



**Development of a Common Funding Approach  
for  
Additional Learning Support**

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## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

1. In April 2003 the LSDA was asked by the LSC to carry out research to support the Council in the development of a consistent approach to funding additional learning support (ALS) across the four learning sectors. The initial brief identified the need to have regard to the simplification agenda in the FE sector and it also became clear that any new arrangements for ALS needed to be consistent with the Council's developing approach to plan led funding in all sectors.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

2. The project team commissioned a number of separate exercises to inform their work including consultant visits to providers, an analysis of data and a survey of assistive technology. The work of the research team was greatly assisted by being shared at key stages with sector panels drawn from representative providers.

### **ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING**

3. We find the nature of provision in ACL to be distinctive and different in that the majority of provision is part time. Both the understanding and provision of ALS is variable, and data is limited. Many provider representatives would welcome a more explicit statement of entitlement of learners to ALS, an indication of the level of resources that might be devoted to it and confirmation that specific individual arrangements can be made for people with high levels of support.
4. We conclude that the introduction of a two-tier approach to funding ALS would have significant overall benefits to the ACL sector and that an indicative allocation for ALS in ACL could be based on percentage of budget or a planned profile of learners.
5. We recommend that LSC introduces a two-tier approach to ALS funding in ACL.

## **SCHOOL SIXTH FORMS**

6. In the School Sixth Form sector we find that there is little evidence of expenditure on ALS other than on pupils who have statements. While statements will remain an important part of the school system, they are insufficient as a basis for funding because of variability in local authority practice. The perception that there are no resources available for post 16 learners without statements means that in most cases support in sixth forms is limited to learners with statements.
7. It is our assessment that for the LSC to identify an indicative allocation for ALS within SSF funding would have clear advantages. We have concluded that it is possible for the system of statementing, and the proposed system of ALS funding, to operate in parallel to the benefit of learners.
8. We recommend therefore that LSC adopts a two-tier approach to funding ALS in School Sixth Forms.

## **FURTHER EDUCATION**

9. In the FE sector the researchers examined a number of different issues that are reported on separately.

### **Basic Skills**

10. An initial hypothesis was that much of the complexity of the FE methodology arose because of the extensive provision of support for basic skills. We conclude from the research that there is no advantage in seeking to separate in class basic skills support from other forms of ALS for funding purposes.

### **Funding Discrete Groups**

11. The study examined whether the complex issues around funding discrete groups might largely be resolved by the introduction of a two-tier system. A detailed study showed that the majority of high cost claims in the colleges examined included an element for reduced class size.
12. We recommend that two programme weights should be identified, to reflect the fact that some learners require to be taught in small groups, and some in particularly small groups.

### **Standardising Claims**

13. The study confirmed earlier research showing that the cost of teachers was the largest element of ALS claims and the range of costs claimed per teacher hour was relatively narrow. There was also broad agreement about the costs of learning support assistants (LSAs) though greater variation in the claims for other categories of staff.

14. We judge that it would be both fair and acceptable to standardise the rates claimed for the costs of the major categories of staff when claims are made for costs above the threshold. We recommend that the LSC should issue a set of standard staff rates for teachers and LSAs to be used as the basis of claims, and circulate to LLSCs benchmark data on the costs of other frequently purchased services.

### **Simplification**

15. Although there are concerns in colleges about moving away from a claim system the FE sector panel gave strong support to the idea of a formulaic approach to funding most provision. We commissioned a statistical analysis of patterns of expenditure that showed that most of the variation in current patterns of expenditure on ALS could be explained through a limited number of variables captured on the ILR. Our overall assessment is that the introduction of a two-tier system, based on the ILR analysis, is technically feasible and has advantages.
16. We recommend therefore that a two-tier approach to funding ALS in FE be adopted, accompanied by a clear statement that institutions are expected to maintain appropriate ALS support for all learners who need it.

### **The Threshold**

17. The level at which the threshold should be set requires careful consideration. An analysis of the incidence of claims taken from ILR/ISR data for 2001/02 shows that 85% of claims would fall below a threshold of £2500 and 94% of claims (though nearer 68% of expenditure) would fall below a threshold of £4500.
18. A £2500 threshold would remove 85% of claims, and would leave around 26,250 individual claims to be examined in detail, which amounts to around 550 per local office. The higher threshold reduces the number of claims by some 60%, from 26,250 to 10,500 or to just over 200 per LLSC. The FE sector panel, when asked to consider the matter supported the figure of £4500.

### **WORK BASED LEARNING**

19. The research confirms that some learners with ALS requirements are directed away from WBL to other agencies. The perception that support is unavailable and lack of understanding of ALS availability by providers and other agencies may be one reason for this.
20. In the work-based sector we find that there are the elements of a two-tier system already in place. The rates for ALS/ALN are standard rather than based on individual claims; and there is, albeit imperfectly understood, provision for claiming extra when individuals have high needs for support. The development of a formulaic approach may be more difficult in WBL than other sectors because of the small size of many providers and because of stratification of learner intake.

21. Our assessment is that the promulgation of a two-tier approach in WBL would have advantages as in the other sectors. We recommend that LSC introduce a two-tier approach to funding ALS in WBL on the basis that is consistent with the other sectors but reflects the specific context of work-based providers. This we see as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for achieving a more consistent entitlement to support. This is particularly so for those who require high levels of support.

## **CROSS SECTOR ISSUES**

### **Thresholds**

22. Some stakeholders have suggested that within a two-tier system there might be different thresholds for ACL or for part time learners more generally. Our conclusion is that any attempt to introduce different thresholds would be certain to introduce additional complexity and should not be pursued.

### **Standardising Claims**

23. We have considered whether in setting standard rates for claims above the threshold there should be different rates for the different sectors. Some of the costs faced by providers - externally bought in services for example, will be common. We cannot see why the cost of learning support assistants should differ by sector. We have therefore rejected this proposal.

### **Assistive Technology**

24. We find that the use of ALS to fund assistive technology is relatively limited. The key issue is not funding but access both to equipment and specialist advice. We feel that there is a substantial case for the LSC actively to broker collaborative arrangements for providing post 16 learners with assistive technology.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

25. Our assessment is that overall the changes proposed here have benefits but are not without risks. We see the plan led funding approach as key. It will be necessary to monitor the implementation of the new arrangements and help develop the capacity of both local offices and providers. It is our view that the LSC will need to focus discussions about the impact of changes ***on ensuring learners needs for ALS are met***, rather than the protection of funds 'allocated' for ALS.

## II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

26. In April 2003 the LSDA was asked by the LSC to conduct research to support the Council in the development of a consistent approach to funding additional learning support (ALS) across the four learning sectors: Further Education (FE), Work-Based Learning (WBL), School Sixth Forms (SSF) and Adult and Community Learning (ACL). It was recognised that within a common funding approach some aspects of the funding arrangements might have to vary to take account of the inherent characteristics of each sector.
27. The initial brief, in addition to consistency, identified the need to have regard to the simplification agenda in the FE sector. The current mechanism, although having strengths, was seen as complex, lacking incentives to achieve value for money and a potential cause of instability in college budgets.
28. In the course of the work other important themes emerged. In particular it became clear that any new arrangements for ALS needed to be consistent with the Council's developing approach to plan led funding in all sectors; and to recognise the LSC's decision to reduce the ring fencing of funds.
29. This research project therefore was asked to explore a series of options for developing a common system of funding ALS in the light of anticipated changes to overall funding arrangements. It sought to examine the technical feasibility of options, and also assess their likely impact on the provision of learning support.
30. The research was informed by two principles that appear to command wide support among stakeholders. They are:
  - all learners should be entitled to receive additional learning support that meets their individual needs
  - the funding available to providers should reflect the costs involved in providing ALS.

### III. REMIT

31. The specific objectives of the project, as agreed with the LSC, were to:
- test out the possibility of funding ALS under a 'two-tier' or differentiated approach whereby lower-level claims are funded through a indicative allocation to a provider, whilst higher-level claims are funded on an individually costed basis, applying standard rates where applicable
  - identify the key convergence issues and likely trajectory for each sector in moving towards a common funding approach.

And within this approach to:

- evaluate the feasibility of funding at least some aspects of ALS on the basis of standardised hourly rates (in particular teaching staff, learning support assistants and administrative staff costs), focusing on the FE sector for 2004/05
- gain a better understanding of the costs of providing ALS in the WBL and ACL sectors
- identify good practice in the funding of ALS in the SSF sector
- consider how assistive technology might be best be funded, taking account of the particular circumstances in which equipment is used
- test out alternative approaches to the funding of in-class basic skills support delivered as ALS
- test out alternative approaches to the funding of discrete groups of learners with learning difficulties in small groups
- consider how best providers might be supported in accessing assistive technology and the associated technical support.

## **IV. OVERVIEW OF METHODS**

32. The research questions were of sufficient scope and complexity to indicate that a multi-level, multi-method approach was needed to collect the required data. The necessity of compiling and analysing existing cost data on ALS claims required that a quantitative approach be adopted but the need to understand the process behind constructing this claims necessitated that more in-depth qualitative interviews with providers were also carried out. The qualitative approach became doubly important to ensure that any queries arising from the quantitative analysis could be interpreted and to judge the impact of any changes to the ALS funding mechanism on providers' behaviour. To this end, sector panel events were also hosted allowing the data to be explored with a range of providers from across the four learning sectors.
33. The sector panel events occurred at three junctures in the research process. The first event, at the beginning of June, offered the opportunity for the panels to inform the research process, indicating what issues should, in their opinion, be investigated and the appropriate investigative approach. The second sector meeting at the end of July enabled the research team to present the data gathered and explore this with the groups, performing a 'sense-check' but also gaining explanations for various results. The final event at the end of September was used to explore implementation issues, gauging the sector panels' opinion of the proposed changes to funding, how these could be effectively introduced and what affect they may have on providers' behaviour.
34. The time period over which the research was conducted imposed a series of constraints on the methodology. The research took place between April-September 2003 with at least six to eight weeks of this time constituting a summer vacation period, observed across learning sectors. This made recruiting research participants and arranging subsequent interviews challenging.
35. The changing policy context led to modifications both in the research methodology and its focus. Important changes included the move towards reduced audit, plan-led funding deriving from the simplification agenda.
36. The following sections outline the research methodology within each of the sectors and techniques used to address specific research questions.

### **Collection and Analysis of FE College Cost Data**

37. The purpose of this strand was to test the financial impact of using standard rates to calculate the costs of teaching and other staff, the use of standard group sizes and programme weights to calculate the cost of discrete groups, also to gauge the financial impact of removing basic skills from the ALS mechanism. Further quantitative work was performed to provide a template for a funding formula based on existing ILR/ISR data and this is more fully explained later.

38. The first stage of the methodology involved collecting existing ALS cost data from a sample of colleges. Colleges were sampled that already had in place a specialist computer package (MIDAS), used for recording individual ALS claims and compiling an aggregate college claim. The company responsible for developing this program acted as consultants in collecting the data and carrying out rudimentary analyses. Although it was intended to include FE colleges using their own ALS claim recording system, data supplied by these institutions proved too complex, insufficient or chaotic for an 'outsider' to interpret to include in the analysis.
39. Following a stringent sampling process based on factors such as institution size, location and amount of ALS claimed for 2001/02, colleges were contacted directly by LSDA. Despite over 70 institutions being contacted, useable data relating to 2001/02 was only collected from 17 FE colleges using the MIDAS system with some evidence from a further five. The poor response rate may have been influenced by the time of year that the study took place and concerns about student confidentiality.
40. Despite the restricted sample size, the sampled colleges were broadly representative of the sector and covered the full range in size, were spread across a wide geographical location in rural, metropolitan and city locations (including London) and located in small and large towns.
41. After each college had consented to the research, they were requested by LSDA to transmit a file containing their ALS cost data to the consultants. The resulting data was subjected to various analyses by the consultants and research team, including an illustrative description of what characteristics of claims for support can propel learners above certain ALS funding thresholds, the financial impact of using standard group rates and standard teaching rates.
42. The variability of practice (including one claim that appeared to conflict with audit guidelines) and the resulting complexity of records meant that some of the research questions, such as the financial impact of specific changes could not be estimated.

