

Module 3 Curriculum

For suggestions on how to get the most out of these self-study materials, see the booklet on Using the materials.

Introduction

This module looks at your responsibilities as a governor in terms of the core activity of the college: the curriculum. We also look briefly at ways in which you as a governor can try to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in your college, although quality issues as a whole are addressed in *Module 4 Quality and standards*.

This module is intended for all new governors. It will also be of benefit to those who have been governors for some time but who wish to check, extend and update their knowledge about this topic.

The term 'curriculum' is often used to refer to the sum of course programmes and qualifications offered by a college. In practice, the concept can be broadened to encompass the students' complete learning experience including other activities that enhance learning, cultural and sporting opportunities, and college facilities like libraries and learning centres.

Under the articles of government, the governing body is responsible for determining the educational character and mission of the college and for overseeing its activities. As a result, governors are expected to take a strategic overview of their college's curriculum offer and make sure that it is in keeping with the mission and strategic plan. Where the curriculum changes, for example in response to government initiatives or changing local employment needs, governors should ensure that the mission, strategic plan and curriculum continue to relate to each other and that curriculum change is led, or at least quickly validated, by adjustment to the mission they have set and the strategic plan they have approved. Look back at *Module 2 Strategy and educational character* if you feel you need to revisit this area of training.

Summary of changes to the 2002 edition

From 1 April 2001, the planning and funding of post-16 education and training has been the national responsibility of the new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) along with its network of local LSC councils. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is the body responsible for publicly-funded qualifications for 16–19 year olds. This module covers the large range of government curriculum initiatives, based on Curriculum 2000, a blueprint for the education and training of the 16–19 age range. Curriculum initiatives form an important part of the LSC plan to raise the quality of post-16 education and training, raise achievement by both young people and adults, widen participation and ensure equality of opportunity in education and training, and increase the engagement of employers in workforce development.

The curriculum offer of individual colleges must reflect not only that college's mission statement and strategic plan but also relate to the local LSC strategy for the area and to community needs.

The range of government initiatives at 16–19 includes the vocational GCSEs, Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation degree courses, Key Skills Qualifications, and the Centre of Vocational Excellence (COVE) initiative. The links between general academic qualifications and vocation-related and occupational qualifications (some of them new) are explained. Initiatives for adult learners include new Basic Skills programmes, University for Industry (Ufi) and learndirect, New Deal and Adult and Community Learning (ACL).

In addition, this module contains some new material on support for students, including financial support and the Connexions Service, a new advice and guidance service for all teenagers.

Issues of curriculum quality are now covered in *Module 4 Quality and standards*.

Aims

By the end of this module you should be able to:

- explain what is meant by ‘curriculum’ and the meaning of terms used to describe categories and levels of qualifications
- describe the variety of learning opportunities at your college both for 16–19 year olds and adult learners
- show how this provision relates to the needs of students and employment skill requirements in your local community and to national strategy
- demonstrate how your college’s curriculum offer forms a coherent part of provision within your local LSC area and show how some specialist niche provision contributes towards the ‘bank’ of national skills
- outline the range of government curriculum initiatives
- explain how your college’s provision, on its own and in collaboration with other providers, contributes towards widening participation and equality of opportunity
- participate actively in discussions and in decision-making – at both governing body and committee level – about curriculum issues in your college, in accordance with your responsibilities as a governor.

Contents

Mark the sections you want to study and tick them off as you complete them.

To do Done

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| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 1 National and local influences on the curriculum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 2 The students and their courses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 3 Curriculum initiatives for 16–19 year olds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 4 Learning opportunities for adults |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Section 5 Assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning |

Working on the self-study activities

These materials have been designed for flexible use. You can work through them with other governors in training and development sessions. You can also work through sections and activities in your own time and at your own pace if you find it difficult to attend organised training sessions. Governors who have used these materials point out how valuable it is to work on at least some of the suggested activities together with another governor or group of governors, as there is such potential to learn from each other's experience. For suggestions on how to organise this kind of support for yourself, see the booklet on *Using the materials*.

What you will need

To complete activities in this module you will need to obtain the following documents from the clerk:

- your college's mission statement, a list of the strategic objectives, the college prospectus and the annual published report
- relevant principal's reports to governors
- curriculum reports to governors or to the academic board
- data on the student cohort from the current academic year and from the previous two years.

Where you need to make notes in response to activity questions, we suggest you do this in a notebook or on separate sheets of loose-leaf paper, and store the information you compile along with the module for future reference.

Section 1 National and local influences on the curriculum

No two colleges are identical in their curriculum offer. Each college curriculum is influenced by both national and local factors. In this section you will be looking at some of the key influences, including the LSC, and the needs of your local community.

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

This department brings together two key strands of the learning environment and considers education and training issues from pre-school through post-16 to higher education and work-based learning. It plays a fundamental role in the strategic development of interlocking programmes to move the country towards a high skills, knowledge-based economy. As part of this vision, a commitment to lifelong learning and improved levels of basic skills are seen as essential. These aims are articulated through national programmes such as the New Deal, a Basic Skills strategy, Modern Apprenticeships, Education Action Zones, Curriculum 2000, etc.

The Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

In order to take a strategic overview of the curriculum you will need to understand the national agenda, expressed in the targets for education and training contained in the LSC's Corporate Plan.

The key objectives of the LSC are to:

- extend participation in education, learning and training
- increase the engagement of employers in workforce development
- raise the achievement of young people
- raise the achievement of adults
- raise the quality and effectiveness of education and training.

This will be articulated at local level through the local LSC's strategic plan and associated local targets and measures. In simple terms, the challenge for your college is to improve student achievement and to increase and widen participation in education, learning and training.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)

The QCA is the body responsible for publicly funded qualifications. It has three key responsibilities:

- the design and development of the national framework of qualifications for post-16 education and training
- setting out the criteria for admitting individual qualifications to the national framework both to maintain consistent quality standards and determine which awards should be eligible for public funding
- approving and monitoring the work of qualification awarding bodies – organisations that set out syllabuses, provide examination and assessment opportunities and grade student efforts against their awards.

