



Leading learning and skills

Firstness Rates for Full Level 2 and Full Level 3

Introduction

This article clarifies the 'firstness rates' used for measuring the LSC contribution to the First Full Level 2 and First Full Level 3 PSA targets. The rates used are outlined in the table on page 4 of this document.

The Targets¹

The current adult **Level 2 PSA target** is for 79% of working age adults² to be qualified to at least³ level 2, by 2010/11.

People are counted as being qualified to level 2 and above if they have achieved at least either 5 GCSEs grades A* - C (or equivalent e.g. O levels, CSE Grades 1s), two A/S levels, or any equivalent qualification in the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

The current adult **Level 3 PSA target** is for 56% of working age adults qualified to at least full level 3, by 2010/11.

People are counted as being qualified to level 3 or above if they have achieved either at least 2 A levels grades A-E, 4 AS levels graded A-E, or any equivalent qualification in the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

The targets count people who have attained the level of qualifications for the first time. This is known as achievement of a 'First Full Level 2' or 'First Full Level 3'. Learners who repeat learning at the same level are not counted towards the target. The proportion of Full Level 2s that are First Full Level 2s is known as the 'Firstness Rate', and similarly for Level 3s.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is used to measure progress against the PSA target. Performance against the targets using the LFS was reported in the March 2009 and June 2009 SFR which are available at <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/>

¹ Further information on the targets can be found at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pbr_csr07_psa2.pdf

² Working age adults are all women and men aged 19 to State Pension age, including both economically active and inactive.

³ In delivering this target BIS would also achieve the target of reducing by at least 40 per cent the number of adults in the workforce who lack NVQ 2 or equivalent qualifications between 2001 and 2010.

LSC Operational Target

The PSA targets are defined in terms of a proportion of the population being qualified to a certain level. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) (formerly the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills) translates the PSA targets into the number of qualifications that are needed to deliver this target, and the number of these that the LSC are required to deliver.

This provides an LSC operational target for the purposes of planning, budgeting, and performance management of providers. This operational target is published as part of the Statement of Priorities, alongside the volumes of provision that it plans to contribute towards the national PSA targets, based on a set of assumptions and the funding available.

Measurement of LSC operational target

The LFS is used to measure progress against the PSA targets. Administrative data provided by the LSC's Individual Learner Records (ILR) allows the LSC to measure progress towards the LSC contribution to the targets.

The ILR data allows measurement of Full Level 2 and 3 as well as the number of these that are First Full Level 2 and 3 by using the 'prior attainment' information in the ILR. Changes to the data collections in this field and historical concerns about data quality mean that the both the ILR and survey data are used to assess firstness, depending on the specific year and funding stream under consideration. These changes are described in more detail below and the firstness rates used are summarised on page 5.

Prior Attainment in the ILR

The prior attainment field in the ILR collects information on the level of qualifications held by the learner before they began their current study. So, for example, a learner who has a prior attainment level of 'level 1' who is on a full level 2 would be classified as a 'first full level 2 learner'. If they achieved a level 2 qualification, they would contribute towards the target.

The information collected in the prior attainment field is shown below to indicate whether the learner would count as a first full level 2 or first full level 3.

| Prior Attainment Values in the ILR | Is this a First Level 2? | Is this a First Level 3? |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| No qualifications | Yes | Yes |
| Entry Level | Yes | Yes |
| Other quals below Level 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Level 1 | Yes | Yes |
| Full Level 2 | No | Yes |
| Full Level 3 | No | No |
| Level 4 | No | No |
| Level 5 and above | No | No |
| Other qualification level not known | No | No |
| Not Known | No | No |

In 2007/08 a change was made to data collection of prior attainment of a learner from 'Level 2' and 'Level 3' to 'Full Level 2' and 'Full Level 3', in order to clarify the

information that needs to be collected in this field. The ILR guidance for providers in completing this field prior to this change gave examples of full qualifications.

Where a learner has a prior attainment level of 'not known' or 'other qualification level not known' it is feasible that some of these learners are actually first level 2 and 3 learners, but it is not possible to verify this. A cautious approach is taken and all these learners are categorised as 'not first' i.e. they are assumed to already have a qualification of that level. This means the LSC contribution to the target is likely to be an underestimate of what is actually delivered.

The completeness of the prior attainment field for adult learners was historically poor with many learners flagged as 'not known', particularly in further education (FE) providers. This was a problem in measuring the operational target.