### **Survey of WBL Providers**

43. The purpose of the research in this sector was to identify current practice in respect of ALS in work based learning, add to knowledge of costs, and assess the scope for moving to a more individualised system. The research identified the types of support offered to learners, and the types of needs that were addressed, distinguishing for example those with physical or sensory disabilities from those with cognitive difficulties, language, literacy and numeracy needs (basic skills) and emotional and behavioural difficulties.

44. The research within WBL comprised of a two-pronged approach collecting the responses of providers to current and potential arrangements as well as statistical data. An initial case study methodology was employed followed by regression analyses for 2001/02 WBL ILR data to identify factors driving ASN/ALN claims and a possible funding formula. The second, quantitative aspect will be addressed later. The research in the WBL sector also supplied evidence to support the exploration of the themes concerned with basic skills and arrangements for assistive technology.
45. The case study research was based on visits to 21 providers (six voluntary, five colleges, nine private, one other) offering programmes across a range of frameworks (FMA/AMA 17, Life Skills E2E 11, Other Training 9). In terms of WBL type, seventeen could be characterised as 'provider push', i.e. the provider recruited trainees and sought placements and six as 'provider pull', i.e. the provider recruited employed trainees. The sample selected covered a range of size, location, specialist and non-specialist providers and local and national providers. It again should be noted that problems were encountered in recruiting a group of respondents with over double the amount needed for the sample contacted before an adequate number consented to take part in the research.
46. The research with key staff members within WBL providers was undertaken through a structured interview, the format for which was agreed during a group discussion at the first sector panel event. The interview schedule was then piloted within three providers to further ensure its suitability and comprehensiveness.
47. Before the providers were visited to perform the face-to-face interviews, they were sent a modified interview schedule and details of what data they might be asked to call upon so that they would be fully briefed on their institution's additional support requirements and ASN/ALN expenditure. The provider was also given the opportunity to forward information post-interview if they could not accumulate everything beforehand.
48. A summary of the case study findings and analysis was presented at the second sector panel meeting for further clarification and explanation.

### **Survey of LEAs and ACL Providers**

49. The purpose of the research in this sector was to identify current practice in ACL, add to knowledge of costs in the sector and assess the best way of identifying an indicative allocation of funds. The research also sought to identify the types of support offered to learners, and the types of needs that are addressed using the same distinctions as the WBL research. The ACL research, like that originating from the other sectors, also supplied evidence to support the exploration of the themes concerned with basic skills, a two-tier funding system and arrangements for assistive technology.

50. A number of Local Authorities were selected to represent a range of demographic and structural features. Authorities were contacted by a combination of telephone and email and responding authorities were emailed copies of the questionnaires that had been designed for data collection prior to the face-to-face interviews. The suitability of the interview schedule had been discussed at the first sector panel meeting and following a pilot exercise with three providers was deemed suitable for the continued research exercise. Further information was gathered from course programmes and from Management Information provided by LEAs.
51. Of the 14 LEA areas from which responses were received, there were 12 responses from LEA officers and 11 from providers, most areas being represented by both an officer and a provider.
52. The areas were evenly divided between six urban authorities and authorities with substantial rural areas. Geographically there was some imbalance towards the Midlands where the East and West Midlands accounted for five of the sample, three were from the North and the rest were from London, the South and South East.
53. The sample included four authorities with small ethnic minority communities of less than 4% of the population but six with large ethnic minority communities.
54. A particular issue experienced in the collection of numerical data concerning ACL cost data was the lack of available records. This led to inferences having to be made from arguably comparable sections of FE data and these assumptions were cross-referenced with existing research and discussed at sector group events.
55. The results of the research were explored at the second sector panel meeting and issues of implementation discussed at the final session.

### **Survey of LEAs and Schools**

56. The School Sixth Form research strand aimed to identify current practice in schools, particularly in relation to funding pupils without statements, to add to knowledge of costs and practice in the sector, and to assess the best way of identifying/allocating the resources available for ALS. The survey focused on mainstream schools rather than special schools, but included schools with special resourced units, e.g. for the hearing impaired. The research brief included the types of support offered to learners, the types of needs being addressed, and collection of evidence to inform further exploration of the three key research themes (basic skills, a two-tier funding system and arrangements for assistive technology).

57. The research was conducted through face-to-face interviews with key staff in schools with sixth forms, exploring questions about funding and the nature of support to pupils with SEN, both statemented and non-statemented, throughout the school.
58. The characteristics of the schools and LEAs involved in the research are outlined below:
- number of schools with sixth forms: 10
  - number of specialist units: 5
  - range of needs catered for: Physical Disability, Specific Language Disability, Hearing Impairment, Visual Impairment, Moderate Learning Difficulties / Profound Difficulties
  - number of LEAs: 7
59. The LEAs included 4 shire counties, 1 metropolitan, and 2 unitary LEAs, with a geographic spread covering Northwest, East Midlands, Southwest and East regions.
60. The research with school staff was undertaken through structured interviews, the format for which was agreed following detailed discussion at the first sector panel meeting on 2 June 2003, and further piloted with two schools. Schools involved in the research had responded to a request from their local LSC. The intention was to conduct parallel face-to-face interviews with appropriate officers from the schools' LEAs; in the event, this was not always possible within the short timescale for the research. Where LEA interviews were not completed, outcomes from the school interviews were cross-referenced with data on the LEA from published sources.
61. Preliminary outcomes were reported to the second sector panel meeting, which provided an opportunity for SEN specialists with a wide range of operational experience to apply a 'sense test' to the findings, and to identify areas for further exploration.
62. All fieldwork was conducted over a two-month period between the end of June and the end of August, when access to both school and LEA staff was limited by annual leave commitments. This affected the number of interviews conducted and the range of interviewees available; nonetheless, the findings are consistent with other research findings and have also been endorsed following detailed discussion with the sector panels.

### **Funding Basic Skills**

63. The feasibility of funding basic skills outside the ALS mechanism was assessed via quantitative and qualitative enquiry.

64. The numerical aspect drew upon data collected in the FE strand, determining if it was possible to separate basic skills components from individual claims and modelling the likely financial impact.
65. The qualitative enquiry involved an expert seminar held with approximately 20 providers and LLSC representatives to identify potential mechanisms and likely implications.

### **Modelling a Two-Tier Approach**

66. To explore the possibility of instituting a two-tier funding model to additional learning support claims, an investigation was carried out of existing ILR/ISR data within both the FE and WBL sector. Following a thorough description of the available data and subsequent regression analyses to identify the 'best fit' between the profile of learners and expenditure patterns on ALS (ALN/ASN/ both), modelling was carried out to determine a possible formula and assess the financial impact of changes.
67. The sector panels provided a sense-check of the early data description, advice on important factors to consider when modelling and discussed whether changes to the funding mechanism would affect the behaviour of providers. It was also possible to test the proposed FE funding model using data from the sample colleges based on standard rates, with and without basic skills claims.
68. To consider the specifics of the FE modelling, Frontier Economics undertook a regression analysis using four years of data (up to 2001-02) for general FE colleges, external institutions, sixth form colleges and agricultural and horticultural institutions.
69. A range of variables was considered on student, course and college characteristics as well as information on ALS funding. Out of a sample of 570 colleges, 34 colleges were excluded as having 'outliers' defined by having:
  - fewer than 40 learners or more than 40,000 learners
  - ALS per learner greater than £400
  - ALS per supported learner greater than £10,000; or
  - the proportion of learners receiving ALS greater than 60%.
70. In order to develop a funding formula for WBL, ILR data for August 2001-July 2002 was subjected to regression analyses and subsequent modelling. The outcomes analysed were: claiming ALN, claiming ASN and claiming both ALN and ASN. Regression was performed separately for all three outcomes.

## Access to Assistive Technology

71. Issues were explored around the funding of assistive technology, including the provision of further data on costs and an examination of the possibility of developing collaborative arrangements. The research also looked at the extent to which provision is limited by the restriction of payments in FE to depreciation costs, and the degree to which equipment is tailored to the needs of individual learners.
72. This aspect of the research was conducted by means of a telephone survey to the Learning Support Coordinator in FE colleges throughout England. TechDis acted as the consultants on this strand of the project.
73. The sample for the survey was constructed by randomly selecting colleges stratified by size. A total of 48 colleges were surveyed, forming an apparently representative group. They comprised of a broad cross-section of 'types' of institution, from across regions on England and ranged in size from small to large based on the total number of full time equivalent (FTE) students.

Table 1: Type of colleges surveyed

<b>Type of College</b>	<b>Numbers Surveyed</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
General Further Education College / Tertiary College	33	68
Sixth Form College	7	15
External Institution	7	15
Special Designated Institution	1	2

Table 2: Regional distribution of colleges surveyed

<b>College Region</b>	<b>Numbers Surveyed</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
East of England	8	17
East Midlands	3	6
Greater London	3	6
North East	2	4
North West	9	19
South East	8	17
South West	4	8
West Midlands	7	15
Yorkshire and Humberside	4	8

74. The data resulting from the survey was supplemented by evidence collected from FE colleges, ACL and WBL providers and SSFs. The survey results were also presented to the sector panel to clarify and confirm certain aspects.

## **V. ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Funding and Costs in ACL**

##### **Funding ACL**

75. Compared to the other Learning and Skills sectors there is a lack of national data on learners and provision in ACL. The nature of provision is also quite distinctive in that the majority of it is part time. The funding cocktail is complex in all authorities and also varies between authorities. Even within the same authority, different centres access a different range of funding sources. These differences in accessing funding are matched by the variety of ways in which local authorities manage provision, either through their own services or delegated through external contracts. Despite the diversity in management and funding arrangements, there is remarkable similarity in the programmes of ACL offered by all local authorities.
76. For the LSC and DfES, ACL refers to a funding stream - that sum of money that was formerly spent by LEAs on adult learning but is now passed to them, currently as a block grant, by LSC. For many LEAs and providers, however, the term ACL is used to describe their activity as a whole, whether funded through the block grant, the former FE funding stream or other sources. This report acknowledges both uses.
77. The range of total budget allocated to ACL varied within the authorities visited from £1.2 million to £8.5 million with an average of £3.7million.
  - the percentage of this deriving from LEA block grant for ACL varied between authorities from 57% to 100% with an average of 79%
  - LSC funding for accredited FE provision formerly funded by FEFC, varied from 0% to 31% with an average of 13.25%
  - other sources of funding, including European Social Fund, Single Regeneration Budgets and various initiative funds, account for the remaining 7.75% of income.

##### **Funding ALS**

78. None of the LEAs specified an amount for ALS in allocating budgets and as there is not a clear distinction between ALS and discrete programmes for particular groups of learners, it was harder to identify budgets. Nevertheless, the provision of advisory or support staff or some other central resource meant that LEAs could identify some ALS expenditure. Many ACL providers also received LSC funding for basic skills provision that was formerly FEFC funded and ACL has access to other funding streams such as ESF and SRB. Adult literacy and

numeracy was the area of provision that received the greatest allocation of ALS and formed a significant part of the ACL programme in every authority.

79. The range of total budget allocated to ACL varied within the authorities visited. Although the same balancing mechanism seemed to apply to the funding of ALS there were differences between Authorities in the balance between centrally and locally incurred support costs but the total costs were much less varied, averaging 8-9% of total funding.
- the proportion of funding for central costs for ALS in the sample authorities varied from 2.3% to 5%
  - the total cost of ALS varied from 7% to 13%
  - the 13% figure was the highest by some margin, the second highest estimate being 10%
  - it may therefore be reasonable to assume that the average total cost would be around 8-9%.

### **Staff Costs**

80. The predominant means of providing additional support was with additional staff. This was most frequently provided through non-teaching assistants. Specialist tutors were used to help with assessing needs including technological needs and to support class tutors. The majority of LEAs in the sample either maintained a central team of specialists or had an arrangement with other agencies to provide that support.
81. The rate for tutors varied from £11 to £25.75 with an average of £19.81.
82. For learning support assistants/non-teaching assistants, the rate varied from £6.30 to £20 but this second figure was for a single authority that used some highly qualified specialist assistants. If this single example is ignored the average rate was £6.80.
83. The rate for specialist tutors used for assessments and to advise class tutors varied from £19 to £30 with an average of £27.33.
84. The rate for sign language interpreters varied from £20 to £35 per hour plus travel expenses with an average of £29.50.