The 'match' with community needs

To meet the targets for participation and achievement, it is essential to offer a range of courses closely matched to the needs of the community you serve. In general terms, the 'match' is the outcome of a number of considerations that have an impact on the curriculum.

- There must be enough high quality education and training to meet the needs of all learners in the 16–19 age range within the network of providers in their area. For this age group, you may come across the phrase 'curriculum entitlement' to describe the complete range of the learning experience available to full-time students.
- For those aged 19+, there must be as much high quality education and training as can reasonably be resourced. Within that limitation, priority must be given to adults who have difficulties with basic skills and to ensuring that no community

group is excluded or achieves disproportionately lower standards than other groups.

- The need to widen participation must be met in a range of ways, for example through collaboration between providers and other agencies leading to innovative and responsive provision, through taking learning to new locations, and in New Deal arrangements for unemployed people.
- Equality of opportunity should underpin every aspect of the learner's experience. This means offering an inclusive approach which draws on the strengths of the diverse communities which the college serves and provides an environment and learning experience which ensures all learners equal access the curriculum.
- The particular learning needs of the community might affect provision. For example, in rural areas travel difficulties might require creativity in offering provision where the learners are. In areas where there are pockets of long-term unemployment, programmes that engage learners and offer routes into employment will be required.
- Education and training should lead either to progression to higher levels of study or more directly to employment. It is vital for colleges to provide courses that create the right skills, at the right level, for the local economy. Current and future local skill and employment needs therefore become another factor shaping the curriculum offer of a college.
- Sometimes skill needs are best met on a regional or national basis. Your college might offer a specialist niche provision that contributes in a specific way towards the regional or national provision. The COVE initiative, which you will come across in more detail in Section 3, will influence the curriculum of some colleges.

Finally, you need to think of your college not as a sole provider but as a major contributor to the education and training on offer in the area covered by your local LSC. The funding and planning role of the LSC, the need to ensure value for money, efficient and effective use of resources and to support those who can provide high quality courses, are all part of taking an area overview of provision.

One effect of this might be that courses offered through partnerships between collaborating providers may become more common in future. Your college management will join with those of other providers and the local LSC to address these issues. Decisions taken may affect the curriculum offer of your college in the future.

Activity Find out more about national and local influences on your college's curriculum

Work through the questions below to find out more about the national and local influences on your college's curriculum. Make a note of your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1 Look at some curriculum reports to governors and a selection of governing body minutes from meetings where curriculum issues were discussed. What happens when curriculum reports are presented to a committee or to the full governing body? What form does the discussion take? Make a note of any conclusions and directions that have been given to management.

- 2 Look through some relevant principal's reports to governors. What curriculum matters are raised in the principal's reports? Make a note of them. Do they illustrate any of the national or local influences listed above?
- 3 Look at your college's mission statement and strategic objectives. Make a note of phrases or whole objectives that relate to the college curriculum offer. Do they provide examples of the effect of any of the national or local influences listed above?
- 4 Look through your college prospectus. Note down any courses that seem to you to be intended to widen participation and/or to meet the basic skills or English language needs of the community. Make a note of any courses that seem to have been included to meet a local, regional or even national need for specialist employment skills.

Viewpoint

We hope this activity has given you an insight into how curriculum issues are considered by your college. You should have managed to identify some curriculum areas that seem to reflect national and local influences. You may feel that one or two aspects need to be considered more carefully in the college. When you can, check your thoughts out with the clerk or perhaps with another governor who is particularly interested in curriculum issues. If you have any questions or action points that you want to follow up, make a note of them in the 'Action planner' in *Using the materials*.

In the next section we shall be looking in more detail at how the curriculum relates to student age and at types of courses, levels and qualifications.

Section 2 The students and their courses

As a governor, you need to know who the students at your college are, how they are funded, the levels and types of courses they follow, and what the links are between the courses on offer and occupational activity. In this section you will be looking in detail at the student profile, the range of courses and the links between types of qualifications and occupational activity across the country. You will then focus specifically on the range of students and courses at your own college.

Colleges and courses

A striking feature of the curriculum offered by colleges in post-16 education and training is its diversity. However, it is possible to group colleges according to the age range of their students and the range of courses they offer, as shown in Figure 1 on the next page.

Figure 1 Categories of colleges – students and courses

<i>College type</i>	<i>Students and courses</i>
Sixth-form colleges	Students aged 16–19; some colleges also have adult students; mainly full-time courses
General further education, tertiary and community colleges	Students aged 16+; they attend on a full- or part-time basis; wide range of vocational, academic and professional courses offered; some colleges have links to students aged under 16
Land-based, agricultural and horticultural, colleges Art, design and performing arts courses	Students aged 16+; courses reflect the specialist vocational requirements implicit in the college's name; students may be full- or part-time.
Specialist designated colleges	Students are mostly adults; these colleges may be highly specialised in the courses they offer or they may offer a wide range of courses to adults; attendance is full- or part-time; it may be on a residential basis

Categories and levels of qualifications

Figure 2 on the next page shows the national framework of qualifications for post-16 education and training needs, with three broad categories of qualifications offered at six different levels.

The majority of college students follow courses at entry, foundation and levels 2 and 3. In some colleges there will be a small but sometimes significant minority studying at levels 4 and 5 on degree or higher level professional courses.

