

## **BENCHMARKING DATA 1999/00 TO 2001/02**

### **Success, Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England**

This document complements the Benchmarking Data on levels of success, retention and achievement in further education colleges in England (known as Benchmarking Data) for the period 1999/00 to 2001/02, published at [www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarking](http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarking). The Learning and Skills Council publishes national FE Benchmarking Data annually. This publication updates the Benchmarking Data 1998/99 to 2000/01 published in December 2002 and expands upon the information originally made available in Statistical First Release 25 (ISR/SFR25) published in July 2003 at <http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Documents/SubjectListing/SectorData/StatisticalFirstReleases/SFR-25.htm>. Data for External Institutions is published separately on the internet at [www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarkingei](http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarkingei).

#### **Purpose**

- Allows colleges to assess their performance and assists their planning of action to improve the success, retention and achievement rates of their students
- Supports colleges in the process of setting targets as part of their 3 year development plans set out in *Success for All*
- Informs the process of performance review by Local Learning and Skills Councils

#### **Viewing the data**

The Benchmarking Data is split into three main categories; primary data, supporting data and qualification level data. It is subdivided by qualification type and college type. Success rates along with two measures of retention and achievement rates appear on each table. The data can be accessed via the internet at [www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarking](http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarking).

## BACKGROUND

The publication of national Benchmarking Data is part of the Council's strategy to support colleges in raising the standard of their work. Benchmarking Data on student success, retention and achievement allows colleges to assess their performance, and assists their planning of action programmes to improve the retention and achievement rates of their students.

The term *Benchmarking Data*, rather than 'benchmarks', is used throughout this document. *Benchmarking Data* is used to imply a reference point for comparison, and not necessarily a standard of best practice.

As part of the Success For All initiative, all colleges agree annual targets for improving students success rates with the LSC in their 3 year development plans. Institutional target-setting informed by national Benchmarking Data is an integral part of the colleges' strategies to secure continuous improvement.

### Approach

The Council's approach to publishing Benchmarking Data is to publish a manageable amount of information, drawing on existing statistical measures.

The Benchmarking Data have been derived from colleges' *Individualised Student Record (ISR)* returns and provide a range of national statistics for success, retention and achievement.

As in previous years, three levels of national Benchmarking Data are presented:

- primary data tables showing national averages of success, retention and achievement rates, plus spread of variability by college type and notional level
- supporting data tables showing success, retention and achievement and spread of variability by college type, notional level and broad qualification type
- national Benchmarking Data for individual qualifications by area of learning.

The underlying methodology used to update the Benchmarking Data to 2001/02 has been slightly modified from the 2000/01 publication produced in December 2001. The main changes to the methodology are:

- the exclusion of Ufl qualifications from the Benchmarking Data. These have been excluded because most colleges with Ufl qualifications are undertaking this as recipient colleges, and therefore have very little control over the quality of the provision.
- The inclusion of qualification aims that span more than one teaching year and where the learner withdraws before 1 November in their second, third or fourth year. Previously these qualifications would have been excluded from the Benchmarking Data.

### Presentation

There are two retention rates and achievement rates shown in this publication as in last year's publication. The definitions of the success, retention and achievement rates can be found in the definitions section. The inspectorate bodies are keen to see both of these retention and achievement measures to assist them in reaching judgements on individual college results in comparison with national figures.

Key Skills qualifications have not been included in the Benchmarking Data owing to inconsistencies in the way that they were recorded on the ISR.

The Benchmarking Data is available at the top of the page using the drop down menus. The use of different software to that used in previous years to produce the data tables has allowed the opportunity to improve the presentation of the data in line with feedback that had been received by the LSC.

In addition, short qualifications, where the student expects to complete in fewer than 24 weeks, are distinguished from longer qualifications.

The Benchmarking Data shows the results for general further education and tertiary colleges, and sixth form colleges that recruit a high proportion of their students from deprived areas and which have a widening participation factor for 2001/02 of 1.0417 or higher. Typically these colleges would recruit at least half of their students from disadvantaged areas. Retention and achievement rates for these groups of colleges tend to be lower than for other colleges.

