems level actually makes a difference to individual life chances. Some evidence has been amassed on the factors that tend to facilitate and inhibit cooperation among agencies. However, investigations have shown that it has been extremely difficult to achieve in practice. It is important to ask whether alternative structures might provide a more effective way of securing

support from external agencies. The fragmentation and breakdown of statutory links between schools, LEAs and colleges could be regarded as paving the way for the development of new liaison networks.

The literature suggests that there is scope for the FE sector to think more creatively of alternative systems that would retain the college at the centre of an information and liaison network. If comprehensive multi-agency collaboration among all interested agencies is proving elusive, perhaps ways could be found of securing the necessary liaison through different constellations of agency support. Models developed in other countries might also provide avenues for development. While the literature contains descriptive material, particularly on US and European initiatives, there is as yet no evidence to indicate whether and how such models might be applied within the UK context.

Using the review

The review could be used in the following ways:

Research Sponsors and Research Organisations

- to identify gaps in research
- to identify priorities for future research
- as a reference document

Policy Makers and Planners in Further Education

- as a briefing on the outcomes of research
- as a contribution to future planning
- as a briefing on current issues

College Managers and Practitioners

- to inform planning and practice
- to identify areas for research by practitioners which could improve provision within a college
- using sections to contribute towards curriculum review and staff development programmes

Other Organisations

- as a briefing on issues associated with further education provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- to identify common areas of concern in order to inform joint policy development and planning
- as a contribution to inter-agency training

Further information

The full report, *Students with Disabilities and/or Learning Difficulties in Further Education* by Judy Bradley, Lesley Dee and Fred Wilenius, is available from: Dissemination Unit, NFER, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berks SL1 2DQ. It is priced £6 including postage and packing.

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Foreword

THE FURTHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL

Committee on learning difficulties and/or disabilities

The committee has given priority to establishing a sound evidence base for its work. Its first step was to commission a literature review from the National Foundation for Educational Research. This was to help the committee to acquaint itself with the relevant issues and help it to understand what had already been done in the way of research.

The committee has asked that the review be published so that it can be used as a resource for the sector. The members hope that its publication might serve as a stimulus for new research as well as contributing to the debate about the shape of further education for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

John Tomlinson
Chairman of the committee

How to use this document

The review may be used in a number of ways. These include:

RESEARCH SPONSORS AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

- to identify gaps in research

- to identify priorities for future research

- as a reference document

POLICY MAKERS AND PLANNERS IN FURTHER EDUCATION

- as a briefing on the outcomes of research

- as a contribution to future planning

- as a briefing on current issues

COLLEGE MANAGERS AND PRACTITIONERS

- to inform planning and practice

- to identify areas for research by practitioners which could improve provision within a college

- using sections to contribute towards curriculum review and staff development programmes

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- as a briefing on issues associated with further education provision for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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Contents

Introduction

The remit of the FEFC Specialist Committee is to review the range and type of further education available in England to people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties and recommend to the Council how it can best fulfil its legal responsibilities to these students. The review of research presented here was designed to provide the Committee with a broad base of information on the historical context and on issues of current concern in this area.

The review had four main aims:

- to carry out a comprehensive analysis of published research;

- to describe the major findings emerging from studies undertaken both within the UK and, where relevant, within the wider international context;

- to draw from the research evidence information on issues that would be of particular interest in underpinning the work of the Specialist Committee;

- to identify gaps in the literature as a guide to those areas where future research and development work might most usefully be undertaken.

The literature search covered the period since the 1981 Education Act. The treatment of the subject in the literature can be divided into pre- and post-Warnock phases. Research and discourse from the 1970s and immediately following the Warnock Report (1978) has already been examined by Bradley and Hegarty (1981). Since then, there has been no substantial examination of the literature despite — or perhaps because of — this having been a time of considerable debate and change within education. The initial search produced 1,130 potentially useful references on the further education of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Most of them were from the UK, but there were also a large number from the United States and some from Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Applying a generous view of what might constitute useful research to encompass descriptions of practice in individual colleges as well as funded research (published and unpublished), it was still found that the majority of the references either contained no research element whatsoever or duplicated work appearing elsewhere. Certain references that should properly be regarded as discourse rather than research have been included in order to provide an adequate reflection of the pattern of debate since 1981. Work carried out in the schools context has also been included where it sheds light on matters of interest to the FE sector.

I STARTING POINTS

In order to provide a theoretical basis for the later sections of the review, this first section offers an overview of the conceptual models which might be expected to underpin research carried out on the further education and training of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The different conceptual models that inform thinking in the field suggest different aims and objectives for the curriculum, different types of provision and different modes of delivery. The assumptions behind the various models are the topic of heated debate within the literature (see Ainscow, 1993; Barton and Tomlinson, 1984; Fulcher, 1989; Norwich, 1993; Soder, 1989), though the focus of the debate is most commonly on the schools sector.

The pattern of discourse over the last fifteen years or so illustrates the continued reign of confusion over the conceptualisation and definition of disability and learning difficulty. Wright (1985) has described disability as the stuff of myth-making, both in terms of public perceptions and in the views espoused by service providers. The OECD (1987) has suggested that there sometimes appear to be as many definitions of disability as there are services and professionals who deal with people with disabilities. Similarly, Fish (1987) has noted that in developing concepts of disability it is the person involved in working out the definition who is most important. He suggests that educationalists, social workers, family members, and the individual with the disability or learning difficulty are all likely to provide very different definitions.

Thomas (1982) suggested building a total image of disability by drawing together the various definitions — 'Disablement has many facets: medical, economic, legal and bureaucratic. It has a psychological face (the impact of disability upon the individual person), a socio-psychological side (the valence of disability in social behaviour) and a sociological dimension (role, status, normative framework and subcultural features). Each facet contributes to the total image of disability.' Norwich (1990) shares this view that the varying perceptions and aspects of disability might be combined to try and form a complete picture.

The dominant role in formulating definitions has been performed, either explicitly or de facto, by service providers and professionals, to the virtual exclusion of people who are themselves disabled. Drawing together the range of idiosyncratic definitions on offer is no easy task. At the same time, it is important to recognise that disability and learning difficulty in fact represent a continuum of needs. The place of the individual on this continuum will, moreover, alter at different times, at different ages and in different situations. Thus, the present confusion may perhaps best be characterised as an interplay between the perceptions of a variety of professionals, each with their own working concerns, and a reality which is in itself highly complex.

One reason for the persistent problems surrounding definitions is the failure to develop an adequate theoretical base for considerations of disability and learning difficulty. Riddell (1993) points to the lack of a social theory of disability and quotes Abberley (1987) in suggesting that the sociology of disability as it stands at present is 'both theoretically backward and a hindrance rather than a help to disabled people'. This has allowed an interpretivist paradigm to predominate. The most important question then

becomes: who is providing the interpretation and which aspect of disability will that interpretation emphasise? Along with many others, Hahn and Longmore (1988) believe that 'The definition of disability is essentially determined by public policy. In other words, disability is whatever laws and implementing regulations say it is.' For Stone (1984) the fact that people with disabilities do not play a large part in helping to define the goals of society is a major issue, since this implies that they are powerless to influence the development of policy. This is a view shared by Ferguson *et al.* (op. cit.): 'Certainly people with disabilities and their families have historically belonged to those groups of devalued people without much voice in what was done to and for them by more powerful groups within society.' In the context of education, people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties have expressed feelings of powerlessness in terms of influencing either the nature or development of educational provision (Sutherland, 1981; Rieser and Mason, 1990). The advent and promotion of self-advocacy is a relatively recent phenomenon which in many ways has still to make a significant impact on policy and decision making.

Sigmon *et al.* (1987) describes special education as the forum, and possibly the outcome of a dialectic involving ideas about disability, learning difficulties and special needs. It is Copeland's (1993) view that special education has failed to address the most fundamental problems of definition, especially in terms of theoretical analysis and the systematic collection of empirical data, while Riddell (op. cit.) has argued more specifically for 'a theoretically informed analysis of post-16 education and training for young people with special needs'.

Unfortunately, as Macchialora (1989) suggests, the usual pattern of development in special education is first, to implement changes and only then to encourage academics and practitioners to argue about the best practice. If, as Richardson and Parker (1993) contend, special education is the 'organisational stepchild' of education, it should not be seen as a special type of education in itself but as dependent on mainstream education and included in mainstream debate, while continuing to recognise that there may be parts of special education which do require separate treatment. According to Norwich (1993 op. cit.) the idea of 'special needs' has formed the basis of developments in education for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties for almost twenty years even though the definition of special needs provided by Warnock has proven inadequate. If definitions both of disability and of special needs are unclear or inadequate, then this must pose serious questions about the basis on which special education is conceptualised and provided.

There are in essence three broad perspectives characterising work in this area. They focus on individual, interactional and social factors respectively.

Individual factors

The 'medical' or 'deficit' models which long held sway as the dominant approach in the field would fall within the general heading of individual factors. These models highlight the personal misfortune of the individual and the need for skill development and professional intervention in order to counteract deficient functioning. In the United States, Scotch (1988) notes that government definitions of disability have largely been determined by medical and rehabilitation professionals, although since the late 1970s

disability organisations have exerted a more influential role, spurred on by increasing numbers of Vietnam War veterans with disabilities. It has been argued that, in this country, the functionalist paradigm continued for many years to provide the dominant framework for health and social services (Lewis and Vulliamy, 1981).

In the context of education, responses associated with this perspective seek to change or support students in order to facilitate their participation in the education system, usually by means of additional or separate provision. While Liggett (1988) suggests that deficit definitions of disability are created within administrative practices, Brinker (1990) maintains that these definitions continue to be accepted and justified by staff who 'believe the illusion that the specialised training in the field (of special education) consists of knowledge of unique techniques that will produce the greatest relative gain when applied to individuals with appropriate characteristics'. Hofmeister (1990) sounds a note of warning concerning the spread of information technology which in its application and use by people with disabilities might actually emphasise individual deficit factors.

In an attempt to move away from this approach, the Warnock Report (1978) rejected the prevailing categories of disability on the grounds that there was no direct and invariant link between a given impairment and a particular kind of learning difficulty and, moreover, that placement within a given category gave no real indication of the needs of the individual with regard to appropriate educational provision. However, the OECD (op. cit.) argue that taking every aspect of a person into account often proves so costly that it is found to be more convenient simply to pigeon hole young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties by falling back on the medical definitions. In agreeing with this view, Jongbloed and Crichton (1990) suggest that whereas there may have been a general shift from individualistic to socio-political definitions at the level of discourse, the reality of practice is that many governmental approaches remain individualistic in nature, as in the case of benefits or employment policies, and cannot easily shift to embrace any other mode. This is a view also expounded by Fulcher in *Disabling Policies* (op. cit.).

Discussing the move away from a functional to an environmental approach, Hahn (1989) remarks that 'the study of disability is currently experiencing a massive conflict between opposing paradigms that may have a critical impact on the fate of this discipline and related areas'. The shift from the 'functional limitations' model has been partly brought about by the challenge of a 'minority group' paradigm, which is based in sociological concepts reflecting a wider range of interests and concerns beyond the individual's problems of disability and its consequences as they are defined in medical terms. On the other hand, concern continues to be expressed over what might be lost in terms of specific support for individuals if the shift away from a rational-technical understanding of disability is too great (Hegarty, 1993; Skrtic, 1991a, 1991b). Individual factors must not be ignored. Although there is not a direct or invariant link between a given impairment and a particular kind of learning difficulty, this does not mean that there are no links. Ignoring this fact would be to replace one extreme view with another.

Interactional factors

Models falling within the interactional perspective identify a mismatch between the

characteristics of individuals and the organisational and curricular arrangements available to them. It is acknowledged that although environmental factors are not the direct cause of educational handicap, they do provide a context of opportunities and expectations that may be more or less inhibiting to individual access to education. Hahn (1991) suggests that it is in this area that public policy tends to be most effective, if only in relation to securing environmental access. The minority group view mentioned above is more concerned with adapting the environment to the person in ways which will build on capacities and abilities. In this context, the achievement of integration and attitude change may be seen as a more fundamental requirement.

In practice, proponents of this view tend to vary in terms of the relative weight they attach to individual and environmental factors. Feuerstein *et al.* (1988) warn against stressing environmental factors to the extent of damaging potential improvements in personal factors. Responses are directed either towards supporting the individual to meet the demands of an educational system that is assumed to be relatively fixed, or towards the modification of the system in such a way as to enable it to meet the needs of a broader range of individuals (Ainscow, op. cit.; Weddell, 1981). Brinker (op. cit.) suggests that 'special education should involve the systematic application of specialised knowledge about individual differences' and that these differences need to take account of any other relevant ecologies, while Hogg (1991) argues that this requires moving away from the limited concept of the learner to consider the whole person, of whom intellectual ability is only one aspect. Research by Deno (1990) attempted to dimensionalise individual differences only to find that attending to individual differences alone failed to produce successful outcomes for individuals. However, Speece's (1990) study found that individual differences could contribute critical information for developments in special education.

It is assumed that changes in curriculum content, teaching methods and assessment procedures can increase the overall flexibility and responsiveness of the system. Thus the task of providing an appropriate curriculum is conceptualised in terms of institutional improvement and professional development. According to Lipsky and Gartner (1989) 'the paradigm that undergirds the current organisation and conduct of special education is defective' because it is concerned with environmental factors linked to deficit perceptions. In support of their argument they quote Guess and Thompson (1989): 'The assumption is, of course, that once having identified the problems associated with the disability, the environment can be arranged, controlled or otherwise manipulated to bring about the desired change in the student. This organisation, variously referred to as "prescriptive-teaching", "remedial", "let's fix it", and so on, always carried with it the (at least) implicit assumption that persons with disabilities are somehow less than normal or at worst, deviant.'

The 'differentiation' and 'whole-college' models exemplify alternative approaches that fit within an interactionist perspective. Attending to individual differences requires an understanding of the differences and their implications for learning. Young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties may have very different perceptions of differences than do staff, but it is the views of the latter which are likely to guide decisions about appropriate provision. McIntyre and Postlethwaite (1989) suggest that staff may over-react, developing a rigid classification system which borders on labelling practices. They also discuss the toleration of differences in particular contexts, noting that a difference

may be considered intolerable and result in segregation or some form of institutional separation in one context but not in another, and that certain differences are tolerated more than others. The variation in tolerance levels can be seen in the pattern of provision for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties throughout the education system.

Social factors

The third perspective may be exemplified by the 'social constructionist' model which assumes that the concept of disability is created by the social environment; it exists only as a social phenomenon (Berger and Luckman, 1976; Abberley, op. cit.; Oliver, 1989, 1990, 1992). Squibb (1981) has offered a structuralist analysis which locates disability and special education within society, constructed and developed according to society's needs (Norwich, 1993). This approach naturally infers that the real obstacles to developments which benefit young people with disabilities are social, political and economic factors. Hence the focus is placed squarely on reforming those factors and on the imperative of changing educational institutions to accommodate all students (Dyson, 1990). This is seen as a move from the individual model to take on a wider, systems level perspective, which, in the case of special or additional needs poses a tremendous political shift for many service providers.

It has been suggested that the appeal of social constructionism is grounded in the belief that all learning difficulties can be overcome by an educational system that is in the end infinitely adaptable and that the labelling of individuals will thereby become irrelevant, since all individuals may be regarded as having their own particular needs (Norwich, 1993).

Similarly, Stainback (1989) maintains that since all individuals are unique, education should seek to offer wholly individualised provision which would not only end the dichotomy between serving young people with and without disabilities but would also create 'a continuously changing pattern of services that sensitively responds to the individual and changing needs' of the individual. On the other hand, Soder (op. cit.) argues that definitions of disability which evolve from social interaction may have such a strong symbolic meaning that the individuals concerned will continue to conform to those labels. Part of the political shift involves recognition of the role services and professionals play in reinforcing the stigma attached to disability. As Topliss (1982) suggests: 'The stigma of disability, in the sense that society tends to impute a generalised inferiority to those with disabling impairments is an inevitable corollary of the fact that disablement is a relative and socially defined condition based primarily on assessment and competence for the world of work.' Barton and Tomlinson (1981) have suggested that 'research has begun to show that administrative categories of handicap do not mysteriously develop in an evolutionary manner', that the ideas and beliefs in society transmit into practices. Abberley (op. cit.) and Barton (1988) both note that oppression is a social-historical product of the classification systems employed by service providers, classifications which often render individuals with disabilities powerless. Roaf and Bines (1989) and Bynoe et al. (1992) have sought to locate disability within equal opportunities and equal rights perspectives as a way of addressing this issue.