Figure 2 National framework of past-16 qualifications

<i>Level</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Vocationally related</i>	<i>Occupational</i>
5	Higher level qualifications		Level 5 NVQ
4	First degree	Foundation degree Higher National Diploma (HND) Higher National Certificate (HNC)	Level 4 NVQ
3 Advanced	A level including AS and AE awards	Vocational A level (Advanced GNVQ) 3, 6 and 12 unit	Level 3 NVQ
2 Intermediate	GCSE grades A*–C	Intermediate GNVQ (Vocational GCSEs from 2002)	Level 2 NVQ
1 Foundation	GCSE grades D–G	Foundation GNVQ (Vocational GCSEs from 2002)	Level 1 NVQ
Entry level	Certificate of (educational) achievement		

You may find it helpful to think of the different levels of qualifications in terms of a 'climbing frame' that does not constrain students to any single qualification route. Increasingly learners are expected to develop broad skills, knowledge and experience, by undertaking study from different categories – across the 'climbing frame'. Where a person's earlier achievement has been low, moving on to and through the bottom rungs – entry and foundation – is very important. In the context of widening participation, courses at these levels are a very important part of the curriculum. Student age is not the only determinant of the level and type of courses that are taken.

Links between types of qualification and occupational activity

The links between types of qualification and occupational skills and knowledge vary. The link is weakest with the **general** qualifications in Figure 2. These offer broad-based general development of understanding rather than specific occupational skills and knowledge.

Vocationally related qualifications that combine a taught component with an emphasis on workplace requirements provide a stronger link. You will be looking at this type of qualification in more detail in Section 3.

Many of the students undertaking these general and vocational courses are in the 16–19 age group and usually full-time. However, students from the same age group may also be taking such courses on a part-time basis and you will also find adults taking these courses on both a full- and a part-time basis.

The strongest link is with the **occupational** qualifications in Figure 2. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are developed by National Training Organisations (NTOs). They are awarded by means of assessment of competence in the workplace and by presentation of a portfolio of evidence of competence.

Provision for students with disabilities and learning difficulties

With very few exceptions, college courses and college life should be open to all learners irrespective of any learning difficulties or disabilities. Under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, the ‘responsible body’ of an institution, in this case the governing body, has a clear legal responsibility for ensuring that discrimination on these grounds does not take place.

The essence of the law is that no college may treat a student with learning difficulties or disabilities less favourably than any other student. For example, it would be unlawful for admissions procedures to reject applications from learners with disabilities or learning difficulties who otherwise meet the entry requirements, or to exclude them from visits, residential periods or work experience because of their disability or learning difficulty. If existing arrangements place a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage, there is a timetable from 2002–2005 during which colleges must make adjustments to their provision in order to comply with the law. Colleges must also consider what adjustment may be needed in future and where appropriate make such adjustments in advance; they must not wait for a specific case to occur before taking such action. During the period of adjustment, it remains the responsibility of the governing body to ensure that disability statements are produced annually.

Activity Get to know who your students are and what courses they study

In this activity you will be finding out more about the students at your college and the levels and types of courses that they follow. You may already have some of this information from working through the activities in *Module 1 Introduction* and *Module 2 Strategy and educational character*. If not, or if there are gaps in your information, you should look at your principal’s report to governors and/or your college’s annual report.

- 1 Look at the trends over the last couple of years in terms of student numbers, balance of full- and part-time, and the levels and types of courses on offer by comparing the most recent data with that for the previous two years. What patterns emerge?
- 2 Now consider the curriculum plan. How does it reflect those trends? Are there omissions? Are you happy that the curriculum strategy currently being adopted is congruent with the patterns that emerge from these trends? Are there any implications for the strategic plan here?
- 3 How does the ‘climbing frame’ work in the college? Are all students able to move flexibly across the frame in all the curriculum areas offered by the college? Are

there patterns of unequal take up across the framework according to gender, age, minority ethnic group, disability, etc.?

- 4 Get a copy of your college's most recent disability statement. Write a short summary of the college's plan for the period of 'adjustments' from 2002–5. If you identified any patterns of unequal take up in relation to disability in the previous question, does the college plan address these?
- 5 Make a note of your college's policy on tuition fees and any arrangements for financial support for students. You could start by looking at the information on funding in your college's prospectus. Does the approach to student financial support ensure equality of opportunity?

Viewpoint

This activity should help bring to life the profile of your college and its students. You should have built up a picture of your college in terms of two important characteristics – the student body and the range/type of courses. This picture should be consistent with the college's mission, strategic objectives and the needs of the community it serves. It should provide comprehensive progression routes across subject areas for all students. If you are in doubt about the overall picture or have questions about the fit between the picture and the mission, strategic objectives and community needs, make a note of your questions in the 'Action planner' in *Using the materials* and raise it in the forum and context you consider most appropriate – your clerk will be able to help with this. The issue of financial support for students is considered in more detail below.

Support for students

Financial support for learners

Financial support for students is a complex area, but it is important for you to have a basic understanding of the system of funding and how it is implemented by your own college.

Colleges are free to set their own tuition fee policies subject to the requirement that fees may not be charged to students aged 16–18 in full-time education. (Eighteen is defined as 'under 19 on 31 August of the calendar year in which the student commences a programme of study'.) To promote access for people on low incomes and to encourage basic education, colleges can remit 100% of tuition fees to certain groups of students.

Financial support to learners operates at three levels.

- Support with direct costs of learning through fee remission and fee subsidy.
- Support with the indirect costs of participation, such as transport and living expenses, through grants, allowances and loans. A government access project, Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs), has operated in a limited number of areas since 1999 and is one example of support for the indirect costs of participation. The future of that arrangement is not clear.
- Support with incidental and emergency costs through college funds. You may sometimes hear an outline account of such expenditure at governing body meetings.

Guidance and support

Guidance and support to students is an important part of the total curriculum offer and must be available to all students irrespective of age. Colleges should provide pre-enrolment advice, ensure that induction programmes are part of the course package, and offer tutorial support throughout a course. Staff can also offer specific advice, guidance and limited practical support to students in particular need whether this is to do with learning, financial or welfare issues. In addition, they are able to offer careers information and higher education guidance. Where students have additional learning needs the college will need to have a clear approach to defining those needs together with the resources to support them.