Results for 1999/00 and 2000/01 have been recalculated from the Benchmarking Data 1998-99 to 2000-01 published in December 2002, to take account of revisions to colleges' data and the qualifications database. More details are available in the definitions section.

### **Using Benchmarking Data**

Colleges can measure their performance by comparing their results with the published Benchmarking Data. This information will support the process of setting targets for 2002/03 and beyond. Individual college results will also be used by local LSCs to compare and evaluate the performance of providers.

The Council has provided a set of results to each college for the period 1999/00 to 2001/02 in the same format as the Benchmarking Data publication during the spring 2003.

Where a college's performance differs from the Benchmarking Data, it will wish to explore the reasons for this by calculating success, retention and achievement rates for particular parts of the it's provision and comparing these with statistics for similar provision at national level. To facilitate this comparison, a more detailed breakdown of the Benchmarking Data by broad type of qualification, and individual qualification aim is also available.

In some cases there may be a difference between college statistics and the national Benchmarking Data because the mix of qualifications at the college is significantly different from the national mix, which means that for comparison purposes the Benchmarking Data should be adjusted. An example of how to adjust the Benchmarking Data is shown in the definitions section. It illustrates that in most cases the adjusted Benchmarking Data would be similar to the original Benchmarking Data, even with a different mix of qualifications in the college.

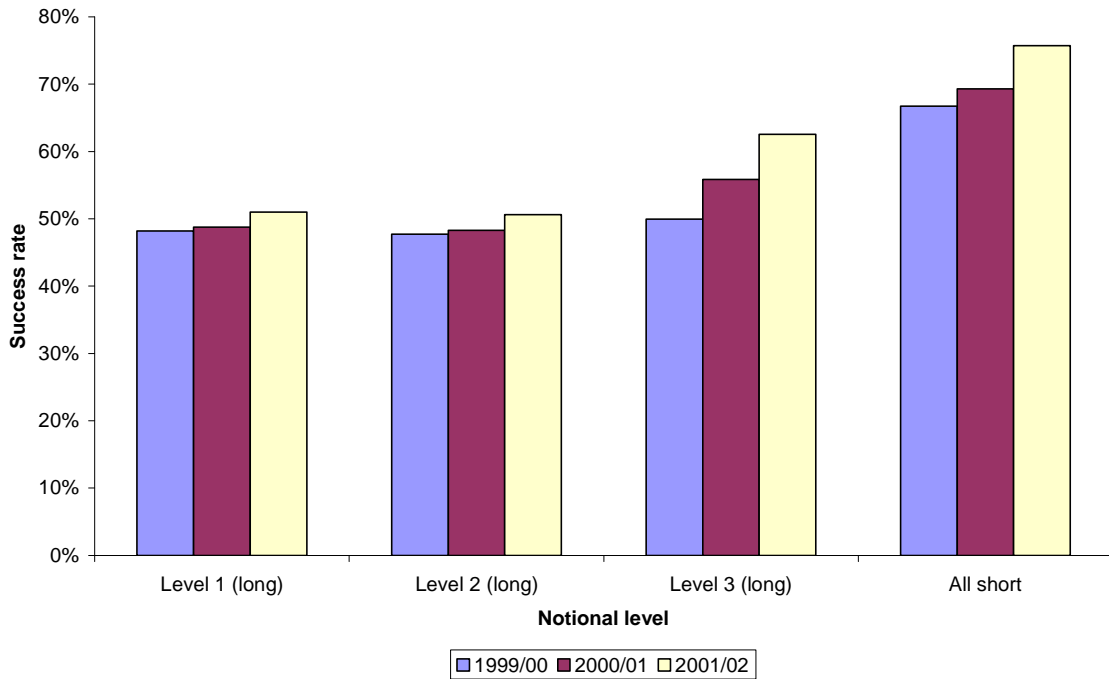
## KEY FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings drawn from the benchmarking data about success, retention and achievement rates.