Whether or not the categorisation and labelling of individuals is necessary and useful lies at the heart of much of the current debate. It has been argued that the introduction of the concept of special educational needs in the wake of the Warnock Report simply replaced one set of negative labels with another broader set (Ainscow and Tweddle, 1988; Barton and Tomlinson, 1984). At the same time, it is suggested that the principal argument should be not against the idea of categorisation *per se*, but against inadequate definitions of categories (Norwich, op. cit.). The problem then becomes one of reducing the negative effects of labelling while finding alternative strategies for protecting an ever wider and more varied range of educational provision. Soder (op. cit.) suggests that not having any form of labelling may mean losing the benefit of provision of service, while McCullough (1982) questions whether labelling should mean receiving special treatment at the expense of lower or diminished status. There are those who feel that the very existence of forms of special education is discriminating and itself constitutes a label (Lipsky and Gartner, op. cit.). Norwich (op. cit. concedes that while terms such as special education and special needs are unsatisfactory, they should only be changed for something else if it would facilitate the provision of a better service.

In the United States, Williams (1983) has suggested that the dominant 'disability as dependence' paradigms can be challenged and shown to be anomalous as a growing number of people with severe disabilities acquire independence even without state and service support. Lewis and Vulliamy (op. cit.) contend that the continued dominance of the medical/functional deficit approach has in fact tended to hinder developments in both theory and practice. Soder (op. cit.) believes that we do not really understand social reality for people with disabilities; that 'We need a more qualitative approach that highlights the subjective definition of situations and the meaning structures in which it takes place.'

There is, then, a clear need for the development of theoretical concepts to be placed more firmly on the research agenda. What is also clear is that any research initiatives that are mounted in this area should draw more explicitly on the perspectives and experiences of young people and adults who themselves have disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

II FURTHER EDUCATION PROVISION

Provision in the school sector has been guided over the last 15 years by the concept of special educational needs espoused by the Warnock Report and the subsequent 1981 Education Act. In 1992, however, the Audit Commission reported a lack of clarity in terms of what exactly constitutes special educational needs, noting also a lack of incentives for local education authorities to implement the 1981 Act. While it may not have been all plain sailing in the school sector, the post-compulsory sector has seen nothing like the same level of discussion or application of guiding principles to direct developments .

The FE context

Blake (1988) contends that Warnock's wider definition of special needs has not been accepted in the further education context and that discussion and publications since Warnock have only served to confuse the situation and have certainly not helped to produce clearer definitions. According to Stowell (1989): 'It is not possible to talk of a "further education special needs sector" as it is of a "special school sector". One reason for this may be that post-school provision is still very much in its infancy.' For Stowell it is the lack of a coherent national policy that has inhibited development in further education. For Landy (1989) it is the colleges which have failed to develop coherent policies designed to respond to individual need. Some of the important developments in the school sector, such as moves towards achieving greater integration for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, have not been adequately addressed in further education. One area of principle in which significant progress is generally felt to have been made is equal opportunities. An HMI (1992a) report found that most colleges had sought to implement policies on equal opportunities. It should, however, be noted that an earlier survey for the RNID indicated that implementation of a general equal opportunities policy is not always an assurance of its application to people with disabilities (Daniels and Corlett, 1990). Indeed, McIntyre and Poslethwaite (1989) have questioned whether it is in fact possible to provide for the whole range of special need, given that the organisational implications would be immense.

The national pattern of further and continuing education for this group of learners has always been patchy (Bradley and Hegarty, 1982; Stowell, 1987), relying on the good will of individuals and on local college or LEA initiatives for its development, rather than any principles or coherent strategy. Gipps and Gross (1987) suggest that where initiatives have been made, resources may have played some part in encouraging the good will and efforts of staff. Blake (op. cit.) reports that surveys carried out in the 1970s and early 1980s indicated that FE staff as a whole were reluctant to take on special education work, largely because of lack of support from management, while staff attitudes and their feelings about clients and curricula could also be seen as another factor inhibiting development (see also Blake and Blake, 1988; Bradley and Pocklington, 1990).

Piecemeal and uncoordinated development of provision due to the absence of either policy guidelines or adequate resourcing may be 'neither cost-effective nor in the best interests of young people' (Dean and Hegarty, 1984). It has been suggested that while colleges of further education were well placed to create accessible provision for young

people with disabilities, they were not sufficiently clear about their roles to capitalise on this to any great extent (Blake and Blake, op. cit.).

An additional factor which may have contributed to the limited development of FE opportunities is the failure to spread good practice among colleges. This was the conclusion of Bramley and Harris's (1986) survey of access and provision in Wales, which found a general lack of communication within as well as between LEAs. Despite the efforts of organisations such as the Further Education Unit and SKILL, there is clearly still a great deal to be done in relation to achieving effective dissemination of good practice.

Surveys of provision

The period since Warnock has produced a fairly large volume of literature on provision. In terms of research, surveys dominate, often carried out by organisations with a vested interest in collecting information on provision. The NUT's national survey of provision for young people aged 16-19, which was carried out in 1982, found that only 17 per cent of the LEAs responding guaranteed a place for young people with disabilities who wanted to continue in education after the age of sixteen. The survey also showed a considerable difference in the level and nature of provision between LEAs, concluding that overall standards were less than adequate to meet the needs of school leavers with disabilities. In terms of the general level of provision, recruitment levels of young people with disabilities reported in the 1982 survey were three to four per cent compared with between 3.5 and five per cent in a survey of provision undertaken in 1992 by NATFHE (1993).

The two most frequently quoted surveys are Bradley and Hegarty's *Stretching the System* (op. cit.) and Stowell's *Catching Up!* (op. cit.), both of which have continued to inform debate in the intervening years. Stowell's postal questionnaire survey of further and higher education institutions was carried out in October 1985. Responses from 496 institutions indicated a population of 43,540 mainly part-time students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The information is now almost ten years old and it would seem that the time is ripe for a comprehensive audit of provision to bring the picture up to date.

In 1989, HMI's *Education Observed 9* summarised inspections carried out since 1983. Although the level of provision appeared to increase over the period, colleges still only catered for a small number of students. Enrolment was found to be haphazard, no college was fully accessible, curricula failed to distinguish between different types of disability and learning difficulty, and there was no significant achievement of integration. However, there were enough examples of good practice to encourage the further spread of provision. Another HMI document, *Special Needs Issues* (1990) acknowledged that substantial development had taken place during the 1980s, but concluded that this was not sufficient and the 'sector is not well prepared to meet the challenges of the 1990s'. HMI reported a need for more courses at colleges, for trained staff who could develop appropriate curricula, and for special needs work to be incorporated more systematically into courses of initial teacher training. They suggested that management should take the initiative: 'Models of good practice exist in some colleges, but to establish the work formally, and to offer experience of good quality for all students, it is necessary for managers of FE to incorporate consideration of this work into their more general strategic planning.'

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A number of surveys have been carried out at the regional and local levels. For instance, the Regional Advisory Council for the Organisation of Further Education in the East Midlands carried out an audit of provision in the area in the wake of Warnock, and followed that with another three years later (East Midlands FE Council, 1984). Wheater's (1988) survey of 26 colleges in the North of England indicated that only 9 of these colleges had students with disabilities, which produced the conclusion: 'It appears that there is a greater response by Polytechnics and Universities to the needs of the disabled applicant than by Colleges, and that this is improving year by year in some institutions.' HMI (1987) reported on three further education courses for young people with moderate learning difficulties in Surrey, advising that autonomous departments coordinate their activities to provide coherent course programmes. Chalk's (1988) study was limited to only one local education authority but the findings were in line with other surveys showing that while courses were offering valuable experiences for young people, overall provision was limited.

Provision in Wales has been examined twice in recent years. In 1989-90 HMI (1990) found that 21 further and higher education colleges provided for 960 students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Assessment practices were considered poor and variable provision needed improving for colleges 'to achieve programmes of study which are sufficiently broad, balanced and differentiated to meet fully the needs of individual students'. Poole's questionnaire survey for NUS Wales (1990) although only achieving a 50 per cent response, revealed only a minority of colleges having adopted policies relating to special needs, a lack of consistency in admissions procedures with unsophisticated subsequent assessment mechanisms, and few indications of effective support systems being in place.

Levels of provision for students with particular types of disability have also been the focus of surveys, as in Baginsky's (1991; 1992) investigation of post-school provision for young people with speech and language impairments. Wildig (1987) and RNID (1992) have both considered provision for young people with hearing impairments, while the position of young people who are blind or have visual impairments has been studied by Butler RNIB (1986), Stockley (1987), RNIB (1988) and NIACE/SKILL/ RNIB (1992). All of these studies refer to the lack of awareness among staff and the failure to access up-to-date information as contributing to the difficulties young people with these disabilities encounter in further education. Butler (op. cit.) suggests that it is harder for young people who are blind to get into further education than into university. This is certainly not the case over the wider range of disabilities. Research has shown that accessing university places is in general difficult for young people with disabilities and only a small number manage to obtain places (Hurst, 1993; Wilenius, 1992).

A recent study by Whittacker (1994) has noted that: 'After almost 15 years of expansion and reorganisation in Further Education the provision for students with learning difficulties lags behind other initiatives colleges have taken to widen representation of people from local communities' and 'rarely is the rhetoric turned into valued students experiences.' Nash (1994) feels that Whittacker's study not only highlights the shortcomings of further education colleges in this field but also the lack of detailed study, especially since the mid-80s, and the fact that there are 'no significant signs to suggest that the experiences of the disabled students are changing'.

The organisation of provision

The references in the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act to provision for this group of learners and the subsequent statements by the Further Education Funding Council about its commitment to this area of work may be an important impetus to change. As noted earlier, what is now required is a re-examination and clarification of the underlying concept of learning difficulties and disabilities in post-compulsory education and training in order to direct the future shape and organisation of provision.

In Skrtic's (1991) view special education is an institutional practice that emerged in the 20th Century 'to contain the contradiction between public education's democratic ends and bureaucratic means' which if it is be made more responsive to young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, requires that education as a whole be deconstructed and then reconstructed in the service of all. For Bines (1993) the plethora of change generated by government legislation has had a 'major impact on special education, requiring reconstruction of the role, content and delivery of such provision'. This is seen as a major shift similar to that following Warnock, which must be supported by research into 'the ways in which current reforms are impinging on, and changing beliefs and practice among, both special educators and their colleagues'. According to Fish (1989), the elaboration of a conceptual framework which describes the nature of special education in the context of a changing system offers a complex definition of special education which in turn suggests that 'what constitutes special education is not fixed. The nature of special educational needs and the provision to meet them will vary over time.' Therefore, discourse should be located within the mainstream of educational thinking and not be allowed to remain isolated.

In relation to the school sector, Ainscow (1991) has argued that the important thing is to consider reforming and changing education, not changing the child: 'Those of us who have spent our careers trapped in the narrow alleyway of special education have to become part of the wider educational environment and allow the perspectives of those in that environment to inform our thinking and practice.' Bigge (1988) stresses that any curriculum that is implemented for those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties should be empowering and should have the 'greatest overall positive impact on students'. These comments apply equally to further education.

The possible options for the organisation of provision which flow from the three broad conceptual frameworks discussed earlier in this review have been described by Norwich (op. cit.) as:

i.   provision for a wide diversity of students but with separate internal and external systems of support and with some students who have significant difficulties having their needs met through separate residential and/or social services and health provision;

ii.   provision for the full range of students with internal and external support systems within the mainstream;

iii. provision which meets the full diversity of student needs within mainstream colleges without specialist learning support systems.

If students are to have access to the mainstream curriculum offer, then it is important to examine its nature, and whether and how it may be differentiated to meet individual needs. The three broad perspectives described earlier as underpinning thinking in special needs—focus on individual characteristics; focus on individual interactions with the curriculum or organisation; and focus on curriculum limitations so that improvements for those with difficulties will benefit all students — have different implications for differentiation. Whereas the first and second require specialist intervention, the third depends on creating the right conditions on a college-wide basis (Ainscow and Hart, 1992).

Differentiation in this context can be seen as segregation and separation or as a means of meeting learners' individual or special needs. Research by Kaufman (1985) examined the relationship between educational environment, extent of disability and educational achievement for pupils with moderate learning difficulties in mainstream and segregated schools. The findings indicated that special environments afforded different opportunities for education than mainstream classrooms and that achievements were higher where a teacher-centred and rule-governed approach was employed. Kaufman suggested that this might be because 'mildly retarded learners exhibit a diversity of academic and social competencies and behaviours, thus requiring complex classification systems for determining appropriate instructional environments'. HMI (1992b) reported on an inspection 'to identify the conditions needed to enable young people with special educational needs at secondary school level and in colleges of further education to have full access to a curriculum appropriate to their particular stages of development'. The inspection found some increase in differentiation by teaching staff for different needs, although this was still felt to be inadequate. Effective learning support is essential to enable access to a broader curriculum but there was little evidence of appropriate assessment procedures or sufficiently flexible support strategies in colleges. In terms of development, the focus tended to be on outcomes rather than progress. Funnell (1991) describes a case study of a college in Suffolk where a staff team was established to help young people with disabilities access everything they needed, including the curriculum.

Halvorsen and Sailor (1990) believe there is no barrier to integration that cannot be overcome. They argue that although the case for the benefits and efficacy of integration has been proven, further research is needed to link integration practices to outcomes, and to their impact on life outside the educational institution. A study of deaf students on post-secondary courses produced evidence linking student persistence on courses and rates of completion with the degree of integration at educational institutions (Foster and Decaro, 1991). Research by Cates and Kinnison (1993) shows that the segregation of young people with multiple disabilities lessens their opportunities for ever integrating into society as a whole. Whittacker (1991) suggests that although integration is increasing, some policies and practices such as labelling and discrete student groupings continue to hinder development. HMI 1992b) investigations have found that segregation appears to be more widespread and persistent in further education than in schools.

Australian research has reported on two obstacles to the implementation of integration, despite strong encouragement from the government. Slee (1993) notes that while discussion of integration and inclusion tends to focus on pedagogical issues, attempts at implementation are often reduced to disputes about resources and the deployment of staff

and facilities. Mousley's (1993) research into the attitudes of teaching staff towards integration policies shows the extent to which staff views might actually determine the success of integration. Jupp's (1992) study of young people with disabilities in this country also demonstrates the importance of attitudinal change, arguing that legislation alone cannot make integration work. Lloyd (1987) notes: 'It is axiomatic that successful integration can only occur if the general educational choice offered by an adult education institute is wide. Where mainstream work is healthy and stimulating there is a strong potential for the development of special needs and integrated education.'

A report from the FEU (Dee 1988) on a three-year curriculum development project raised a large number of issues related to the curriculum, among them the on-going problem of ensuring progression for students with disabilities. For students with learning difficulties and disabilities, as for other learners, there is a tension between the philosophy of a curriculum based on meeting individual needs through differentiation in curriculum content or teaching approaches and an externally devised curriculum framework increasingly tied to accreditation and nationally validated qualifications.

The FE curriculum

The further education curriculum as a whole is the subject of lively debate at present. The need for a curriculum which produces employable adults who are flexible, responsive, capable of problem solving and collaboration seems to run counter to some of the narrow skills-based focus of NVQs and to a lesser extent GNVQs (Young et al., 1993). The standard method of teaching continues to be didactic (McFarlane, 1993). Where the division between academic and vocational courses is being challenged by GNVQs, the success of this challenge continues to depend on higher education's responses to the new qualification.

Betts (1989) suggests that 'vocational drift' in the curriculum, spurred by the growth of vocationalism since the mid-1980's and evinced in the Education Reform Act 1988 has created difficulties in defining and measuring competence, difficulties which have allowed employment to become the major consideration in programmes as well as outcomes. The Manpower Services Commission, according to Stowell (1989), had sufficient control of resources to influence developments which emphasised vocational education and training at the same time as the government was laying great stress on the value of non-academic education. This was further consolidated in the DES document *Education and Training for the 21st Century* with its stated aim of removing the disparity between academic and vocational qualifications.

The impact of the new vocationalism on further education curricula has placed the emphasis on skills development rather than academic studies, according to Blake (op. cit.), who also feels there is a need for research into the 'elusive nomenclature (the litany of participation, permeation, transfer, negotiation and the rest) and the extent to which the ideas lying behind this vocabulary of curriculum discourse are translated into practice'. While acknowledging the increasing number of students with learning difficulties in post-secondary education Nelson and Lignugans-Kraft (1989) point out that there is little evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of programmes, their outcomes, or the relationship between programme components and students' achievements. Without evaluative evidence of this kind, it is difficult to ascertain which

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aspects of programmes are useful and worth retaining.