There is also a new initiative that will link college activity in this area to other providers of information and advice. The **Connexions Service** is a new advice and guidance service for the 13–19 age range. All teenagers will have access to the Connexions Service – whether they are at school, in further or higher education, in or out of work. There will be a special emphasis on young people who feel excluded and find it difficult to use the usual sources of advice. The Connexions Service will work to bring together all the services and support young people. The Connexions Service began in 12 areas in April 2001, was extended to a further three areas in September 2001, and will be introduced to all the remaining local LSC areas during 2002.

Activity Review the guidance and support your college offers

- 1 Do you know what support your college could offer the students in the case studies below? If not, you might want to find out more about student welfare services.

Brian (16 years) is having trouble making friends at college although he is now in his second term. He has started drinking to excess at college social events because it makes it easier for him to talk to people. Brian increasingly feels that the college is not the right learning environment for him and is seriously considering abandoning his course.

Sarah (18 years) fears she may be pregnant as a result of a short-lived relationship with a fellow student. She does not feel able to discuss it with her family or with her own GP, who is a family friend, but her friends have persuaded her that she must seek advice from someone before her pregnancy advances further.

Paul (17 years) lives some distance from the college. His parents have separated and his mother says she is no longer able to afford his travelling expenses. She wants him to transfer to a college nearer home, but Paul is anxious to remain at your college because he has made a wide circle of friends and because there is no equivalent course at his local college.

- 2 Read the scenario below. How do you think the management of student guidance and support might affect student retention?

Senior management at your college report a drop in retention across a majority of courses at the first census point of the year compared to the previous year. They advise the governing body that their investigation will incorporate an examination of student induction, the tutorial system and the internal data they have on lesson observation. You are aware that the management of Student Welfare has changed during the last year and that the present incumbent has not been long in post.

Viewpoint

- 1 This activity may have given you more insight into the guidance and support your college offers students. Student welfare can often be seen as the 'soft' end of the business yet it can have a major impact on the student experience. Your college might have fully-qualified counsellors on hand. Hopefully there will be advice available on drugs and sexually-transmitted diseases, as well as medical (including pregnancy testing) facilities. Many young people are experiencing a vulnerable period in their lives while they are at college. Forming relationships with others is a critical dimension to their maturation. College life can offer wonderful opportunities in this direction but it can also provide formidable challenges. If individuals are unable to form friendships with others they will quickly become alienated from college life and leave.
- 2 The management of the student welfare provision is of critical importance in ensuring that the college is able to retain students. It is important to make sure that all students have an imaginative induction programme that integrates them into their peer group and the wider college community. You should ensure that the college has in place a swift and effective support service that addresses student problems quickly and sensitively whilst keeping teaching staff informed and involved.

Section 3 Curriculum initiatives for 16–19 year olds

In this section you will look at a number of curriculum initiatives. Individually and collectively, they are having or will have a significant impact on your college's curriculum offer. These initiatives stem from national policies aimed at:

- raising the levels of skill in the workforce
- ensuring that young people's learning enables them to develop the key skills and broad range of capabilities needed for future employment
- widening participation in education and training and addressing equal opportunities issues so that no group is excluded from the full range of benefits that come from work and from playing a full part in society

- developing a lifelong learning culture enabling people to continue to learn throughout their lives for a variety of purposes
- encouraging people of all ages to take part in learning and so enjoy the benefits of qualifications and improved knowledge and skills.

Key initiatives

Some of the key educational and training initiatives that follow from these national policies are outlined below. The intention behind many of them is to contribute to the development of a high skills economy and to overcome patterns of poor achievement and differential participation. As a governor, you need to be aware of these developments so that you can take a medium- to long-term strategic view of the curriculum that your college will offer. Some of these initiatives will already be influencing the curriculum your college offers. They present challenges to college management and staff and may hold almost immediate implications for your college's strategic plan.

Curriculum 2000

Curriculum 2000 is a blueprint for study for 16–19 year olds. It refers to a set of reforms that linked together A Levels, Advanced GNVQs and Key Skills. The intention was to make post-16 study broader and more flexible, and to encourage young people to study more subjects over two years. The reforms were also intended to make it easier to combine academic and vocational courses and to encourage young people to take a new qualification in key skills.

We have summarised below the links between the courses.

- A level courses are each based on six units of approximately equal length.
- A new Advanced Subsidiary (AS) qualification consisting of three units will comprise the first half of an A level course. They will also be examined as a qualification in their own right.
- GNVQ qualifications have been aligned with A levels.
- A new six-unit GNVQ qualification is available and is equivalent to one A level.
- In four vocational areas a three-unit GNVQ qualification is available. It is equivalent to an AS level.
- There are qualifications based on each of the Key Skills Qualifications of Communication, Application of Number and Information Technology.

The unit structure of these qualifications is intended to provide flexibility for both students and colleges, with the result that learning programmes will be more appropriate to individual needs. The total number of unit awards that a student can obtain on successful course completion will reflect the types of qualification and the number of courses taken.

Curriculum 2000 has brought with it a number of difficulties and criticisms, particularly in relation to the demands of AS level courses and examinations, the lack of appeal to students of the Key Skills Qualification, and the complexity of fitting all

learning programmes together. Some aspects of Curriculum 2000 are therefore under review.

Vocational GCSEs

One of the government's key policies is to remove the academic/vocational divide in education and training. This policy is inherent in the introduction of vocational GCSEs – a new qualification route at levels 1 and 2 in schools and colleges. Vocational GCSEs are scheduled to be available for teaching from September 2002 in the following subject areas:

- art and design
- business
- engineering
- health and social care
- information and communication technology
- leisure and tourism
- manufacturing
- science.

Vocational GCSEs will replace the Foundation and Intermediate GNVQ qualifications which will be phased out over two years. Vocational GCSEs will be graded in the same way as other GCSEs but will have a combination of external and internal assessment.