### Success Rates

1. Overall success rates for all qualifications have increased from 59% in 2000/01 to 65% in 2001/02. Two factors have had a major impact on this increase:
  - success rates for A2 qualifications (A level, year 2), which were introduced as part of the Curriculum 2000 strategy, are extremely high compared with other qualifications. This impacts on those institutions that offer a high percentage of A levels e.g. Sixth Form Colleges
  - increases in learner volumes and success rates within short courses. Short courses such as Health and Safety and Food Hygiene are delivering the qualifications required by legislation in certain areas of employment.
2. Success rates for both 16-18 year olds and adults attending General FE and Tertiary colleges with high WP factors have shown a large increase between 2000/01 and 2001/02. Mean success rates have increased by 7 percentage points and now stand at 63% for all ages.
3. Success rates in Sixth Form Colleges have continued their upward trend with the mean increasing by 7 percentage points from 2000/01 to 74% in 2001/02. This gives an overall mean increase of 12 percentage points between 1999/00 and 2001/02.
4. Success rates have increased for qualifications at all levels, but most markedly for level 3 long qualifications, where the mean increased by 6 percentage points to 62% between 2000/02 and 2001/02, and for short qualifications, where the mean increased by 7 percentage points to 76% over the same period.
5. The large increase in mean success rate, 11 percentage points, between 2000/01 and 2001/02, for A/AS/A2 qualifications is primarily driven by the year on year increase in retention rates of 11 percentage points. This is linked to the structural changes in A/AS/A2 level provision. The mean achievement rate between 2000/01 and 2001/02 for A/AS/A2 qualifications has also increased but by a smaller increment of 3 percentage points.
6. The median success rate has increased by 6%. The 10<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> percentiles also show 6% increases in success rate demonstrating that poorly performing providers are increasing at the same rate as well performing providers.

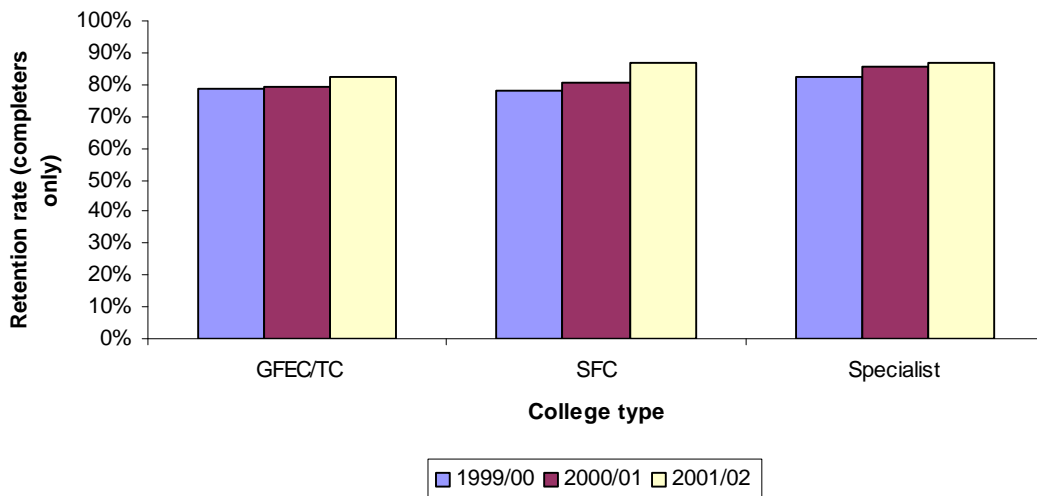
### Success rates by notional level, length and year for all ages