The influence of vocational initiatives in terms of provision for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties is not clear. Although discussing research in the United States, Siegel *et al.,* has observed that there is always likely to be a high rate of unemployment among people with disabilities, and that it is essential that follow-up work is carried out to discover whether vocational education is leading to employment, and for research to document 'those instructional procedures that lead to the acquisition, generalisation and maintenance of a wide range of occupational and social skills'. In this country, Green (1987) has referred to the unhappy marriage between education and training, that further education should be the ideal stepping stone for young people with hearing impairments to move into employment but that it has consistently failed to provide the necessary vocational preparation. In the case of young people with speech impairments, Baginsky (op. cit.) came across a similar situation, finding no specific provision for this group, who tended instead to join courses designed for those with moderate learning difficulties. The Rathbone Society (1992) contends that it is important to 'ensure that quality training is available for all young people rather than just those whose parents are able and determined to secure appropriate provision'. The recent Audit Commission/HMI Report, *Caught in the Act* (op. cit.), similarly highlighted the way in which special educational provision in schools was available mostly where 'parents had the emotional stamina for debate with professionals, and increasingly, where they had access to a voluntary organisation or lawyer'.

In a report on the Scottish Young People's Survey, Raffe (1989) notes that training programmes such as YTS have been mainly unemployment focused, failing to reach broader training objectives and achieving only limited success in helping young people with disabilities escape from low status outcomes. Kuh's (1988) study of 16-25 year olds in Exeter found that the two most common post-school destinations for young people with disabilities were either day placement or unemployment, suggesting that more opportunities were needed which offered progress out of static or unstable occupational paths.

Studies on the impact of the Training and Enterprise Councils have found variable success by TECs in developing links with students and employers. HMI (1992c) noted the shortfall in numbers of students and commented that it is as yet unclear how far training credit schemes have resulted in young people enrolling in FE colleges who would not otherwise have done so. Smith's (1992) questionnaire survey of 61 TEC areas on provision for young people with disabilities revealed some evidence good practice but generally found that they were 'not implementing effective policies for people with disabilities who seek to gain training and employment'. Similar comments have been made about TVEI (Cooper, 1992; NBHS, 1987; HMI, 1989, Underwood, 1986). It would seem that these initiatives have not been particularly responsive to the needs of young people with disabilities, or influential on their behalf.

Discussing the position of 'special education' provision in Australia, Bain (1992) suggests that 'the gap between the aspirations of special education policy and the realities of practice is a consistent source of discord for parents of exceptional children, special educators and advocacy groups. The baseline of service delivery in our systems rarely fulfils the promise of the policy documents on which it is based.' One aspect of the reality

for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties has been highlighted by George (1992) in describing the difficulties they experience just getting into further and higher education. A report by the Institute of Public Policy Research (Bynoe *et al.*, 1991) claims that young people with disabilities are the victims of discrimination because colleges and other educational and training establishments are simply not prepared to accommodate them. In response to the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century*, Hutchinson (1991) argues that 'having regard' to young people with disabilities is simply not enough, that it should be a specific duty to make provision, even beyond the age of 19 where appropriate. It is worth recalling a comment by Siperstein (1988) to the effect that the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary education can only be assured when the delivery of services works well enough to attract and keep them.

III THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

In the broadest sense, assessment can be defined as a method of 'providing information to be used in decision-making' (Satterley, 1989). The purposes to which assessment outcomes can be put include: selecting learners for a particular educational programme; identifying additional support needs; monitoring and recording progress; offering guidance; and acting as a means of accountability to funding agencies and students. As such, assessment must be regarded as a key element in provision for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. It provides the link between individual needs and provision and programmes; an access route for students, as well as a source of information for colleges; a means of ensuring that resources are used effectively in meeting students' needs.

Since Roberts' (1982) study of the function of assessment for students with moderate learning difficulties in the early 1980s, there has been little further exploration of the role assessment plays in establishing and developing provision for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties in further education. The main thrust of development and debate has largely been located in the school context (Mittler, 1993). The extent to which this has influenced and guided the development of policy and practice in further education is not clear. There have been very few attempts to consider assessment issues solely within an FE context and in the majority of cases these have been descriptions of practice rather than research-based investigations

The nature of assessment

There have been major changes in the ways that assessment has been conceptualised, especially in the last twenty years as views about special needs education have changed. According to Cline (1992), from the 1940s through to the 1970s individual deficits were assessed so that the individual could be directed to appropriate resources or provision. The 1970s saw the development of criterion referenced assessment, a consequence of adopting special needs methods of instruction from the United States; and by the mid-1980s the focus was firmly on the needs of the individual. An interactionist approach to assessment placed the emphasis on directing resources and developing provision to cater for identified needs. Taking a different route but reaching a similar conclusion, Hogg and Raynes (1987) highlight three developments in assessment practices over the last sixteen years: a shift from global assessments to the assessment of specific functions and competences; a shift from the assessment of deficiency to assessing competence; and a move towards assessing the individual in terms of their interaction with the surrounding environment, rather than in isolation.

The Warnock Report (1978) played an important part in encouraging the evolution of an interactionist and holistic view of assessment, notably with its list of the main requirements for achieving effective assessment, which was highly influential in shaping opinion during the 1980s. However, the extent to which it promoted widespread changes in assessment practice is not so easily ascertained. By the mid-1980s ILEA's Fish Report (1985) was making the same encouraging noises about looking at the young person as a whole when attempting to identify appropriate educational opportunities: 'Some handicapping conditions, particularly behavioural disorders may be brought about or accentuated by factors at school, such as its premises, organisation or staff. In such cases,

assessment may need to focus on the institution, the classroom setting or the teacher as well as on the individual child and his family if it is to encompass full consideration of the child's problem and their educational implications. This needs to be borne in mind by all who take part in assessment.' More recently, discussion of the implications of the National Curriculum for young people with disabilities has welcomed the opportunity to develop a holistic approach to assessment.

Cline (op. cit.) argues that assessment may take one of four different approaches by choosing to focus on the individual, on the teaching programme, on the individual's zone of potential development, or on the immediate learning environment. Focusing on the individual can never provide a full answer in terms of identifying appropriate provision, while considering potential development or the immediate learning environment, although flexible and informal, may be 'vulnerable to distortion through unconscious bias'.

Research in the United States by Dunlap and Sands (1989) found that to be effective, assessment should to be appropriate to those being assessed; should assess a broad range of skills; should be easily communicated; should combine a number of different methods, such as observation and interview; and should allow the delineation of specific programme goals and objectives. This again reflects the shift in emphasis from the individual being assessed to fit into a programme to one of understanding the individual so as to 'identify and respond to the programmatic needs of persons with disabilities'.

For Cline (op. cit.) appropriate intervention can be determined through 'systematic assessment followed by intervention informed by the outcome of assessments', so the primary objective of assessment is 'to guide intervention, and for that purpose it must have a broader focus and not concentrate exclusively on the target individuals who appear to have disabilities or learning difficulties: the learning environment is equally important as a focus for assessment.' Hogg (1991) takes a broader view: 'Specifically, comprehensive psychological, social, physical, sensory, medical and environmental assessment contribute to the basis on which all intervention ultimately proceeds.' Norwich (1990) notes the lack of systematic research into modes of assessing difficulties, particularly from an educational perspective. He recommends a multi-dimensional approach to assessment, which takes account of a range of social, medical, educational, cultural and emotional factors. Macdonald (1981) on the other hand, suggests three main elements: cognitive, developmental and social competence.

The growth in the range of post-school education and training opportunities has produced greater scope for continuity and progression for students, presenting them with an increasing number and complex range of choices. Providing assistance in weighing up the various options demands 'sensitive evaluation across a range of relevant achievement' (Roberts, op. cit.), thereby greatly increasing both the scope for, as well as the importance of assessment (Frederickson, 1992).

Nevertheless the real extent of change is felt by Davie (1993a; 1993b) to have been mostly in terms of rhetoric; in practice little has been done to capitalise on the opportunities for improving assessment procedures in the service of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. When examining means of assessing social skills in further education colleges, Roberts and Norwich (1983) found little evidence that

assessment was an integral part of the teaching process. For people with profound and multiple disabilities, Hogg (op. cit.) claims that: 'Appropriate assessment is not the norm in many educational and intervention settings.' Although changes may have taken place in the 'rituals' of assessment, Davie (op. cit.) contends that the primary focus remains 'to identify learner characteristics in order to separate the learner either from the majority of peers or from the curriculum currently on offer to the majority of peer's.

One obstacle to changing practice may lie in problems associated with identifying and agreeing the purpose of assessment. Sabatino (1979) claims that the purpose of special education has first to be defined. The Warnock Report may have failed to provide a sufficiently clear definition either of 'special needs' or of the role of 'special education', which Corbett (1993) feels has never been resolved in the context of further education: 'What constitutes relevant goals and outcomes remains the subject of contentious debate in post-compulsory education and training.'

While the implementation of the 1981 Act established an irrevocable link between assessment and decisions about resource allocation, continued lack of clarity in definitions of 'special needs' and in descriptions of what constitutes 'special education' along with resource limits and weak controls over the use of resources has meant that assessment for statutory purposes has been led by provision, which in turn has been largely determined by the availability of resources and not by individual needs (Fish, 1989; Audit Commission/HMI, 1992). This has prevented a total move away from labelling, as labels in special needs education usually have a resource implication and the absence of an easy method for identifying resource needs could well precipitate a budgeting nightmare (Davie, op. cit.).

The Education Reform Act 1988 pushed testing into the limelight to the detriment of assessment, causing it to be perceived as an end in itself. Wolfendale (1993) argues that assessing for special needs must be seen as wider than testing, more as 'a means to other ends', and that it should contain four main elements: it should be a shared activity, it should be linked to intervention, it should involve review and evaluation, and the methods and findings should be open and accountable. Cline (op. cit.) also advocates four key elements: an understanding of special needs and the learning process; practical efficacy; equity; and accountability. Of the four, the most difficult to satisfy are equity and accountability. Withers and Lee (1988) identify two kinds of assessment. One is a natural activity with no sense of a power relationship, the other a politically-based and biased process dressed up as objective assessment. The extent to which assessment can be interpreted as a power relationship, and especially the powerlessness of those being assessed are matters of some concern. Unless assessment is located within an equal opportunities context, where everyone has the right to participate, it can only be regarded as an esoteric professional exercise (Wolfendale, op. cit.).

A study of the Asian community in Waltham Forest by Begum (1992) reported that:'Bangladeshi parents expressed concern that their children had been assessed in English but if they had been assessed in their own language they would have been able to carry out the tasks required.' Similar worries have been expressed by Orton (1990) and Corbett (op. cit.,) while the Fish Report (op. cit.) made strong representation in respect of the need to consider and accommodate cultural background and language difficulties in assessment procedures, for young people as well as their parents or carers.

McEvoy (1991) discusses the notion of possible disenfranchisement in the assessment process stressing that 'it is important that the mode of assessment used does not artificially disenfranchise sections of the population', and that designers and providers of assessment consider the needs of different groups, offering alternative and flexible mechanisms for assessment.

The nature of this particular target group offers a further complexity, particularly in relation to the wide range of disabilities and learning difficulties that may be encountered in the colleges (Haring, 1988). Some people have clearly identifiable needs which stem directly from their learning difficulty or disability, although as Booth (1992) points out, disabilities do not necessarily mean difficulties in learning.

It is necessary to take account of differences in designing programmes (Elkins, 1990) and assessment procedures should aim to highlight those differences that might impact on provision. It must, however, be recognised that given the continuum of need, no absolute boundaries can be drawn between those who have additional support needs and those who do not. A student may require additional support in one context and not in another, at one time but not at another.

The degree to which additional or different provision is made will depend to some extent on the nature of the general provision made available to all students (FEU, 1992). Acceptance of this principle has implications for the style and nature of assessment arrangements which are developed by colleges: 'Provision is only likely to be effective when it is linked to a skilled assessment of specific individual needs. Assessment is only appropriate when it leads to suitable arrangements to meet such needs' (Fish, 1992).

The purposes of assessment

Mittler (op. cit.) suggests that in implementing assessment procedures it is essential to be clear about the aims and purposes of assessment, who and by what means it will be carried out, and how the assessment can be related to teaching and curriculum development. Sabatino (op. cit.) attempted a definition of the purpose of assessment in the context of a special education curriculum as 'the search for interaction between learner trait and curriculum interaction, which would promote the development of rules for preparing and implementing the most appropriate short and long term objectives', adding that research should be concerned with 'the search for a systematic structure through which learner characteristics can be viewed, measured and/or observed'.

Roberts (op. cit.) focuses on three main purposes for assessment: counselling, curriculum evaluation and as a catalyst for instructional improvement (see also Popham, 1981). Certainly the literature has paid particular attention to the role of assessment in curriculum design and evaluation.

Assessment can play a vital part in the curriculum development process by providing opportunities for assessing students' progress, testing the efficacy of curriculum and teaching strategies in achieving their stated aims and objectives, and providing feedback to students. Curriculum-based assessment has been described by Tucker (1988) as: 'Any procedure that directly assesses student performance within the course content for the purposes of determining that student's instructional needs.' Branwhite (1986) claims

that assessment is essential to achieving optimal educational programmes. Similarly, in relation to people with visual impairments, Stockley (1987) stresses the importance of assessment in achieving the most appropriate educational setting. In Corbett's (1992) research, learner coordinators felt that ongoing assessment procedures were closely linked to curriculum goals.

Bigge (1988) suggests that a curriculum should have a built-in assessment mechanism for systematic evaluation but notes the 'inequalities in curriculum guides and resources available to teachers in special education compared to those available in regular education', claiming that most special education teachers develop their own curricula. If indeed a poorly designed programme can drive students away (Zigmond, 1990), it is clearly essential that students themselves take some level of ownership of the curriculum.

Assessment can also play an important part in the management of the transition process. Roberts (op. cit.) considered assessment at different stages of the transition process, at pre-entry, during and at the end of a course in further education. In his research, Molloy (1991) found that a thorough assessment of all needs at any one stage of education was essential so that an individual's requirements in the next stage of education could be determined. Only in this way would a student be assured of the support and guidance needed. Corbett's (1990a) research on school-college links also indicates the importance of joint assessment as a way of easing transition. Whatever assessment is carried out at school, there is a need for reassessment in the specific context of further education. Baker and Blanding (1987) emphasise the importance of considering previous academic achievements in assessing for post-secondary courses.

Recent legislation (Disabled Persons Act, 1986; Children Act, 1989; National Health Service and Community Care Act, 1990) has helped to promote a more coherent response to transition by requiring services to conduct an assessment of individual needs in order to plan provision. However, much legislation in this area lacks congruence and continues to promote a service-led approach. In Scotland, the last ten years have seen the development of the Future Needs Assessment Programme to 'ensure a smooth transition for those requiring care both as children and adults' (Banks, 1993). A major impetus has come from legislation such as Community Care and encouragement from the Scottish Office (Circular SW 11/1991). At the school leaving stage, and throughout adult life, the views of the individual at the centre of the process become at least as important as those of their families and professionals. This clearly necessitates ease of access to objective guidance and assessment

A final, and critical role for assessment lies in the determination of resource allocations to colleges. The implementation of the 1981 Act has demonstrated the irrevocable link between the assessment of needs and decisions about resource allocation. The expectations placed on colleges to produce strategic plans based on a needs analysis in order to determine funding levels will require access to early, accurate information.

Participation in assessment

There are in theory a wide range of agencies and individuals who might be expected to contribute to the assessment process. All will require specific preparation for the task, if their contribution is to be effective.

As assessment is a combination of information and interpretation, Salvia and Yssledyke (1988) have suggested that the individual responsible for interpretation must be seen as a critical factor. In the case of identifying and recruiting young people with disabilities for YTS programmes, Spencer (1989) found that 'it is not necessarily a straightforward task to infer from assessments based on educational performance and experience whether or not a young person is suited to YTS'. An adequate assessment requires more than just linking educational background and disability, and the absence of formal assessment procedures meant that a great deal was based on attitudes and individual interpretations by staff of an applicant's ability. This resulted in a poor recruitment record among young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

The attitudes and perceptions of staff are, then, a crucial element in the assessment process. The ability to identify needs and then to specify appropriate levels of intervention require skilled staff and sensitive procedures which keep the learner at the heart of the process. An ability to recognise an individual's achievements and an awareness of the learner's repertoire from which to draw choices are important considerations when developing models that involve increasing choice and self-determination for young people with disabilities (Schloss *et al.*, 1994). Although there is felt to be a role for non-specialists in the assessment process, especially in relation to the assessment of social competence, it is acknowledged that they, too, will require guidance from specialists in the area (Sebba, 1988). Assessment takes place in a social, political and legal context and staff have ethical responsibilities when carrying out assessments. Salvia and Ysseldyke (op. cit.) feel that staff must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions as well as recognising the limits of their own competence.