Modern Apprenticeships

Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (formerly known as National Traineeships) are aimed at school and college leavers from the age of 16 who want to gain the skills and qualifications needed to start a career in business and industry rather than remaining in full-time education. Modern Apprenticeships provide training to industrial standards at NVQ level 2 and are designed to give young people the broad range of skills required by employers.

Most young people taking part are employed and paid a wage. A training agreement sets out what is expected of the employer and of the young person. The length of training depends on the young person's needs. Beyond the specific employment requirements, they have an opportunity to develop skills in information technology, communicating in the workplace, handling numbers, solving problems, working as part of a team and managing their own future development.

Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (formerly known as Modern Apprenticeships) were developed by employer-led partnerships. They are at Level 3 and are open to young people aged 16–24 who are in work. Advanced Modern Apprenticeships are the main work-based training option for those aged 19+ and they are widely available across industry and commerce. They offer a balanced, structured training programme and an opportunity to develop high level skills. Young people with an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship qualification can progress to a higher level Foundation degree or a level 4 or 5 qualification.

Because few employers have the educational and training services to provide the learning that complements the workplace component of Modern Apprenticeships, colleges are involved in the delivery of underpinning knowledge and Key Skills.

A report published in November 2001 by the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee recommended that, by 2004, 175,000 (28%) young people between the ages of 16 and 21 should be entering apprenticeships, and that a long-term target of 35% should be realised by 2010. Clearly it is intended that this will be a growth area over the next few years, adding a further element to the government's skills agenda. Colleges will be assessing how this initiative can be successfully integrated into their curriculum offer and what kind of adjustments might have to be made in order to deliver that successful accommodation.

Foundation degree courses

The Foundation degree is a new qualification introduced into further education colleges and universities from September 2001. It offers a new route for progression beyond level 3 courses. Nearly 4,000 places on 66 courses will be available – 70% on a part-time basis – across 60 higher and 85 further education institutions.

Foundation degree courses are designed to develop higher level skills at levels 4 and 5 which will equip students with the combination of technical skills, academic knowledge and transferable skills that employers need. All students enrolled on Foundation degree courses must demonstrate their skills in the workplace and work experience is essential for students who are not in employment.

Students will be awarded a qualification on successful completion after two years and four months full-time study or equivalent. They will also have access to an Honours degree course.

Foundation degree courses are expected to be a popular choice among students, because they do not require the commitment to three or more years of a first degree course and are without the academic focus of traditional degree courses. For colleges, they are a new way in which to extend the curriculum offer beyond level 3 courses.

Activity How can curriculum initiatives help students?

With all these government initiatives to think about, it might help you to review them in relation to some typical college situations.

Read the two case studies below and try to decide what the curriculum initiatives outlined above could offer to these two students at Bluewater college.

Parvin (aged 16) is an able student with 8 GCSEs in grades B–E. She has applied to the college to undertake a 12-unit vocational A level in Leisure and Tourism. She has a Grade D in English and IT, and a grade B in Maths. She has a hearing impairment. In addition to her vocational A level studies, she wants to take an AS level in Sports Studies and Key Skills Qualifications in Communication and IT. She hopes to pick up coaching awards in enrichment studies and to undertake a period of work experience. Her hearing impairment is not profound but she finds it difficult to hear in noisy environments. The acoustics in sports halls are problematic for her.

Richard (aged 17) had a patchy career at school. He has never actually been suspended, but has come close a few times. He has spent some time in care and currently lives away from his family. His references from school identify poor attendance in some subjects and some behavioural issues in the past. In his personal statement he says that he sees the college as a second chance and is determined to do well, though is a bit worried about getting distracted by his 'mates' who, he says, led him astray at school. He seems to be an intelligent young man. He has a part-time job and plays in a band in his spare time. However his qualification profile reflects his difficult experience at school. He has only 2 GCSEs (in Music and Art). He wants to undertake A levels and go to university, though he suspects someone will suggest he does a foundation course.

Viewpoint

There are all kinds of possibilities for these two students, and they are only two of many. Your ideas may be different from the suggestions below – these are simply offered to illustrate how curriculum initiatives can help open up much wider educational choices for individuals who might otherwise miss out.

Parvin has applied to undertake a mix of qualifications from the general, vocational and occupational routes. This will give her a range of career opportunities, including higher education or employment. Working across the three types of qualification will expose her to a range of different assessment methods and her programme will need careful support from her tutors to make sure she can cope with this. They will need to work through what support can be offered to ensure that her partial hearing does not disadvantage her access to the curriculum.

Richard may be able to pick up some level 3 study through continuing his studies of Music and Art. However his lack of a broad base of knowledge means that he would need to take some level 1 and 2 qualifications from occupational or vocational routes. Again, he will need careful tutorial support and consideration whether his part-time work and performance in the band offers additional opportunities for accreditation. A Foundation Modern Apprenticeship is another alternative opportunity for him, although a more general education programme would offer him the second chance education he is looking for. If Richard successfully achieves level 3 qualifications, the Foundation degree will offer him continuity and a clear vocational focus. The opportunity to continue working and earning may be the most effective higher education experience for Richard.

Key Skills

Key Skills are defined by QCA as 'general skills that help you to improve your own learning and performance.' They are a range of essential generic skills that underpin success in education, employment, lifelong learning and personal development. They are highly rated by employers.

Key Skills Qualifications at levels 1–4 are available in 'Application of Number', 'Communication and Information Technology'. Also available at levels 1–4 are the wider Key Skills units 'Working with Others', 'Improving Own Learning and Performance', and 'Problem Solving'. These may well be regarded by academic staff

as equally important, especially for students working at advanced level. Employers and higher education institutions tend to value evidence of these wider skills.

In terms of government policy, Key Skills Qualifications reflect a broader and more flexible approach to the curriculum. They are seen as an essential component in the drive to raise standards in post-16 education and training.

