

BENCHMARKING DATA: EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONS 1999/00 TO 2001/02

Success, retention and Achievement Rates in External Institutions in England

This document complements the Benchmarking Data on levels of success, retention and achievement for accredited adult and community providers, formerly known as External Institutions, in England (known as Benchmarking Data) for the period 1999/00 to 2001/02, published at www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarkingei. This publication updates the Benchmarking Data External Institutions 1998/99 to 2000/01 published in April 2003 and expands upon the information originally made available in Statistical First Release 25 (ISR/SFR25) published in July 2003 at 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>.

Purpose

- Allows External Institutions to assess their performance and assists their planning of action to improve the success, retention and achievement rates of their students
- Supports External Institutions 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 subdivided by qualification type and institution 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/benchmarkingei.

BACKGROUND

These pages provide information on the background, approach taken, presentation and uses of the benchmarking data for accredited adult and community providers, formerly known as External Institutions. For the purpose of this publication we will refer to accredited adult and community providers as External Institutions.

The publication of national benchmarking data is part of the Council's strategy to support External Institutions in raising the standards of their work. Benchmarking data allows External Institutions to assess their performance and assists their planning of action programmes to improve the retention and achievement rates of their students.

Benchmarking data may be used as a measure in provider reviews, strategic area reviews and in producing External Institutions' development plans (Success for all).

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.

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 External Institutions' individualised student record (ISR) returns and provide a range of national statistics for retention and achievement.

The benchmarking data for External Institutions is presented in data tables similar to the primary data tables for Further Education Colleges published in August 2003 at www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarking. These primary tables show national averages of success, retention and achievement rates plus spread of variability by External Institution type and notional level.

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 institution results in comparison with national figures.

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

Key Skills qualifications have not been included in the benchmarking data due to inconsistencies in how they were recorded in the ISR.

The benchmarking data are available at the top of the page using the drop down menus. The tables are similar in format to the primary tables of the Further Education Benchmarking data at www.lscdata.gov.uk/benchmarking.

The benchmarking data shows the results for all External Institutions and External Institutions that recruit a high proportion of their students from deprived areas and that have a widening participation factor for 2001/2002 of 1.0417 or higher. Retention and achievement rates for these groups of External Institutions are lower than for other External Institutions. The definition of widening participation can be found in the definitions section.

Results for 1999/00 and 2000/01 have also been calculated to give a time series of the data over three years.

USING THE BENCHMARKING DATA

Comparing results

External Institutions will be able to measure their performance by comparing their results with the published benchmarking data. This information will support the process of provider reviews and be used when producing External Institutions 3 year development plans.

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

Where an institution'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 it's provision and comparing these with statistics for similar provision at national level.

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Definitions

External Institutions

For the purpose of this publication we will refer to accredited adult and community providers as External Institutions.

Summary of calculation method

The method takes data for each External Institution 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 tables for External Institutions.

The percentage breakdown of number started may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Since the data is calculated at qualification level, students 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 166 (of 178) External Institutions where ISR13, ISR16, ISR19, ISR 22 and ISR25 data were available. This includes 69 (of 70) External Institutions with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas.

The 12 External Institutions excluded from the benchmarking data consists of:

- 8 External Institutions with poor data quality, identified during the benchmarking process
- 4 External Institutions who had not returned valid ISR25 (December 2002; 2001/02) data in time to be included in the results.

The results for 1999/00 and 2000/01 have been recalculated from Benchmarking Data 1998/99 to 2000/01 for the following reasons:

- a number of External Institutions have revised their ISR data, either as a response to the 2000/2001 summary statistics or for other purposes
- there have been some changes in the qualifications database, for example some qualifications have changed programme area or have a known notional level whereas previously it was 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 External Institutions for each year

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

Age

A student's age group is calculated from their age as at 31 August in the teaching year they started their qualification. Students of unknown age are included in the age group 19 and over. Students under 16 years are included in the 16-18 age group. All tables except those for short qualifications 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 External Institution 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 External Institution, by the number of units generated excluding widening participation units.

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

Benchmarking Data for External Institutions 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 External Institutions with WP. In 2000/01 the widening participation factors were increased by 4/3 and as a result of this the threshold for defining External Institutions 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 External Institutions in England can be found at 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.

Number of starters

The 'number of starters' is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the learner was expecting to complete the qualification that academic 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 academic 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 External Institution variability

Measures of External Institution variability for retention and achievement rates enable External Institutions to compare their results against the range for the sector or particular groups of External Institutions.

The results in this publication show the rates which:

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

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

The measures of variability are calculated at External Institution level in order to provide information on variation between External Institutions. 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 External Institution equally. This means that students in smaller External Institutions have a greater bearing on results than those from larger External Institutions

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. Where the difference is greater, the median is higher than the mean due to a number

of External Institutions with relatively few students having high levels of success, retention and achievement. These External Institutions are given the same weight in the calculation of the median as External Institutions with a larger number of students thereby increasing the median External Institution result.

Both the mean 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 External Institutions is the focus (measures of variability).