Students themselves are the main source of information on programme effectiveness, and the extent to which they are meeting stated goals and objectives (Knight *et al.*, 1991). The extent to which students are involved in the assessment process will be important in determining its nature and outcomes. The FEU (1991) has proposed that 'Students should be given the opportunity at all stages of their learning to be involved in the assessment process. It should be made as flexible as possible to remove unnecessary barriers and optimise access to nationally recognised competence-based qualifications. Assessment should take place at the diagnostic, formative and summative stages.' Additionally, McGinty and Fish (1992) believe that students in further education should be 'encouraged to use their own preferred way of working towards agreed goals'. If assessment is intended to help the learner and guide programme development then it should be discussed and negotiated with the learner (Richard *et al.*, 1991). Hitt (1993) claims that the 16+ Action Plan and the SCOTVEC National Certificate in Scotland have created opportunities for flexible assessment within the context of inclusive practices. Both Jones (op. cit.) and Corbett (1993) consider that assessment should take account of the possibility of participation for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Failure to take steps to encourage participation in appropriate ways may result in 'passive resistance' (Hutchinson, 1990) or in opting out of programmes (Corbett, 1990b) on the part of students. Gersch (1992) has suggested that on an international level the practice of consulting students is increasing as its value for programme development becomes more apparent.

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Developments in the field of information technology offer new opportunities for young people with disabilities in relation to courses and curricula, and enhanced employment opportunities. A number of guides have been produced to assist colleges implement IT strategies and develop support (Broadbent and Curran, 1992; Vincent, 1990; Hawkridge and Vincent; 1992). IT might allow students who would otherwise experience great difficulty to participate in the assessment process and even to assess themselves. However, Finnigan (1987) warns that the assessment of IT needs is in itself a very complex process requiring specific skills.

The 1981 Act and subsequent legislation, together with moves towards a more interactionist approach, has broadened the base for assessment, so that a key feature of the assessment process for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties is the range of professionals and services who might now be involved. This is true at the school leaving stage and in adult life, for example as part of a community care programme. Corlett (1992) has expressed the view that flexible multi-professional assessment is critical in making appropriate provision. A survey by Ford and Newcombe (1990) found that assessment is more effective when there are good working relationships between agencies. Evans and MacKay's (1993) study of young people with disabilities at Telford College highlights the problem of identifying hidden needs, suggesting that a multi-disciplinary, holistic approach is required to 'ensure that any significant changes in an individual's needs are noticed quickly and therefore addressed promptly'. However, they also add that a multi-disciplinary approach carries with it significant cost implications.

Although legislation encourages, in some instances requires, cooperation between agencies, the achievements have so far been very limited. Davie (op. cit.) suggests that the problem of assessment meaning different things to different agencies and professionals remains a significant obstacle to joint working. Education, social services and health departments might each have a very different conceptualisation of assessment as well as different views about the aim of assessment, or about who should be involved in making the assessment. These views are not obviated by legislative prescriptions. However, for people with severe disabilities in particular, Hogg (op. cit.) maintains that the implementation and development of an appropriate curriculum 'will require genuine interdisciplinary activity, with respect to assessments being undertaken jointly by educational, therapeutic and habilitation staff in a common context'.

Teaching staff may find the involvement of other professionals in multi-disciplinary working arrangements threatening. In Armstrong et al's. (1993) study of teachers in three LEAs, staff felt 'deskilled' since they had a lesser role to play in assessment and believed that they were losing control of the task of developing and refining programmes. Other pressures on staff are also important, for instance in relation to their professional development and the amount of time taken up by assessment (Roberts, op. cit.).

Official guidance and legislation throughout the 1980s and early 1990s has tried to encourage greater involvement of parents in education. Since the 1981 Act, the notion of the 'equivalent expertise' of parents and professionals has gained some ground (Wolfendale, 1988). The Citizen's Charter (HMSO, 1991) and the 1993 Education Act, both sought to promote greater parental involvement. While these developments have been welcomed in so far as they 'attest to a shared commitment to protect and enhance the quality of education for children and young people with special educational needs

within the context of 'education for all'', there is still concern that they amount to very general statements that are not particularly helpful to people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties (Wolfendale, 1993). It is an issue which has hardly been addressed in the context of further education, where parental involvement may be seen as far more controversial.

How far the lessons of good practice in schools, particularly interactive systems of assessment such as Pathway and Pathfinder schemes, or the Reciprocal Reporting Model might be considered applicable to the post-compulsory sector is something that has not been explored.

Assessment techniques

According to a recent survey by NATFHE (1993), there are a great many assessment techniques in use in colleges of further education. Colleges responding to the NATFHE questionnaire were using a total of 27 different methods of assessment. Unfortunately, there is no information generally available on the extent, nature or impact of these different methods, or on their relative merits. Hogg and Raynes (op. cit.) suggest that 'all staff involved in intervention should be critically appraising the multiplicity of instruments now available, rather than re-inventing the wheel'. More recently, Hogg (op. cit.) has observed that: 'Where assessment has been considered, all too often *ad hoc* instruments have been developed by well-intentioned staff.' Research by Corbett (op. cit.) confirms the fact that informal assessment is predominating in further education. Concerns about instruments that have appeared in the literature include doubts about their reliability (Cline, op. cit.) and validity (Fox and Norwich, 1992), and the lack of clarity of assessment instruments, as in the case of GNVQs (Office for Standards in Education, 1992). The latter survey also highlighted the need for nationally agreed codes of practice in assessment.

Models such as those developed by Wehman et al. (1992) in the USA and the Specialist Assessment and Training Service at Stevenson College (Cox, 1993) might point to a possible way forward. There is however, an urgent need to explore the theoretical and methodological integrity of the wide range of models and assessment techniques currently in operation.

Commenting on changes since the 1981 Act, Bryans (op. cit.) has suggested that: 'The effects of educational changes as a consequence of legislation are nowhere more evident than in the area of special educational needs assessment.' While this may be true of the school context, there is little evidence of the impact of change in further education. This is not to deny that there has been and will continue to be changes in approaches to assessment in FE. At present, however, such change must be regarded as being implemented on an *ad hoc* basis and research into all aspects of the assessment process is clearly necessary.

IV   FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Given the importance of funding in providing educational facilities and support for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, it is surprising how little research has been carried out in this area. Even in discussion and debate on special needs issues during the last ten years or so, it is unusual to find funding concerns placed centre stage. While this could be interpreted as a reluctance to confront the subject of finance directly, it might also suggest a tendency to assume that research and debate located in other areas will provide the lead for considerations of resourcing.

There has certainly been a tendency for research in the area to focus on overall policy considerations and to make recommendations for practice on the assumption that the necessary resources will automatically be forthcoming. In an ideal world, this would be an attractive and logical first step. In reality, however, resources to secure policy implementation have always been scarce.

Why is additional funding provided?

As noted earlier, the principle of providing for the additional needs of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties has been fairly widely accepted throughout further education. Statements to that effect now appear in many college policy documents. Of interest in the context of funding is the extent to which this principle, and other concomitant principles, have made their way into the practice of colleges and the policies of funding bodies.

Although their research is concerned with funding at school level and primarily with the impact of Local Management of Schools, Lunt and Evans (1993) point out that resourcing considerations are fundamental to any discussion of special educational needs provision, and that at the root of any crisis in the field there is usually a 'crisis of resourcing'. Blackburn (1990) describes the emergence of a tension between integration and the efficient use of resources since the 1978 Warnock Report, which he believes has never been resolved to the benefit of young people. In Cole's (1989) history of special education in this country, financial considerations are claimed to have been highly influential in determining the pattern of development of provision. Noting that 'enlightenment and improvements all cost money', he suggests that the non-availability of funding stemmed innovation in special education throughout the mid-80s.

The outcomes of this conflict between principles and funding considerations can be seen in the emergent pattern of policies and practices since the 1981 Education Act (Fulcher, 1986; Cole, 1989; Adams, 1990). While the overarching principle may remain intact, it has not attracted a high level of priority in funding allocations. Implementation therefore becomes problematic. Indeed, it has been suggested that funding considerations, especially concerns about scarce resources, may have become the single most important arbiter of the value and applicability of new initiatives. This criticism has been made of the push to implement open learning approaches in this country on the grounds that they offer a cheap alternative. McGill, (1993) argues that although it may be more efficient and effective, open learning is not necessarily cheaper. In the United States, Lloyd *et al.* 1992) have contended that the Regular Education Initiative has more to do with cost-cutting than with the potential benefits for young people or with improving practice

What is the funding provided for?

This question raises two important, inter-related issues to do with definitions of additional needs. One is that the application of the general principle of providing for the additional needs of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties requires that those needs be identifiable so that resources can be appropriately directed. The other concerns the specific forms of support that these young people might require.

Discussion of support since 1981 has seen a shift in focus from providing for the particular needs of individuals, to one of making provision for the needs of all students. The latter encompasses such notions as the 'whole college approach' and 'inclusion', both of which are based on the principle of establishing provision in which all students and staff flourish. There are still continuing schemes which favour provision being made on an individual basis, as in the discussion of voucher systems by Turner (1991), whereby young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties should be provided with vouchers which they can use to purchase the education and training that best meets their individual needs. However, Lunt and Evans (op. cit.) have contended that: 'Targeting increasing additional needs in this way to individual pupils does nothing to enhance the ability of the school or its teachers to meet the very diverse needs of the range of pupils.'

One of the strongest criticisms made by the Audit Commission in *Getting in on the Act* concerned a general lack of clarity about what constitutes a special need. This was described as a major deficiency in the system. Vevers (1992), a co-author of the report, has stated elsewhere that: 'In most schools and LEAs, there is no working definition of special educational need.' Certainly those definitions that are espoused tend to vary according to where they are used and who does the defining. An attempt to address this issue has been made in the *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (DFE, 1994). The specifics of support for individuals may take three forms — direct support, indirect support or a combination of the two. While the costs of direct support for learners are easily identifiable (for example, communicators, note takers, additional tutorial support), the costs of indirect support are less so (for example, staff development, curriculum development, policy development). Much depends upon which model of provision is adopted. If this were to be an inclusive model, then it could be argued that investment in indirect support would be the more effective in increasing access to education (Dessent, 1987).

How is the level of funding calculated?

Recent years have seen a push to achieve a formula for calculating funding. It is an enterprise which reads something like the search for the Holy Grail, and has probably proved just as frustrating. Dee's (1993) work illustrates the complexities involved in attempting to estimate current or future costs of provision for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A number of the colleges participating in her study found it extremely difficult to calculate the actual costs they incurred in making provision for young people, often failing to take account of the wide range of cost factors that should be included in order to reach an accurate figure. Haigh (1992) has described the variety of methods employed by LEAs when allocating funding for special needs provision. Some LEAs and Training and Enterprise Councils use banding systems, placing young people in categories which also act as resourcing bands linked to the degree of intervention they require in order to join a particular programme or achieve a particular

set of goals. Advocates of the voucher system argue that this offers a way of ensuring that funding does reach the individual. It does not, however, resolve the associated difficulties of assessing need and calculating appropriate funding.

The range of disabling conditions and learning difficulties and their variable impact on the learning needs of young people tend to militate against the systematic categorisation of disability as a basis on which to consider possible funding levels (Touche Ross, 1990). The nature of a student's disability or learning difficulty is not necessarily a good indicator of the additional costs of the provision needed. When the Audit Commission (1993) sought to indicate the average annual cost of educating a student, they found a considerable variation, between £1000 and £7000, depending on the size of class and the degree of support a student required. Moreover, the costs associated with meeting individual needs may be strongly influenced by a range of external factors, and especially the quality of generally available provision.

From April 1994, funding for students with learning difficulties or disabilities will in future be linked to an assessment of their individual additional needs. Tying additional resources to individuals ensures that they are spent appropriately. In times of cash limits this is clearly an attractive proposition when faced with an open-ended concept of learning difficulties; that is, a continuum of needs. The position of low-incidence, high-cost learners within the proposed funding mechanism also requires consideration. They will require the support of staff who are highly qualified in a particular specialism as well as needing access to high quality facilities. One option might be, as the Touche Ross report on special schools recommended, that specialist provision be funded on places rather than according to individual disabling conditions, so that staff expertise is not dissipated and lost. There will always be a minimum level of support without which a student might not succeed on a particular course or programme, as well as a maximum level of support a student may need. If the level of available funding falls between the two, this creates a funding gap.

A study by Coopers and Lybrand (1993) of the costs involved in making mainstream education accessible to young people with disabilities, carried out for the National Union of Teachers and the Spastics Society, concluded that until research into per capita expenditure on pupils with different levels of special need in both special and mainstream schools has been carried out, it will be impossible to assess the cost of either existing or further progress towards integration. This applies to further education as much as it does to schools.

What causes funding to be provided?

Institutions require funding to make provision for current students and to cater for the support needs of future students. The funding they require should therefore be based on the cost of current commitments to students and on plans for supporting students in the future. Accurate assessments of both of these elements should in practice cause the funding to be provided. However, which of them should be the trigger for any additional funding, and on what basis, is the subject of debate as well as representing an area in need of further study (Audit Commission, 1993). The process of assessment and its relationship to funding is a highly complex matter and attempts at developing and implementing a simplified system for triggering extra resources have met with little

success (Nixon and Sands, 1993). As Vevers (1992) noted: 'Although the Warnock Report provided guidance for schools on methods of identifying pupils' special needs, it did not clearly identify the level of need in a child which should trigger extra attention in school. Neither did the 1981 Education Act identify in practical terms the level of need which should trigger a multi-disciplinary assessment.'

It is clearly vital that assessment mechanisms are in place and that there are professionals available with the skills to assess the wide variety of needs of young people and contribute to the overall assessment process. Institutions also need to develop information systems to support the calculation of funding requirements, and to incorporate such systems into their strategic planning schemes. It is a cause for concern that colleges do not always have the necessary information, or are even aware of its potential value or uses. Assessment of needs, provision and strategic planning are considerable tasks, incurring their own substantial costs. If such tasks are being undertaken with inadequate information, it must be concluded that human and financial resources are in effect being wasted. This, then suggests that research into the links between assessment and funding is now a matter of some urgency.

How is funding being monitored?

At any time, but more so when resources are scarce, it is important to ensure that funding reaches those who most need the support. Mechanisms for monitoring the use of resources are essential (Audit Commission 1992). In Lunt and Evans' (1993) opinion, they are the key to protecting the interests of students as well as the investment of the community. Nevertheless, a concern has been expressed in relation to the lack of accountability, at a number of levels, for funding (Audit Commission, 1992; Vevers, op. cit.).

There may be some tension between monitoring requirements and the need for flexibility in allocating funds at the college level. Dee (op. cit.) has discussed the possibility that colleges might need funding mechanisms which allow a flexible deployment of funds if they are to provide for a wide range of needs, which might vary over time or for any particular individual. The introduction of such flexibility does, however, place the onus on individual colleges to ensure the effective monitoring of funding allocations.

Questions concerning the adequacy of levels of funding, whether the concern is with the total amount of funding available for the support of young people with disabilities and/ or learning difficulties, with the level of funding made available to institutions, or with the amount allocated to an individual, can only be determined through monitoring and evaluation.

In terms of the general level of funding, issues arise out of competition for scarce resources and colleges putting forward an increasing number of learners for additional funding, thus decreasing the overall level of resources available for investment in general provision. Attaching funding to individuals limits the flexible use of resources; for example, shifting resources as a result of reviews or meeting late needs. The three-stage approach adopted by the FEFC may ease this problem.

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Issues of funding necessarily overlap with quality issues and support systems which are discussed in other sections of this document. In respect of efforts to explore these links in the context of further education, useful material does not seem to have been forthcoming from the research literature. Lunt and Evans (1993) have investigated ways of examining the use of resources and developing resource indicators as part of evaluation procedures, but that is in a school context. The particular context of further education demands specific investigation.