Activity How useful are Key Skills Qualifications?

Think back to the two case studies above. Which Key Skills Qualifications could Parvin and Richard usefully take?

Viewpoint

Parvin already has an equivalent qualification to 'Application of Number' at level 2, so she might be able to undertake level 3 studies; however, as GCSE Maths is very different in nature to a Key Skill in 'Application of Number' she may struggle with some aspects of level 3. In 'Communication and IT' she may need to start at level 2 and work towards level 3 over the two years.

Richard is likely to benefit from a programme that enables him to pursue all six Key Skills. He may have areas of significant weakness in Key Skills which means he is likely to study across levels 1 and 2.

These case studies demonstrate the complexity that offering flexibility involves. The learning programmes offered are likely to provide a better learning experience for the students but offer challenges too. In Key Skills, students will have a complex pattern of ability in sub-skills in each Key Skill and may need to work across levels. Without looking at this level of detail, governors may wish to explore with managers where the appropriate balance lies between responsiveness, flexibility and coherence for students.

Activity Taking up curriculum initiatives at your college

Consider some representative students from the student profile at your college. How might the curriculum initiatives offer them a more responsive learning experience? What challenges are posed for these students, and for staff and managers?

Viewpoint

Although the curriculum initiatives offer very flexible choices in principle, they pose challenging problems for managers in terms of group sizes, timetabling and tracking, forecasting income, etc. For teaching staff, there are additional tutorial burdens. For students, greater flexibility and different assessment approaches can be confusing.

Centres of Vocational Excellence (COVEs)

16 'pathfinder' further education colleges were announced in July 2001 as the start of a three-year £100 million initiative designed to improve vocational skills. The key objectives of the initiative are to:

- develop and strengthen innovative approaches by further education colleges designed to meet the present and future skill needs of the UK

- enhance the standing of further education colleges with employers
- encourage collaboration among providers and promote excellence in economically-relevant specialist areas.

The LSC target is for about half of general further education colleges to have at least one department with COVE status by 2004. At that point, the national network of specialist COVEs will facilitate close links between colleges, business partners and other employment interests. They will form a resource that enables colleges to be more flexible and responsive, focusing on meeting the skills needs of employers at local and national levels.

The role of information and learning technology (ILT)

To meet the national objectives, students need to have access to information technology facilities – computers and the Internet. The LSC has made funds available to help colleges improve their IT facilities and to ensure that staff are skilled in using them. Learning resource centres combining traditional library resources and computer facilities are now commonplace. They are an important part of the overall curriculum offer. In terms of student life, they complement other facilities such as the refectory, recreational and leisure opportunities and a Student Union.

Activity What is the impact of government initiatives on your curriculum offer?

As we said earlier, individually and collectively these initiatives are having or will have a significant impact on your college's curriculum offer. Use the following questions to consider the impact at your college. Write down your thoughts using a separate piece of paper. You will need to refer to various college documents such as the college's prospectus, the annual report and the principal's reports to governors. The clerk may be able to help you with finding documents relating to specific curriculum initiatives.

- 1 How confident are you that the college is endeavouring to deliver the government agendas through embracing the curriculum initiatives? How have they been translated into the college curriculum plan and how do they figure in the strategic plan? Are there shortfalls? Are there omissions?
- 2 What are your college's plans to be part of the COVE initiative? What are the strategic implications for the college if it chooses to become involved?
- 3 How is the college responding to the challenges of increased use of ILT in the delivery of the curriculum. Does the college have an ILT strategy with milestones for gradual development of this area of delivery? Is ILT used across the curriculum or only in some curriculum areas?

Viewpoint

- 1 Curriculum initiatives have been developed at a very fast pace and this has meant that some colleges have responded to them in a piecemeal fashion. As a governor you have a responsibility periodically to review the range of initiatives and assess whether they meet the mission and vision of the college; if so, have they been accommodated in **all** aspects of the planning process – the strategic plan, the curriculum plan and the financial plan?

- 2 As a governor you need to explore proposals for a COVE at your college. It will be important to consider a range of dimensions including the local demand for the skills area being considered, the implications for the staffing establishment, staff development requirements, the capital expenditure that might be required, etc. Managers should develop the proposals, but you have a key role in testing out the robustness of the case for a particular COVE and in evaluating the impact it will have on the college as a whole.
- 3 ILT is a rapidly developing area, but its ultimate contribution to the learning experience needs testing out with care. As a governor you need to explore the speed and mechanisms for development of ILT capacity and encourage a holistic approach to its use across the college rather than within pockets of enthusiasm for technology.

This activity should have helped your understanding of the way in which current curriculum initiatives have affected or will affect the curriculum offer of your college. The development of the curriculum plan will, of course, have been the main focus for this area of activity. However, if this has undergone a major overhaul recently then the strategic plan will have been affected too. For instance, the COVE initiative will cause many colleges to reconsider their curriculum strategy and this, in turn, will affect staffing and the human resources development plan, as well as accommodation and the accommodation strategy. Are you happy that you have evidence that this 'joined-up thinking' is taking place?

Section 4 Learning opportunities for adults

In this section we will be looking at the learning needs of adults, how these are different from those of 16–19 year olds, and the implication of national policies and initiatives on your college's provision for adults.

The learning needs of adults

The learning needs of adults are different from those of most students in the 16–19 age group. They may want to acquire basic skills missed in their earlier years, to refresh and upgrade their skills as returners to work, or to retrain for different employment opportunities after periods of unemployment. Some adults will be learning solely out of personal interest, as a leisure activity. For them, the social aspects of studying might be as important as the knowledge or skill gained. Their study skills and confidence as learners may need to be enhanced.

The reality of adult lives – a skill needed for a job, a shortage of time for study because of family commitments, and the need to earn a living – is such that adults' learning needs are often best served by short episodes of learning rather than by a long course or a whole qualification.

