

## **Measuring progress towards the 2011 Skills for Life Literacy and Numeracy PSA target**

### **Introduction**

This document provides the background to the 2011 Literacy and Numeracy Public Service Agreement (PSA) target. Progress against this target is reported in a quarterly Statistical First Release (SFR) on Further Education and Skills, which is published by the Data Service. More information on the SFR can be found at: [www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics](http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics)

### **The Target**

Skills for Life (SfL) is the name of the Government's national strategy for improving the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults aged 16 and over, through the delivery of literacy, language (in the form of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses) and numeracy provision. Skills for life training is provided at entry level certificates 1, 2 and 3; and at levels 1 and 2.

The Skills for Life 2011 PSA target is defined as:

- 597,000 people of working age to have achieved a first level 1 or above literacy/ESOL qualification between 2008/09 and 2010/11.
- 390,000 people of working age to have achieved a first entry level 3 or above numeracy qualification between 2008/09 and 2010/11.

This target is consistent with a trajectory towards the Leitch 2020 ambition of 89 per cent of people of working age possessing functional literacy skills, and 81 per cent possessing functional numeracy skills.

Further information on the Leitch Review and the 2020 ambition can be found at: [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch\\_review\\_index.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch_review_index.htm) and at [http://hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pbr\\_csr07\\_psa2.pdf](http://hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pbr_csr07_psa2.pdf)

Further information on Skills for Life can be found at: <http://rwp.excellencegateway.org.uk/readwriteplus/>

## Measurement Against The Target

A range of data sources are used to identify the number of all learners who have achieved a relevant SfL qualification at the appropriate level for each target.

### Data

The range of data used to identify qualifications that count towards the target includes:

- Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data for:
  - Learner Responsive further education data – including General FE Colleges;
  - Employer Responsive further education data – including Apprenticeships and Train to Gain data;
  - Adult Safeguarded Learning;
  - University for Industry;
  - European Social Fund;
- Higher Education data – to identify any Skills for Life qualifications being studied at a Higher Education institution.
- School Sixth Forms data.

The last two are not included in this SFR but would only contribute a few thousand towards the targets.

### Adjustments

To arrive at an estimate of those progressing towards the target a number of adjustments need to be made to the analysed figures available from these sources. These include:

1. Removing repeat learners i.e. those learners who have already achieved that level of Literacy/ESOL or Numeracy;
2. Accounting for 'jumpers' i.e. learners who achieve at a level above the target but who began with skills below it;
3. Estimating the proportion of numeracy entry level qualifications that are at entry level 3.

#### 1. Removing Repeat Learners

The ILR is used to measure the number of learners who have achieved Skills for Life threshold qualifications. It is not possible from the ILR data to directly determine if any of these learners had been previously recorded as achieving a qualification at this level since 2003 (since the 2020 target baseline was set in 2003). The overall achievement figure is therefore adjusted down to remove estimated repeat learners.

Based on analysis of ILR data done by the Fischer Family Trust in 2008, we estimate that 5% of Literacy and ESOL level1 achievements in a particular academic year are from learners who had been previously recorded as

achieving a qualification at this level. Similarly, we estimate that 3% of learners who achieve a numeracy qualification had been previously recorded as achieving a qualification at this level. This research was very comprehensive as it covered all ILR data from 2001/02 and 2006/07. We are considering whether to update this research. If the research is updated, it will be communicated in a future version of this paper and within the SFR.

## **2. Accounting for ‘Jumpers’**

In general, providers test SfL learners by an initial assessment prior to starting their course and put them on a course which aims to raise their skills by one level. The results from this initial assessment are not recorded on the ILR and providers are not obliged to keep them. Occasionally, learners are put on courses which raise their skills by more than one level. Learners achieving at a level above the target level only count towards the target if they began the course with skills below the target level. These learners are often referred to as ‘jumpers’ because they have passed the target threshold on their way to achieving a qualification at a higher level.

So a jumper would be either: a learner who achieved a level 2 Literacy/ESOL qualification who was assessed at below level 1 Literacy/ESOL when they started their qualification; or, a learner who achieved a level 1 or level 2 Numeracy qualification who was assessed at below Entry level 3 Numeracy when they started their qualification.

Based on research carried out by the National Research and Development Centre (NRDC) between January and March 2010, we estimate that the percentage of ‘jumpers’ are;

- 2.7% of Literacy/ESOL learners achieving a level 2
- 6.6% of Numeracy learners achieving a level 1 and
- 0.6% of Numeracy learners achieving a level 2.

Adjustments are made to the data based on these estimates in order to determine how many of these higher level achievements can be counted towards the target.