### **A Two-Tier Approach to Funding**

85. A majority of LEA officers and all providers favoured a two-tier approach. There was agreement that high cost support should be funded centrally through individual claims, although there was no agreement as to when a claim becomes high cost. It seems that this is likely to be a rare occurrence and tends to focus on one to one support, such as support for dyslexia or signing for deaf learners. It was widely felt that the costs associated with one to one support could distort budgets and it would therefore be better if these costs were separately identified and claimed.

86. The main form of support was through additional support staff working on a group basis and this made costs relatively low for any individual in the group. A large majority of those interviewed felt that such low cost support should be met by an indicative allocation based on agreed targets.
87. The most frequently expressed reason for an indicative allocation for the bulk of the funding rather than individual claims was to avoid an excessive administrative burden on providers and to simplify administration for LEAs. The counter argument put by a minority of LEA officers and providers was that one way or another, providers and LEAs already had to do most of the work that would underpin individual claims and that fears of excessive administrative demand are exaggerated. They argued that accountability and the need to ensure that funding really is spent on additional learning support can only be achieved through individual claims. If administrative convenience were the only argument for a two-tier approach, the counter arguments for individual claims would be very strong.
88. Several providers, including LEA centre managers, made a further argument for a two-tier approach. If the support needs of a group of learners, all of whom needed some support for some of the time, could be met by one or two support assistants in the group this was easier to arrange on a collective rather than individual basis. The providers preferred to have a budget that could be used flexibly to build up a support team that could work as required across groups.
89. The prevalence of group-based support, especially in relation to basic skills provision where the bulk of ALS expenditure is incurred, makes a two-tier approach particularly appropriate to ACL. If the system of individually based claims used in further education were to be applied across all sectors it would be necessary to look at the criteria used to trigger funding. Criteria of attendance or support cost per individual would need to be different for ACL. For example a student in ACL is unlikely to attend for more than 60 hours per year and, as one of a group who share support, may cost less than £100 over the year as an individual. Nevertheless a provider may spend several thousands on support costs spread across fifty or a hundred part time learners. Any common funding approach needs to recognise such differences between sectors and ensure an equitable distribution of funding to enable each sector to meet the needs of learners.
90. An advantage of an indicative allocation is the relative stability that this would give to support funding and this in turn would enable providers to develop specialist expertise within a support team over a period of years.
91. On balance, the potential for developing expertise and employing support staff flexibly may be a stronger argument for a two-tier approach than simply a matter of administrative efficiency but, taken together, these underpin the marked preference for a two-tier approach expressed by respondents.

92. As the overall level of resources available for ACL will not change, the sector panel pointed out in some cases, a more appropriate, increased level of ALS might result in a reduced overall level of provision.

### **Threshold**

93. Some LEA officers and providers expressed concern that a system of individually based claims may set the threshold at levels that would be too high for ACL. They felt that a threshold that would be appropriate to further education where many students are full time or substantial part-time would be inappropriate to adult education where the majority of students attend for 60 hours per year or less.

### **Ensuring that ALS needs are met**

94. All LEA officers expressed some concern about the ability of the ACL service to meet its obligations under the DDA. Providers on the other hand seemed less aware of the potential problems and were more optimistic about the adequacy of good practice and good intentions as a basis for meeting the requirements of the Act.
95. Given that that there will be no ringfencing of ALS funds or audit mechanisms in place to ensure that resources identified for ALS are actually spent on ALS, the sector panel stressed the importance of quality assurance and improvement mechanisms in ensuring that learners' needs are met. The sector panel also pointed out that it was important for learners to know that they have an entitlement to support and what this may constitute. Providers and LEAs are responsible for assuring the quality of provision including provision for people who require ALS. Together with local LSCs they need to respond to under-represented groups. Panel members suggested that there is a need for providers to collect data and keep records giving evidence that learners' needs are met and local LSCs will also want to be assured that this is so.

### **Basic Skills and ALS**

96. Whereas Basic Skills within Further Education are often part of the additional learning that individuals require to participate in a mainstream programme, in ACL, Basic Skills are usually offered as discrete courses. The only exception identified by respondents was support for dyslexic learners following a mainstream course. The definition of ALS and the difference between Basic Skills and ESOL as a learning goal and as ALS was not uniformly understood in ACL.
97. Adult Literacy is the curriculum area that attracts the largest amount of ALS. Classes normally have reduced numbers to allow the tutor more time for individual support and this was reflected in the programme weighting. They also frequently had additional support staff that work on a group basis. The situation

was similar for Numeracy and ESOL although the amount of provision was smaller.

98. Given the discrete nature of Basic Skills provision in ACL and the pattern of support by additional support staff within groups, there is a strong argument for meeting most ALS costs as part of the indicative allocation. There would still need to be scope for individual additional claims; for example, a deaf student who needed signing support or a blind student who needed access technology. Since Initial Assessment for ABE and individual learner records are already in place in many centres, the additional administrative requirement of individually based claims may be less than widely feared.

### **Assistive Technology**

99. LEAs are at different stages in meeting the demand for assistive technology. Few authorities had adequate equipment available to ACL learners and several respondents referred to historically low levels of investment in ACL for both staffing infrastructure and equipment.
100. There was an increasing awareness of the need for equipment, largely as part of a wider awareness of the requirements of the DDA, and this was reflected in recent developments in a number of authorities. Several authorities provided lists of assistive technology that they had recently acquired with an emphasis on laptops and software for visually impaired learners.
101. LEAs, in general, only seem prepared to meet the assistive technology needs of learners if they are pre 16 or if designated funding is made available. Guidance on the range of equipment is likely to be required.
102. There was a general recognition in larger authorities that equipment needs to be held as a centrally co-ordinated, shared resource for providers but that it also needs some degree of dispersal to make the resources as closely available as possible to providers. The ACL panel concluded that larger providers prefer to have their own assistive technology and technical support services while smaller providers need to act co-operatively. However, the panel did express concerns over the practicalities of managing a co-operative system.
103. Only one authority within the sample had started to develop a system for distributing equipment across the whole authority with a combination of a network of centres and mobile units. This authority also identified the broadest range of equipment to meet the support needs of those with physical, sensory and learning disabilities.
104. Those authorities that were in the process of establishing centrally held resources on a loan stock basis relied on technical staff employed by the school sector or on FE staff in local colleges. The need for technician support and the costs that this will incur should be considered in making any recommendations to local authorities on the proportion of funding that should be allocated to ALS.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

105. Although there is a lack of data in the ACL sector compared to other sectors and the concept of ALS is not universally understood, it is possible to draw conclusions on which to base recommendations for the future funding of ALS. Despite the evident diversity of management structures and funding mechanisms, provision throughout the country appears overall to be similar. However, the nature of provision in ACL is distinctive and is different from the other sectors in that the majority of provision is part time which has a significant impact on the provision of ALS.
106. Many provider representatives would welcome a more explicit statement of entitlement of learners to ALS, an indication of the level of resources that might be devoted to it and confirmation that specific individual arrangements can be made for people requiring high levels of support. We therefore conclude that the introduction of a two-tier approach to funding ALS would have significant overall benefits to the ACL sector although clear guidance and monitoring will be necessary to minimise the risks. The benefits of an explicit indicative allocation are that it will help address the current perception that there are few resources for ALS and the concerns of LEAs and providers that they will be unable to meet their requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4.
107. We recognise the difficulties in deriving an appropriate indicative allocation given the absence of robust data and conclude that an indicative allocation for ALS in ACL could be based on a percentage of budget or a planned profile of learners.
108. In determining a percentage of budget, it is possible to draw on a number of sources of data. LSC research indicates that LEAs allocate approximately 3% of their expenditure to ALS. Our research on the other hand suggests that this sum may not include expenditure allocated by providers at local level for ALS. Regardless of contractual arrangements, the balance of responsibilities between central LEA staff on the one hand and centre staff or external providers on the other, remain very similar. Central expenditure on ALS varies widely between LEAs, as does expenditure at the local level. However, these differences balance each other, and total expenditure on ALS across LEAs appears to fall within a fairly narrow range, with over three quarters of the LEAs in the sample spending an estimated 8-10% of their ACL budget on ALS. In practice, the broad features of ACL are fairly constant across the country.
109. There is a broad estimate that ALS within the FE sector costs approximately 8% of budget and this would seem to be in line with this small ACL sample. Any recommendations on ALS allocation as a percentage of budget could apply equally well to ACL and FE. Given the consistency of the pattern of expenditure on ALS there is a strong case for arguing that LSC funding to local authorities should recommend an allocation of at least 8% of funding to ALS.

110. We recognise that a percentage of budget indicative allocation is a relatively crude approach. There is evidence, primarily from the FE sector, that the need to spend on ALS varies according to the profile of learners recruited, and evidence of differences between LEAs and ACL providers in their missions and recruitment patterns. Though there is no detailed data about ALS in the ACL sector we believe that the incidence of need is similarly varied. The lack of data means that it is difficult at present to develop a profile of learners on which to base an allocation. The sector panel was clear that the regression analysis carried out on FE data was not applicable to other sectors, however, LSC will need to consider the extent to which careful use of FE data is better than no data at all. Therefore, we recommend that the indicative allocation is based in the first instance on a percentage of budget and this is used as a basis for dialogue with local LSCs about future patterns of spending on ALS. Over time it will be possible to refine the allocation mechanism on the basis of improved data and more experience.
111. The risk in providing an indicative allocation is that LEAs who make higher levels of provision might be inclined to reduce the resources allocated for ALS. To minimise this risk LSC could issue clear guidance to local LSCs, LEAs and ACL providers indicating that the allocation should not be taken as grounds for a reduction in the provision of ALS.
112. We conclude that access to individual claims for those with high levels of support needs will be necessary but in reality they will be the exception. The argument for a single threshold for all sectors means that very few adult community learners will ever cross it.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

113. In summary, our assessment is that there are likely to be significant benefits, and few disadvantages from the LSC introducing a two-tier approach to funding ALS in ACL. This we see as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for achieving a more consistent entitlement to support.
114. We recommend that LSC:
- introduces a two-tier approach to ALS funding in ACL
  - issues guidance making explicit the entitlement of all adult community learners to have their additional learning support needs met
  - calculates an indicative allocation for each LEA setting out, in the light of current patterns of expenditure and planned profile of learners, that proportion of funding that might be devoted to ALS but indicates that LEAs or providers should not see this as a reason for any reduction in the amount of ALS provided
  - puts in place a system for individual claims for ALS for learners with high levels of support need, for whom the cost of support exceeds the threshold

- recognises that as the overall budget will not change, in some cases a more appropriate, increased level of ALS might result in a reduced overall level of provision
- monitors the provision of ALS, and collects and publishes data accompanied by guidance on good practice in the delivery of ALS.

## VI. SCHOOL SIXTH FORMS

### FINDINGS

#### **Support in School Sixth Forms**

115. The majority of pupils of statutory school age identified as having special educational needs had high incidence needs: behavioural and general learning difficulties were reported as the most frequently occurring additional needs in all schools visited and the most typical form of support offered was some hours of LSA support and small group teaching. Pupils whose statements were maintained post-16 were generally those who had higher level/low incidence needs.
116. All schools reported that the support provided for learners with additional needs post-16 was limited to that specified in individual students' statements of SEN. Most interviewees expressed concern about the lack of support available for pupils with ALN post-16. One Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) considered that the sixth form was not meeting the post-16 needs of pupils in the community because of the academic nature of the curriculum offer, but also because no support arrangements are provided. Another felt that the lack of support meant that students had to consider alternative provision, even when this was not in their best interests. In only two schools was general support from learning support assistants available to post-16 learners and in both cases this was a special arrangement for specific courses.
117. The number of post-16 pupils with statements of SEN in School Sixth Forms is relatively small; excluding pupils in special resourced units, none of the schools in the sample had more than eight pupils, and one school had none at all. The number of post-16 students with SEN statements identified in the most recent published Annual School Census (2003) as being on the roll of maintained secondary schools is 6,900 i.e. less than 1.7% of the post-16 mainstream school population. This total includes pupils on the roll of special resource units.
118. Also of concern is the marked drop in the number of pupils with statements in Year 13 (i.e. in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of sixth form). The breakdown of the 6,900 pupils with statements in January 2002 shows 4,767 pupils in the first year of sixth form, dropping to 1,825. Although this could partially be explained by pupils who have missed periods of education or were repeating years, and therefore remained to complete their GCSE programmes, another interpretation might be that there is a significant level of drop out by pupils with statements from School Sixth Forms in the course of Year 12.