Does the funding system work?

To be considered effective, the funding system should work for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, for education providers and for the wider community. Students' interests lie in the quality of their educational experiences together with their progression and achievement. The Audit Commission (1992) expressed concern about the lack of accountability in special education for the degree of progress and achievement of young people. There is certainly a dearth of information on the attitudes and perceptions of young people themselves. For education providers their particular interests focus on how, when and on what basis they receive funds and whether it allows them to provide support in effective and efficient ways.

Topics of interest here include strategic planning arrangements and the need to know what funds are going to be made available in order to plan. There are also issues of quality of provision and the need to improve practice by building on knowledge and experience. That would, of course, be dependent on efforts made by academics and practitioners to encourage the spread of knowledge and information, and to share good practice. The wider community has a vested interest in how funding is used. At the local level it is important to know whether it is providing for the needs of the community, including the needs of local industry and employers. How their money is being spent and whether this is the best use of scarce resources are questions the wider community, both local and national, might legitimately ask of education providers, funding bodies and national policy makers. It would seem essential for information which addresses these questions to be available at all levels

A number of the questions posed above, particularly those concerned with monitoring and the evaluation of effectiveness, also reflect value for money considerations. Securing the future funding of support and provision for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties is highly dependent on the ability to delineate and analyse the links between funding mechanisms, levels of funding, patterns of allocation, development of provision and outcomes and to locate this in the context of the relationship between mainstream education and the additional needs of students; essentially what is spent, what it is spent on and what benefits it brings. In the United States, Lewis *et al.* (1988; 1990) have developed a framework for making a cost-benefit analysis of educational provision for young people with learning difficulties. They found that it was possible to assess the efficiency of special education services by focusing on 'the usage of resources in relationship to outcomes', while also taking into account non-quantifiable benefits such as increased self-esteem and post-education outcomes. They suggest that it may well be possible to assess the relative efficiency of different models of provision using a framework of this kind.

Funding must be an essential consideration in any plans to improve practice, possibly determining the extent and sometimes the nature of provision. McGinty and Fish (1992) have emphasised the need for a coherent pattern of provision which is relevant to young people. They welcome a centralised system of funding as a possible step towards developing a coherent national policy for the provision of additional educational support for young people. The principle of providing for the additional needs of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties may on the surface appear a fairly simple matter; either there is recognition that this should be done or there is not. As indicated earlier in this section, it seems that there is now a fairly widespread consensus that it should be provided. Problems appear when any aspect of funding provision other than the application of this basic principle is under discussion.

The literature demonstrates that when it comes to questions of who, why, what for and how, the overall consensus rapidly disappears. The views and interpretations of the various stake holders differ. Funding bodies, education policy makers, college administrators and managers, college staff at all levels, students, peers, parents, the local community, voluntary groups, campaigning groups, other agencies, potential employers — there are many stake holders, each with a potentially different answer to the questions of what should be provided, how it should be provided and so on. In such a situation decisions relating to the calculation, prioritisation and monitoring of funding take on an additional complexity. The literature does not offer any real assistance in reconciling the obvious tension between the ideal of creating provision in which all flourish and the need to control and target funding. What it does do is to suggest a number of priority areas for investigation and the sorts of methodology that might be effective in addressing these.

V SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Support lies at the heart of the relationship between students and educational institutions. The kind of support a college is prepared to offer will be influenced by its philosophical stance with regard to equal opportunities which should be made clear in the college's mission statement (FEU, 1990). This in turn will determine the model of support adopted by the institution and also translate into specific action planning as laid out in the college development plan, and into planned procedures for conducting evaluation and monitoring of the type and level of support that is made.

The scale and effectiveness of support provision can play a large part in determining the quality of the experience of young people as they pass through further education. Indeed, it is often argued that the presence of appropriate support systems will inevitably make the difference between encouraging or discouraging potential students to enrol at a particular college and to embark on particular programmes of study.

Yet the potential significance of support is not reflected in the research literature. Rather, the evidence suggests that, alongside funding with which it is inextricably linked, support is possibly the least researched aspect of special needs in further education. There are no studies of what determines effective support, of the ramifications of indirect and direct support needs and provision, of the kind of support needed in various circumstances, of students' views of support provision, nor in fact of whether support makes any difference. This latter is assumed to be true. Much of the work referred to in this section has been undertaken in the school sector. The only area that has received any degree of attention is the staffing aspect of support provision, mainly as related to professional development and the changing role of the special needs coordinator, although some attention has been paid in recent years to gaining a clearer understanding of what, is implied by the term 'learning support'.

Defining support

The Further Education Unit has offered a definition of learning support as 'a college-wide approach to meeting the individual needs of a wide variety of learners, including those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties' (FEU, 1992). This definition confirmed the increasingly predominant view that support systems should provide for all students, as all have needs which education should be designed to address. It also reflected a shift in concern from the aim of catering for individual needs in what were largely segregated locations to that of providing support in integrated or inclusive environments.

While carrying out research into the provision of learning support in further education, Corbett and Myers (1993b) found that what they referred to as 'learning support', and what appears to be fairly similar kinds of provision, was described by practitioners under a variety of terms: learner service centre; drop-in workshop; flexible learning centre; open learning centre; study support centre; specialist workshop; communications workshop; essential skills workshop; study skills centre; student resource centre; and flexible support. Most favoured a workshop type approach, although the findings to date suggest that efficiency in making provision is determined more by operational factors than by the particular model adopted.

In attempting to clarify students' possible support needs, the Further Education Unit (1992) distinguishes between *learning support* as the additional support which is required to enable students to learn more effectively through increasing their access to the curriculum, and *learner support* which describes those facilities needed by individuals to enable their full participation in programmes or courses of study and gives them the opportunity to acquire the status of a learner. Examples of the latter include child care facilities, information on financial support and personal counselling. Support is, then, not only concerned with learning needs, but also with those contextual factors which allow the learner to attend college and to exercise choice.

Developing models of support

A good deal of discussion in the literature has concerned itself with the philosophical underpinnings of support provision, tackling issues such as integration and inclusion. The development and implementation of actual models of support have been left to the school sector, where greater advances are felt to have been made (Greenway, 1992). Dumbleton (1993) discusses the general failure of further education to develop support in the same way as has been achieved in schools, observing that few colleges have well-established systems for learning support. On the other hand, two reports by HMI (1989; 1992) provided little evidence of the supposed advances in the school sector, describing variable practice in providing support, little clear policy direction, inadequate guidance and counselling, especially concerning post-16 options, poor management of services, and poor monitoring and record keeping. The extent to which the school sector might provide models of support systems that might be adapted for use in further education could, then, be seen as arguable.

It has in any case been suggested that models developed in the school sector have not transfered to the FHE context. Baker and Blanding (1986), in their study of the experiences of young people with disabilities moving from school to college, they found that those providing services often made very broad, simplistic assumptions about these young people, notably that they are passive and need help at all times. This manifested itself in the tendency for concerned members of staff to offer help on a one-to-one basis. A lack of effective, college-wide support services posed a major problem for the young people in their study who, on moving to colleges, found themselves dealing with situations very different from those they had experienced at school. The absence of well-organised support made settling in difficult for new students and often resulted in previous academic achievement being ignored. Kincer's (1991) research in the United States also shows the presence of centralised support services to be a significant aid in helping young people with disabilities adjust to the new demands of post-secondary education. The discussion of work on transition elsewhere in this document intimates that whereas schools and colleges could be providing a continuity of support to ease the passage from school to college, they have clearly been failing to do so. The medium through which this continuity would be provided are the support systems or services available in schools and colleges.

The role and requirements of support systems would seem to be as complex as students' needs. Boxer (1990) argues that a support system should 'enable the resolution of any problems which arise', while Brisenden (1989) states that they should 'be geared towards truly adult requirements'. Such definitions are as nebulous as they are all-encompassing

and offer little guidance to those attempting to implement relevant systems. Boxer does, however, go on to make the case for involving students themselves in the design and development of support provision. While this would seem an obvious way of identifying and ensuring the delivery of appropriate support, it is not common practice.

More than ten years ago Bradley and Hegarty (1983) commented on the failure of further education to make provision for support across the whole range of disabilities. Meeting the support needs of students with low-incidence, high-cost disabilities and/or learning difficulties remains a particularly problematic area. Carpenter (1992) has expressed concern at the lack of research into the experiences of young people with multiple disabilities in post-16 education and increasing unease about the paucity of provision for

Implications for professional development

It is widely acknowledged that all college staff have their particular role to play in supporting students who have disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The DES FE Special Needs Teacher Training Working Group recommended the creation of a wide range of development opportunities for staff at all levels within the FE system (DES, 1987), and a number of staff development resource packages have been produced to support this work (see, for example, Bradley, Dee and Hegarty, 1985; Harris and Faraday, 1989; NFER, 1992). Despite these various initiatives, it is worrying to note that a recent study by NATFHE (1993) found that in more than two-thirds of the colleges responding to their survey, it was reported that available opportunities for professional development did not match all identified needs.

When examining the degree of contact and attitudes of staff towards students with special needs at a college of further education in the south of England, Shimman (1990) found that, only half of the survey respondents reported having any contact with these students. The majority of those who did have contact displayed positive attitudes, but the general lack of contact and awareness gave cause for concern. Teachers may be apprehensive about the prospect of working with young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, and so need 'careful preparation' (Hanrahan, 1990). Having to deal with young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties can cause tensions among staff, as Corbett (1983) found in her study of provision at Fraser College. Staff development programmes, according to Harris and Clift (1988), should encourage teachers in special needs and those in the mainstream to be aware of each other's culture, aiming to draw special needs into the wider culture of further education. Teachers on training courses for work in special needs may exert a positive influence on other members of staff by raising the profile of this area of work, and even becoming agents for change in policy and practice (Hegarty and Moses, 1988). Sharing the experiences of teachers who themselves have disabilities has been found to be a useful addition to teacher training programmes in the United States (Keller, 1992), yet this is something that remains largely unexplored in this country.

One of the obstacles to professional development may be the difficulty in identifying service development needs in the face of a large number of possible disabling conditions (Miller and Watts, 1990). For this reason, among others, staff at any institution are likely to have a range of training needs, depending on individual interests or experience (Radcliffe, 1992). Information collected from special needs coordinators by Corbett and Myers (1993b) shows that it is not always clear who in a college decides on priorities for staff development, and on what basis. This is despite the widespread recognition that this role should be performed by senior college managers.

A support system or service in a college, like any operational system, has to be managed. A report by HMI (1989) observed that, although practice was variable, the role of special needs teachers did appear to be changing from one of direct teaching to advising and supporting other staff, and increasingly taking on a number of administrative tasks. In the further education context, research has recently become more attentive to the work and role of the special needs coordinator in managing and developing support provision.

Barton and Corbett (1993) make the point that a general move from integration to inclusion together with a corresponding change in the philosophy of colleges and the

consequent structural alterations required in the way services are delivered, should result in significant role changes for special needs coordinators. Others who have looked at this change in roles in relation to the provision of support services include Clough and Lindsay (1991). A good deal of discussion has also revealed a growing concern about the possible future roles of special needs coordinators, as in the exchange between Butt (1991) and Dyson (1991) — on the one hand predicting their decline and disappearance, and on the other their need to adapt to new circumstances in further education if they are to survive. Suggestions for possible future roles lie in the direction of learning consultancy or coordinating the individual development opportunities of staff and students.

Whatever the future holds for special needs coordinators, the fact remains that at present they play a significant part in providing effective support for students. Lavender (1993) describes how the introduction of a learning support coordinator for psychological support at a college in Norfolk resulted in the development of a Learning Support Team which not only made provision across the college but was able to offer a service to other providers unable to afford their own support provision of this type.

If coordinators are seen as standing at the centre of 'a series of overlapping networks' (Corbett and Barton, op. cit.), boundary management must become a critical issue for them — something which also arises in relation to the roles of the tutor, the learning support specialist and the external specialist, both in terms of cross-college relationships and in terms of liaison with external agencies and voluntary organisations. Students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties may find that they can obtain support from external organisations as in the case of the JET project described by Harper (1992), or from organisations such as RNID or RNIB, whose efforts in this respect are well documented (RNIB, 1986; 1988). Internal initiatives may also require careful supervision. The voluntary partner scheme at Richmond-upon-Thames Tertiary College, which matches students with and without learning difficulties as a way of providing support, is a good example (Hayhoe, 1992). The attention now being paid to the need for individual development plans for students, especially in terms of programming transition arrangements, has support systems playing an indispensable role (McGinty and Fish, 1992; Sailor, 1989; Wehman, 1988, 1992).

Development plans and effective transition arrangements require a clear identification of areas of responsibility for the provision of support throughout each transitional stage. There are likely to be major coordinating tasks both within and across stages, as well as for the process in its entirety. In addition, Foster and Walter (1992) have emphasised at the importance of properly resourcing programmes and the possible involvement of support staff in bidding for funds, or in responding to requests that they attempt to anticipate future service demands and estimate resource needs. All of these factors, some of them highly complex, are likely to mean additional burdens for special needs coordinators, as well as raising more questions about the need to clarify their role and spheres of activity.

A number of other staff issues have received some attention in the literature including the support needs of part-time tutors (Avery Hill College, 1985); the problems of stress and burnout among staff working with young people with disabilities, (Cartwright, 1988) and the use of consultant teachers and team teaching, along with the general notion

of using consultation as a resource in this field (Jones, 1987). Staff status has been the subject of several studies. Matthews and Austin (1992) describe their experience of changing the name of care assistants to 'student support assistants' in recognition of the fact that their role was much wider in practice than just providing care assistance and that their status in this respect deserved recognition. In this country, special needs tutors are often given responsibility but no corresponding seniority (Corbett, 1986) whereas, according to Rodbard (1990), special education staff in Holland 'are perceived as being better qualified, better trained, more skilled, better able to cope and generally more competent than their mainstream counterparts'.

The levels of support that a college can and should provide depend on a number of factors, notably the conceptual model adopted and funding that is available. Staff, as the literature shows, are a vital element in the provision of support. Thus, factors affecting staff will have ramifications for the quality of support provided; whether it is the type of training and the nature of support that staff themselves are able to access, the stress and strain they experience in their work, the way their area of work is perceived, or their views on whether their status is commensurate with their roles and responsibilities.

Monitoring and evaluation

Aspects of funding and quality are considered in other sections of this document. In the case of funding, the problems associated with costing support are fundamental, as indeed are the methods adopted for monitoring and evaluating the quality of support provided. While, given appropriate funding, strategies for monitoring direct support are relatively clear, monitoring aspects of indirect support require a more substantial input of time and effort. This would apply, for instance, to policy development, curriculum development and staff development. The research literature is not as yet sufficiently developed to offer guidance on best practice in these areas.

Earlier it was mentioned that support systems need to be as complex as students' needs, but there is very little evidence of how the relationship between needs and provision is determined, or how support systems operate in practice. Corbett and Myers (1993) found that support systems often consist of provision that already exists being pulled together under a single banner. They appear when the need arises in response to a particular demand or identified need currently in view, rather than being established as permanent provision. Permanent and responsive provision is likely to be a greater encouragement to the potential student. As in other areas that have been investigated, the student perspective is missing. Greenway (1992) carried out a small-scale study at a college of further education comparing staff views of students' needs and the support they provided with students' own views of their support needs and their feelings about the support on offer, only to find that students' observations and perceptions of support merely served to confuse rather than illuminate the relationship between needs and support. A body of research that would provide the necessary illumination is a vital component in the development of provision for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties that is urgently required.

VI   QUALITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

During the 1980s the major task for colleges was to extend access and develop provision for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. In the 1990s there is just as much concern about ensuring the quality of existing provision as there is about increasing opportunities still further. As Dumbleton (1994) notes: 'This probably reflects both the growing maturity of the provision and the general climate of further education, where quality issues are second only to funding issues and are increasingly being linked to them.'

Defining quality

Elliott (1993) believes that discussions of quality are not always couched within a clear conceptual framework. This is a view shared by Muller and Funnell (1991), who feel that although the term 'quality' is now widely used and felt to be recognisable, there is in practice no evidence of a general consensus either on what constitutes quality or on how it can be measured. They identify two core meanings: quality as aspiration and effectiveness in the ability to achieve the aspiration; and quality as the combination of effectiveness and efficiency, particularly within financial constraints. Two very broad perceptions of quality adopted in the literature are, on the one hand, that it is a system, and on the other, that it is something understood only through the eyes of practitioners. In practice there may be a tension between these two perceptions as individual value systems will be instrumental in determining views of quality.