The NRDC research can be found at <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A3838DE3-FD78-4F49-8F71-6BA2F2629BA0/0/NRDCFinalReportQuantitativeresearchintoentrypointlevels ofSkillsforLifelearners.pdf>. The findings were based on contacting 37 large providers of SfL which were representative of both the nine regions and provider type (Further Education colleges, private training providers, Adult and Community Learning). Unfortunately, only 10 providers had the required data and were able to provide it in the limited time available. Although the number of providers responding was lower than hoped, NRDC obtained good sample sizes of learners;

- 1,431 who achieved Literacy/ESOL level 2

- 2,799 who achieved Numeracy level 1 and
- 1,525 who achieved Numeracy level 2.

Ideally, we would have preferred data from more providers to help reduce the impact of sample error<sup>1</sup> on these estimates, particularly given the number of jumpers are only a small percentage. However the sample would have to be extremely biased for it to have a significant impact on the overall target measure and we have no firm evidence to suggest this. On balance, we consider the findings to represent a sufficiently robust indication of the assumption and the best information currently available, so they are therefore in the public interest to publish. We are considering whether or not further research may be necessary.

<sup>1</sup>The sample error is the error caused by taking a sample of providers rather than the whole population. It provides information on the quality of the assumption

### **3. Estimating the proportion of Numeracy entry level qualifications that are at entry level 3**

The 'Learning Outcome Grade' field in the ILR collects information on whether the entry level qualification is achieved at entry level 1, 2 or 3. However, this information is not completed for all learning aims, and is only valid for ILR data and we therefore have to use an estimation of the proportion.

The assumption used is that 50% of all Numeracy entry level qualifications achieved are at entry level 3. This is based on analysis of the grade field in the ILR data from 2007/08.

This information will be updated for 2008/09 once full year ILR data is available to assess if this assumption is still consistent.

## **Definitions**

The data and assumptions are analysed according to agreed definitions. Where these are specific to the target these are set out in detail below.

### **1 Working Age**

For the purposes of this target 'working age' is defined as a learner aged 16 to 64 inclusive. Age is calculated as 'academic age' which is age as at 31<sup>st</sup> August of that academic year. Further information on the calculation of age can be found at

[http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/AGE\\_DEFS.htm](http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/AGE_DEFS.htm)

## 2 Qualifications that count towards the target

Achievements that count towards the target are shown below. These are split into those achievements that directly count towards the target, and higher qualifications that may count towards the target, depending on the whether or not the initial assessment showed the learner was below threshold level when their qualification, i.e. if they are a 'jumper'.

<b>Achievements that directly count towards the target</b>	
<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Numeracy</b>
Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Level 1)	Certificate in Adult Numeracy (Entry Level 3)
Certificate in Adult Literacy (Level 1)	Award in Functional Skills Mathematics (Entry Level 3)
GCSE English (D-G) = Level1	
Key Skill in Communication (Level 1)	
Award in Functional Skills English (Level 1)	
<b>Achievements that <i>may</i> count towards the target once adjustments have been made</b>	
<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Numeracy</b>
Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life (Level 2)	Certificate in Adult Numeracy (Level 1 and Level 2)
Certificate in Adult Literacy (Level 2)	Award in Functional Skills Mathematics (Level 1 and Level 2)
GCSE English (A*-C)=level 2	GCSE Maths (D-G) = Level 1 (A*-C)=Level 2
Key Skills in Communication (Level 2)	Key Skills in Application of Number (Level 1 and Level 2)
Award in Functional Skills in English (Level 2)	

## 3 Derived Variables

Below is a list of the most relevant variables that are used to calculate which learners, and which SfL achievements count towards the target using the ILR data. Derived variables apply business rules to the data, and each derived variable has a link to the data dictionary where further information can be found.

More detail on the ILR variables and datasets can be found at:

<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/listing/>

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Use within this target calculation</b>
A_SFL	To identify potential target bearing activity. <a href="http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFL+L_SFL.htm">http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFL+L_SFL.htm</a>
A_SFLTY	To identify Literacy Numeracy and ESOL. <a href="http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFLTY.htm">http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFLTY.htm</a>
A_NOTION	To identify level of qualification <a href="http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/businessdefinitions/Notional+NVQ+Level.htm">http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/businessdefinitions/Notional+NVQ+Level.htm</a>
A35	To identify partial and full achievements for Key Skills
A36	To identify GCSE grade and therefore achievement at Level 1 or level 2. Also used for the assumption of Entry Level Numeracy that are entry level 3
A_SFL_LEITC H_LIT_ACH	To identify target-bearing achievements in Literacy at level 1 <a href="http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFL_LEITCH_LIT_ACH+L_SFL_LEITCH_LIT_ACH.htm">http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFL_LEITCH_LIT_ACH+L_SFL_LEITCH_LIT_ACH.htm</a>
A_SFL_LEITC H_NUM_ACH	To identify target-bearing achievements in Numeracy at Entry level (NB jumper assumption has to be applied to count EL3) <a href="http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFL_LEITCH_NUM_ACH+L_SFL_LEITCH_NUM+ACH.htm">http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/technicaldefinitions/derivedvariables/0809/A_SFL_LEITCH_NUM_ACH+L_SFL_LEITCH_NUM+ACH.htm</a>