119. The evidence from the research also suggests that these figures under-represent the level of ALS needs in sixth forms: throughout the rest of the school, some support was offered by all schools to pupils with SEN at school action and school action plus (i.e. who did not have SEN statements). Post-16 this support is not available because of a perceived lack of funding, suggesting that there are pupils who have additional needs at statutory school age but who no longer receive this if they remain in the school post-16. Also of concern were reports from many of the schools interviewed about groups of pupils who either do not remain in the school or experience later difficulty because of the non-availability of support.
120. The research indicated other factors that may contribute to a greater level of unmet need in the future. Although schools identified issues about groups of students, they had more difficulty in identifying individuals whose needs they could not meet for reasons other than funding. However, the interviews suggested that the level of unmet need in sixth forms might grow further as schools begin to offer more vocational courses and encourage a wider range of students to stay on in school.
121. Another factor relates to changes in some LEAs' policies on statements. Within the current legislative framework, pupils with SEN statements will continue to have an entitlement to the support specified in their statements, regardless of the mechanisms introduced for funding this support. However, the numbers of pupils with ALS who do not have the protection of a statement is likely to grow if more LEAs move towards funding mechanisms for students with SEN which seek to allocate funding to schools without the need for an SEN statement. Of the seven LEAs in the sample, at least three were developing this approach or had already introduced it.
122. In all schools visited, systems were linked very closely to statementing procedures and processes, and focused almost exclusively on 11-16 provision. Almost all schools reported a wide range of support systems pre-16 (typically learning support assistants, small group support teaching, specialist teachers, specialist software programmes) provided within the school and supplemented in a number of cases by specialist external services. All schools also offered some provision for pupils with behavioural difficulties or disaffected pupils, and the boundaries between budgets and management of this provision were not always clear to SENCOs and front-line staff.
123. SENCOs, interviewed as part of the research, did not know whether the school received funding for AENs or on what basis this was allocated. In general they used the statementing funds as the basis for funding a range of support for a wider number of pupils, but did not appear to access AEN funds. A recurrent concern expressed by SENCOs was that an indicative allocation could result in ALS funds being spent on other priorities within the school if school budgets came under pressure.

124. The range of salary costs quoted was reasonably consistent across all the schools interviewed. However, there were significant variations between schools and LEAs in the access to specialist services, and the extent to which the true costs of delivery of these services had been calculated and salary costs fully identified.
125. Assessment of learner need appeared to be very closely linked to statementing procedures. Only one provider reported a formal system of on-going assessment and tracking of all pupils; others reported that assessment of need 11-16 was linked to deficit models based on reports from mainstream teachers and monitoring of annual reviews. In schools without units, support systems tended to cease at 16.

### **Basic Skills**

126. There was no real concept of basic skills provision (or Language, Literacy and Numeracy – LLN) post-16, and no examples of formal support for basic needs in the sixth form, other than where this was an integral part of the support provided within resourced unit provision. All schools mentioned key skills in this context but acknowledged that key skills and basic skills differed. None of the schools interviewed were familiar with arrangements for basic skills and were generally unable to provide examples of support for basic skills provided within their current programmes. In part this may be because many School Sixth Forms still focus primarily on A-levels and more academic curricula; however, it can be anticipated that the development of more vocational programmes will lead to a wider range of curricular delivery post-16 and may encourage more pupils to stay on post-16.
127. The sample provided only limited data in relation to ESoL. Only two schools had significant number of pupils for whom English was not their first language. In both cases the pupils were either attracted because the school offers the International Baccalaureate, which attracts a large number of international students to the sixth form, or were drawn from a large network of families whose need for linguistic support was very limited. The additional support provided for these pupils was not considered typical of other schools and issues associated with ESoL therefore remain open at this stage.

### **Assistive Technology**

128. The sample also provided limited data in relation to assistive technology. Budgets for equipment outside those specified in pupil statements or related to resourced unit provision were very limited; use of ICT varied widely and seemed to relate more to whole school policies rather than strategies for addressing SEN needs. The LEA fulfilled a significant role in funding and maintaining equipment specified in pupils' SEN statements.

129. The research suggested that there is a significant unmet need within School Sixth Forms, and that few school staff are fully aware of the contribution that assistive technology can make to meeting pupils' needs.
130. Generally, assistive technology was seen in terms of physical equipment. Although the levels of equipment provided varies from area to area, it appears that little equipment is provided, and where it is, the need for it arises from the statementing process with costs generally being met from LEA or Health Trust budgets.
131. The small numbers of pupils involved means that economies of scale and opportunities to develop expertise do not apply to schools. It is possible that creating a wider pool of knowledge and equipment within an area would benefit pupils and school staff, but those interviewed did not express any views about preferred mechanisms.
132. SEN professionals seemed to be united in their wish to be able to see resources allocated on the basis of individual need, and welcomed the prospect of additional funding being available to support sixth form students. Support (qualified in one case) was expressed for the idea of a two-tier approach, in that this seemed to offer the prospect of more resources. All expressed the wish that new arrangements should avoid the bureaucracy associated with the statementing process. There also seems to be an issue about ear-marking SEN/ALS resources to individual students, with SENCos expressing concern that resources allocated to support ALS post 16 might become diverted into other uses or pre-16, as schools seek to balance the range of demands on their budgets.
133. In all cases, the system for supporting ALS/SEN pre- and post-16 was very closely linked to the LEA policies and funding mechanisms. These varied significantly across the sample, both in terms of the levels and mechanisms for funding SEN, the extent to which LEAs retained central specialist services, and the degree of paperwork, monitoring and accountability required of schools.

### **Funding of Units**

134. SEN/ALS support in schools with resourced units tended to be more broadly based, with pupils in mainstream classes benefiting from the expertise and additional resources provided by the unit. There seemed to be a correlation between the existence of resourced unit provision and a willingness by the school to admit pupils with a wide range of additional needs. Staffing costs for the units were funded by all LEAs on a place-led basis, but the extent to which core funding was allocated for the additional costs of unit provision varied.
135. Despite the apparent security of unit funding arrangements, there was less clarity about how this applied to students in the unit post 16. In at least three cases, the SENCo or Head was not aware of any formal agreements about funding or expectations in relation to post-16 students, and it appeared that the

arrangements for the unit had developed over time without changes necessarily being formally agreed. Arrangements in place, which evolved in a pre-LSC context, had not been updated to reflect the changed funding arrangements. Neither was it always clear what age-range the units are funded for; interviewees were not able to say whether this resulted from a longstanding lack of clarity about arrangements or from the changed arrangements for funding post-16s. In two cases, the viability of specialist post-16 arrangements that had evolved in collaboration with local special schools was being questioned by the host schools because there appeared to be no appropriate source of funding.

136. The confusion about funding units post-16 appeared to apply to both schools and LEAs.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **General**

137. The extent to which practices, procedures and funding vary between LEAs is a key issue for the further development of funding models.
138. ALS/SEN support currently is closely related to procedures for SEN statements and pre-16 arrangements. The perception that there are no resources available for post 16 learners without statements means that support in sixth forms is limited to learners with statements. This results in a lack of support available for learners who need it and some learners considering alternative provision even when it is not in their best interests. In any new arrangements it will be essential to address the perception that no funding is currently available.

### **Standard Rates**

139. The wide variation in schools' current ability to draw on specialist support from the LEA or other sources, and the differences in mechanisms for payment of these services, will present some challenges in modelling new approaches. However, the costs quoted for key elements of support, especially for LSA support, are very similar between all schools, suggesting that it would be fairly straightforward to identify standard rates.
140. For high incidence needs, a shortfall in appropriate support in the short-term is likely to be addressed as a result of schools having an alternative mechanism to access funding for the purchase of support. The same cannot be said in relation to access to, and funding of, specialist support for low incidence/high cost needs (e.g. sensory impairment). Because of the small numbers of ALS/SEN in individual schools, the current support for these SEN pupils may be jeopardised.

## A Two-Tier Approach

141. The most complex aspect of the research relates to assessment of the effect of introducing a two-tier approach to funding. We conclude that the new arrangements should be as simple as possible and minimise bureaucracy. On the face of it, the introduction of a two-tier approach with an indicative allocation to cover high incidence, lower level support needs would respond to this and is consistent with developments in some LEAs designed to reduce the number of pupils whose needs can only be met through the statementing procedures. Equally, the requirement that higher level ALS needs be subject to individual claims could fit alongside current statementing arrangements without creating additional budget pressures, as there is an overlap between high cost/low incidence needs and the existence of a statement, with the exception of accidents or late onset medical conditions (only 131 new statements were completed for post-16 students in 2001/2).
142. A benefit of the two-tier approach could be to identify core funding for ALS/SEN support in School Sixth Forms. This could provide a foundation for an entitlement to support that is ongoing and consistent. However, in determining an allocation for the lower tier the following issues need to be addressed to avoid the risk of unintended outcomes.
- the calculation needs to include current statementing costs, the basis of which vary from LEA to LEA and some of which are below the threshold, but it should not be restricted to the cost of statements
  - it also needs to take account of the extent to which the funding allocated for an individual pupil before 16 is complemented or includes any AEN funding. (The scope of the research did not compare the relative value of statements for similar levels of need between LEAs)
  - school staff, including SENCOs, need to understand the basis of the indicative allocation and that it is greater than the resources identified in statements. This will be the basis for providing a range of support for a wider number of pupils
  - the recurrent concern of practitioners about ALN funding being diverted to other uses within the school will need to be addressed.
143. There are also some presentational concerns related to the identification and visibility of an indicative allocation. Since at present each LEA was clear that additional funding for pupils without statements of statutory school age was included in the schools' base budgets and yet schools rarely acknowledged this fact, a more explicit and well-publicised allocation is needed.
144. We conclude that a two-tier system could in time be harmonised with funding for post 16 pupils in units. Given that they cater for pupils with high levels of need, the top tier with individual claims could offer a way forward. However, any changes to funding levels caused by fluctuating levels of pupils should not destabilise the viability of these units. One of the key features of unit provision is the recognition of the importance of maintaining adequate levels of specialist staff regardless of the actual number of pupils. One means of addressing this

concern might be to designate resourced units as place-led to 16 but subject to special arrangements post-16.

145. The research suggests that, in principle, the approaches being developed could be applied to School Sixth Forms without significant difficulty, and would be broadly welcomed by those working in the sector. In particular, salary costs appear to be comparable throughout the country and therefore this aspect of the proposals could be developed and introduced relatively smoothly. However this belies the very real difficulties that arise from the more detailed aspects of implementation. Some of these relate to presentational issues, where the introduction of a two-tier system with indicative funding for higher-incidence/lower cost needs becomes absorbed into the general school budget and does not filter through to direct provision for students (as is currently the case with AEN funding and some aspects of delegated SEN funding). It is also the case that mechanisms for accountability for LSC funding generally are not yet fully secured.
146. There are also issues associated with the variations in funding levels and mechanisms between LEAs that will present a significant challenge for the introduction of national funding mechanisms.
147. In addition, the introduction of change will need to be carefully managed in order to reassure parents of students with SEN statements that their child's entitlement will still be delivered within any revised arrangements.
148. For all these reasons, it seems advisable that the introduction of a funding approach based on principles common to all sectors is carefully project managed as far as the school sector is concerned with a timetable that allows pupils currently in the sixth form to work through the system before changes are finally implemented i.e. for implementation from September 2006. This would enable parents of pupils transferring to the sixth form in September 2004 to receive full information before their children cease to be of statutory school age. It would also enable further more detailed discussions to be held with LEAs, schools and the DfES to identify points of detail that need further consideration and to ensure that there are no inadvertent casualties in the transfer from one system to another.

### **Basic Skills Provision**

149. The nature of the sixth form curriculum means that few pupils with basic skills needs stay on in School Sixth Forms. This might lead to the conclusion than any indicative allocation will not need to allow for the costs of ALS for basic skills. The risk of excluding an amount for basic skills from the calculation could be to prevent schools from widening their curriculum offer and learner intake. It might also prevent schools from developing the infrastructure for basic skills support.