### Retention rates

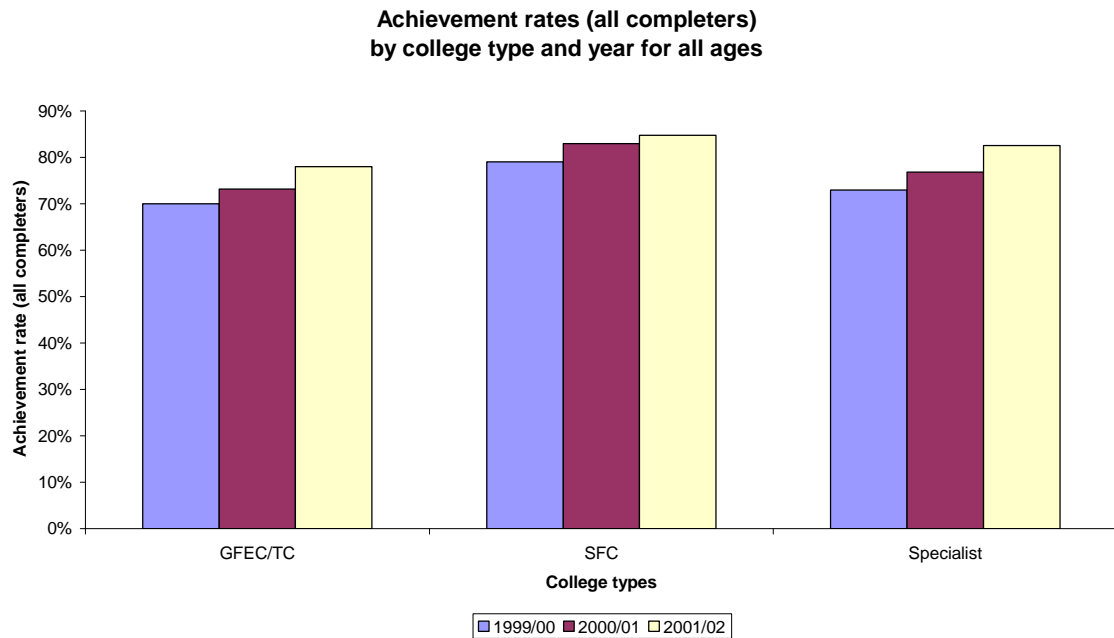
7. Retention rates have increased between 2000/01 and 2001/02 for both 16-18 year olds and 19+ age groups. The largest increases have been in Sixth Form colleges where the mean retention rate (completers only) increased by 6 percentage points to 87%.
8. There were increases in retention rates at all levels for long qualifications with level 3 qualifications showing a 7 percentage point mean increase to 79% in 2001/02 for retention rate (completers only). The mean retention rate (completers only) for short qualifications increased by 1 percentage point and now stands at 92%.

### Retention rates (completers only) by college type and year for all ages



## Achievement Rates

9. Achievement rates have increased at all levels and for all college types. The mean achievement rate (all completers) has increased by 5 percentage points between 2000/01 and 2001/02 and now stands at 79%. This is an increase of 8 percentage points from 1999/00 when the mean achievement rate (all completers) stood at 71%. In general the increase in achievement rates have been higher for adult students than for students aged 16-18.
10. Short qualifications have shown the greatest increases in achievement rates. The mean achievement rate (all completers) rose by 5 percentage points from 74% in 2000/01 to 79% in 2001/02.



## ANNEX A

### HEADLINE SUCCESS RATE DATA

Below are tables showing the headline success rates split by college type. A more detailed version of the headline data table can be downloaded as an Excel spreadsheet from the Benchmarking Data website homepage.

#### Success Rates

Qualification length	End year	All colleges	GFEC/TC	GFEC/TC - WP	SFC	SFC -WP	Specialist
All	1999/00	56%	55%	55%	62%	60%	60%
All	2000/01	59%	58%	56%	67%	64%	66%
All	2001/02	65%	64%	63%	74%	70%	72%
Long	1999/00	49%	47%	46%	61%	57%	50%
Long	2000/01	52%	49%	48%	66%	63%	53%
Long	2001/02	56%	53%	53%	74%	69%	56%
Short	1999/00	67%	67%	65%	66%	75%	73%
Short	2000/01	69%	69%	65%	71%	82%	79%
Short	2001/02	76%	76%	72%	72%	74%	84%

#### Success Rate Spread Of Variance

Qualification length	End year	Percentile	All colleges	GFEC/TC	GFEC/TC - WP	SFC	Specialist
Long	1999/00	10th	39%	38%	37%	47%	32%
		25th	45%	44%	41%	53%	45%
		50th	50%	48%	46%	60%	54%
		75th	57%	52%	50%	69%	59%
		90th	67%	58%	53%	73%	66%
Long	2000/01	10th	41%	39%	39%	52%	38%
		25th	47%	45%	44%	59%	45%
		50th	52%	50%	47%	66%	55%
		75th	61%	54%	52%	72%	62%
		90th	70%	61%	58%	78%	66%
Long	2001/02	10th	45%	43%	42%	62%	45%
		25th	50%	48%	47%	67%	50%
		50th	56%	53%	52%	73%	57%
		75th	66%	58%	57%	81%	61%
		90th	77%	62%	62%	85%	68%