For example, in 2005/06, 51% of adult FE Full Level 2 learners had a prior attainment level of 'not known' and 45% of adult FE Full Level 3 learners had a prior attainment level of 'not known'. The completeness was better for Work Based Learning (WBL) providers where 14% of adult Full Level 2 (Apprenticeship) learners had a not known prior attainment level and 21% of Full Level 3 (Advanced Apprenticeship) learners.

In 2006/07 there was a drive to improve the data quality of the prior attainment field, particularly focusing on adults on Full Level 2 and Full Level 3 qualifications in FE. This reduced the levels of 'not known' prior attainment in 2006/07 significantly and reduced them further in 2007/08.

Percentage of prior qualifications that are 'not known'

| | Year | | |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
| FE | | | |
| Full Level 2 | 51% | 26% | 18% |
| Full Level 3 | 45% | 24% | 17% |
| | | | |
| WBL | | | |
| Full Level 2 | 14% | 5% | 3% |
| Full Level 3 | 21% | 8% | 4% |
| | | | |
| TTG | | | |
| Full Level 2 | * | 3% | 3% |
| Full Level 3 | * | 6% | 8% |

* Train to Gain (TTG) started in April 2006 hence rates for this academic year are not shown

Survey information on Firstness Rates

Since 2004, a sample survey monitoring the performance of FE college provision in delivering First Full Level 2 and First Full Level 3 provision has taken place. The survey has been needed due to historically poor data quality and / or completeness in the ILR related to the recording of learners' prior attainment. The outcomes of this research were used up to 2006/07 to measure the LSC operational target, i.e. how many of the full level 2/3s that were achieved from LSC funded FE provision contributed towards the PSA targets.

Following the drive from BIS (formerly DIUS) and the LSC to improve the quality of reporting on the ILR and specifically, the completion of the prior attainment field, the DIUS Data Research and Evaluation Sub Programme Board assessed the improvement in data quality of prior attainment in the ILR and agreed at its meeting on 26 January 2009 that, for monitoring and publication, the LSC would use administrative data from the ILR to monitor firstness for FE for 2007/08 onwards, and FE survey data for previous years.

Administrative data is also used to monitor firstness for all WBL Apprenticeships from 2005/06. Train to Gain uses the Evaluation Survey from 2006 and 2007 to measure firstness, this is because unlike FE and Apprenticeships, the firstness recorded on the ILR was significantly higher than the Evaluation Survey for Full Level 2 learners, and this raised some doubts about the quality of the firstness data on the TTG ILR.

The measurement of firstness is difficult and while we are publishing the best available statistics the measures are under constant review. TTG providers are working to improve the quality of the ILR firstness, and we are currently rerunning the Evaluation Survey which will report in September 2009 across TTG, FE and Apprenticeships to assess how closely the Evaluation Survey matches the ILR data in these streams. Ultimately, we would like to use ILR data for all three main LSC-funded streams.

Firstness Rates used to measure the LSC operational targets

The table below sets out the levels of firstness which are applied to the operational target from 2002/03 onwards, and the source of the rates used. It shows the rates used for full Level 2 and Level 3 learning, and the rate applied to those learners who are level 3 'jumpers' – i.e. they are undertaking a full Level 3 qualification without having a prior qualification at Level 2.

Firstness Rates by funding stream, year and the source

| Funding Stream | Year | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
| FE, Ufl and ACL | | | | | | |
| Level 2 | 39% | 39% | 38% | 38% | 38% | 46% |
| Level 3 | 55% | 55% | 54% | 54% | 54% | 65% |
| Level 3 jumpers | 21% | 21% | 22% | 21% | 19% | 24% |
| | | | | | | |
| WBL | | | | | | |
| Level 2 | 32% | 32% | 32% | 47% | 57% | 60% |
| Level 3 | 46% | 46% | 46% | 69% | 83% | 87% |
| Level 3 jumpers | 12% | 12% | 12% | 20% | 25% | 25% |
| | | | | | | |
| TTG (including ETP) | | | | | | |
| Level 2 | n/a | 79% | 79% | 79% | 79% | 69% |
| Level 3 | n/a | 95% | 95% | 95% | 95% | 83% |
| Level 3 jumpers | n/a | 75% | 75% | 75% | 75% | 51% |

Source

| | |
|-----|--|
| | Prior Qualifications Survey |
| | Train To Gain Evaluation Survey |
| | Administrative source - ILR data prior attainment field |
| | There was no survey for this year, therefore the first year of survey data is used |
| n/a | Not applicable - ETP started in 2003/04 and TTG started in April 2006 |

Feedback and Queries

If you have any feedback and queries on this document please contact the Service Desk on 08702 670001 or servicedesk@thedata-service.org.uk