## **Assistive Technology**

150. We conclude that there is a significant unmet need within School Sixth Forms, and that few school staff are fully aware of the contribution that assistive technology can make to meeting pupils' needs. LEAs fulfil a significant role in funding and maintaining equipment specified in pupils' SEN statements and this service has the potential to be extended to those without statements provided that resources are identified to cover the costs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

151. In making these recommendations we recognise that there are substantial variations in practice which will have an impact on both the speed and nature of progress towards a common approach both within the schools sector and between sectors.

152. We also recognise that ensuring that funding is identified and available for ALS is necessary, but not of itself sufficient, to address the low numbers of learners with ALS needs in School Sixth Forms or the lack of support available.

153. We recommend that LSC:

- develops a trajectory for bringing School Sixth Forms into the common approach for funding ALS that is both gradual and carefully considered
- makes explicit, by issuing guidance, the entitlement of all School Sixth Forms that states clearly that all learners are entitled to additional learning support to meet their individual needs
- addresses the perception that no resources are available to support learners on mainstream programmes who do not have statements by suggesting an indicative allocation for this support (the bottom/lower tier of a two-tier approach)
- puts in place a system for allowing individual claims for additional learning support for learners with high levels of support need, for whom the cost of support exceeds the threshold (the top tier).

## VII. FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

### ADDITIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT IN THE FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

#### Context

154. ALS is a well-established feature of the FE sector, arrangements having been introduced by the former FEFC. At the current time funding is allocated on the basis of individually auditable claims that are calculated on the basis of locally determined costs. Claims are only allowed when spending on ALS for an individual exceeds a threshold (£500 for a full time student, £170 for a part time student) but once the threshold is passed the claim is for the total amount.
155. The funds for ALS are both open ended and ring fenced. It means that if a college faces increased needs for ALS it can draw down additional funds; it is not possible however to spend any excess ALS funding on other items. The arrangement effectively means that ALS expenditure at institutional level has no opportunity cost.
156. There has been considerable support in the FE sector for the ALS funding arrangements which have been seen as enabling institutions to focus on providing the support learners need without having to worry about the financial consequences. Expenditure on ALS has grown to around 8% of spending across the sector or a total in excess of £250 million per year. Within this total there have been significant variations between colleges with some using little or no funding and others claiming in excess of 20% of their budget.
157. The open-ended nature of ALS funding has led to concerns about possible abuse and increasingly detailed auditing. The process of calculating claims, maintaining records in the form required for audit and discussions with auditors is widely seen as burdensome, though some point out that part of the 'bureaucratic burden' - maintaining records of the support given to individuals - would be needed under any system.
158. The current arrangements have also led to instability in funding through the ability of auditors to disallow parts of claims and clawback funding that does not meet the regulations. On occasions college budgets have been reduced by sums in excess of £1 million. It is a weakness of current arrangements that attention has to be focussed on whether expenditure will get past audit rather than whether it will best meet the needs of learners.
159. It is not part of this project to assess the extent of any abuse, but it is relevant to ask whether the audit overhead might reasonably be reduced in any claim-based system. The analysis of claims, and conversations with providers and auditors, suggest that the existence of 'gaming behaviour' by colleges is endemic and it

would be unwise to remove audit controls. The data shows for example patterns of claims falling predominantly in the lower part of funding bands; and there is substantial anecdotal evidence of claims and rates being inflated to maximise funding.

160. A consequence of this inheritance is that there are strongly held views in the sector about the desirability of changing the method of funding ALS. Those who work directly with learners with additional needs see the current system as a means of ensuring that they can access the resources that they think they need. It gives a unique capacity to control resources to staff near the front line and they are reluctant to contemplate losing it. On the other hand those who are concerned with college funding more generally, such as college finance directors, are far more likely to see the costs and instability inherent in a claim based system and to advocate a more formulaic approach.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Standardising Costs**

161. The first stage of the investigation of ALS provision in FE was a detailed study of costs and provision in a sample of colleges. Reliable observations of a standard college teaching rate were made for 22 colleges showing variations between £28.70 and £48.00 with a mean of £38.68. Colleges however also used a variety of other teaching rates and sometimes used mixed rates making it impossible to model the financial impact of changes.
162. This evidence confirms that of earlier studies, such as that commissioned from KPMG by LSDA, which showed that in most cases the costs of teaching staff fell within a fairly narrow range. In addition it confirmed that the cost of teachers was by far the largest single element of cost so that standardising this item would make a major contribution to consistency.
163. Although plausible assertions were sometimes made about the reasons for differences in rates, the researchers were not in a position to substantiate them, and their experience of the variety of practice suggests that it would probably be a difficult task to do so.
164. The second most frequent element of cost in the FE sector is the employment of learning support assistants (LSAs). There were 20 useable observations of college LSA rates with a range varying between £6.15 and £26 with a mean of £12.19. Although the data in the claims suggests that there was variation in the activities carried out by staff claimed for as LSAs, there was in the FE panel and in other discussions, broad agreement on a standard LSA role.

165. In 15 cases, colleges also reported a rate for 'other non teaching staff'. In most cases this was higher than the LSA rate (mean £15.16) though the college with the standard rate of £26 recorded an 'other' rate of £10. Discussions with stakeholders suggests that from time to time all colleges will find themselves paying for a service at a rate that falls outside the standard, though the incidence in the statistics is low. The potential complexity of generating a long list of standard rates may not be cost effective.
166. A commonly quoted circumstance is that where a college faces a monopoly supplier who can effectively set their own rates. Educational psychology services or teachers of the deaf are often quoted as examples. LSC will need to consider whether to apply a standard rate in these circumstances will damage the prospects of learners getting the support they need, or bring benefits by giving providers a greater incentive to seek value for money.
167. The consultants reported that most colleges welcomed some standardisation of rates, and particularly highlighted administration costs as an area needing clarification. The practice in respect of administration varied substantially in the sample looked at in detail with one institution charging £400 per learner for administration and others claiming minimal amounts.

### **Discrete Groups**

168. One aspect of the current FE arrangements that is particularly problematic concerns the arrangements for claiming for the extra cost of teaching learners with learning difficulties or disabilities in small discrete groups. The correct method involves the calculation of an average class size for the college, the calculation of the necessary class size for the group, and the calculation of an hourly staff cost as a method of identifying the extra cost of small groups. There are opportunities for variation at each stage of the process; and it has the direct consequence that colleges claim different amounts for identical provision.
169. There were 18 observations relating to the Average Class Size (ACS) used by colleges to calculate the small group claim with a range varying between 12 and 20 and a mean of 15.8. (This is 20% above the sector average of 14). This range would mean that for a discrete group of 6 students one college would claim twice the hourly rate of a standard group and another over three times the amount.
170. In previous studies the small group formula had widely been seen as unsatisfactory. In the context of the present work, some college staff spoke in favour of a move to programme weighting for discrete provision but one person spoke strongly against on the grounds that he felt he would lose control of funding.

171. The study examined whether the issue of funding discrete groups might largely be resolved by the introduction of a two-tier system. A detailed study showed that the majority of high cost claims in the colleges examined included an element for reduced class size. The problem therefore would not simply disappear as a consequence of a new, higher threshold.
172. Our work suggests that on balance the best way to simplify the funding of this type of provision would be through the introduction of one or more programme weights, reflecting the needs of those learners who require to be taught in discrete small groups. The risk of introducing standard programme weights is that if they are perceived to be financially advantageous, there may be pressure on practitioners to place learners on discrete provision inappropriately. Two programme weights will allow an allocation closer to the currently claimed costs but creates a problem of defining the characteristics for the different weights. A single programme weight removes the difficulty of the definition, but would out of necessity be very much lower than the current claim for individuals with high levels of support needs.
173. From information supplied by those institutions that we were able to study in depth, it seems that provision in discrete groups accounts for around 15% of expenditure on ALS. It would be necessary therefore to reduce the amount of funds distributed by formula proportionately were a system of weights to be adopted.

### **A Two-Tier System**

174. As indicated earlier we find widespread concerns about the complexity of the current system and a wish to reduce the impact and demands of financial audit. College Finance Directors are particularly keen to see a system that minimises the use of individually calculated claims; and there are concerns about inappropriate use of ALS and poor value for money. The FE sector panel gave strong support to the idea of a formulaic approach to funding a majority of provision.
175. On the other hand we also find widespread concern among specialist staff that moving away from individual claims will allow resources to be diverted elsewhere or will lead to pressure to shift the pattern of resource allocation from relatively high cost individuals to a lower level of support for many learners as this might be deemed better value for money. They are also concerned that resources will be diverted to support the achievement of national targets and it may lead to pressure not to recruit learners with high levels of support need who fall below the threshold.
176. In seeking to assess whether it would be possible to construct a formula that was both simple and fair we commissioned a statistical analysis of patterns of expenditure. A specialist consultancy, Frontier Economics, was commissioned to explore the relationship between historical patterns of expenditure in the sector

and background variables such as the type of course or characteristics of the learner.

177. This regression analysis showed that most of the variation in current patterns of expenditure on ALS could be explained through a limited number of variables captured on the ILR. An indicative allocation, based on these factors could offer substantial simplification and substantially reduce the need for audit.

### **Basic Skills**

178. An initial hypothesis was that much of the complexity of the FE methodology arose because of the extensive provision of support for basic skills. The study therefore examined whether funding all basic skills support outside the ALS arrangements might effect a major simplification. A detailed investigation of a sample of claims found that in most cases basic skills support was part of an overall package of measures to assist learners, and could not readily be disentangled.
179. Basic skills provision was a substantial part of provision in most of the sampled MIDAS colleges accounting for 48% of the learners (although one college had a very high percentage and without it the total percentage would have been 34%). 36% of the total value of the claim was basic skills (29% excluding the same college). It was however difficult to assess the full financial impact of removing basic skills from the ALS mechanism since in very many cases learners receiving basic skills support also received other forms of support.
180. Most claims involving basic skills support fell into support bands 0 (32%) and band 1 (45%). An indicative funding system for claims up to £1000 therefore would remove 77% of basic skills claims from ALS. In total, 30% of claims (7% costs) fell in band 0, 36 % of claims in band 1 (22% costs), 12% in band 2 (12% costs) and 7% in band 3 (10% costs). An indicative funding system for claims up to £3500 would remove 93% of claims from ALS (69% costs). The impact would however vary between colleges; in this sample it would range from 59% in one case to 99% in another.

### **Assistive Technology**

181. We find that in FE the use of ALS to fund assistive technology is relatively limited. A survey of colleges showed that in the FE sector expenditure on such technology was a very small proportion of total budgets and in the main related to generic and re-usable equipment (e.g. laptops).
182. Although FE colleagues have consistently raised concerns about only being able to claim for depreciation, not capital costs, there was very little evidence of the sort of expenditure where only being able to claim depreciation put them at a disadvantage. One interpretation offered is that the recent injection of funding for technology may have depressed the use of ALS as a source of funding for assistive technology; this may not be the case in the future.

183. The survey, carried out by TechDis for LSDA suggests that the use of ALS to fund equipment is a relatively minor feature for colleges and should not be critical in determining the funding model. The main findings were as follows:
- all of the colleges surveyed use assistive technology with their learners
  - 10% or fewer of learners supported by ALS receive some form of assistive technology
  - the most common types of technology were specialist software, e.g. JAWS, laptops and hardware/peripherals
  - the majority of colleges claimed under £10,000 per year on assistive technology
  - 85% of colleges who claim technology through the ALS do so via depreciation, and the majority claim this over three years
  - Internal and external support is drawn on for:
    - assessing learners' needs
    - identifying and acquiring the correct equipment
    - technical support and maintenance.
  - internal support is generally provided by college IT teams; external support is much more varied.
184. Colleges also gave opinions on possible improvements to the system. A popular view was the establishment of some local or regional source of equipment and support, which would provide advice and allow colleges to hire and trial assistive technology. It was also investigated whether there were elements of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) system as applied in HE that could enhance the present arrangements. Although colleges were opposed to the full implementation of a DSA approach, it was thought that there were certain aspects, which if incorporated, would be a positive development for the ALS system.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **Standard Rates**

185. The data in this sample suggests that around 80% of colleges pay standard rates within about 10% of the mean of £39 per hour. Any further investigation of the outliers would need to consider not only whether the calculations were accurate but also whether it was in fact necessary to deploy more expensive staff in the high cost cases and whether the use of lower cost staff reduced quality in others. The complexity of such a task and the difficulty of including any findings in a funding model strongly suggest that it should not be pursued, and that claims should be standardised around the current median.
186. There is a greater range of variation in the rates paid to LSAs with half the sample paying rates 10% higher or lower than the mean. In addition, in most colleges there are special rates that fall outside the range for teachers or LSAs,

although it is not clear what proportion of costs they account for. It would be a huge task to establish how far the variation in LSA rates paid represented a consistent approach to provision, pay and claiming, and not practicable to incorporate such findings in a funding formula. The options would appear to be to continue with individually determined claims or to standardise any claims for LSA support around the sector median.