HMI (1992) have stipulated that quality assurance is now a high priority. In terms of the further education experiences of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties this should encompass the quality of all experiences while at college. These include: the course programme; social experiences; support and outcomes; transition into, during and out of college; as well as students' levels of achievement and progression both throughout and following the time spent at college. The links with assessment are significant, as the assessment of students' needs and their progress towards desired objectives should go hand in hand with the evaluation of the provision on offer within the FE sector.

The FEU (1991) emphasises assessment as the key to quality of provision; 'the need for FE colleges to look to efficiency and effectiveness, and the need to improve participation and attainment, are inescapable. Educational ideas and economic realities are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as long as appropriate changes in organisational and curricula management, and in teaching and learning can be effected. This in turn, depends significantly on the models for and approaches to change and quality which are adopted by colleges and LEAs. It also depends upon where the improvement of the curriculum, of teaching, of learning and of attainment sits in relation to those models and approaches.'

Quality models devised for or adopted by FE colleges tend to be underpinned by three inter-linked concepts: fitness for purpose; the ongoing pursuit of excellence; and the requirement to meet students' needs as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. They depend on strong and visible leadership from senior management, the active and informed support of all staff, and the participation of students in the process of evaluation

and development. Muller and Funnell (op. cit.) suggest that 'the essence of the quality approach to management is in providing products which meet the exact specifications of the customer'. In further education there may be a number of customers or clients with a vested interest in the college's products, such as funding bodies, students and employers. However, Thomson (1988) contends that: 'Client satisfaction is a single factor from a broad range which college management and teaching staff must take into account when assessing the quality and appropriateness of their courses, systems and services.'

Discussing the quality of services for people with learning difficulties, Bradley and Bersani (1990) make the following comment: 'Quality assurance might be seen as a procedure to compensate for imperfect checks and balances in the mental retardation service system.' Funders, providers and consumers all require assurances, and the evaluation procedures employed in making those assurances can be used to help maintain service gains, offer feedback to providers and communicate expectations of service delivery. They also underline the danger of allowing minimum quality standards to determine optimum levels of practice. Commenting on the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century*, NATFHE (1991) has stated: 'Quality measurement and quality assurance must use equal opportunities and improved access and progression as their central yardsticks for assessment of the system's performance. Equal opportunities policy at national and regional Council level and at the level of TECs and institutions must provide appropriately for among others people with special educational needs, not only statemented school leavers, but those with a wide range of physical or mental disability, acknowledging further and adult education's role in assimilating them into society.'

Assessing quality

The literature offers evidence of an increasing concern with progression in the education of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. After studying the difficulties experienced by young people with disabilities in accessing YTS programmes, Dick (1987) concluded that 'what young disabled people require more than anything else is a visible ladder of progression and a personal route plan'; neither were evident in YTS where the situation has been likened to a maze. In NATFHE's 1993 survey of provision at FE colleges 83 per cent of respondents referred to the existence of routes of progression of some sort at their college, but there is no indication that these were clearly defined in relation to young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Cooper (1993) suggests that routes of progression are now clearer, but that provision for ensuring progression remains inadequate. One of the acknowledged progression routes is from general to specific programmes but, in the case of students with disabilities, Beazley and Baillie (1988) claim that progression often means simply moving from outside to within mainstream educational institutions.

Apart from a general agreement about the importance of progression as an indicator of quality, there seems to be some confusion about what appertains to measurable outcomes of education and training. The emphasis is frequently placed on seeking to add as much value as possible to students' skills, knowledge and experiences within available resources. For students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, the issue of what constitutes 'value added' and the sorts of areas that should be taken into account is in need

of particular consideration. Possibilities that have been explored include a young person's quality of life (Segal, 1990), building an effective person (FEU, 1989), attainment of employment together with other aspects of adult status (Riddell, 1993), personal growth and increased self-confidence (Walley, 1990), social and vocational competences (Detraux and Dens, 1992), degree of employability (Kings Fund, 1984, 1985), skill generalisation and transferability (Haring, 1988) and the generalisation of leisure skills (Vanderlook, 1991).

Siegel (1992) identifies a tension between the use of job attainment and quality of life considerations as the most appropriate criteria for assessing outcomes. He does, however, see a need for rigorous documentation of 'those instructional procedures that lead to the acquisition, generalisation and maintenance of a wide range of occupational and social skills'. Such an approach obviously implies that clear definitions of occupational and social skills are readily available — an implication that is contested by Chadsey-Rush (1992). If it is indeed the case that widely accepted definitions do not exist, this clearly represents a fundamental problem. Outcomes have to be measurable in some way if provision is to be evaluated and opportunities maximised. Gaylord-Ross and Chadsey-Rush (1991) stress the need for more than one strategy to measure outcomes, particularly given the complexity of employment environments. They feel, as do others, that follow-up is essential in order for provision and programmes for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties to be properly evaluated.

The view of Barton and Corbett (1993) is that education should not be outcome oriented or competitive but have equal value for all, while (Barton 1988) has expressed concerns about the desirability of using the development of social competence as an aim of education. Adopting this perspective necessarily shifts the focus away from outcomes and towards the curriculum. FEU (1991) defined quality as being concerned with 'the curriculum in its widest sense, with its resourcing, its delivery and its management and with the access, participation, learning and attainment opportunities afforded'. The FEU has also produced material on curriculum entitlement which suggests that the curriculum should provide appropriate learning opportunities, as well as opportunities for all learners to establish and develop a recognised competence base of knowledge, skills, and experience sufficient to facilitate progression into employment, FE, training and other roles and an understanding of the local and national economic and social environment to promote an appreciation the variety of adult roles in society. In developing performance indicators for measuring the quality of the curriculum, HMI (1990) have suggested that attention be paid to relevance, access, responsiveness, appropriateness of learning and teaching approaches and standards.

In the NATFHE (op. cit.) survey mentioned above, just over half of the colleges responding carried out an assessment of the quality of integrated learning, but in very few cases was this a formal procedure. The Responsive College Programme has attempted to assess student satisfaction with colleges and courses using SPOC/EPOC frameworks and questionnaires. The Programme stresses the importance of gathering feedback on client satisfaction as an essential component of quality assurance

The need for evaluation of provision by the students themselves receives substantial coverage in the literature and not only in relation to quality, although the advent of quality considerations has afforded the student role in evaluation greater prominence. In higher

education it is relatively common for institutions to have developed strategies for gathering information from their students. This tradition is less prevalent in the FE sector and especially so for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. It may, however, become more common in the wake of the Further Education Students' Charter (1993). Describing provision at a further education college in Croydon, Sutcliffe (1992) concluded that in evaluating curriculum provision college management have to consider whether students are offered a genuine range of choices; whether learning groups are integrated; whether students are consulted and involved in development of programmes; and whether students who cannot advocate for themselves are accommodated. The FEU (op. cit.) also suggest that the curriculum should provide a basis for learners to increase their self-awareness, to appraise realistically their potential and prospects and to become progressively responsible for negotiating their own personal development.

It has been argued that if colleges wish to pay greater attention to the role of the curriculum in promoting student development and increasing the participation of students with disabilities and/or learning disabilities, then the notion of value-addedness may be more appropriate than the idea of 'fitness for purpose' (Muller and Funnel, op. cit.), especially in terms of the longer term impact on the learner. The aim of the curriculum should be that 'learners fully participate in, and contribute to, the learning process in such a way that they become responsible for creating, delivering and evaluating the product'. Muller and Funnel identify five criteria for establishing a quality curriculum: that it recognises the centrality of the learner; that to some extent the learner takes ownership of the learning process; that the learner has some responsibility for helping define the style and mode of delivery; that learners participate outside the formal learning process; and that learners experiment and learn from failure as well as success. This last point challenges the 'zero defect' notion in Total Quality Management, which probably makes it too inflexible a concept for work with young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Poteet (1993) suggests that it is important that students become involved in every aspect of curriculum development including assessment, that they should be testing what is taught as well as monitoring their own progress. Studies by Muller and Funnel (op. cit.) and Muller (1993) have explored the potential gains from the incorporation of evaluation into the ongoing process of curriculum development, of bringing learners and tutors together 'in such a way that their exploration of the learning process can have an immediate impact upon the curriculum' rather than relying on a model of curriculum development through retrospective evaluation and analysis. Thus, questions of quality would be pursued throughout the learning process. Modular programmes would seem to provide a useful framework for developing such an approach. The experiences and perceptions of learners can be a critical component in the effective operationalisation of quality. Where evaluation leads to changes in future curriculum design, the learner might play a central part in identifying and working towards building in quality as part of those changes.

If the student is to occupy a central position in the process of quality assurance, then the creation of opportunities for students to make contributions must be a vital consideration. Professionals working with young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties tend to focus their efforts on developing the independence of young people and on encouraging self-advocacy. Students' participation in evaluation is a logical next step.

A study of sex education programmes for young people with learning difficulties by Lawrence and Swain (1993), exploring the extent to which students were empowered to make informed choices, highlighted the importance of involving young people in the evaluation process. In this particular case, involvement was seen as a way of achieving emancipation in an area of significant personal relationships. Barnett's (1991) view is that education should 'look to enable those going through it to be able to stand on their own two feet, to be articulate about their thoughts and experiences' but that students themselves rarely press for quality. Achieving quality in the learning experience may mean that the 'claims of the largely silent students have to take the centre ground' but, as Barnett suggests, this has major implications for management in that it would require 'a paradigm shift in the way institutions are managed'.

For some students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties participation may depend on the efforts of their advocates or on the existence of programmes designed to develop self-advocacy skills. Williams and Schultz (1982) in their study of self-advocacy projects in Nebraska and Clare's (1990) research both underlined the importance of self-advocacy among students being accompanied by appropriate professional development for staff. Building empowerment skills has considerable implications for relationships with members of staff. Sutcliffe (1990 1993) has gathered views and examples of practice from provider organisations and colleges throughout the country to produce guides for disseminating good practice in developing self-advocacy programmes.

The impact of self-advocacy developments on parents has been explored by Wertheimer (1989), who also considers the wider aspects of parental involvement. The role of parents and carers in this context is ambivalent. It has been suggested (McGinty and Fish, 1992) that while parents may be informed about students' learning and support programmes, they are rarely consulted about the content, aims and objectives of such programmes, and opinions differ as to how far parents and carers should be expected to contribute to evaluations of quality.

Other issues that have received attention in the literature largely concern the position of staff. Improvements in teacher training and professional development are seen by Tilstone and Upton (1993) as the most effective way of improving the quality of provision. Simpson (1993) maintains that quality assurance for young people with disabilities is the responsibility of all members of staff, and not just those designated as having a particular responsibility in this area. However, Bersani's (1988) research in the United States has indicated a possible conflict of interest for staff in developing quality assurance mechanisms, as they try to accommodate their responsibilities to clients and to the institution.

Quality considerations overlap with funding where quality evaluation might be used to provide information for developing funding criteria (Muller and Funnell, op. cit.). Also on the subject of funding, Bersani (op. cit.) points to 'the dilemma of assuring the health and development of quality services in a context of heavy handed, top-down monitoring by service funders', especially where consumers are disempowered. Holmes (1993) argues that education generally is overly preoccupied with quality linked to performance appraisal and management techniques, that this a consequence of the influence of the commercial sector and that quality assurance in the educational context is 'a sacrificial lamb on the altar of managerialism.'

A study recently undertaken on behalf of FEU (Stoney and Sims, 1992) found that quality initiatives have to date focused on effecting improvement in management approaches, college systems and service, and working relationships. Despite the emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, evidence was not yet available in colleges on levels of enhanced student participation, attainment and satisfaction.

VII   THE TRANSITION PROCESS

The transition from school to adult life has long been a topic of major concern. Halpern (1992) describes transition as, 'a period of floundering that occurs for at least the first several years after leaving school as adolescents attempt to assume a variety of adult roles in their communities'.

Societal models for the 1990s and beyond differ in emphasis and implications. They do, however, converge on two fundamental assumptions: firstly, that preparation for transition must be not solely for working life, but for adult life as a whole; and, secondly, that such preparation must begin in the final years of schooling and follow a logical progression through further and continuing education and training (FEU, 1987; OECD, 1990). The major OECD/CERI (1986a; b) study on transition suggested that goals for this preparation should be set in four broad areas:

* employment, useful work and valued activity;
* personal autonomy, independent living and adult status;
* social interaction, community participation, leisure and recreation;
* adult roles within the family.

While it is clear that these goals apply in principle to all young people, it is also apparent that certain groups are more vulnerable and may encounter particular difficulties in moving towards them (Hutchinson and Tennyson, 1986).

The role of the support services

For young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties there is now a strongly held belief that transition is likely to be accompanied by service inputs of some kind. The more appropriate and effective the relevant service input, the less problematic the transition process should be for the individual and the greater the potential for a successful outcome. According to Clark and Hirst (1989), while services do not guarantee a successful outcome, they can at least clarify and assist in negotiating the various options. Most aspects of the transition process, particularly service involvement, have been debated in Europe and in the United States, in the latter case on the basis of a considerable research effort.

Education is only one of the relevant services. It does, however, play a major part in young people's lives up to school leaving age and must take on the task of setting the transition process in train before pupils reach the age of 16. In relation to young people with learning difficulties, Ludlow (1988) argues that professionals must assume responsibility for the development of transition plans, selecting appropriate transition training goals and strategies that 'address each individual's unique needs, preferences and communities'. After school leaving age, young people may opt to remain in education. Statistics show that a growing number are moving into further education, and in this respect, Siperstein (1988) describes a three-stage transition model which takes account of entering college, managing college and leaving college for employment or higher education. Even those who opt for the 'world of work' immediately after school may find further education playing a part in their lives through training courses.

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For many young people, education will cease to make any input once they leave school. In their case the critical factor in transition must be preparation for leaving, at least in ensuring that they have easily accessible information about post-school options (Bryant, 1990). Some of those who opt for further education may find that they then move into higher education which presents another transition stage and another set of challenges. The literature shows a growing concern with understanding education's role in supporting and influencing transition, as well as with identifying the stages of transition and appropriate points of service intervention in to support young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

It is often said that at points of transition, inequalities between individuals are brought to the fore. A study of people with disabilities over the age of 25 by Clark and Hirst (op. cit.) found that their disabilities had affected both the timing and sequence of transition to adult status, often limiting and sometimes preventing that transition. This may well be the experience of young people with severe multiple disabilities and/or learning difficulties who could find themselves denied adult status. McBride and Ward (1991) suggest that 'the difficulties experienced by young people with special needs in the transition from school to adulthood are not necessarily inherent in their disability or learning difficulty'. Although it may be assumed that transition is easier for those who have mild disabilities, Neubert's (1989) research produced no evidence to support this; instead it showed a high level of need for support and intervention.

The importance of preparing young people for transition while still at school has been highlighted by a number of studies. Ragosta's (1987) analysis of data on 10,000 American students who left school between 1979 and 1983 found that post-16 experiences were more closely linked to school experiences than to any other factor. Research into the post-school experiences of young people with physical disabilities by Summerson (1988) indicated a desperate need for effective pre-leaving curricula. Hubbard and Martin's (1990) longitudinal study of 77 school leavers with multiple disabilities found evidence of a strong link between their subsequent quality of life and the support they had received up to leaving. Work by Morton (1982), Bookis (1983) and Corrie (1984), among others, has also emphasised the significance of pre-leaving preparation in determining post-16 development and experiences. However, Edgar (1987) contends that school-based programmes have little effect on adjustment to adult life: a view that must give cause for concern about the evaluation of their aims, delivery and outcomes.

Opinions differ as to the priorities for these programmes. As far as leaving school is concerned, emphasis has been placed on providing guidance to counteract what Hirst (1983) refers to as the 'uncertainty and disruption experienced before and after leaving school' and what Hughes and May (1985) term a 'context of confusion'. Johnstone (1988) suggests the use of social skills training in preparing young people for life after school, Durlak (1992) believes self-determination is the most important asset. Mittler and Buckingham (1987) propose 'getting ready to leave workshops and support groups' to encourage young people with disabilities to become involved in decisions affection their future lives, rather than remain passive in the face of change. They do, however, recognise that such participation is extremely difficult to achieve. Many of the young people with physical and sensory disabilities involved in Hirst's (1985) study felt that their schools should have done more to prepare them for leaving, but Hirst notes that a shortage of resources, such as skilled professionals, made it difficult for schools to

establish and run formal leavers programmes or to carry out effective pre-leaving assessments. In Scotland, implementation of the Future Needs Assessment Programme seems to have achieved considerable progress in terms of transition planning and support (Banks, 1993). This has been encouraged partly by legislation but also by recommendations for transitional arrangements made by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (1987), one of which referred to the importance of making pupils fully aware of impending transition. Issues around transition have been examined in research by Ward *et al.* (1991) although questions have been raised about the validity of their findings (see Jackson, 1993).