Qualification length	End year	Percentile	All colleges	GFEC/TC	GFEC/TC - WP	SFC	Specialist
Short	1999/00	10th	43%	46%	41%	33%	37%



		50th	65%	65%	61%	62%	68%
		75th	74%	74%	73%	74%	86%
		90th	82%	81%	83%	83%	88%
Short	2000/01	10th	49%	53%	49%	40%	31%
		25th	61%	62%	58%	52%	63%
		50th	71%	70%	63%	69%	77%
		75th	78%	78%	76%	80%	87%
		90th	84%	83%	82%	85%	95%
Short	2001/02	10th	56%	60%	58%	39%	60%
		25th	67%	69%	66%	59%	71%
		50th	77%	77%	74%	73%	84%
		75th	83%	83%	79%	85%	91%
		90th	89%	87%	85%	97%	95%
All	1999/00	10th	44%	44%	41%	49%	37%
		25th	50%	49%	45%	54%	49%
		50th	56%	55%	51%	62%	62%
		75th	63%	60%	57%	69%	67%
		90th	70%	65%	70%	74%	75%
All	2000/01	10th	48%	47%	46%	53%	45%
		25th	55%	53%	50%	60%	54%
		50th	61%	59%	55%	66%	64%
		75th	67%	64%	61%	73%	74%
		90th	74%	70%	68%	78%	82%
All	2001/02	10th	54%	52%	50%	62%	55%
		25th	61%	59%	59%	68%	66%
		50th	67%	64%	63%	74%	72%
		75th	74%	69%	68%	80%	79%
		90th	80%	75%	74%	86%	83%

## **ANNEX B**

### **DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS**

#### **Summary of calculation method**

The method takes data for each college from the following five ISR returns to create the Benchmarking Data:

- ISR13 (December 1998; 1997/98)
- ISR16 (December 1999; 1998/99)
- ISR19 (December 2000; 1999/2000)
- ISR22 (December 2001; 2000/01)
- ISR25 (December 2002; 2001/02)

ISR13 is used to provide information on learners starting qualifications that were expected to end in 1999/00 or later, i.e. courses of three years or more duration. In a similar manner, ISR16 is used to provide information on learners starting qualifications that were expected to end in 1999/00 or later; for example learners on a two year GNVQ programme expecting to end in 1999/00. The results in this publication were calculated using a hierarchy table, available with the Pseudo Code, which is based on version 14.3 of the qualification database and updated using information from the Learning Aim Database (LAD).

Learners and their qualifications are matched across the five years of ISR returns using the learner reference, course code, start date and expected end date to calculate the number of starters at the beginning of each programme, retention across the whole programme, and success and achievement levels. Only qualifications that learners expected to complete between 1999/00 and 2001/02 are included in the publication.

The Benchmarking Data is built from cohort level, a cohort being a particular qualification being studied over the same duration and expecting to end in the same teaching year. Only cohorts, which consist entirely of Council-funded learners, or a mixture of Council-funded and non Council-funded learners are included. Overall, approximately 95% of the 'number of starters' in the Benchmarking Data are Council-funded learners and 5% are non Council-funded learners.