187. There is a range of other services and activities reported by colleges with costs that vary substantially. Discussions with stakeholders suggest that variations in costs often reflect local market conditions as much as consistent variations in practice to reflect varied need. A process of seeking to tabulate and evaluate a long list of alternative rates, justified in different circumstances, is unlikely to be cost effective and runs counter to the objective of increasing simplicity. In the context of a two-tier system, with a substantially increased threshold, such rates would only apply to a tiny fraction of college expenditure.

188. One implication of the variety of rates used and the difficulty of ensuring that any variations in rates paid are necessary would seem to be that it is preferable to restrict the use of locally generated claims for funding purposes. A two-tier system would allow institutions to judge what they felt it necessary to spend in all the circumstances without having to have regard to external guidelines.

### **Discrete Groups**

189. The significant range of variation in college class sizes used to calculate funding for discrete groups of learners means that colleges are currently receiving significant differences in funding for the same provision. This is difficult to justify. Discussions with stakeholders, including the FE sector panel confirm that this is one of the least popular elements of the current method and the simplification of using a system of one or two weights would be welcomed. The KPMG survey reported similar findings.

190. A move to a weighting system would not be without difficulty. At the moment colleges can and do, submit claims for every size of class between 2 and 10. It would not be much of a simplification to produce a similarly differentiated set of weights; still less to ensure their correct application. Similarly there are those who argue that a weight to reflect small group size should be superimposed on existing programme weights (i.e. a small group of learners doing catering should attract the catering weight on top of the small group weight.) We feel that such a move would only be feasible were it to be accepted that the extra cost of running small groups for those who need them should be captured in, at the most, two weights which should operate like programme weights.

191. On balance we feel that it is possible to define two groups of learners around whose needs a weighting could be constructed. The first would be those learners with moderate levels of additional support needs who would normally be taught in groups of no more than 8-10. The other group, with higher levels of

support need would normally be taught in groups of no more than 6, and in addition require LSA support.

192. In either case, should an individual have individual support requirements such as a communicator, and should the cost of these additional needs pass the threshold, it would be possible to submit an individual claim.

### **A Two-Tier System**

193. Our assessment is that the introduction of a two-tier system, based on the ILR analysis is technically feasible. It would have advantages for colleges in giving greater flexibility and reducing financial audit. It is likely to benefit some learners, particularly those with a need for low levels of support because it would make explicit that all learners were entitled to support, not just those where it was possible to make a claim. The freedom that it would give to colleges to spend on ALS without worrying whether it met audit guidelines would improve overall value for money.
194. This is balanced by the possible disadvantage to learners who do not contribute to national headline targets and who require levels of resource just below the threshold to meet their individual needs.
195. It is likely that there will be initial concerns in colleges, particularly from those who work most closely with learners. We feel however that the introduction of plan led funding provides a new context in which the different circumstances of different institutions can be recognised. We also recognise that it will be necessary to monitor the impact on provision and support to ascertain whether there are any unintended consequences.
196. The LSC needs to consider whether claims for costs above the threshold should be for the total cost or only the amount that falls above the threshold. The risk of the former method is that it provides a powerful perverse incentive to inflate claims that fall near the threshold level (as suggested by the current pattern of claims). The risk of the latter is that colleges might limit the ALS budget to that proportion that they can claim as extra. To minimise the risk of the perverse incentive to inflate claims LLSCs would need to monitor changes to the pattern of claims at and above the threshold.
197. The level at which the threshold should be set requires careful consideration. If it is set too high it runs the risk that the needs of a small number of individuals for high cost support will be sacrificed to meet the lower cost needs of a greater number. On the other hand if it is set too low it risks increasing the administrative burden, requiring higher levels of auditing, and reducing pressure for overall value for money.
198. An analysis of the incidence of claims taken from ILR/ISR data for 2001/02 shows that 85% of claims would fall below a threshold of £2500 and 94% of claims (though nearer 68% of expenditure) would fall below a threshold of £4500.

The pattern varies between individual institutions reflecting their circumstances and practice.

199. The arguments in favour of the £2500 threshold are that it would remove 85% of claims, which represents a significant reduction in bureaucracy and financial audit, especially as the major elements in the remaining claims can be standardised. It would leave around 26,250 individual claims to be examined in detail, which amounts to around 550 per local LSC office. Expenditure of £2500 for a single individual is a considerable sum and should be based on a thorough individual assessment of need and individual learning support plan. Practitioners who work directly with learners generally favour the lowest level of threshold.
200. The arguments in favour of the higher threshold are that it further reduces the number of claims by some 60%, from 26,250 to 10,500 or to just over 200 per LLSC. It gives colleges a higher level of resource for which they do not need to account in detail and reduces the potential for claims close to the threshold to be inflated to secure extra resources. The FE sector panel, when asked to consider the matter supported the figure of £4500.

### **Assistive Technology**

201. We find that the use of ALS to fund assistive technology is relatively limited. A survey of colleges showed that in the FE sector expenditure on such technology was a very small proportion of total budgets and in the main related to generic and re-usable equipment (e.g. laptops). Although FE colleagues have consistently raised concerns about only being able to claim for depreciation, not capital costs, there was very little evidence of the sort of expenditure where only being able to claim depreciation put them at a disadvantage, although we recognise that recent injections of funding for technology may have depressed the use of ALS as a source of funding for assistive technology and this may change in the future.
202. Our assessment is that in respect of assistive technology, funding is necessary but not of itself sufficient to allow access to all who need it. An indicative allocation would allow providers to purchase generic items such as laptops that can be used by a number of learners outright if they so wished. For those individuals who require high cost individualised items of assistive technology, where depreciation is held to be inappropriate because they are not needed every year, it may make more sense to fund specialist support services that can assess needs, provide, maintain and offer technical support for equipment on a local LSC area basis. In the longer term LSC may wish to support cross department arrangements for assistive technology to move with the learner across phases of education and employment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Standardised Rates**

203. We recommend that the LSC should issue a set of standard staff rates for teachers and LSAs to be used as the basis of claims when costs in any instance exceed the threshold. The rates should be based on the median rates identified in the survey, with the addition of any area cost uplift as agreed from time to time.
204. We recommend that LSC should not seek to identify standard rates for every conceivable category of cost but should circulate to LLSCs benchmark data on the costs and definitions of other frequently purchased services. It will be necessary to update these rates regularly with reference to the costs incurred for these same items out of the indicative allocation. The freedom to vire the indicative allocation should give better assurance that rates represent value for money than the claim based system.

### **Discrete Groups**

205. We recommend that two programme weights should be identified, to reflect the fact that some learners require to be taught in small groups, and some in particularly small groups. The weighting should reflect the reduced size of the group and associated needs for learning support assistants. It should not be necessary to apply further programme weightings in respect of the particular activities pursued by these learners but it would not preclude individual claims for those who need additional support above the threshold.

### **Basic Skills**

206. We recommend that there should be no change to the way that support for basic skills needs is treated in relation to ALS. Where basic skills are pursued as a main learning goal the appropriate funding, including uplifts should be sought and ALS not used. Where basic skills support is additional to a programme ALS can be provided, either from the indicative allocation or, when costs exceed the threshold, in the context of a claim.

### **A Two-Tier System**

207. We recommend that a two-tier approach to funding ALS in FE be adopted with a claim system retained for either 5% or 15% of most expensive cases. For costs up to a threshold, the lower tier, an indicative allocation should be calculated based on past patterns of expenditure, and be available for colleges to spend without financial audit or further reference to LSC. Colleges should also be able, additionally, to make an additional claim when costs for an individual learner fall above the threshold.

208. A simple formula could be developed based on the regression analysis undertaken by Frontier, but recognising that the current pattern of expenditure does not represent a perfect allocation. The indicative allocation should guide local negotiations in the context of plan led funding rather than be applied rigidly.
209. Guidance and a clear statement that institutions are expected to maintain appropriate ALS for all learners who need it should accompany the allocation.
210. Measures need to be put in place to monitor patterns of provision and support to ensure that learners needs are met and learners are not denied access to provision.

### **Assistive Technology**

211. We recommend that LSC make no changes to the way in which assistive technology is funded in FE but that where appropriate colleges are encouraged to participate in local collaborative arrangements brokered by LSC. In some cases the expertise of colleges will be such that they are able to support other institutions in this respect.

## VIII. WORK BASED LEARNING

### FINDINGS

#### **Support in Work Based Learning**

212. In work-based learning additional learning support is defined in terms of additional learning needs (ALN) or additional social needs (ASN). ALN is identified by assessing basic skills level and is relatively well understood and straightforward to do. Providers indicated that they were less clear about what ASN was and how it should be identified; ASN was often defined in terms of causes (e.g. homelessness) rather than need for support.
213. Providers indicated that they completed an assessment form and collected evidence to support an individual claim for ALN, ASN or both. The claim was then passed to Connexions to endorse. Once the learner was categorised as having either ALN, ASN or both, an additional sum of £1000 for one and £1500 for both is allocated. Although this sum is attached to individuals, it does not necessarily reflect the additional learning support costs of the individual and tends to be used to support the whole group of learners. Providers emphasised that future funding arrangements must continue to recognise both types of support need.
214. Although there were local arrangements until July 03 and a national arrangement for individual claims for 'exceptional' needs, there was little evidence that providers used this. Some delivered support above the level for which they were funded but did not tend to claim exceptional support.
215. Learners assessed as having ALN or ASN were not equally distributed among WBL frameworks or providers. Apart from a few learners with ALN on FMAs there were very few learners with ALN or ASN on AMAs and FMAs. There were some differences reported between providers and provider types that are relevant to ALS funding. Even within the same framework there tends to be a hierarchy of providers with some, usually employer based schemes, able to select more able learners leaving others, usually specialist voluntary providers, with a higher incidence of learners needing ALS.
216. A key finding was that the current ways of funding the main frameworks and levels of funding have a significant impact on what is 'additional.'
217. The specific methods of paying providers in WBL affected the way providers responded to the need for ALN. Increased funding for key skills, that can support basic skills, had been provided by adding a month to the standard length of stay (SLOS) but since most trainees needing ALS did not complete programmes this usually did not add to providers resources. Equally learners needing ALN or ASN were less likely to trigger achievement funding.

218. Most providers in the research sample reported that some trainees had ALN, which was identified in terms of level of basic skills. In a number of cases providers reported dyslexia and to a lesser extent dyspraxia.
219. Providers responded to ALN in a variety of ways including 1:1 support both in the workplace and off the job; workshops, both drop in and timetabled; through upskilling vocational tutors and buying in specialist support and diagnostic assessment.
220. Most providers also reported that they had some learners with ASN though were less confident and more varied in respect of both the identification and support of such learners. They highlighted lack of confidence, lack of self-esteem and difficulties in concentrating or engaging with others as key problems and identified a range of social circumstances (broken homes, homelessness, drug abuse, periods of time care and recent and historic periods of offending etc) as causes. This cohort was predominantly placed in pre-apprenticeship programmes.
221. The responses to ASN emphasised individual counselling; effective inter agency liaison (at which some voluntary providers excelled) and increased levels of individual support. These learners also typically took longer to complete the scheme and be placed with an employer.
222. Though most providers had engaged with learners with disabilities at some time, they recognised that families and other agencies were directing these learners into FE perceived as providing better support arrangements. People with disabilities and learning difficulties are much less likely to be in employment than non-disabled people and therefore employer led schemes are likely to have fewer trainees with ALS needs.
223. Providers reported a range of activities on which ALN/ASN funds were spent. In work based learning as in other sectors, they included extended use of their own staff to provide extra support sessions, both one to one and group workshops, provision of personal care support and classroom assistance. One provider reported a specialist member of staff who was able to assess and deliver support for dyslexia. Others bought in specialists including counsellors and provided extra support for basic skills and ESOL needs. They also used resources to purchase materials, from which all learners benefited, and provided staff development. Some items quoted, e.g. bus passes and hardship funds are more akin to learner support in other sectors than learning support. Voluntary sector providers were very experienced and successful in accessing and securing additional funding streams for support and these were predominantly used on pre apprenticeship programmes.