Activity How well does your college cater for the needs of adult students?

Before you read the rest of this section, try to identify some key ways in which your college is catering for the needs of adult students – for example, where are courses sited, what additional support or services are offered? If you are not sure, look at your college's mission statement, strategic objectives, the college prospectus, the annual published report, relevant principal's report to governors, or curriculum reports to governors or the academic board.

Viewpoint

We hope you were able to identify some key ways in which your college is providing adults with learning opportunities. You may have noticed some different approaches to learning from those you've noted for 16–19 year olds: learning taken to other locations such as community centres, employers' premises, libraries and primary schools; dedicated adult areas in the college such as adult common rooms; provision of crèche or nursery places. Perhaps special projects have been developed offering a range of beneficiary allowances and support.

We shall now look at some of the government initiatives designed to provide adults with access to learning.

Basic skills

The government's 1999 report *Fresh Start* described how around 20% of adults – possibly up to 7 million people – have problems with basic skills to the extent that they are functionally illiterate, innumerate, or both. The report set out measures needed to strengthen basic skills programmes to meet the needs of these adults. The strategy is underpinned by the production of separate standards for literacy and for numeracy at entry level and at levels 1 and 2.

The adult literacy and numeracy standards specify the full range of skills required for an adult to communicate or to use numeracy skills effectively, confidently and efficiently. From September 2001 they will have formed the basis of all publicly-funded adult literacy and numeracy qualifications and programmes of study.

The challenge for colleges is to reach people who lack basic skills and then to provide high quality learning in locations that suit them, and in a manner that these adults find friendly and comfortable rather than imposing and intimidating. Basic skills provision should be free of charge for those who need it and should use an increasing proportion of qualified full-time teachers.

University for Industry (Ufi) and learndirect

Ufi is a public-private partnership set up to increase the competitiveness of business and the employability of individuals. It sets out to make learning available at a time and place to suit learners' needs, making maximum use of technology to achieve this goal. In many cases, Ufi programmes are short, bite-sized pieces of learning, seeking to provide an enjoyable experience that will encourage adults to take a further and

more challenging step along the road to higher level skills and to returning to education and training on a more formal basis.

learndirect is the name of Ufl's network of learning centres. They are to be found in a range of easy-to-access locations such as sports and shopping centres, community centres, churches and libraries. There may also be a learndirect centre in your college. Courses are provided via the internet and once an individual has enrolled, courses can be followed wherever and whenever there is internet access. learndirect courses are split into four main areas:

- information and communications technology (ICT)
- reading, writing and working with number, and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)
- general business and management
- specialist business and management.

New Deal

New Deal is a key element of the government's Welfare to Work strategy. It gives adults a real chance to develop their potential, gain skills and experience, and find work. New Deal jobseekers are grouped in the age brackets 18–24, 25+, and 50+. New Deal also offers lone parents and disabled people receiving benefits an opportunity to explore work options.

New Deal is based on local partnerships between employers, local authorities, training providers, Jobcentres, environment groups and voluntary organisations. These partnerships are co-ordinated by the Employment Service. Further education colleges are not the main providers of New Deal, although they are often the main providers of the full-time education and training route that is one of the training options within the scheme.

New Deal is a great opportunity for businesses to make use of the untapped energies and talents of a new workforce. Nearly 90,000 companies have signed New Deal employer agreements so far.

Adult and community learning (ACL)

ACL provision is either directly from local education authorities (LEAs) or is secured by them through contracts with voluntary and community organisations, the Workers' Educational Association or with further education colleges themselves. Often there is a mix of directly provided and 'secured by contract' LEA ACL provision. If your college is involved in ACL provision, you will need to know something about the main features of ACL.

Between 1.6 and 2.5 million adults participate in LEA provision alone, the majority of them women. Much of ACL is non-vocational and non-accredited so that it does not lead initially to qualifications, although it often does lead to improved skills and employability, and may give adult learners the confidence to take up more 'formal' learning options.

ACL often involves regeneration and reaches out to the disadvantaged, with considerable social benefits. Learning is not confined to colleges but may take place in settings like health centres and pubs. ACL is notable for a much higher level of participation among older people than is seen in adult learning.

Activity Reviewing your curriculum offer for adults

Now you have read the information about these government initiatives, have another look at your college's provision. Do you think your college's curriculum offer is meeting the government's drive to improve access to learning for adults?

The two case studies below may help you to focus your thoughts. Think how your college could help Jas or Dawn. Can you think of any aspects of their learning that might have to be handled with particular sensitivity?

Jas is 39 years old and has worked in a garden nursery for most of his adult life. The outdoor environment combined with the pleasure in cultivating plants has ensured that he has had a happy and contented working life. This contrasts significantly with his experience at school. Ridiculed by both teachers and pupils for being 'slow', Jas switched off from learning (as it was defined by the school) and suffered low self-esteem which he was only able to counter as an adult when he became champion pool player at his local pub. As he has grown older, Jas has become resentful of being short-changed at school and would like to take a second chance at learning. He has spent years disguising the fact that he is hardly able to read or do number calculations. He wants to change this because he would like some advancement at work, perhaps to a supervisory capacity, but he is extremely cautious about admitting this to anyone or being seen attending classes for 'reading and sums'.

Dawn is 35 and has just seen her only daughter Michaela marry and leave the family home. A single mother at 16, Dawn had shown promise at school but had to abandon her exams to take care of Michaela, with little support from her family. As her daughter grew up and went to school Dawn, took a series of low-paid jobs with hours that fitted in with the school day. Dawn is now free of all ties and is desperate to resume her education. She thinks she might want to go into childcare or perhaps social work.

Viewpoint

This activity should have given you a good insight into your college's curriculum offer for adults. There are a number of practical issues to consider; for example, you will need to make sure that your college provides adult education at times that are convenient for working people. Don't forget to consider things like public transport and child care; there is no point running courses that people cannot get to.

