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# Fees Charged to Part-Time Adult Students 2001-2002



The NIACE Annual Fees Survey 2001-02 shows that wide variations in fee policies continue to exist between different Local Education Authorities. Where learners live is a key factor affecting both the range of learning opportunities available to them and the price of that learning. Variations in concessionary policies further affect people's opportunities to learn, especially for those who are disadvantaged.

This is the thirty-third in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

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Since 1979, NIACE has published an annual fees survey report to provide a reference point for those involved in setting fee levels, and to provide contextual information to governors and elected members involved in decision making around these issues. In November 2002, NIACE asked Colleges and Local Education Authority adult education providers about the fees that they charged to adult learners for part-time courses of around two hours per week. This year's full report, **NIACE Fees Survey 2001-02** is available from NIACE, priced £8.

The issue of fees and fee levels remains a significant one for those who are concerned with the planning, funding and delivery of adult learning. A new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) FE funding formula became operational from September 2002. This funding system applies to all qualification bearing further education provision in colleges, local authority adult learning services and other institutions receiving 'FE' funding from the LSC. The formula assumes that 25% of the agreed national funding rate for each learner on a particular course or programme is paid by the individual learner (or their employer) in the form of a course fee. The LSC also carried forward the fee remission policies of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC).

It was the LSC intention at its inception that non-accredited adult learning (non-schedule 2 provision) should transfer to a comparable formula based funding system from September 2003. However, the full implementation of this has been postponed for another year. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the LSC is still developing its funding policy – it is seeking an approach to funding which better recognises the importance of planning, and which enables local planning decisions, rather than shifts in national funding rates, to shape the pattern of local provision.

Secondly, analysis of course and learner data in local authority non-accredited adult learning provision has shown that current patterns of funding there are more varied than had been expected, and that the link between learner numbers and actual funding levels is harder to map than anticipated. The LSC is wisely concerned not to destabilise current provision by moving too rapidly to an inappropriate formula based funding system and has now decided instead to pilot formula funding during 2003/04 with some volunteer LEAs.

The consultative circular on future funding and arrangements for Local Education Authority (LEA) adult and community learning from 2003/2004 (Circular 02/16) issued by the LSC in September 2002, also explored the notion of fees in non-accredited learning. It suggested that the fees charged by LEAs for their non-schedule 2 provision had historically covered a higher proportion of the costs of making such provision than in accredited provision. The circular proposed that a different fee assumption should be made in any funding formula for non-accredited learning and suggested that a 40% assumption might be closer to the current position. The circular also recognised the variation in the fee remission policies currently operating in LEAs, acknowledging that many LEAs had traditionally offered fee remission to a wider range of categories than those within the current LSC policy. It also recognised that some provision, particularly that primarily designed to widen participation, is made free to everyone and that, where fee remission is offered on other provision for which fees are set, then it is rarely offered at 100%.

However, the position in LEAs is only part of the picture. Much provision offered in further education colleges falls outside the national qualifications framework and is currently funded under the FE funding formula as 'other provision'. Much non-accredited learning undertaken by the designated institutions is likewise funded through the FE funding formula. Any decision on the future funding of non-accredited learning - and implicit in this, the assumptions to be made about the level of income that can be achieved through the collection of fees - needs to apply across all provision whichever organisation is making that provision.

But perhaps we overlay the connection between funding rates and fees. National funding policy clearly needs to take account of the amount of income that providers can generate through fees. It also needs to incorporate measures to ensure that providers are not financially penalised for working with socially or economically disadvantaged learners who would not be able to pay a fee, and that learners in national priority curriculum areas, for example, basic skills, are provided with an entitlement to free provision. Beyond that perhaps, the setting of actual fee levels is a matter for local decision-making. But, whereas once this was a matter for individual providers, and one in which market forces and perceived competition played a major part, perhaps now we can hope that fee levels in an area will be the subject of joint planning and agreement and that fees are set and collected in ways which both acknowledge national policy on adult learning and support the achievement of local strategic objectives.

## The findings

The average fee for examination courses (former schedule 2 provision) was £1.33 per hour in colleges and £1.32 per hour in LEAs. The average fee for non-vocational courses (former non-schedule 2 provision) was £1.80 per hour in colleges and £1.78 per hour in LEAs.

34% of responding LEAs and 52% of responding colleges charged a registration fee for former schedule 2 provision, 34% of responding LEAs and 26% of responding colleges charged a registration fee for former non-schedule 2 provision, and 15% of responding LEAs and 20% of responding colleges charged a registration fee for other funded project work.

Of responding LEAs, 67% charged an accreditation fee for former schedule 2 provision, 17% for former non-schedule 2 provision and 23% for other funded project work. Of responding colleges, 65% charged an accreditation fee for former schedule 2 provision, 16% for former non-schedule 2 provision and 23% for other funded project work.

It is common for providers to have different concessionary rates for different categories of learners. The most generous concessions tend to be given to those on unemployment and means tested benefits.

In order to increase and widen participation, many LEAs modified fees to provide 'special offers'. 86% offered tasters free or at a reduced fee, 25% of responding LEAs offered a reduced rate for first time learners, 18% offered a reduced rate for second and subsequent part time courses, 7% offered a maximum fee for multiple enrolments and 53% offered other special offers.

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## References

**Fees survey 2001-2002 : indicators of fee levels charged to part-time adult students by Local Education Authorities and Colleges.**

Fiona Aldridge, Leicester, NIACE, 2003.  
ISBN 1 86201 176 1 £8.00

**Consultation on arrangements for funding adult and community learning from 2003/04.**

Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

Circular 02/16

Website: [www.lsc.gov.uk/news\\_docs/02-16.pdf](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/news_docs/02-16.pdf)

NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.

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