224. Within the work-based sector, staff competencies needed to undertake learner initial and diagnostic assessment were felt to be less developed than in the FE and the voluntary sector. The impact of this was that identification of how to meet learner needs was slower and funding access was sporadic.
225. Where initial assessment was carried out, providers of work-based learning were better at identifying ALN (determined by level of basic skills) than ASN as they had access to diagnostic and Initial Assessment 'tools' and guidance. ASN took longer to identify and endorse. The FE sector had access to a large resource for initial assessment within the college, which supported the process and assisted the identification. The voluntary sector, with its specialist focus, tended to have a better-informed history of client need and used the recruitment and induction time to identify and support educational and social needs. Providers with increased volumes of learners with ALN and ASN felt that the increased identification of support needs had resulted through more effective Initial Assessment and recognition that learners have barriers to learning.
226. The work-based sector experienced similar issues with the delivery of learning and social need support, with a reliance on providing additional visits and informal one to one support in the work place. In contrast, the FE sector delivered demand led support in classroom sessions but did not always meet learner needs in the work place. It was felt by the FE sector that information on learner needs was not effectively communicated. The voluntary sector worked with discrete groups both in placement and in centre with a better learner tutor ratio and had much closer links with support and referral agencies.
227. Both the FE and work-based sectors appeared to deliver additional support through extra visits by assessors to the workplace to complete vocational qualifications. Support to meet ALN was perceived by work-based providers to be delivered through the key skill sessions, whilst the FE sector also supplied additional support for dyslexia with specialist practitioners. The work-based sectors relied on tutors and assessors to provide this support both in the work place and at the centre although they were not usually specialists. The voluntary sector had a more flexible approach to delivery of support which appeared more learner centred. Currently, voluntary organisations deliver very low numbers of FMAs and AMAs, but they are expecting higher numbers due to changes in funding for other training.
228. Most providers interviewed did not know the detailed financial costs to their organisations of providing additional support to individual learners because they were not required to submit individually costed claims. However they were clear about the resource implications that these learners had on staff time.
229. In particular, the private providers in the work-based sector felt that their staff capacity and capability were an issue and seek additional guidance in delivering learning and social support effectively. They also recognised the associated issue of meeting the required levels of support for the learner based in the work place.

## **Standard Rates**

230. In the context of a two-tier approach it is necessary to specify the basis of claims for high cost learners. The range of costs quoted for staff salaries in the work based sector was greater than FE, ranging between £12 and £50 per hour for trainers, £10 and £68 for basic skills specialists and between £10 and £40 for assessors and verifiers. There was little evidence of systematic use of other types of support staff. Providers gave plausible accounts as to why their rates were particularly high (e.g. the staff concerned were more specialised) but it was not possible to assess whether this was either true or necessary.

## **A Two-Tier Approach**

231. Panel members identified the benefits of a two-tier approach as: the greater potential for meeting learners' needs; appropriate funding for high level support needs; stability of funding which will assist with the three year development plan and that they may be able to offer a place to learners with high level needs which some providers do not currently do. They saw the negative aspects as: an increase in bureaucracy due to an increased number of learners with high levels of support; it would be necessary to review ASN needs on an ongoing basis as it is not possible to anticipate accurately what level of support individuals might need; it might encourage non specialist providers to take learners whose needs they cannot meet and there would be no way of knowing if the provider was using the indicative allocation for support purposes. The panel recommended that the most appropriate way to fund ALS was on an individual basis but they were concerned about bureaucracy.

232. When asked what the extra resources would be spent on, the majority of responses identified counselling (for ASN), increased 1:1 support and basic skills support.

233. The statistical analysis to find out which factors in WBL were most strongly associated with learners who have ALN, ASN or both, showed some significant factors. The framework the learner was on had the strongest association, followed by NVQ level and in decreasing order of strength: the occupational sector; age; ethnicity; WP postcode and gender. However, even within the same framework recruitment patterns vary reflecting a hierarchy of providers with some able to select their learners.

## **Assistive Technology**

234. The low incidence of disability meant that access to assistive technology was not a common issue but where it arose providers did not report special difficulties. One example cited as good practice was the provision of specialist support through organisations such as ENABLE in the Midlands. This service was widely used and appreciated.

235. Providers noted that in WBL learners needed equipment to assist them both in the work place and also in off the job training. This has implications for the provision of equipment, as it needs to be available in both settings.

### **Basic Skills**

236. In practice, basic skills needs and ALN are indistinguishable since ALN are defined by level of basic skills. Providers were clear that certain programmes had high proportions of learners with basic skills needs although others such as AMAs with 0.02% and FMAs with 4.11% have very few.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **General**

237. The research confirms that some learners with ALS requirements are directed away from WBL to other agencies. The perception that support is unavailable and lack of understanding of ALS availability by providers and other agencies may be one reason for this. Learners with ALS needs are much less likely than others to be in employment or with private training providers who are able to select their trainees. These learners who often have emotional and behaviour difficulties are much more likely to be with specialist, voluntary providers. We conclude that for LSC to underline that there is a common entitlement to ALS across all routes could be an important step towards equity.

### **Standardising Costs**

238. The variety of practices and rates revealed in this sector mean that consistency and equity would be difficult to achieve if providers claim for trainers, assessors or verifiers on the basis of their own rates. Consequently, standard rates, although less closely linked to actual cost, might be helpful. Individual claims above a threshold are likely to remain exceptional so that a standardising of rates would not have a major impact on overall provider finances.

239. It may also make sense to collect data on which to base rates for services bought in from external support specialists (e.g. counsellors). This should be collated with data from the other Learning and Skills sectors.

240. The WBL sector is, through the use of ALN/ASN, familiar with the idea that payments are a standard contribution to costs rather than a precise reflection of local circumstances. It may be better if funds available through a two-tier system continue to be presented in this light.

### **A Two-Tier Approach**

241. Providers were clear about a range of circumstances that was likely to give rise to ASN - for example care leavers, ex drug users, homelessness, etc. This is

because the current mechanism requires the provider to identify the causes of ALN/ ASN in order to draw down the extra funding. It does not however help providers to identify what additional support these learners need in specific terms to be successful in their learning. Providers need to develop skills in assessing support in the learning context so that they can provide effective support to enable individuals to learn successfully.

242. For ASN an approach like the FE WP factor might be a straightforward way of routing funds to deal with the general needs of such learners. Work-based providers were less inclined than FE practitioners to look for a link between funding and provision at the level of the individual and this emphasis on using all resources to best fit the needs of all learners needs to be encouraged.
243. In allocating resources to providers, the LSC needs to consider the implications of increasing the average weekly rate versus extending the SLOS.
244. In the work-based sector we find that there are the elements of a two-tier system already in place. The rates for ALN/ASN are standard rather than based on individually costed claims; and there is, albeit imperfectly understood and infrequently used, provision for claiming extra when individuals have high needs for support.
245. There are issues related to determining an appropriate indicative allocation. One approach is to use the current level of ALN and ASN claims to provide a starting point. Another possibility is to fund on profile based on statistical analyses of WBL records that show very strong associations between a limited number of variables and the incidence of ALN/ASN claims. These possibilities require further investigation. On the other hand there is evidence of significant variations between providers in the incidence of learners needing support, reflecting both their missions and status.
246. We conclude that the development of a formulaic approach may be more difficult in WBL than other sectors because of the small size of many providers and because of stratification of learner intake. Seen in the context of plan led funding however, a formula, as in other sectors, should be a useful addition to the planning dialogue.
247. The threshold level is an issue for work-based learning, as the maximum payable is £1500 and although this is a reflection of costs rather than an individually costed claim, there could be a significant gap for learners with high levels of support needs who are below the threshold for individual claims. The gap increases with the level of threshold. We conclude that it would be possible to set different thresholds for different sectors to reflect their current arrangements, but this would add complexity so we conclude it would be impractical to do so. Nevertheless we conclude that consideration must be given to recognising those higher level costs within the formula or allocation so that work-based learning providers are not treated inequitably in relation to their counterparts in FE.

## **Providing Assistive Technology**

248. The relatively low level of use of assistive technology in the sector argues that providers should have access to specialist support services through some collective arrangement as the best method of ensuring that all learners have equal access to the most appropriate facilities. The strong support for ENABLE suggests that this model works well.
249. The need for learners to access technology at work as well as off the job suggests that an approach which enables learners acquire and keep appropriate technology might be worth consideration. Where equipment and technical support costs cross the threshold an individual claim may be made for the full cost.

## **Basic Skills**

250. Basic skills needs and ALN are in practice indistinguishable since ALN are defined by basic skills level. Providers were clear that certain programmes had high proportions of learners with basic skills needs and that enhancing programme funding generally might be a better route than relying on ALS. This is the method adopted in E2E.
251. On the other hand the 'selection' of trainees by certain providers argues for a method of basic skills funding linked to characteristics of the learner. Perhaps enhanced funding or enhanced key skills funding for those lacking certain prior levels of achievement, might be a way forward.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

252. In summary, we assess that there are advantages in developing a two-tier approach to funding ALS in WBL on the basis that it is consistent with the other sectors but reflects the specific context of work-based providers. This we see as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for achieving a more consistent entitlement to support.
253. We recommend that LSC:
- develops a two-tier approach to ALS funding in WBL
  - issues guidance making explicit the entitlement of all work based learners to have their additional learning support needs met
  - calculates an indicative allocation in the light of current claims for ALN/ASN and the planned profile of learners
  - considers in allocating resources to providers, the implications of increasing the average weekly rate versus extending the SLOS
  - puts in place a system for individual claims for ALS for learners with high levels of support need, for whom the cost of support exceeds the threshold. The threshold needs to be determined and the standard rate to be revised.

- Calculations need to include the costs of assistive technology and use a standard rate for teaching/training staff across all sectors
- monitors the provision of ALS, and collects and publishes data about the provision of ALS and cost accompanied by guidance on good practice in assessing and delivering ALS.

## **IX. CROSS SECTOR ISSUES**

### **Thresholds**

254. Some stakeholders have suggested that within a two-tier system there might be different thresholds for ACL or for part time learners more generally. We find that there is a clear difference in the profile of learners between ACL and FE; but there is no simple distinction between part time and full time learners. Rather there is a wide distribution of programme sizes varying from 3 glh at one extreme to 300glh or more at the other. In the future it will not be possible to distinguish ACL and FE for funding purposes.
255. Our conclusion is that any attempt to introduce different thresholds would be certain to introduce additional complexity. While stakeholders may raise this as an issue we believe that once the difficulties have been explained they will come to the same conclusion as the sector panels; that it should not be pursued. There is no body of support, nor any logical case, for a different threshold for School Sixth Forms. Similarly there is no pressure for a different threshold in WBL.

### **Standardising Claims**

256. We have considered whether in setting standard rates for claims above the threshold there should be different rates for the different sectors. While it would be against the spirit of a common approach to differentiate in this way some have argued that there are significant differences in the costs faced by providers. We have rejected this proposal for a mixture of principle and practice.
257. Some of the costs faced by providers - externally bought in services for example, will be common. While we are not proposing standard rates for all services there should at least be consistent benchmarking. We cannot see why the cost of learning support assistants should differ by sector and propose a single standard rate.
258. For teachers we see no need to differentiate between schools and FE to reflect the relatively small difference in average salary costs. It is recognised that the practice of using a high proportion of part time staff in ACL gives a different cost profile but we feel that the number of instances in which an ACL provider needs to claim teaching staff costs above the threshold will be negligible. For work-based learning there are variations between occupational sectors that are as significant as variations from schools and FE; and colleges as well as PTPs deliver WBL. We recommend that for simplicity LSC should use the teaching rate for all trainee facing staff.