#### **Presentation issues**

- The 'number of starters' is rounded to the nearest 100 in the Benchmarking Data in this publication and the supporting data.
- Where the number of starters is less than 500, results and percentiles are not shown.
- The percentage breakdown of number started may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
- The Benchmarking Data for individual qualifications on the Council's website shows 'number of starters' unrounded, but does not show Benchmarking Data for qualifications with less than ten starters.
- Since the data is calculated at qualification level, learners studying more than one qualification will appear once for each of their qualifications

## Coverage

The Benchmarking Data for 1999/00 to 2001/02 has been calculated for 374 (from a total of 407) colleges where ISR13, ISR16, ISR19, ISR22 and ISR25 data were available. This includes:

- 26 (from a total of 28) specialist colleges; agriculture and horticulture colleges and art, design and performing arts colleges
- 93 (from a total of 101) sixth form colleges. Of these 8 (from a total of 12) with a high number of learners from disadvantaged areas are included in the data
- 255 (from a total of 278) general further education and tertiary colleges, including designated colleges. Of these 59 (from a total of 71) with a high number of learners from disadvantaged areas are included in the data

The 33 colleges excluded from the Benchmarking Data consist of:

- 22 colleges with poor data quality, identified during the benchmarking process
- 11 colleges who had not returned a valid ISR25 (December 2002; 2001/2002) data in time to be included in the results.

The results for 1999/00 and 2000/01 have been recalculated since *Benchmarking Data 1998/99 to 2000/01* published in December 2002 for the following reasons:

- a number of colleges have revised their ISR data, either as a response to the 2000/01 summary statistics or for other purposes
- there have been some changes in the qualifications database; for example some qualifications have changed area of learning or have a known notional level where it was previously unknown
- there have been slight changes in the methodology used to calculate the Benchmarking Data
- to maintain consistency when showing results by using the same set of colleges for each year

In most cases the changes due to recalculations of success, retention and achievement rates are slight.

The spread of variance is not shown for sixth form colleges with a high number of learners from disadvantaged areas due to the small number of institutions in the cohort.

## A, AS, A2 and GCSE grades

The variable quality of data in the 'grade' field of the ISR means it is not yet possible to accurately differentiate the ranges of GCSE grades. In the Benchmarking Data the number of GCSEs achieved is calculated as the number of GCSEs achieved at grades A\* to G for all colleges.

Qualification Level Benchmarking Data shows the percentage achieving a 'high grade' calculated from the grade field in the ISR to provide an indication of the A\* to C achievement rate for GCSE's, and the A to B achievement rate for 'A' levels.

## The Effects of Widely Differing Mixes of Qualification Type

The example below shows how the Benchmarking Data can be adjusted to match the mix of qualifications at an individual college, where the mix of qualifications at the college is significantly different from the national mix.

The example relates to adult learners studying at level 3 in a general further education college. The starting point is the average retention and achievement rates for different level 3 qualifications for all general further education colleges and for our example college.

**Table 1.**  
**Notional level 3 qualifications, learners aged 19 and over**

	Average for GFEC/TC			Example College
	retention rate %	achievement rate %	breakdown of enrolments %	breakdown of enrolments %
All qualifications	78	72	-	-
GCE A/AS/A2	67	64	18	10
GNVQ	68	77	9	5
NVQ	82	73	17	50
Other long	83	64	56	35

In our example college, the level 3 provision for adults includes many more NVQs, and fewer GCE A/AS/A2 levels, GNVQs and Other qualifications than nationally. In order to check whether the published Benchmarking Data for all level 3 qualifications is an appropriate comparator, the following calculation may be used:

Average GFEC/TC retention rate = 78%

GFEC/TC retention rate for mix of qualifications in example college comprising:

10% GCE A/AS/A2 retention rate of 67% = 6.7

5% GNVQ retention rate of 68% = 3.4

50% NVQ retention rate of 82% = 41

35% Other long retention rate of 83% = 29.05

**80.15% rounds to 80%**

The same approach can be used for achievement rates. Strictly, the breakdown of enrolments for completed qualifications with a known outcome should be used rather than the number enrolled, but this is unlikely to have a significant effect:

Average GFEC/TC achievement rate = 72%

GFEC/TC achievement rate for mix of qualifications in example college comprising:

10% GCE A/AS/A2 achievement rate of 64% = 6.4

5% GNVQ achievement rate of 77% = 3.85

50% NVQ achievement rate of 73% = 36.5

35% Other long achievement rate of 75% = 26.25

**70.00 rounds to 70%**

As can be seen, the adjusted Benchmarking Data are similar to the original Benchmarking Data, despite the very different mix of qualifications in the example college. In practice, mix of qualification types is unlikely to be a significant factor for most colleges. This method can be used on success rates and both types of achievement and retention rates.

