Chapter 5

An implementation process

5.1 A system of ILAs with a Learning Bank would take time to introduce. However, if it were to be implemented for, say, 2000/2001, the enabling process would need to begin immediately. This might require Government to give an undertaking, via an early White Paper for example, that consultations would begin straightaway on plans to introduce a system within the lifetime of the Parliament.

5.2 One crucial initial step would be agreement on a secure and equitable loan facility.

5.3 The presentation aspects of an implementation strategy should not be underestimated either. If the process of consultation were begun straightaway, interested parties could begin to orientate themselves towards the expectation that a systems of ILAs will be introduced in the near future. Provided the implementation phase is not compromised by an over-hasty introduction of ILAs in other segments of the learning market, there is every prospect of a successful system-wide implementation in higher education and lifelong learning within a reasonable period of time.

Pilot schemes

5.4 There may be a natural temptation to approach a general system of ILAs via pilot arrangements. Great care will need to be exercised to ensure that the model is tested under conditions which give it the best possible chance of success. We have emphasised in this assessment that a reliance on the employer connection alone is likely to place unrealistic expectations on the inclination of employers to support a new kind of investment partnership. Therefore, we believe that any initial pilot schemes should involve contributions from the state - derived from Funding Bodies or TECs, for example - to complement the contributions expected of individuals and
employers.

5.5 To this end, it might be helpful if policy were to respond sympathetically to sub-national or regional proposals to pilot a system of ILAs. This might be effective for a lifelong learning strategy overall. For higher education specifically, some consideration might be given to organising pilot schemes for postgraduate students in the first instance, or to encourage initial cycle and sub-degree participation for specific social groups.