In terms of moving into further education, Prout (1993) maintains that students are likely to be concerned about making the adjustment from school to college, the type of curriculum they will find and their personal and social relationships. The majority of students leaving special school for post-secondary education in Liebert *et al's.* (1991) study said that they had not been adequately prepared for the new environment. Both the FEU (1988) and Prout (op. cit.) stress the need for colleges to recognise and accommodate the particular transitional challenges faced by young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, especially in the provision of pastoral care support. Transition arrangements to support progression from school to further education were found to be particularly important in Tomkins and Carpenter's (1990) study of a small group of young people with severe disabilities.

Closer liaison between schools and colleges in providing continuity of support is critical. Sarkees and Scott (1985) have looked at the barriers to co-operation between school and college, including difficulties in sharing education records and the reluctance of post-secondary education staff to adapt to students with disabilities. Similar aspects of co-operation between school and college have been explored by Cooper (1989), Corbett (1989) and Dee (1993) in the setting up of link courses, where it was found that an additional problem lay in the establishment of lines of responsibility for curriculum planning and delivery.

Many people who have disabilities and/or learning difficulties require more support than their peers and many different agencies and individuals are potentially involved in providing this support. Both Johnson (1987) and Baginsky and Bradley (1992) have explored the role, and stressed the importance, of interagency collaboration in providing transition services and support. However, a major problem for many young people with disabilities is achieving continuity of support, or even maintaining the interest of service providers once they pass the age of compulsory schooling. This problem is examined in the next section of this review, which also notes the difficulties experienced by researchers in maintaining contact with young people after leaving school. This was the experience of Anderson and Clark (1982) who in attempting a three-year longitudinal study of 119 young people with disabilities, to cover the last year at school and the following two years, were only able to find 51 once they left school. Freshwater and Leyden (1989) encountered the same problem in tracking down members of a small group of school leavers with moderate learning difficulties attending special schools once they had left, leading them to comment that 'the very considerable success of special schools in valuing and developing their pupils up to the age of 16+ is in stark contrast to the lack of education or work, and therefore of support and encouragement available to most of them beyond that age'. In Richardson's (1988) study of young people in

Aberdeen the lack of support at the time of leaving school and afterwards is a prominent feature, although the findings do indicate that the majority of young people did in fact find employment without any service input.

Clark and Hirst (1989) have remarked on the difficulties resulting from the absence of a coherent set of policies covering the transition years, a problem which seems to be shared by other countries (Soder, 1984; Hultkvuist, 1991; OECD, op. cit.). In the USA, Benz and Halpern (1987) found discrepancies among participating organisations over who was responsible for transitional planning, while in New South Wales Knox and Parmenter (1990) found that although all of the agencies involved in transition believed that providers should be concerned with all aspects of a young person's life in practice there was no clear linkage among them, particularly between schools and community agencies.

Individual transition plans

The formulation and implementation of individual transition plans is likely to be critical. Transition must be seen as a total process that unites all four of the elements identified in the OECD/CERI work, while being both coherent and continuous (FEU, 1989). This is a topic which has received considerable attention in the United States, particularly in the work of Wehman and colleagues (1985; 1992). Spruill (1993) has emphasised that the transition process should start early by drawing up an individual plan before the pupil reaches the age of sixteen. Everson and Goodall (1991) have identified the five main steps for developing individual transition plans as: convening a planning team; developing personal profiles; specifying desired employment objectives and activities; implementing transition objectives and activities; and subsequently monitoring, evaluating and revising those objectives and activities. According to Madden (1993), coherent individual planning for young people can only take place within the context of strategic planning involving all those concerned. It should take a holistic, needs-led approach, as well as being open and comprehensive, ensuring continuity.

The DFE's Draft Code of Practice (1993) reflects most of these concerns, suggesting that the Annual Review two years before leaving school should include a Transition Plan, 'which will draw together information from a range of individuals within and beyond the school in order to plan coherently for the young person's transition to adult life'. Furthermore, that the Transition Plan should 'cover all aspects of the young person's development, allocating clear responsibility for different aspects of development to specific agencies and professionals'.

Achieving coherence and continuity depends on the provision of a broadly based curriculum which is supported by guidance and counselling and which spans the key transitional points. Thus, curricula in the final years of schooling should progress logically to vocational and work preparation courses beyond school. These, in turn, should be combined with initiatives designed to enhance employment opportunities and to ensure that types and levels of support are effectively matched to individual requirements. As McGinty and Fish (1992) have argued, approaches to transition must change from a service-led to a needs-led model. In the United States Fairweather and Shaver's (1991) study of 1,242 17-year-olds with disabilities found that more young people were moving into vocational education than anything else and the same seems

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to be true of this country. Banbury (1984), Nield (1987) and Cobbold (1987) have all discussed the increasing significance of vocational training and preparation as part of the transition to adult life in this country. It is, however, clear that the Government is expecting the TECs to take a major role in planning and coordinating local activities in this area.

Although the OECD/CERI (op. cit.) has stated that preparation for adult life should not be concerned solely with working life, it would seem that employment related outcomes have largely been adopted as the measure of programme success. Studies of transition such as those by Walker (1982) and Hirst (1983) have served to emphasise employment outcomes, particularly the possibility of unsatisfactory occupations or unemployment for young people with disabilities. Examining the position of young people with disabilities after leaving school, Ling (1990) found that those who were unemployed experienced noticeable deterioration in their psycho-social condition. Research in the United States by Hasazi (1989) and by Shapiro and Lentz (1992) has found a high correlation between high employment rates and pre-leaving vocational training in schools and colleges, together with a strong relationship between jobs and the foci of training programmes. Yet, on the other hand, as an outcome of their research Knox and Parmenter (op. cit.) have noted the lack of attention paid to the range of possible alternative outcomes. One approach may be that suggested by Riddell et al. (1993), to establish adult 'markers', as identified by those aspiring to those markers, to help plan transition and measure outcomes. Both Jackson (1984) and Shalock (1986) have discussed the difficulties in establishing predictive indicators, stressing the need to research the nature of outcome measures and whose view or interpretation of outcome is most important.

In these circumstances employment outcomes appear to have been adopted as the most convenient rather than the most relevant measure, and this may in turn determine the expectations of young people. Closs's (1988) study of the career perceptions of young people with disabilities indicates the need for further work in this area. The dangers of promoting unrealistic expectations was highlighted in a study by May and Hughes (1985) which revealed young people with moderate learning difficulties adjusting from expectations of employment to the likelihood of 'a series of short-lived placements on various government sponsored schemes of dubious meaning and value, punctuated by successive and growing periods of unemployment as they move beyond the range of emergency measures set up to assist the post-school transition'.

Transition overlaps with other areas discussed in this review, notably assessment, FE provision, support systems, interagency working and quality in the sense of measuring outcomes, and the degree of young people's success in negotiating the transition process will be determined by the extent of effectiveness in all of those areas. However, the most significant absentees in the literature's treatment of transition, particularly in this country, are young people themselves, their voices and their experiences. There is now a need for more research into what actually happens in transition, rather than the discussion of principles which has so far dominated. It is also important to examine the potential of innovative models originating in other countries, to consider the role of parents which has received scant attention even though they are the one constant element in the whole transition process, and to undertake more sustained development work on appropriate curricula for transition. In the final analysis, Fish (1992) has suggested that

effective transition support and programmes may simply be a wise investment for government, if it is to reduce the levels of long-term dependence on the state which research in the USA and Scandinavia has shown to be a far more costly alternative.

VIII   INTERAGENCY WORKING

Interagency collaboration in the service of young people and adults with disabilities and/or learning difficulties has not been the subject of extensive research or discussion in any context, and certainly not in relation to further education. This is despite the general acknowledgement that cooperation between agencies is a crucial element in the achievement of coordinated and effective support. Research and discussion tends to locate interagency working on the periphery; to regard it as an added extra that will simply slot into place once policy decisions have been made.

The importance of interagency working

In the early 1980s the OECD initiated a considerable body of work on the transition from school to adult life which, while not as well researched as the aims of the programme may have suggested, did develop a number of guiding principles for transition programmes. One of these principles maintained that it was the role of professionals to work together in order that young people with disabilities might be empowered in claiming the right to adult status. In the UK, the Warnock Report (1978) had offered similar encouragement in the context of education. The commitment to such collaboration is now enshrined in national legislation as well as in many college policy statements. Putting it into practice is proving more difficult.

Views of interagency working have changed over the last twelve years or so, both in response to the kinds of statement made by Warnock and the OECD and as discussion about the most appropriate way of providing support for young people has mirrored the shift, at least in thinking, away from an individual needs perspective to emphasising service provision, and what services can and should contribute. This change in focus has been discussed by Fish (1989), who emphasised the need to move away from labelling the learner to describing the type of support the learner might require.

Two developments in thinking about approaches to working with young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties have brought increasing recognition of the importance of interagency cooperation. One is the idea of taking a holistic view of the individual, especially in terms of making an integrated response to his or her needs. This is reflected in the literature emanating from health and social services as well as from education. Another is the idea that many people in fact experience a continuum of need, which in turns requires an equivalent continuity of service response. Thus, the dominant view of interagency working is no longer simply about ensuring that the individual receives the right support or guidance at certain moments from a particular agency, but is now concerned with the availability of appropriate support from a number of services working together throughout the life careers of people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

The important role of interagency collaboration in providing effective support is stressed in both research and discourse. A survey of young people with severe learning difficulties in the mid-70s by Preddy and Mittler (1982) found that the failure to involve other agencies, notably careers officers, in pupils' case conferences often resulted in a very limited assessment of possible options. One of the recommendations that Jowett and

Hegarty (1982) made as a result of their study of young people with disabilities attending St Loyes College was that an efficient assessment of the needs and potential of these young people would only be possible if 'a team of professionals' worked closely with those making educational provision.

In the case of YTS, Dick (1987) pointed out that 'close liaison between agencies' was essential in encouraging and assisting young people with severe disabilities to join programmes, and that this support should, ideally, have been continuous throughout the programmes. Without the support of various agencies working together, young people with disabilities found it difficult to penetrate and negotiate their way through YTS procedures or programmes. Similarly, research in the United States by Spekman *et al.* (1992) found that for young people with learning difficulties, success in achieving coherence and continuity in planning their education after the age of compulsory schooling was dependent on the provision of ongoing support by a number of agencies. This can, of course, apply equally to able-bodied young people. However, in the case of young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, it has been argued that their need for coordinated support is much greater.

The various transitional phases that young people negotiate and experience have been discussed earlier in this document. Research focusing on the transition process has consistently emphasised the importance of planned programmes designed to offer the individual a logical progression of opportunities and support. Getzel (1990), for example, has argued that 'without a coordinated transition plan few students with handicaps are able to take advantage of additional education'. This is confirmed in the work of Everson and Goodall (1991) with young people who are both deaf and blind. Achieving a successful outcome for transition plans relies significantly on interagency collaboration (HMI, 1991; Wehman, 1988 1992). Moreover, if resourced effectively, the actual process of formulating and implementing transition programmes and individual support plans will have an important role to play in instigating and facilitating strategic planning at an interagency level.

The prevalence of interagency working

It is, then, widely acknowledged that interagency support systems are the essential infrastructure through which relevant education, training and employment plans should be designed, implemented and monitored for people who have disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

However, the literature since the early 1980s does not reveal any significant level of response to the attempts by Warnock and others to encourage the development of inter-agency support. Indeed, the indications are that little may have changed since the 70s. As Bell and Best (1986) remarked, 'The range of professional agencies and related cultural institutions which comprise an extended welfare network are rarely acknowledged to exist, let al.one embraced as colleagues in a common pursuit.' In their research into multi-agency support, Maychell and Bradley (1991) found few examples of successful inter-agency cooperation. Warburton's (1990) survey similarly concluded that little had been achieved in terms of multi-agency support for young people with disabilities in preparing them for adulthood, while a recent survey by NATFHE (1993) of UK colleges of further education found that less than half of the respondents indicated that their

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college was taking positive steps in attempting to develop an interagency approach. This has also been the experience of other countries. In their New South Wales study, Knox and Parmenter (1990) found few links between schools and other community agencies. Sarkees and Scott's (1985) review of American research on barriers to facilitating transition from secondary to post-secondary education settings uncovered a widespread failure to achieve interagency collaboration.

The evidence suggests that young people with disabilities experience difficulties in simply trying to maintain contact with agencies or sustain agency support once they have left school. Jackson's (1984) review of research on transition from school to adult life indicated that once the years of compulsory schooling were over, the input from various agencies ended, forcing young people into dependence on adult services. Adult services might not display the same degree of commitment to them, relying on individuals to make the contact and to ask for support. This, of course, raises important issues for schools and colleges who clearly have a crucial role to play in preparing young people to take on this task. Among school leavers with multiple disabilities in Hubbard and Martin's (1990) study, it was found that loss of the individual support which they had become used to during their school years exerted a serious negative impact on their opportunities for further development. Researchers have themselves found this failure to maintain contact a problem for their own work. An example can be found in Walker and Corrie's (1984;1985) research on school leavers where their own difficulties in keeping track of young people once they left school were compounded when various agencies also lost touch with them.

The indications are that the loss of contact with agencies may be a fairly widespread phenomenon. There was some confirmation of this in Richardson *et al.'s* (1988) study of young people with learning difficulties in Aberdeen, which showed that a large number of their participants were receiving no support after leaving school. They also produced evidence that only those young people experiencing very severe difficulties were likely to receive any support through contact with agencies. Jackson (op. cit.) claims that this is largely a resourcing issue: that the state cannot continue to support an individual in the same way beyond the age of sixteen. He also questions whether the continuation of support actually makes any difference to outcomes, noting that there is no research which addresses the question of whether the level of successful outcome for those receiving special support is any different to the achievements of those receiving no such support.

Problems in achieving collaboration

Research has found that efforts to initiate and sustain inter-agency working have faced a number of common problems (Davie, 1993; Maychell and Bradley, 1991; Thomas *et al.*, 1985). Johnson *et al.* (1987) have suggested four reasons why interagency cooperation might be difficult to achieve: inconsistent national policy; conflicting policy goals; different eligibility criteria; and different funding patterns across agencies.

One of the difficulties in providing a comprehensive framework for service delivery lies in the fact that the legislation impacting the work of the various agencies is originating in different government departments who each operate their own definitions and criteria of eligibility (SCI, 1990; Warburton, 1990). In its guidance to LEAs, the DFE referred to recent amendments to the Disabled Persons Act 1986 and to the Secretary of State's

instruction to the FEFC to promote inter-agency collaboration. Allied to this is the recent Health and Social Services legislation, at the centre of which is a requirement to produce individual care plans. The key features of such plans are the assessment of individual needs and, most importantly in the present context, the detailed assignment of responsibilities for ensuring that these needs are met.

Views differ as to the potential of legislation to promote joint working. The introduction of the Children Act 1989 is seen by Russell (1992) as offering opportunities for developing interagency collaboration. Crook (1989) notes similar opportunities provided by Care in the Community legislation, emphasising the possibility that 'multi-agency arrangements become multi-agency projects', such as jointly carrying out a needs audit of current services, creating a new agenda, dismantling current systems and initiating a mapping exercise to identify current and future service needs.

On the other hand, Madden (1993) discusses the missed opportunities of the 1986 Act, noting the fact that local advisory groups were not involved in implementing Sections 5 and 6, and contending that the failure to implement parts of the legislation may well have been due to the consequent lack of cooperation among the appropriate agencies. Warburton (1990) shares Madden's view, especially concerning the failure to consult with voluntary organisations. Whereas the Act had raised the profile of people with disabilities and provided a legislative framework for the development of good practice, the steps necessary to bring such practice to fruition had not been taken.

An important aspect of collaboration between professional groups is agreement over aims and objectives. It must be recognised that agencies may hold different beliefs about what would represent the best course of action for their clients and that they may not share the same goals. Sometimes these differences lie in the absence of a common professional language. Even at the level of legislation, differences in terminology are apparent which have significant implications for the availability and delivery of coordinated services. Difficulties in achieving collaboration may also arise from differences in conditions of employment, in the nature and status of professional qualifications and training, and in the types of line management characterising the various agencies from which the relevant professional are drawn (Maychell and Bradley, op. cit.; Sills, 1987). Reflecting on these differences, Moore and Morrison (1988) conclude that they can lead to an inertia in decision-making which militates against progress in joint developments.

