

Follow-up research into best practice in the collection of prior attainment information on learners

RCU ref. 05.012



Guidelines on Capturing and Accurately Recording Prior Attainment

A central aim of the Skills Strategy as set out in the White Paper, 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential¹, is for unskilled or low skilled adults to gain a platform of employability skills, represented by a full Level 2 qualification, that they need for sustained and productive employment.

Lessons learned from a workshop held in October 2004 on the Skills Strategy Implementation Project identified the lack of early management information on Level 2 recruitment as a weakness in the current reporting systems. It is important for the LSC to have access to information about the prior attainment of learners for the following reasons:

- to monitor and evaluate policies to engage learners with limited prior attainment;
- to calculate contributions to the national targets;
- to understand learners' progression between programmes to inform policy and curriculum development; and
- to calculate value-added accurately.

In order to increase the available information on adult prior attainment levels, the ILR support manual for 2005/06 contains the following advice about completing the prior attainment level field, field L35:

For learners undertaking a full level 2 or full level 3 qualification it is very important that the prior attainment level of the learner is returned in this field since it is being used to measure the LSC's contribution to reducing the number of adults who lack NVQ 2 or equivalent as part of the Skills Strategy. The LSC and DfES are working closely with colleges to improve the recording of prior attainment level in this field. During 2005/06 a focus of this work will be on doing so for all learners on full level 2 or level 3 qualifications. This will be the subject of a credibility check and local LSC follow up.

The LSC wishes to have greater compliance with the completion of the L35 field in order to meet its strategic objectives.

Draft Guideline 1: Commitment from senior management

A key driver in the information gathering process is commitment from senior staff to reinforce the importance of capturing accurate data. Where senior management in colleges place a high priority on the capture of learner data this requires a high level of commitment in time and resources to meet this objective. For example, Knowsley Community College has a team of 31 staff to maintain good clean data for the College. Without this level of commitment to capturing robust learner data, the systems to support this process can be lacking.

¹ Crown Copyright July 2003



Follow-up research into best practice in the collection of prior attainment information on learners

RCU ref. 05.012



Draft Guideline 2: Staff Development and Good Communication

Staff development and good communication are central to obtaining prior attainment information from adult learners in the first place. Where colleges involve both teaching staff and support staff in the enrolment process it is essential that all staff concerned are fully briefed, not only on the nature of data requirements but also about the reasons why particular data need to be collected. Delivering separate training to staff dealing with Level 2 and Level 3 learners is an excellent example of staff development to support the enrolment and information gathering process.

Knowsley Community College's Staff Development

Everyone is made aware of the importance of recording prior attainment, including teaching and support staff. The College is organising enrolment training for staff and any changes in data requirements are included in this training.

For the coming academic year the College has reviewed the training it delivers to teaching and support staff involved in the enrolment process. This year enrolment training has been tailored to meet different information needs, especially for staff enrolling learners onto Level 2 and Level 3 courses. Staff dealing with Level 2 and Level 3 learners will be fully briefed on the importance of the new requirements supporting the collection of prior attainment information. Staff change from year to year, as do information needs and the College places a high level of importance on the staff development process that supports enrolment.

Special staff development to raise awareness of L2E will help identify potential beneficiaries at the enrolment stage. This is less resource intensive, and more effective than retrospectively trawling the ILR for Level 2 adults.

To improve the capture of prior attainment information, it is essential that all staff understand the reasons why this information needs to be correctly identified and accurately captured.

Draft Guideline 3: Quality Checks for Missing Information

Face-to-face discussions during on-screen enrolment appears to be the best way to identify and capture prior attainment information and to minimise missing information. This approach is still open to data entry error but it readily enables the full transfer of prior attainment information into the L35 field on the ILR. Several colleges operate excellent systems where they have tightly controlled enrolment procedures that rely on skilled information and guidance staff to undertake enrolment. Tyne Metropolitan College and Hertford Regional College are two such examples. In order to improve the capture of prior attainment Tyne Metropolitan College is currently testing software linked to the prior attainment field, which will automatically sort and assign the correct prior attainment level for learners.



Follow-up research into best practice in the collection of prior attainment information on learners

RCU ref. 05.012

Accurate information is also obtained from paper-based enrolment processes. Enrolment processes that require learners to provide information on all previous qualifications, rather than highest levels of prior attainment, represent some of the best examples of accurate capture and recording of prior attainment. The interpretation and recording of prior attainment levels then becomes the responsibility of skilled data staff at the data entry stage, which ensures accuracy and consistency. West Kent College, Farnborough College of Technology and Swindon College are three examples of colleges that employ skilled data entry staff to input enrolment information. These staff input the information directly from enrolment forms while the learner is sitting in front of them, which not only helps to ensure accuracy but also enables information gaps to be filled with the minimum of effort. Where colleges rely on accurate data entry of paper enrolment forms, there are a wide range of quality checks and audits that have been devised to ensure accuracy.