## Age group

A learner's age group is calculated from their age as at 31 August in the college year they started their qualification. Learners of unknown age are included in the age group 19 and over. Learners under 16 years are included in the 16-18 age group. All tables show the Benchmarking Data divided into two age groups: 16-18 and 19 and over.

## Short qualifications

A qualification is 'short' if it has an expected length of less than 24 weeks. In practice the majority of short qualifications are of 12 weeks duration or less. Short qualifications (excluding short Key Skills qualifications) are shown separately, since the success, retention and achievement rates for these qualifications are significantly different from those of longer qualifications.

## Notional NVQ level

Qualifications are grouped according to their NVQ level or notional equivalent according to the categorisation of each qualification on the Council's qualification database. The levels are:

level 1	includes qualifications at level 1 and level 'E' (entry level), such as NVQs, foundation GNVQs and other foundation or pre-foundation qualifications
level 2	includes level 2 NVQs, intermediate GNVQs and precursors (BTEC first certificate or first diploma, City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education at intermediate level), GCSEs and other intermediate level qualifications
level 3	includes level 3 NVQs, advanced GNVQs and precursors (BTEC national certificate or national diploma, City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education at national level), advanced VCEs, GCE A, A2 and AS levels and other advanced level qualifications
level H	all level 4 and 5 qualifications including HNCs, HNDs, access to HE qualifications, NVQs at levels 4 and 5, and other higher level professional qualifications.
Level X	Qualifications with unknown or unspecified level

Key skills have been excluded from the Benchmarking Data due to inconsistencies in the way that they have been recorded on the ISR.

## Widening participation factor

Each college has a widening participation (WP) factor calculated by the Council. It is based on the number of learners recruited from areas with different levels of deprivation, using a modified version of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions. Learners with addresses in postcodes with high levels of socio-economic deprivation are allocated a factor according to the level of deprivation. Learners can also qualify for widening participation in other ways, such as the homeless or asylum seekers. The higher the number of these learners, the higher the WP factor. The WP factor therefore provides a basis for identifying both individual and geographical disadvantage.

Specifically the WP factor has been calculated by comparing the total number of units generated by each college, by the number of units generated excluding widening participation units.

Analysis of colleges grouped by WP factor showed that it would be useful to publish separate benchmarks for general further education and tertiary colleges with very high WP factors, as the retention and achievement rates for these colleges as a group, were significantly below other colleges of the same type.

Benchmarking Data for general further education and tertiary colleges, and sixth form colleges which have a widening participation factor of 1.0417 or higher are shown separately. Before 2000/01 a factor of 1.025 or higher has been used as the threshold for defining colleges with WP. In 2000/01 the widening participation factors were increased by 4/3 and as a result of this the threshold for defining colleges with WP has increased to 1.033 ( $1 + (0.025 \times 4/3)$ ) whilst in 2001/02 the WP factors were increased by 5/4. As a result the threshold has now increased to 1.0417 ( $1 + (0.033 \times 5/4)$ ).

### **Pseudo Code**

Version 3.2 of the pseudo code describing the standard algorithms used to calculate success, retention and achievement rates for the inspectorate spreadsheet and the Benchmarking Data for further education colleges in England can be found at [http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/data/standardalgorithms\\_csras\\_02.html](http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/data/standardalgorithms_csras_02.html). This pseudo-code updates version 3, which covered the period 1998-99 to 2000-01 and was produced in October 2002 by the LSC.

### **Qualification Codes**

The qualification codes shown in the qualification level data tables can be mapped to the qualification codes used in ISR 25 (from the learner aims database (LAD)) using the hierarchy table that can be found at [http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/data/standardalgorithms\\_csras\\_02.html](http://www.lscdata.gov.uk/data/standardalgorithms_csras_02.html). In this hierarchy table the mapcode column corresponds with the qualification codes shown in the qualification level data tables on the Benchmarking Data website.