For many adults like Jas there can be as much of a stigma attached to learning as there is to ignorance. It would be easy to scare Jas off, particularly in the early stages of a learning programme, if his experience evoked that of his schooldays. Many colleges run sessions for people like Jas within the community where they feel most comfortable, for example in a social centre or a pub, only moving into more conventional surroundings when the learners feel confident to undertake that change.

Dawn will be hungry to learn and will want to 'catch up' as quickly as possible. Again, her expectations will need to be handled sensitively. She may have an unrealistic perception of her own capabilities and some detailed diagnostic work might be required before she can be placed on an appropriate learning programme.

Creating easy-to-access opportunities to learn is central to promoting lifelong learning and encouraging more under-qualified adults to engage in learning. It is a key plank in government policy and the colleges are expected to deliver it.

Section 5 Assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning

As a governor, you will want to be confident that the college is delivering high quality teaching and learning and is working to improve the quality level. Quality issues are the subject of *Module 4 Quality and standards*. In that module you will learn about quality assurance, course review, self-assessment and development planning frameworks that seek to improve college performance. You will also learn about the ways in which your college performance is monitored and reviewed in-year and annually, and the way in which the new common inspection framework seeks to answer the question 'how effective and efficient is the provision of education and training in meeting the needs of learners?' However, there are less 'formal' ways in which you as a governor can try to judge whether the teaching and learning at your college is effective.

There are three main ways in which you can do this.

- 1 Retention and achievement statistics (by course and in aggregate) provide you with an indirect measure of the effectiveness of teaching and of the extent of learning. They are particularly useful when cross-college comparisons are drawn, and more useful still when benchmarked against national data and against a selected set of 'like colleges'.
- 2 Learner views, most often presented in the form of satisfaction questionnaires or as summaries of complaints, are another source of information. They are an excellent way to discover the nature of the learner's experience, especially if the questions they ask, or facts that they report, include learner views on the teaching they have received, and on such matters as the regularity with which work is set and the care with which it is marked. Taking account of learner views and of learner needs is a central part of the new inspection process.
- 3 Your college will have a policy on classroom observation. Reports to your governing body summarising the extent of observation undertaken in a set period, the grades awarded related to course results, and indicating what plans were made to address weaknesses, are another means by which you can gain an awareness of the quality of teaching and learning.

Activity Reviewing the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your college

Ask the clerk to provide you with:

- 1 Comparative retention and achievement statistics for your college and similar colleges nationally.
- 2 Learner questionnaires or summaries of complaints.
- 3 Reports on classroom observation.

Use this information to make your own judgement on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning at your college. If you can, observe some teaching and learning for yourself.

Viewpoint

Doing this kind of research will give you confidence in the quality of teaching and learning in your college. If it has raised any doubts in your mind or questions that you want to ask, note them in the 'Action planner' in *Using the materials* and come back to them after you have worked through *Module 4 Quality and standards*.

Module review

This module has looked at your responsibilities as a governor in terms of the core activity of the college: the curriculum. It also briefly looked at ways in which you can assess the quality of teaching and learning at your college. If you have worked through the whole module you should be confident that you can:

- explain what is meant by 'curriculum' and the meaning of terms used to describe categories and levels of qualifications
- describe the variety of learning opportunities at your college both for 16–19 year olds and adult learners
- show how this provision relates to the needs of students and employment skill requirements in your local community and to national strategy
- demonstrate how your college's curriculum offer forms a coherent part of provision within your local LSC area and show how some specialist niche provision contributes towards the 'bank' of national skills
- outline the range of government curriculum initiatives
- explain how your college's provision, on its own and in collaboration with other providers, contributes towards widening participation and equality of opportunity
- participate actively in discussions and in decision-making – at both governing body and committee level – about curriculum issues in your college, in accordance with your responsibilities as a governor.

If you are not sure that you have achieved a particular goal, look back at the contents list in the Introduction to the module. You may find it useful to reread the relevant section.

Summary of key learning points

In this module you have looked at the range and depth of curriculum offered by your college and your own responsibility as a governor for ensuring the quality of that curriculum and monitoring the college's response to national curriculum initiatives.

The curriculum is the core activity of the college and therefore a major responsibility for governors. One important aspect of this is to match the curriculum with the needs of the community the college serves.

There are a number of national and local influences on the curriculum offer of a college – some of them government-led and others specific to the community served by the college.

Your college's curriculum offer must fit into the national framework of qualifications for post-16 education.

It is important to understand the student profile at your college so that the curriculum offer meets their needs. Special consideration must be given to widening participation and providing equality of opportunity, including opportunities for students with disabilities and learning difficulties and students whose first language is not English.

There are a number of curriculum initiatives for 16–19 year olds. These are designed to contribute to the overall government policy of providing flexibility for learners, raising the levels of skill and employability in the population, and developing a lifelong learning culture.

Your college's curriculum offer should also attract adult learners and take into account ways in which their needs are different from those of the younger age group. The challenge for colleges is to reach adults who lack basic skills, to provide them with high quality learning, delivered in ways that suit them best, and to encourage a culture of lifelong learning.

Where next?

You have now completed work on *Module 3 Curriculum*. If there are areas in which you need more guidance or information, they may be covered in other modules. Turn to 'Check your current knowledge and skills' in *Using the materials*. This self-assessment questionnaire will help you to decide which modules or sections of modules may help to fill these gaps. Tick the useful sections for further study.

If you cannot find the information you need within these materials, turn to the 'Action planner' in *Using the Materials*. Note down what further information, support or guidance you would like. The *Action planner* gives advice on who may be able to help, and how.

Putting it into action

We hope that working through this module has raised useful questions, increased your awareness of issues and given you ideas for practical action that you would like to follow up. The 'Action planner' in *Using the Materials* contains a section where you can note down any questions or action points that you want to follow up within your own college.