Middlesbrough College's Data Checking System

Each site has a named Data Controller whose job is to monitor data input staff's work with daily spot checks. Data staff and teaching staff have staff development on the importance of collecting accurate data from learners and the importance of prior attainment in relation to L2E.

City of Sunderland College's Enrolment Checker

The College has an Enrolment Checker whose job it is to identify incomplete enrolment forms and chase people for missing information.

Colchester Institute' Requirement for Previous Qualifications

Learners are asked to record all previous qualifications taken on the enrolment form, not just the highest attained. This information is then entered into the Institute's own database. The Enrolment Officer, rather than the learner, then decides the prior attainment level that will go into the L35 field. The College IT system ensures an automatic transfer of the data straight into the L35 field, once the data to be transferred have been visually verified.

Havering College of Further & Higher Education's Compliance Team

Threshold staff enter the data from the enrolment forms and the Compliance Team spot checks data entry for accuracy. The Compliance Team has a remit to ensure the accuracy of the data on the ILR.

Farnborough College of Technology' Web Enrolments

For the 2006/07 academic year the College is working on web enrolments using a process that requires learners to complete all the necessary information boxes in order to proceed with the process. Missing prior attainment data would appear as an error preventing submission of the enrolment.

Follow-up research into best practice in the collection of prior attainment information on learners

RCU ref. 05.012



Draft Guideline 4: Effective Checking Procedures in Evidencing Prior Attainment

Gathering evidence of adults' prior attainment is not a standard procedure in most colleges unless the learner requires a specific qualification level or type in order to enter a course. However, where data are gathered several colleges have implemented effective checking procedures to verify adult learners' prior attainment.

Swindon College's System to Evidence Prior Attainment

All full-time learners have their qualifications checked by staff at the College. The learner is asked to provide evidence of previous qualifications, and a photocopy is taken and put into the learner's file. Tutors check the qualifications on entry to make sure they are correct and the sign the enrolment form to say they have seen the evidence of the qualifications and checked them. If a full-time learner has not brought proof of their qualifications to enrolment they are sent a letter asking them to bring their certificates into the Advice & Guidance Centre for staff to check. Photocopies are taken by staff in the Centre and added to the learner's file.

West Kent College's Checking Mechanisms

When learners enrol they are asked for evidence of their qualifications. The College operates a Fast-Track enrolment process for learners who have already been interviewed and who have provided evidence of their prior attainment. They are given a date and a time to take their certificates to the Fast-Track desk. Once the evidence has been checked it is sent straight through to the data input staff where the enrolment information is keyed directly into the College's information system.

The Slow-Track enrolment process requires learners who do not have proof of prior attainment to have a short interview with a tutor before moving on to the data input staff to have their details entered onto the system.

Draft Guideline 5: Rolling Over Qualifications

Rolling over qualifications attained for adults returning for a second year ensures accurate information on prior attainment levels in the L35 field on the ILR for re-enrolled learners. Several colleges mentioned the fact that they roll over qualifications gained in the previous year for all learners who return for a second year. This is done in the knowledge that the L35 field for these learners is accurate and robust.



Follow-up research into best practice in the collection of prior attainment information on learners

RCU ref. 05.012



Draft Guideline 6: Preparing for L2E

Colleges' preparations for L2E are either based on the individual applicant or on devising specific provision for potential L2E learners. Where potential L2E learners form a significant market sector, the identification of a dedicated curriculum offer will raise demand and facilitate consistent data processes.

City of Sunderland College's Dedicated L2E Provision

The approach taken by this College has been to set up dedicated courses for L2E including Hairdressing, Beauty Therapy, Holistic Therapy, Childcare, BTEC First Diploma in Care, BTEC First Diploma in Systems Support, OCR Text Processing, Motor Vehicle Maintenance, Electrical Installation and Plumbing. To date the College has held two L2E Open Days and a third is to follow. Expressions of interest have been received from 350 adults and it is anticipated this number will rise to approximately 500.

Many providers are devising processes to support L2E based on the identification of individual beneficiaries rather than dedicated provision. However, staff training and development will be essential in order to support this process over the coming enrolment period.

Colchester Institute's Preparation for L2E Rollout

The Institute already collects information on previous qualifications for all learners and will be attaching a self-declaration letter to the enrolment form in readiness for the L2E rollout.

Knowsley Community College's Recording Systems Supporting L2E

The College has been collecting data on previous qualifications for some time and is anticipating little difficulty from the introduction of L2E. Separate training for staff dealing with Level 2 and Level 3 adult learners has taken place and the information necessary to determine L2E status will be readily available.

Redcar & Cleveland College's Guidance for Staff on L2E

The L2E form is being incorporated into the standard enrolment form for the 2005/06 academic year and teaching staff will be briefed on the entitlement and the necessity to identify previous qualifications. A list of Level 2 qualifications will be included in the tutor pack to support this process.