### **Number of starters**

The 'number of starters' is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the learner was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. Details to note on the definition include:

- (a) the number started excludes any learner who transferred onto another qualification. The qualification the learner transfers into will be included as a start on the new qualification. Analyses of 2001/02 results show that approx 2% of all enrolments were recorded as transferring onto another qualification
- (b) learners who start on a qualification and withdraw before the 1 November of their first year are not recorded on the ISR and as such are excluded from the number of starters.
- (c) each qualification a learner is enrolled on is shown as a separate 'start'
- (d) the 'number of starters' includes some non Council-funded provision as set out in the summary of calculation method section.
- (e) A learner on a two year programme who began their studies in October 2000 would appear in the results for 2001/02 as this is the college year in which they expected to complete their qualification, even if they withdrew in the first year of their programme.

## **Success rates**

Success rates are calculated as the number of qualifications achieved divided by the number of starters who do not transfer out. It can also be derived by multiplying achievement rate (all completers) by retention rate (completers only).

### **Retention rate (inc. continuers)**

The retention rate (inc.continuers) is the number of learners continuing or completed, divided by the number of learners who started the qualification, excluding transfers out. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, i.e. from the start to the end of the qualification. This measure was previously called retention rate in the Benchmarking Data 1998/99 to 2000/01.

### **Retention rate (completers only)**

The retention rate (completers only) is the number of learners completed, divided by the number of learners who started the qualification, excluding transfers out. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, i.e. from the start to the end of the qualification. The retention rate (completers only) will be lower than the retention rate (inc. continuers) when a significant amount of learners are recorded as "continuing or intending to continue the learning activities leading to the qualification aim" beyond their expected end date. This is the definition of retention rate which was used in the Statistical First Release 25 (ISR/SFR25).

### **Achievement rate (known outcomes)**

The achievement rate (known outcomes) is the number of qualifications learners have fully achieved divided by the number of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included as achievements. This measure was previously called achievement rate in the Benchmarking Data 1998/99 to 2000/01.

### **Achievement rate (all completers)**

The achievement rate (all completers) is the number of qualifications learners have fully achieved divided by the number of completed qualifications. This denominator includes those completers recorded with unknown outcomes in the ISR, for example outcome code 4 'exam taken but result not known' or outcome code 5 'learning activities are complete but exam has not yet been taken'. Partial achievements are not included as achievements. The achievement rate (all completers) will be lower than the achievement rate (known outcomes) when a significant amount of learners are recorded as "learning activities are complete but the exam has not been taken and there is an intention to take the exam" or "exam taken but result not yet known". This is the definition of achievement rate which was used in the Statistical First Release 25 (ISR/SFR25).

## **Measures of college variability**

Measures of college variability for success, retention and achievement rates enable colleges to compare their results against the range for the sector or particular groups of colleges. The measures are also shown on the supporting data on the Council's website for results by broad qualification type and college type.

The results in this publication show the rates which:

- 10% of colleges meet or surpass (90th percentile)
- 25% of colleges meet or surpass (75th percentile)
- half of colleges meet or surpass (median or 50th percentile)
- 75% of colleges meet or surpass (25th percentile)
- 90% of colleges meet or surpass (10th percentile).

Measures of variability are published where there are sufficient numbers of colleges to calculate a meaningful result.

The measures of variability are calculated at college level in order to provide information on variation between colleges. This is different from the mean success, retention and achievement rates, which are calculated as the average rate for all the relevant enrolments, weighting each enrolment equally.

The measures of variability weight each college equally. This means that learners in smaller colleges have a greater bearing on results than those from larger colleges. The results for small groupings, such as qualifications being studied by adults in sixth form colleges, will be affected by this weighting more than others.

The differences between the two methods can be seen by comparing the average or 'mean' rate, with 50th percentile or 'median'. In many cases the difference is slight, whereas in others such as notional level 1 qualifications in sixth form colleges, the difference is greater. In this case the median is higher than the mean due to a number of colleges with relatively few learners having high levels of retention and achievement. These colleges are given the same weight in the calculation of the median as other sixth form colleges with a larger number of learners thereby increasing the median college result.

Both the mean success, retention and achievement rate and the measures of variability are valid and useful measures, depending on whether the overall performance of the sector is of interest (mean success, retention and achievement rates) or the variability between colleges is the focus (measures of variability).