## **Assistive Technology**

259. We find that the use of ALS to fund assistive technology is relatively limited. A survey of colleges showed that in the FE sector expenditure on such technology was a very small proportion of total budgets and in the main related to generic and re-usable equipment (e.g. laptops). Although FE colleagues have consistently raised concerns about only being able to claim for depreciation, not capital costs, there was very little evidence of the sort of expenditure where only being able to claim depreciation put them at a disadvantage. However, the level of the threshold will affect the extent to which non-FE providers have access to individual claims.
260. In schools and ACL circumstances varied, and while potentially LEA central services could be made available in many cases, little use was made. The study of the WBL sector showed very variable practice but some good examples of use of local external support services.
261. Our assessment is that in respect of assistive technology, funding is necessary but not of itself sufficient to allow access to all who need assistive technology. An indicative allocation would allow providers to purchase generic items such as laptops that can be used by a number of learners outright if they so wished. For those individuals who require high cost individualised items of assistive technology, where depreciation is held to be inappropriate because they are not needed every year, it may make more sense to fund specialist support services that can assess needs, provide maintain and offer technical support for equipment on a local LSC area basis. In the longer term LSC may wish to support cross department arrangements for assistive technology to move with the learner across phases of education and employment.
262. There is a substantial case for the LSC, actively to broker collaborative arrangements for providing post 16 learners with assistive technology. For many providers access to advice, training and support is as important as the equipment itself. Bodies such as some LEA central teams, access centres, some FE colleges, charities and independent specialist bodies could provide a service to providers funded out of the two-tier arrangements. We recommend that this is a task LLSCs are asked to take on as a priority in the light of the DDA.

## **X. IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES**

### **Implementation**

263. We are conscious of concerns in the FE sector, that in the absence of individual claims, the resources allocated to ALS by institutions might be diverted elsewhere. There are likely to be calls for ring fencing of ALS funds; but it is clear that this is counter to the overall policy of the LSC. Ring fencing requires audit and introduces the associated problems of bureaucracy and financial uncertainty. Clear guidance about expectations for the entitlement for support and reporting on changes of pattern of ALS provision will be necessary to provide some form of assurance.
264. Individual claims above a threshold will involve institutions in discussions with LLSCs. There is a risk that the lack of capacity, in terms of knowledge and experience to carry out this additional function may result in inconsistent practice emerging. To overcome this risk it will necessary to provide clear guidance and training for both providers and LLSC staff.
265. Our assessment is overall that the changes proposed here have benefits but are not without risks. The benefits are clear in ACL, WBL and schools, in FE, it is more finely balanced. It will be necessary for LSC actively to sell the changes to stakeholders. In FE in particular, the changes to ALS, as with the move to plan led funding, represent a significant paradigm shift that initially may be hard to understand. In the work based sector providers will need assurance that the system is sensitive to different learner profiles. In ACL it may be necessary to dampen expectations of additional resources and in schools there will be a need to confirm that system of statements will not be challenged or undermined.
266. Our assessment is that the plan led funding approach is key. As we understand it the allocation of funds to providers will be based not on a detailed count of historic learner numbers but on an agreed forward looking plan. The profile of activity of an institution, including its patterns of ALS will be taken into account in negotiating that plan; and the results of the two-tier calculations will also inform the discussions. The benefit of plan led funding, both for ALS and more generally, is that once agreed, the budget will not be subject to in year audit and clawback.

### **Data**

267. One of the risks of the planned two-tier approach is that the removal of the requirement for individual claims for the majority of learners will result in the loss of some data in the FE sector concerning the number and distribution of learners. LSC will need to consider how to overcome this in order to have data to report to the Secretary of State on its duty to have regard to the needs of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities and progress in promoting equality of opportunity.

## Monitoring

268. It is our view that the LSC will need to focus discussions about the impact of changes ***on ensuring learners needs for ALS are met***, rather than the protection of funds 'allocated' for ALS. It will also be necessary to emphasise the benefits for learners while recognising and minimising the risks. We see the key benefits of the proposals as being:

- confirmation that all learners have an entitlement to support irrespective of sector or provider
- confirmation that all providers are resourced to meet individual needs from within their basic allocation
- confirmation that all providers can draw down extra funding for learners with high levels of support need
- removal (in the FE sector) of the administrative burden, potential instability and inequity caused by individually calculated and audited claims.

269. One way to help allay the concerns of some practitioners will be to emphasise that local LSCs will take an active interest in ALS provision as part of their routine relationships with providers. We recommend that the LSC issue guidance to its local offices and to providers to support the planning dialogue around ALS and the treatment of ALS in provider review.

## **XI. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING**

270. In summary, our assessment is that there are likely to be significant benefits, and few disadvantages from the LSC introducing a two-tier approach to funding ALS in ACL. This we see as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for achieving a more consistent entitlement to support.

271. We recommend that LSC:

- introduces a two-tier approach to ALS funding in ACL
- issues guidance making explicit the entitlement of all adult community learners to have their additional learning support needs met
- calculates an indicative allocation for each LEA setting out, in the light of current patterns of expenditure and planned profile of learners, that proportion of funding that might be devoted to ALS but indicates that LEAs or providers should not see this as a reason for any reduction in the amount of ALS provided
- puts in place a system for individual claims for ALS for learners with high levels of support need, for whom the cost of support exceeds the threshold
- recognises that as the overall budget will not change, in some cases a more appropriate, increased level of ALS might result in a reduced overall level of provision
- monitors the provision of ALS, and collects and publishes data accompanied by guidance on good practice in the delivery of ALS.

### **SCHOOL SIXTH FORMS**

272. In making the following recommendations for the School Sixth Forms sector, we recognise that there are substantial variations in practice which will have an impact on both the speed and nature of progress towards a common approach both within the schools sector and between sectors.

273. We also recognise that ensuring that funding is identified and available for ALS is necessary, but not of itself sufficient, to address the low numbers of learners with ALS needs in School Sixth Forms or the lack of support available.

274. We recommend that LSC:

- develops a trajectory for bringing School Sixth Forms into the common approach for funding ALS that is both gradual and carefully considered
- makes explicit the entitlement of all School Sixth Forms that states clearly that all learners are entitled to additional learning support to meet their individual needs by issuing guidance
- addresses the perception that no resources are available to support learners on mainstream programmes who do not have statements by suggesting an

- indicative allocation for this support (the bottom/lower tier of a two-tier approach)
- puts in place a system for allowing individual claims for additional learning support for learners with high levels of support need, for whom the cost of support exceeds the threshold (the top tier).

## **FURTHER EDUCATION**

### **Standardised Rates**

275. We recommend that the LSC should issue a set of standard staff rates for teachers and LSAs to be used as the basis of claims when costs in any instance exceed the threshold. The rates should be based on the median rates identified in the survey, with the addition of any area cost uplift as agreed from time to time.
276. We recommend that LSC should not seek to identify standard rates for every conceivable category of cost but should circulate to LLSCs benchmark data on the costs of other frequently purchased services. It will be necessary to update these rates regularly with reference to the costs incurred for these same items out of the indicative allocation. The freedom to vary the indicative allocation should give better assurance that rates represent value for money than the claim based system.

### **Discrete Groups**

277. We recommend that two programme weights should be identified, to reflect the fact that some learners require to be taught in small groups, and some in particularly small groups. The weighting should reflect the reduced size of the group and associated needs for learning support assistants. It should not be necessary to apply further programme weightings in respect of the particular activities pursued by these learners.

### **Basic Skills**

278. We recommend that there should be no change to the way that support for basic skills needs is treated in relation to ALS. Where basic skills are pursued as a main learning goal the appropriate funding, including uplifts should be sought and ALS not used. Where basic skills support is additional to a programme ALS can be provided, either from the indicative allocation or, when costs exceed the threshold, in the context of a claim.

### **A Two-Tier System**

279. We recommend that a two-tier approach to funding ALS in FE be adopted with a claim system retained for only the 5%-10% of most expensive cases. For costs up to a threshold, the lower tier, an indicative allocation should be calculated based on past patterns of expenditure, and be available for colleges to spend

without financial audit or further reference to LSC. Colleges should also be able, additionally, to make an additional claim when costs for an individual learner fall above the threshold.

280. A simple formula could be developed based on the regression analysis undertaken by Frontier, but recognising that the current pattern of expenditure does not represent a perfect allocation. The indicative allocation should guide local negotiations in the context of plan led funding rather than be applied rigidly. A clear statement that institutions are expected to maintain appropriate ALS support for all learners who need it should accompany the allocation.

### **Assistive Technology**

281. We recommend that LSC make no changes to the way in which assistive technology is funded in FE but that where appropriate colleges are encouraged to participate in local collaborative arrangements brokered by LSC. In some cases the expertise of colleges will be such that they are able to support other institutions in this respect.

### **WORK BASED LEARNING**

282. In summary, we assess that there are advantages in developing a two-tier approach to funding ALS in WBL on the basis that it is consistent with the other sectors but reflects the specific context of work-based providers. This we see as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for achieving a more consistent entitlement to support.

283. We recommend that LSC:

- develops a two-tier approach to ALS funding in WBL
- issues guidance making explicit the entitlement of all work based learners to have their additional learning support needs met
- calculates an indicative allocation in the light of current claims for ALN/ASN and the planned profile of learners
- considers in allocating resources to providers, the implications of increasing the average weekly rate versus extending the SLOS
- puts in place a system for individual claims for ALS for learners with high levels of support need, for whom the cost of support exceeds the threshold. The threshold needs to be determined and the standard rate to be revised. Calculations need to include the costs of assistive technology and use a standard rate for teaching/training staff across all sectors
- monitors the provision of ALS, and collects and publishes data about the provision of ALS and cost accompanied by guidance on good practice in assessing and delivering ALS.

## **XII. APPENDICES**

### **ASSOCIATED PAPERS:**

- Development of a Common Funding Approach for Additional Learning Support Project Plan - March 2003 to December 2003 by Elaine Carabok, LSC National Office

#### **FE Sector:**

- Development of a Common Funding Approach for Additional Learning Support: Research Report for the LSDA by Midas Systems (London) Ltd
- FE Case Study Analysis by Helen Monteiro, LSDA
- Additional Learning Support: Data Analysis: FE Block Funding, Turbulence and Regression Report by Steve Greenfield
- Additional Learner Support – FE Block Funding Approach: How to measure whether Block Funding “will pay” - an initial approach by Steve Greenfield
- Additional Learning support for Small Classes by John Bolt, LSC National Office
- How Should we Fund Small Groups on Specialist Courses? Is a system of programme weights feasible? by Sally Faraday, LSDA
- A Quantitative Analysis of Expenditure on ALS: Preliminary findings from an examination of college level data using ISR data by Frontier Economics
- Developing a Formula for the Allocation of ALS: Findings from an examination of ISR data by Frontier Economics

#### **WBL Sector:**

- Post Interview Report for Work Based Learning: Funding Additional Learning Support by Nicki Hay and Michael Ratcliffe
- A Quantitative Analysis of Expenditure on ASN/ALN: Descriptive and Regression Analysis by Elizabeth Allen
- Developing and Applying the WBL formula: A winners and losers analysis by Elizabeth Allen

**ACL Sector:**

- Additional Learning Support Funding for Adult Continuing Education by Gordon Dryden

**SSF Sector:**

- Literature Search: ALS and AEN Funding in Schools by Karin Bell
- Funding of ALS in School Sixth Forms by Karin Bell

**Special School Sixth Form Sector:**

- The Funding of Post-16 Pupils in Special Schools by Gordon Kirk
- Additional Learning Support Funding for Special School Sixth Forms: The Views of Head Teachers by Gordon Dryden

**Common Themes:**

- Basic Skills Expert Seminar Report on first meeting 10<sup>th</sup> July 2003 by Helen Monteiro, LSDA
- Development of a Common Funding Approach for Additional Learning Support: LSDA Research Methodology by Helen Monteiro, LSDA
- Research into the Use of the Additional Learning Support Fund in Further Education Institutions: A Report by TechDis (Carrie Jamieson and Sue Harrison) on behalf of LSDA
- Developing a Common Funding Approach for Additional Learning Support: Report of First Meeting of Sector Panels on 2 June 2003 compiled by LSC
- Developing a Common Funding Approach for Additional Learning Support: Report of the Second Meeting of Sector Panels on 30 July 2003 compiled by LSC
- Protecting Resources for ALS by Mick Fletcher, LSDA
- ALS Monitoring System by Steve Greenfield