Education, health and social services are all undergoing fundamental changes in their own internal structures and working practices. This has led to slow progress both in joint policy development and in the establishment of appropriate structures to facilitate cooperation at local and regional level. McDonnell et al. (1986) have argued that the variations in working practice between agencies is so profound in the case of people with severe disabilities that even if they do work together, they still cannot provide either the information or support that might be required. This does raise the issue of different types and degrees of disability and learning difficulty and how interagency co-operation can be achieved in terms of catering for a wide range of needs. A case study of a young person with a severe disability in Manchester (Molloy, 1989) concluded that 'packages' of service provision based on an institutional model may in practice have the effect of militating against participation in mainstream post-16 education.

Madden (op. cit.) argues that agencies require a wider perspective than they have at present, if they are to implement systems of collaborative working. They need to consider initiatives in areas such as joint training, interchanging staff, and procedures for the dissemination of information, in order to provide a baseline of agreed definitions and working practices from which to move forward

Strategic planning is an essential prerequisite to providing effective support but it is only possible if agencies can find a way of working together. According to Maychell and Bradley (op. cit.), 'probably the most serious hindrance to interagency working at the present time is the almost total lack of joint policy development across agencies'. On Care in the Community legislation, Lavender (1988) comments: 'Jointly written policies and plans are vital in harnessing resources, meeting the needs of students and making the most of all those working in the field...It is likely that finance, and particularly joint finance, will eventually only be allocated to provision that relates to a clearly agreed policy and to jointly planned services and development's.

As in the case of college support systems, staff development programmes — whether joint or within agencies — are a vital part of preparation for interagency working, particularly ensuring that training is appropriate and relevant for different groups of staff. Unfortunately, the literature does not reflect the same degree of concern in this wider context as in education. Two studies of careers officers (Institute of Careers Officers/ RADAR, 1986; Welsh Office Careers Service, 1989) reveal how poorly informed officers are about the range of possible options for young people at 16. Similarly, Fish (op. cit.) questions the ability of services to assist young people with disabilities and learning difficulties to plan for transition because agencies might not be sufficiently well informed about one another's respective areas of operation.

A related complication focuses on the exchange of information about clients. Sarkees and Scott's (op. cit.) research in the United States found the problems associated with sharing of educational records to be a major obstacle to collaborative working. Obviously professionals have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality and their clients have a right to this, which suggests the need for very careful negotiation in this respect.

A further issue that has rarely been addressed concerns the locus of responsibility for interagency liaison. Examining the potential role of the LEAs in this respect, HMI (1991) found that, 'few local education authorities have addressed the management of the process of transition for young people with special educational needs'. At the time, it could be argued that LEAs were ideally placed to lead and promote coordination among the relevant agencies (Baginsky and Bradley, 1992). The recent large-scale changes in the role of the local authorities means that this may no longer be a realistic possibility. Indeed, the question remains as to whether mechanisms for interagency working initiated at LEA level were in any case sufficiently well grounded to ensure their continuation under another aegis. Lavender (op. cit.) also expresses concern about the failure to establish direct lines of responsibility for collaborative ventures. Experience in other countries would suggest that the UK is not alone in failing to address this issue (Benz and Halpern, 1987).

On the other hand, there are instances in the literature of successful attempts at

overcoming the various barriers to interagency co-operation, notably in other countries. The experiences of drawing together transition teams in the United States offer good examples of interagency working. In Sweden, a response to the failure of agencies to coordinate their services on behalf of young people with disabilities is the creation of Liaison Officers who act as a reference point for young people, assisting them in dealing with the various support agencies (Huiltkvist, 1991). The Kurator performs a similar function in Denmark, while in Belgium regional Guidance Centres are staffed by multi-disciplinary teams offering support to young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties up to the age of 18 (Detraux and Dens, 1992).

The literature does include references to smaller scale initiatives in the UK. For example, Stevenson College (1991) has a multi-professional group which helps identify appropriate training needs and assists students in developing their own individual programmes. Clydesbank College has introduced the Step approach for assisting young people with severe learning difficulties as they move from school to further education. This involves interagency cooperation and close liaison between schools, social workers and college staff (Keppie, 1993). Liaison with other agencies in providing guidance and support is an essential part of the Careers Assessment Programmes for young people with learning difficulties at Colchester Institute (Jewers, 1989). Harper's (1992) description of the Jet Project highlights the importance of joint working with the voluntary sector; something that has received very little attention. The role of parents is another significant topic that has received scant attention in the research literature. While Harper (op. cit.) is sure that parental involvement has been essential to the success of the JET Project, Keppie (op. cit.) found it difficult to achieve and, moreover, to be fairly controversial as far as staff were concerned.

In the United States the increasing use of case management or care management techniques, especially when linked to transition arrangements, are seen as a way of encouraging interagency cooperation. A similar development in this country, the Disability Team in the London Boroughs of Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea which offers multi-disciplinary case management support to people with disabilities, may offer some pointers to a possible way forward (Pilling, 1991).

As in other areas of education for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, an investigation by HMI (1991) found that inter-agency links were often dependent on the effort and goodwill of individuals whose roles and responsibilities were not formally recognised by the local authority. By allowing this to happen, Lavender (op. cit.) argues that education has missed an opportunity to place itself on the map and develop a leading role in joint working situations. Maychell and Bradley (op. cit.) found that developments were largely *ad hoc* and insufficient as a basis for strategic planning. In terms of providing effective support for young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties the ability to develop coherent plans for individuals within the context of strategic planning must be a prime objective. The literature gives no grounds for optimism. As Fish (op. cit.) observes, it is easier to suggest that agencies should co-operate than to see how it would work in practice or whether it is even possible.

IX   ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Research on the further education of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties is rare. While a search of relevant literature yields a great number of references, it soon becomes clear that the field is dominated by discourse rather than research, by conjecture rather than evidence, by intuition rather than evaluation. The literature reveals a wealth of exhortation to action, but very little in the way of consensus on the direction this action should take. At a fundamental level, opinions differ as to the appropriateness of a range of conceptual frameworks to offer a firm basis for practice in the area. At the level of both policy and practice, professionals are deprived of a secure evidence base in which to ground decision-making on critical issues relating to assessment, guidance, support and funding.

In the previous sections of this review the material has been divided into a number of discrete areas reflecting the various aspects of the topic that need to be addressed. This is in many ways an artificial distinction, since these aspects are in reality inextricably linked. In this final section, therefore, the focus shifts to an examination of their interrelationships and to some of the overarching issues that are in need of investigation and clarification.

* **The continuum of student needs**

Thinking in this area is informed by a variety of conceptual models underpinned by different definitions of what constitutes disability and learning difficulty. In consequence, no clear agreement exists about appropriate aims and objectives for the curriculum, the type of provision that should be made and the way it should be delivered. The dominant role in formulating definitions has been performed, either explicity or de facto, by service providers and professionals, to the virtual exclusion of people who themselves have disabilities or learning difficulties. This latter perspective is obviously crucial and must be drawn upon more explicity if progress is to be made. Within this context it must be acknowledged that the numbers of young people and adults applying for college places, and the range of support requirements they represent, are increasing.

At the same time, it must be recognised that disability and learning difficulty are part of a continuum of student needs. It is at present unclear how far the FE sector is committed to making provision that reflects the whole of this continuum. For example, it must be asked precisely how Schedule II is being interpreted by the colleges and whether it is leading to a limited curriculum offer by emphasising job-specific skills rather than core skills and cross-curricular themes. Given that such an interpretation would result in a learning programme of little relevance to the needs of certain students, this is clearly an area that merits closer investigation.

* **The pattern of provision**

Small-scale surveys carried out over the past ten years have continued to indicate that student recruitment to FE is largely piecemeal and uncoordinated. While individual examples of colleges offering effective provision have been identified, there appears to have been limited success in initiatives designed to facilitate the implementation of good practice throughout the FE sector. Concern has been expressed about the ability of the sector as a whole to offer significant numbers of students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties access to appropriate provision.

The time is ripe for a comprehensive audit of the nature and scope of current provision. While the Further Education Students' Charter lays out the entitlement for the student body as a whole, information on the kinds of additional support that is being provided by the colleges, and in what ways, remains unclear.

Previous mapping exercises undertaken in the area are now out-of-date and cannot be relied upon as a source of baseline information. It must, however, be recognised that the task of mapping current provision will not be straightforward. In particular, it will require the formulation and agreement of clear definitions of the student population, as well as a widely understood system for classifying the many types of support and routes to progression possible within the new FE.

* **The role of assessment**

There have been major changes in thinking about the nature and purpose of assessment, especially over the past 20 years. These have come about primarily in response to the increasing recognition that learning programmes should be designed to meet individual needs, rather than individuals being expected to fit into pre-existing programmes. The extent to which these changes have had any marked impact on practice is, however, open to question. The available evidence suggests that approaches to assessment have developed in an ad hoc fashion. The importance of skilled assessment at the initial, formative and summative stages is widely acknowledged as the key to securing appropriate learning opportunities and goals. Yet there has to date been no rigorous evaluation of the theoretical and methodological integrity of the wide range of assessment models and techniques currently operating in FE.

LEAs still have duties under the Education Act 1993 to assess needs. Under an agreement with the FEFC, LEAs make recommendations to the FEFC for students who may need to attend a specialist institution. Sector colleges have responsibility for assessing the individual needs of their own students. In theory at least, the dual role required of sector colleges in this respect — as purchaser and provider — could lead to a conflict of interests. There is some suggestion in the literature that initial assessment should be carried out by an agency independent of the providing institution, but there is no apparent agreement about which agency or agencies would be best suited to this task or whether another, different arrangement should be explored.

* **Monitoring quality**

While the major task for colleges in the 80s was to extend access and develop provision, the advent of the 90s brought with it an equal concern about monitoring and evaluating the quality of the provision already in existence.

There is at present no evidence to indicate how far the quality models adopted in FE are appropriate for use in evaluating and developing provision for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Neither is there agreement about what should be regarded as constituting value added in this area of work nor about the kinds of performance indicator and associated evidence that should be applied. The development of models for this area is complex since it requires the establishment of strategies and criteria that cover a multiplicity of individual needs and a variety of aspects of provision — initial and on-going assessment procedures, arrangements for securing curriculum continuity and progression, direct and indirect support systems, and resource allocation procedures are just some of the aspects that need to be taken into consideration.

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It is only recently that the importance of students' own views on quality has been widely acknowledged. The extent to which self-advocacy is developed and supported by the curriculum and the mechanisms colleges use to gather students' views have yet to be investigated. The strategy common in HE of gathering students' opinions by questionnaire will not be appropriate for certain student groups and more accessible methods will need to be employed. The ongoing negotiation and review of individual plans may offer a useful alternative mechanism for gauging student satisfaction. There is widespread agreement that the assessment of quality of work should focus on process rather than product, which again would suggest a potentially valuable role for individual plans.

* **Funding matters**

Given the importance of securing adequate funding to meet students' additional needs, it is perhaps surprising that so little research attention has been paid to the relationship between funding mechanisms and the quality and nature of provision. Colleges need to develop sound information systems for calculating funding requirements, deciding on priorities and monitoring the use of resources, and to incorporate such systems into their strategic plans. There is, however, little consensus on the criteria and procedures that should be adopted to guide decision-making in this area.

What is clear is that funding mechanisms must take account of the need for both direct and indirect support. In relation to direct support, concerns have been expressed that outcome related funding may encourage colleges to focus their provision on particular groups of students whose needs are more easily met, or to set student learning targets at too low a level, thereby inhibiting progression. At the same time, it must be asked how a balance can best be achieved between meeting both students' individual needs and the expectations of an externally imposed and validated programme. It is, for instance, argued that NVQ level 1 may not be a realistic possibility for students with severe cognitive difficulties, yet some colleges state that these students are working towards it. On a related matter, it has been suggested that for some students a gap may be identified between their learning support needs and what can be afforded. It is, then, important to establish the extent of this problem and whether it is increasing or decreasing under the new funding arrangements. In particular, it needs to be ascertained whether such students are accepted but inadequately supported or whether colleges simply refuse admission.

There are, in addition, certain students whose needs would be best met by a short burst of additional support that may not be catered for by the current FEFC threshold of £600. Colleges will therefore need to consider whether and how external funding can be used flexibly enough to respond to these students' requirements.

Under the new mechanism, college budgets include an element calculated on the basis of the costs of providing additional support for individuals whose needs have been assessed. Indirect support, such as curriculum and professional development, does not attract specific funding. There is, then, a mismatch between the evidence on the crucial importance of indirect support in determining the quality of the curriculum offer and the priority that can be attached to it in practice. Again, there is no hard evidence on the priority being attached by colleges to the funding and development of indirect support systems and to the impact of any initiatives undertaken in this area. Thus, an essential element in any attempt to assess the impact of funding methodologies on the nature and quality of provision is missing.

*   **Learning support**

A major theme in the literature has concerned the concepts of integration and inclusion as the philosophical basis for different models of support. The nature and development of the models themselves have received far less attention.

Patterns of direct and indirect support are likely to be undergoing change in response to recent initiatives in, for example, open and flexible learning, or in response to new groups of learners and to changes in the FE curriculum. In the absence of detailed information on the pattern of learning support, it is not even possible to say with any certainty whether or not such support makes a difference to participation, retention and completion rates or to student achievement. While it is generally assumed that support is a critical factor in ensuring student success, it is not possible to identify which of the different aspects of support are most significant in this respect and how such support is best delivered.

It is frequently argued that the expertise and experience of staff are a college's most important resource and that they must therefore occupy a central position in any consideration of indirect support. The last comprehensive review of the professional development requirements of FE staff was carried out under the auspices of the (then) DES in the late 1980s. The extent to which the recommendations of that review were followed up has not been investigated. It must, in any case, be expected that recent developments in the scale and nature of FE provision will have caused new needs to arise. Recent evidence from NATFHE indicates that colleges have been unable to meet the range of professional development needs identified, though little information is available on what these needs are and how appropriate training programmes might best be resourced and delivered.

*   **Support for transition**

Issues associated with transition between a range of educational contexts have been the topic of a long-established research tradition. While very few students have investigated the support offered to adult learners, the particular challenges faced by young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties have been a focus of special concern. The importance of preparing young people for transition while still at school has been highlighted by numerous studies, as has the part played by close school-college liaison in providing continuity of support, curriculum planning and delivery.

When decisions about post-school placements are being made, the literature suggests that a multiplicity of both positive and negative factors come into play. Included among these are: the degree and pattern of individual disabilities and/or learning difficulties; school tradition; school-based courses designed to prepare leavers for transition; link courses; the availability of funding; the accessibility of sufficiently detailed information on the range of post-school options available; the level of interagency liaison and collaboration; and the views held and roles played by parents, carers and other significant individuals. A clearer exposition of the relative importance of these factors would be of assistance in ensuring that the most appropriate options were chosen by individual students on the basis of sound information and guidance.

Interagency collaborative working is generally assumed to be a good thing, particularly (but not exclusively) at points of transition. Yet there is remarkably little information on its precise benefits to individuals, or indeed on whether collaboration at a systems

level actually makes a difference to individual life chances. Some evidence has been amassed on the factors that tend to facilitate and inhibit cooperation among agencies. However, investigations have shown that to date it has been extremely difficult to achieve in practice. Given this fact, it is important to ask whether alternative structures might provide a more effective way of securing support from external agencies. The fragmentation and breakdown of statutory links between schools, LEAs and colleges could be regarded as setting the scene for the development of new liaison networks.

In the past, it has been common practice for individual FE lecturers to establish their own contacts with external agencies and individuals in order to meet the needs of particular students. While in the absence of systematic networking arrangements, this was clearly an inefficient and time-consuming process, It may be that the FE sector should be thinking more creatively of alternative systems that would retain the college at the centre of an information and liaison network. If complete multiagency collaboration among all interested agencies is proving elusive, it may be that ways could be found of securing the necessary liaison through different constellations of agency support for different purposes. The feasibility and resource implications of such alternatives have not, however, been investigated. A further avenue for development may lie in models for the management of support that are in operation in other countries. While the literature contains descriptive material, particularly on US and European initiatives, there is as yet no evidence to indicate whether and how such models might be applied within the UK context.

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