

Origin: DENI Circular No 1987/46

To: Governing Bodies and Principals/Directors of Institutions
of Further Education
Lecturers in Institutions of Further Education
Recognised Teachers' Organisations in Further Education

17 September 1987
Amended LNC (18 May 2000)

OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

DEFINITION

1. For the purposes of this Circular, open learning approaches are defined as approaches which enable people to learn at times, places and paces convenient to them as individuals. Thus open learning is organised so that people have greater access to the range of courses available in colleges which in turn are able to be more flexible and responsive to individuals and to employers requesting tailor-made and, at times, highly specialised courses of varying duration. Open learning approaches incorporate therefore the twin advantages of allowing people access to courses they would otherwise be denied and of giving them greater degrees of control over their own progress.
2. Open learning should not be seen as being confined to distance learning techniques for people who for different reasons are unable to enrol in conventional full-time or part-time courses. Open learning approaches based on new methods of audio-visual presentation, information technology and computer-based learning, have much to offer students enrolled on traditional full-time and part-time courses.
3. Open learning approaches are clearly of considerable significance in the context of colleges responding flexibly to employers, employees, the self-employed and the unemployed faced with the need to obtain up-to-date knowledge and acquire contemporary skills involved in new systems and new technologies.

OPEN LEARNING PROVISION IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

Type of Provision

4. The involvement of FE colleges in open learning may be divided into 2 categories:-
 - a. The provision of tutorial and other support for open learning packages which have been purchased by a local employer wishing to train or update a number of employees in a particular skill or skills.
 - b. The provision by the college itself, as part of its existing programme of course provision, of a course on an open learning basis.

Categories of Courses

5. For the purposes of the Department's Circular 1984/28 about the Grading and Staffing of Institutions of FE, and in order to determine the hourly rates of pay for part-time teachers or full-time teachers working additional hours, all courses in FE colleges are categorised as II/III, IV or V. This also applies to Open Learning course provision. The Department will be prepared to give advice in any case where a College is having difficulty in determining the category of a particular open learning course.

Lecturers' Conditions of Service Relating to Open Learning

6. Agreement has been reached at the Lecturers' Negotiating Committee on a scheme which sets out the position of lecturers in colleges with regard to their involvement in open learning course provision. In particular, the agreement sets out the agreed allowances of class contact time for each teacher involved in open learning according to his or her caseload. A copy of the agreement is attached as an Annex 1 to this Circular.

J S Smith
Assistant Secretary

ANNEX

LECTURERS' NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE

OPEN LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1. This agreement has been made at the Lecturers' Negotiating Committee to enable the introduction of open learning on a sound educational basis in Colleges of Further Education. It is recognised that open learning is a further development of normal course provision made in colleges and the provisions of Conditions of Service of Lecturers in Colleges/Institutes of Further Education, shall therefore apply.
2. The policy, in introducing and developing open learning provision, is to extend educational opportunities to those whose needs cannot be fully met within the present pattern of course provision.
3. Any proposal to introduce open learning systems shall be subject to consultation between the College Principal and local representatives of the recognised teachers organisations. The Principal shall inform the representatives prior to consultation of the general nature of the open learning systems proposed. The Principal and the representatives shall jointly review the operation and impact of open learning at the end of each academic year.
4. A college intending to introduce open learning systems shall ensure that sufficient senior staffing time is available to carry out the necessary management and organisational responsibilities.
5. Open learning courses shall be taught by full-time staff as a part of their normal time-table commitment, or by part-time staff.
6.
 - a. Where an open learning course involves planned formal classes these shall be part of the normal college load and will be covered by existing conditions of service.
 - b. A teachers "caseload" of open learning students will be determined at the beginning of each term, and the appropriate allowance of student contact time to be given. The attached appendix sets out the agreed allowances of student contact time according to caseload servicing the needs of open learning students on an ongoing basis. The case load will be reviewed at the mid-point of each term and the teachers student contact allowance adjusted should the number of students anticipated for the second half of each term lead to an increase or decrease in the appropriate student contact allowance. Where a student is following 2 or more units of study, he/she will be counted as 2 or more students for the purpose of calculating case load.
7. It is expected that existing or specifically developed open learning material will be used on open learning courses. Where an open learning course requires the development of new material or the substantial adaptation of existing material, then the provisions of Conditions of Service regarding reduced student contact time shall apply.
8. The grades of work in open learning provision will be determined by reference to current comparators.
9. Open learning tutors will have access to adequate secretarial, reprographic and other support services and the use of a telephone; tutors will not be required to use home telephones for contact with students.

10. In recognition of the demands placed upon staff by open learning developments, the institution will facilitate the release of staff for in-service training and will meet the fees and expenses in accordance with current practice.

APPENDIX TO AGREEMENT

SCALE OF STUDENT-CONTACT ALLOWANCES

NUMBER OF OPEN LEARNING STUDENTS (“CASELOAD”)	STUDENT CONTACT ALLOWANCE (HOURS PER WEEK)
1-2	½
3-4	1
5-6	1.5
7-9	2
10-12	2.5
13-15	3
16-18	3.5
19-21	4
22-24	4.5
25-27	5
28-30	5.5
31-33	6
34-36	6.5
37-39	7
40-42	7.5
43-45	8
46-48	8.5
49-51	9
52-54	9.5
Pro rata increase in bands of 3	Pro rata increase 1/2 hour per band

